



## A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR WEALTHY COUNTRIES TO REFOREST THEIR LAND FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The Coalition of Financially Challenged Countries with Lots of Trees, known as "CoFCCLoT", representing most of the world's remaining tropical forests, is asking wealthy nations to share global responsibilities and reforest their land for the common good of stabilizing climate and protecting biodiversity.

"We are willing to play our part, but we require a level playing field in which we all commit to equal sacrifices," a coalition spokeswoman says. "Returning forest cover in the G8 countries and the EU back to historic levels will benefit all of us in the long term."

Seventy-five percent of Europe was once forested. Now it is 45 percent. Some countries such as Ireland saw their forest cover reduced to near zero. Most forest cover in the developed world is now often planted with stands of alien trees, turning them into deserts for biodiversity. Remaining natural forests are often highly fragmented and have few native species.

"For all the forests we in Indonesia, Brazil or Central Africa do not cut down, G8 countries should reforest a similarly sized area," says the CoFCCLoT spokeswoman. "Too many agricultural areas in Europe and the United States are only kept in business because of tariffs and subsidies."

CoFCCLoT members also ask why they are criticized for developing oil-palm plantations, even though oil-palms produce much more biofuel and oil per unit area than temperate crops such as maize, and thus require much less land to satisfy global demands.



CoFCCLoT points out that nature in wealthy nations needs urgent attention. "Large areas are degraded. Soils are compacted, soil faunas depleted, and their hydrology disrupted and contaminated."

The coalition says that if wealthy nations restore their forests, they can help slow climate change by absorbing atmospheric carbon and provide people with clean water and healthy soils. It also highlights the benefits for species diversity and environmental services. CoFCCLoT notes the opportunities to reintroduce bears, lynx, wolves, beavers and other threatened animals that have been decimated or driven to extinction by rampant exploitation of natural forests in much of the industrialized world.

It says, too, that in the longer term, ongoing climate change and reforestation may permit tropical megafauna to thrive in temperate countries. Lions could be reintroduced to Greece, CoFCCLoT suggests and gorillas might thrive in Spain. Both countries face economic challenges that could be reduced by the revenues from ecotourism.

The coalition acknowledges that their demands will meet some resistance. People might be scared to live near large forests with wild animals and may be resentful of not being allowed access to forest resources. "But people will get used to it," explains the spokeswoman. "It is time to share these global responsibilities," she adds. "The G8 cannot have their cake and eat it too." (Source: [www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com), 11 August 2011.)



## ASIA'S REAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE GLOBAL HEALTH OF FORESTS

As the UN International Year of Forests kicked off this spring, there was good news from Asia. New planting in China, India, Viet Nam and other countries in the region is helping to slow down the rate of forest loss worldwide, according to the *State of the World's Forests 2011* report from FAO.

Many environmental lobby groups are unhappy that the FAO report includes plantations at all, considering them undeserving of the title "forests" because of their limited social and environmental value when compared with the natural kind. Recognizing these concerns,

Eduardo Rojas-Briales, Assistant Director-General of the FAO Forestry Department, noted at the report's launch that the tree-planting spree in Asia over the last decade did not happen at the expense of natural forest.

However, emphasis on the expanding coverage of plantations still masks the fact that in Asia, as elsewhere, natural forest area continues to shrink.

Natural forests deliver quite different benefits from plantations. Plantations act as "carbon sinks", absorbing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, while mature natural forests serve as "carbon reservoirs", preventing the release of the carbon that they have accumulated over the centuries. Plantations are easier to design and manage for regular income. Natural forests, however, bring a wealth of services essential to the livelihoods of 450 million indigenous and forest-dependent people in the Asia-Pacific region alone.

Nevertheless, there is growing consensus that we need to open much of the forest up, rather than fence it off, so that it can be managed and valued for the services it provides. This means giving the people who depend on forests for their everyday needs a greater say in their management.

A recent report by the Rights and Resources Initiative shows that forest dwellers and local people have consistently done a better job of managing and protecting forests than the centralized management structures that most governments favour.

