
[The need to listen to and learn from local communities](#)

The different cases addressed in this bulletin describe a broad range of situations where forests are either being destroyed or conserved. Contrary to the discourse of many experts, these cases show that deforestation is more linked to policies implemented by governments than to actions carried out by local communities. Additionally, they show that cases where forests are being conserved are more the result of organized community efforts than of government action.

Commercial logging --legal and illegal-- is clearly a major cause of deforestation, but it is still being promoted by governments. Large corporations --mostly foreign-- reap the benefits while impacts are borne by local communities and within them particularly by women and children.

There is no doubt that large-scale hydroelectric dams destroy large areas of forests and with them the livelihoods of local peoples. However, they are still being promoted. Here again, benefits go to the hands of large companies --many of which foreign-- while local communities suffer the consequences.

The history of oil and gas exploitation and transport in the tropics is a history of human rights abuses and environmental destruction. Entire forest ecosystems are destroyed, including deforestation, wildlife depletion and widespread pollution of waterways and underground water. In spite of mounting local opposition, oil and gas activities continue being promoted.

Mining is another extremely destructive and polluting industry, which impacts heavily on local peoples. Here again the profits go to foreign companies whose activities are promoted and supported by national governments.

Even the apparently benign activity of tourism is in many cases resulting in the destruction of forests to give way to large infrastructure aimed at attracting tourists from abroad.

Large-scale pulpwood or carbon sink tree plantations are also resulting in forest destruction, both directly and indirectly, and affecting entire ecosystems --including biodiversity, soils and water-- and local peoples' livelihoods. However, they continue being actively promoted nationally and internationally.

Additionally, many sectoral or macroeconomic government policies result in forest loss. Those policies may appear to have no relation to forests, but their end result on forests may be devastating. For instance, the promotion of certain cash crops for export, or high electricity tariffs may encourage land clearance for agriculture or tree cutting for charcoal production. In spite of that, government policies continue disregarding those impacts.

Within the framework of the above examples, local communities find it very difficult to protect the forests that constitute their homes and sources of livelihood. However, in spite of the difficulties, they continue struggling to achieve that aim. Not only do they try to oppose the "development" projects that will affect them, but at the same time they try to build alternatives to sustainably use those

forests, among which community forest management is perhaps the more well known.

In sum, solving the forest crisis implies changing those policies --national and international-- that are affecting forests and putting in place new policies to provide local communities with an adequate framework to protect what is in their interest to protect. Governments, multilateral and bilateral agencies, corporations and other major actors should begin by listening to and learning from those communities. That would be the best starting point to ensure the survival of the forest and its peoples.