The synthesis report to the Global Workshop

What follows is the synthesis report prepared as background document for the Global Workshop on Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation (Costa Rica,18-22 January), under the heading "An overview of the underlying causes identified, similarities and differences and possible ways forward."

The process leading to the Costa Rica Workshop involved the preparation of case studies in different regions of the world and their presentation in seven regional and one indigenous peoples' organizations workshops. Presentations provided the basis for discussions in working groups and in plenary, aimed at the identification of the common underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, followed by the identification of actors and solutions to address them.

The eight workshops and the more than forty case studies reflect a wide range of causes, actors and possible solutions in extremely diverse social, political, economic, cultural and environmental contexts. However, all of them coincide in the identification of a number of key causes which are at the root of deforestation and forest degradation processes in all types of forests. All of them also show important coincidences regarding a number of actors -both domestic and international- which are part of the problem and therefore can be part of the solution.

As part of the solution, it is important to highlight that the process leading to the workshops, as well as the workshops themselves, constituted an important step forward in raising awareness and increasing knowledge about this relatively new -at least for many people- way of looking at the causes of deforestation and forest degradation. The process involved the participation of local community representatives, NGOs, academics, government officials and representatives from international and to a lesser extent business organizations. This mix facilitated a wider understanding of the problem through the exchange of different types of information and different viewpoints with the common aim of addressing the problem. Given the success of the approach, we feel that it could be extremely useful to continue carrying out similar processes at the national level and that this suggestion could be discussed at this global workshop.

The different processes identified a whole array of underlying causes, some of them very specific to one region or country, while others common to other regions or even to all of them.

The present synthesis is an attempt to group together some of the common identified underlying causes, although it is important to stress their interlinkage in chains of causality. However, such grouping might prove useful to facilitate the discussions of this workshop.

1) Land tenure issues

Many of the case studies and regional workshops identified land tenure as a major underlying cause. Although situations widely vary, the following can be highlighted as the most common:

- the non-recognition of the territorial rights of indigenous and other traditional peoples resulting in the

invasion of those territories by external actors

- the lack of legally-recognized land titles by local communities

- government-led or spontaneous colonization processes into the forests, stemming from inequitable land-tenure patterns in agricultural areas

- large-scale unsustainable agriculture leading to a lack of fertile land

- privatization of forests in the benefit of large-scale private or corporate landowners

2) Resource management

The way in which natural resources are managed at the country level -expressed in explicit or implicit policies- was identified as a major underlying cause. Most of those policies result in negative impacts and are even conflicting with policies and practices aimed at forest conservation. Among the most common are the following:

- lack of recognition of multiple values of forests, which are either visualized as a source of wood materials or as occupying land which could be dedicated to other activities, such as agriculture, cattle-raising or other

- lack of empowerment and participation of local communities in decisions over forest management

- the promotion of large-scale development projects with high negative impacts on forests

- inappropriate and conflicting policies which affect forests

- economic and other incentives which result in deforestation

- issues of governance, including corruption, human rights abuses, inadequate enforcement of existing laws and lack in institutional capacity to adequately manage forests

- dominance of industry's interest in decisions which affect forests (timber, pulp and paper, mining, oil, shrimp farming)

3) Trade

Trade -both national and international- is neither good nor bad in itself. However, it has been identified as a major underlying causes (particularly within the current trade liberalization process), linked to other underlying causes, such as:

- unsustainable extraction of forest products

- substitution of forests by other systems of production, particularly those aimed at the international market, such as pulpwood and other tree plantations, cattle-raising, shrimp farming, etc.

- rising consumer demand resulting in unsustainable consumption patterns of a wide variety of products extracted either from forests or from productive activities which substitute forests

- undervaluation of forest products via the externalization of environmental costs

4) International economic relations

Practically all workshops identified underlying causes stemming from the current economic model, but with different levels of importance following the high consumption-low consumption (or rich-poor) country divide. Among the major identified underlying causes were the following:

- macroeconomic policies imposed on less developed countries, including structural adjustment

- external debt and its service/repayment

- unfair trade relationships

- poorly directed foreign aid programmes

- lack of regulation of transnational companies in both 'home' and 'host' countries

5) Social exclusión

Social exclusion was identified as an underlying cause, but was in general not given the high profile which it has received in the past. It was identified as a consequence of a number of national and international policies which resulted in the creation and increase of poverty, which in turn resulted in unsustainable use of forests and forest lands. Regarding population growth, only one workshop highlighted it as an underlying cause.

It is clear that underlying causes categorized in one group are influenced by underlying causes categorized in the other group. However, such division at least helps to clarify in each case who the main actor to address the different underlying causes could be: whether the national government, or a set of governments, or international organizations or the international community as a whole. The coupling of causes and actors should lead to commitments to address them and, given that they all form part of a complex chain of causality, improvement in one area would promote or facilitate the adoption of measures in another, all leading to an improvement in forest conservation.

It is important to stress that, although there are clear commonalities, there are also clear differences and specificities. All situations are simultaneously similar and different and there are therefore no universally applicable ready-made solutions.

However, the processes carried out within this initiative seem to be coincident in arriving at the conclusion that, to address deforestation and forest degradation there is a need to:

1) Socially identify the chain of causality in each country, with the informed participation of all stakeholders

2) Create democratic mechanisms for stakeholder participation in decision-making about resource management, including the promotion of equitable land-tenure systems

3) Introduce changes to national and international macroeconomic policies, including changes to the current trade liberalizaton process

4) Modify current unsustainable consumption patterns

Responsibility over the above lie in the hands of many actors, including governments, civil society organizations, multilateral institutions, research organizations, bilateral aid agencies, etc. Within such wide range of actors, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests might play a crucial leading and coordinating role in the promotion of a process leading to agreements on specific commitments to begin to address underlying causes both at the national and international level.

We hope that this workshop will become an important starting point in this direction.