Nepal's community forestry programme, in which self-identified groups of local forest dwellers assume full management responsibility for the forests that they have traditionally used, is a fine example to other countries in the region and beyond. In areas right across the country, degradation of natural forest has not only stopped, but has been reversed.

Cambodia's experience is another promising example. In essence, successful examples of people-centred forest management tend to entail a wholesale paradigm shift in a government's approach to forest policy.

Asia also holds cautionary tales. The Philippines was one of the first countries in the region to enact legislation giving local communities and indigenous peoples the rights to own and manage forest areas, but these rights became hostage to the whims of subsequent governments.

Across the region, there is a precarious balance between the incentives to hand resources back to the people, and the instincts of governments to centralize and regulate forest use and management. (Source: RECOFTC, 10 May 2011.)



## DEBT-FOR-NATURE SWAPS

The debt-for-nature swap concept, whereby a portion of a developing nation's foreign debt is waived in exchange for local investments in environmental conservation measures, dates back to the mid-1980s. Since the first swap was brokered with Bolivia by the non-profit Conservation International in 1987, many national governments and conservation groups have engaged in similar types of debt-for-nature swap negotiations. Costa Rica has exchanged tens of millions of dollars in debt to protect some of its most pristine and biologically productive rain forests.

But far fewer deals are occurring today because debt restructuring and cancellation have reduced developing nations' debt significantly more than by debt-for-nature swaps. Some experts also argue that the financial benefits are overstated, that funds are misdirected to less needy countries, that external debt is not a primary driver of deforestation and other environmental ills, and that funding does not necessarily equate to effective implementation of conservation strategies.

Criticism aside, some deals are still getting done. In 2008, France waived

US\$20 million in debt owed by Madagascar to help the biodiversity-rich nation triple the size of its protected areas to protect its native flora and fauna better. In 2010, the United States of America waived US\$21 million in Brazilian debt to fund several ecosystem protection initiatives in Brazil's still vanishing tropical rain forests. So while debt-for-nature swaps are not as popular as they once were, they are still a key tool in the toolbox of environmentalists looking to promote conservation in tropical countries. (Source: *The Environmental Magazine*, 31 July 2011.)

## FORESTS PLUS: LOOKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Can you picture life without forests? Within their branches and trunks, forests record the history of life on Earth. Forests can be seen as a mirror of evolving human needs, dynamic and ever-changing. They have the unique ability to sustain and revitalize us, through a multitude of services from food and shelter to biodiversity and clean water.

Over a decade ago, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) was established to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests. The Forum addresses all cross-sectoral aspects pertaining to forests, using a 360-degree perspective. Most people are aware of the economic values of forests, particularly timber production, and more recently the focus has been on climate change mitigation values through forest carbon sequestration.

However, the full picture of what forests offer is much more than simply economic values and carbon. Forests provide a healthy environment for people, secured livelihoods, shelter and sustenance. Forests are central to achieving sustainable development, yet they are not addressed in a holistic and integrated manner by the mechanisms and institutions created by the Rio Earth Summit.

A holistic approach to forests is clearly needed, one that takes into account economic, social and environmental values, as well as cultural and spiritual dimensions of forests. Looking at sustainable forest management through a biodiversity lens alone, for example,

cannot address the full suite of forest issues. A key requirement in this regard is more frequent and effective cross-sectoral and cross-institutional integration.

Approaches to forests at the policy and institutional level are often fragmented, a fact exacerbated by the reality that threats to forests most often come from outside the forest sector. In this regard, the notion of "forests-plus" as an approach embracing forests' intersectoral and inter-institutional complexity has received support at Forum discussions, including in particular at a recent high-level round table held at the Ninth UNFF session in February.

"Forests for People" is the theme of this year, the International Year of Forests 2011, which celebrates the central role of people in sustainably managing the world's forests. People are ultimately at the heart of all forest issues. However, in order for forests to be truly a sustainable natural resource to improve the well-being of people, the economy and the environment effectively, countries will need to devise programmes on a range of issues, from governance to tenure security, access and benefits to local participation, as well as increased funding at all levels, based on well-informed policy decisions, social dialogue and coordination among different ministries.

Increased attention towards the multiple values of forests through the International Year of Forests has provided a unique opportunity to strengthen implementation at the national level, by supporting national governments, international and regional organizations, and other interested stakeholders, to work together in a cross-sectoral and cross-institutional manner. (Source: Jan L. McAlpine, Director, UNFF Secretariat [in *IISD RS*], 2 August 2011.)



## LEADERS DEFINE PATHWAY TO RESTORING 150 MILLION HA OF LOST FORESTS

A core commitment to restore 150 million ha of lost forests and degraded lands worldwide by 2020 is being launched today at a ministerial conference in Bonn. New analysis by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates that restoring 150 million ha would be worth US\$85 billion per year to national and global economies.

At the Bonn Challenge Ministerial Roundtable, a select group of ministers and chief executives of international and non-governmental organizations and companies are discussing how to benefit biodiversity and the fight against climate change through concrete restoration activities.

"The restoration of lost forests will increase carbon stocks and result in healthy and resilient ecosystems, which will provide the multiple goods and services people need, and lead to an increase in biodiversity," says Ashok Khoshla, President of IUCN, which acts as coordinator of the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration (GPFLR).

The landmark commitment in Bonn comes as new analysis shows that more than 2 billion ha of the world's deforested and degraded landscapes – equivalent to half the size of Asia – offer opportunities for restoration. This new global estimate is almost double the area previously considered restorable, thanks to improvements in the precision of mapping zones where climate and soils allow forests to grow.

"Recognizing that national circumstances vary enormously, this core commitment to restore 150 million ha is a robust and realistic response to the global

assessment," says Stewart Maginnis, IUCN's Global Director of Environment and Development. "What is needed urgently is a country-by-country assessment of how this commitment could be achieved in line with national economic development and conservation priorities, something we have already started doing in Ghana and Mexico."

The 150 million ha restoration target directly relates to existing international commitments on climate change and biodiversity. It will contribute to the biodiversity convention target calling for restoration of 15 percent of degraded ecosystems by 2020, and the climate change convention goal on REDD+, which calls for countries to slow, halt and reverse the loss and degradation of forests.

Forest landscape restoration can be seen as offering the world a highly cost-effective way to combat climate change, create new jobs and contribute to rural development and livelihoods.



Earlier this year, IUCN expressed its support of Rwanda's historic announcement to restore the country's degraded landscapes border-to-border, predicting that it could be the beginning of the biggest restoration initiative the world has ever seen. With similar bold commitments expected to be announced at the Bonn event, cochaired by IUCN and the German Government, an unprecedented global initiative is clearly gathering momentum. [Source: International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2 September 2011.]

### NEW PARTNERSHIP ESTABLISHED TO ADDRESS THREATS TO FORESTS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

A new partnership for Mediterranean forests has been established to address major threats to the region's forests being exacerbated by the severe impact of climate change. The partnership was announced at the Second Mediterranean Forest Week, which took place in Avignon, France, from 5 to 8 April.

"The Collaborative Partnership on Mediterranean Forests will help raise awareness on the wealth of vital functions Mediterranean forests provide. These include soil and water protection, landscape values, carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation. It is urgent that we join efforts to restore and preserve their functions for future generations," said Eduardo Rojas-Briales, Assistant Director-General of the FAO Forestry Department.

The partnership involves 12 institutions and organizations including FAO and will focus primarily on six countries in the southern and eastern Mediterranean: Morocco, Algeria,

Tunisia, Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Turkey. The new partnership offers a way for stakeholders in the region to address the mounting challenges facing Mediterranean forests and draw greater attention to their value and the urgent need to protect them.

The partnership is designed to integrate policies and investments at the country level in order to adapt forests to climate change; this would involve sectors such as forestry, agriculture, urban development, water, environment, land-use planning, education and tourism. It is also aimed at developing a joint regional approach to forest management and, in particular, to wildfire prevention, through the sharing of expertise, knowledge and best practices. At a local level, the partnership will help to promote sustainable forest management among all stakeholders, including local communities, forest owners and managers, farmers, herders, environmentalists, protected area managers and researchers. (Source: UN Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, 6 April 2011.)



## MINISTERS BACK BINDING EUROPEAN FOREST AGREEMENT

Ministers have agreed to back plans to introduce a legally binding agreement (LBA) to protect Europe's forests. Delegates also agreed to adopt resolutions that would help shape forest policy over the next decade. On Tuesday, a report concluded that sustainable forestry management was essential if the EU was to reach its emission goals.

The ministerial agreement was signed at the Sixth Forest Europe Conference in Oslo, Norway. As well as signing the declaration to begin negotiations to establish an LBA, delegates also agreed to set a number of targets to be achieved by 2020. These included all European countries implementing a national forest programme, which needed to contain climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Ministers also agreed to cut the rate of biodiversity loss within forest habitats by half, and take steps to eliminate illegal logging.

Poland's minister, Janusz Zaleski, said that nations needed to ensure that any agreement would need the legal weight required to deliver progress on the ground. Sweden's Rural Affairs Minister Eskil Erlandsson told the conference that while he supported the concept of sustainable forest management, he favoured a voluntary approach rather than an LBA. "I do not believe in common legislation for forests across the Pan-European region. Put simply, one size does not fit all," he said. "We need to recognize the different geoclimatic and socio-economic conditions." (Source: BBC News, 15 June 2011.)



## PLANS TO PROTECT FORESTS COULD DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD UNLESS POWER IS IN LOCAL HANDS

Tropical countries that seek a share of billions of dollars of climate finance in return for protecting their forests risk creating strategies that fail to bring social and environmental benefits, according to a report released today by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

The report draws on the work of Forest Governance Learning Group (FGLG) teams in ten nations in Africa and Asia to promote decision-making about forests that is fair and sustainable. It highlights success stories at the national level, in which FGLG teams have influenced policy processes to promote outcomes that benefit forest-dependent communities that have been marginalized.

On the international stage, the FGLG teams have focused on how their countries are preparing for REDD+, a system being developed to reward countries that maintain or increase their forest to limit emissions of greenhouse gases from deforestation. FGLG teams in Ghana, Indonesia, Mozambique, the United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam report that national plans for REDD+ could do more harm than good.

In many countries, top-down, government-led plans for REDD+ have been rushed through and focus more on how to count carbon stored in trees than on how actually to implement a system that brings real benefits for communities, biodiversity and the climate.

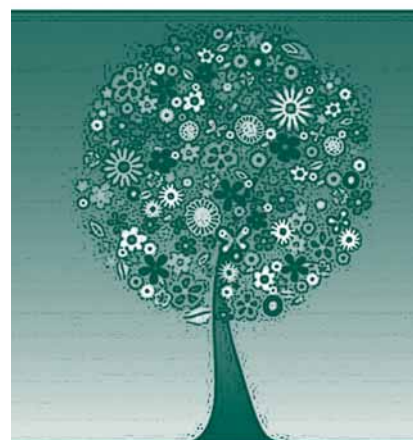
"REDD remains forestry's best hope yet but it must be built from the bottom up," says James Mayers, head of IIED's Natural Resources Group and coauthor of the FGLG report.

"Strategies are difficult to turn around once they head off in the wrong direction – and the costs of bad strategy for forests are extremely high. To realize justice in the forests, policy-makers must turn REDD on its head and put control of the forests into local hands."

The FGLG teams bring together representatives of communities, governments, civil society organizations, businesses and the media, to explore the drivers of poor forest governance and to influence policy-making. They operate in

Cameroon, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and Viet Nam. For each country, the report describes successes from the past year and plans for activities between now and 2013.

The project has been steered by IIED since it began in 2003 and has been funded by the United Kingdom and Netherlands governments and the European Commission. (Source: IIED, 25 August 2011.) ♣



**A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people.**

*Franklin D. Roosevelt*