
Does an International Day of Forests make sense?

The UN, under whose auspices many initiatives to halt deforestation have been launched, is adding another to the list: 21 March from 2013 onwards will be the International Day of Forests.

But does such a Day make sense? The International Year of Forests in 2011 went largely unnoticed, and one would be hard pressed to point to actual action that reduced deforestation and was undertaken as part of the UN Year on Forests.

It can be observed that despite the renewed interest, tropical forests - containing 60% of the world's biodiversity and home to hundreds of millions of forest peoples – continue to be destroyed and are being increasingly grabbed by corporate interests. REDD+ and related forest conservation efforts have not changed this reality of continuous and, in some regions, even increasing forest destruction. The volume of news from the ground in the main tropical forest countries is about deforestation, violation of human rights, violation of land rights and displacement and destruction of local economies vital to the livelihoods of forest dependent peoples. The destruction, if anything, has increased, not decreased, let alone stopped.

It is therefore that WRM decided to dedicate the entire bulletin this month to the issue of deforestation, as well as publish a letter on the same issue on March 21st, urging for measures to effectively halt deforestation (see http://www.wrm.org.uy/forests/letter_Day_of_the_Forests.html).

The present bulletin shows that for the International Day of Forests to make a meaningful contribution to the struggle against deforestation, it needs to shine the light on the underlying causes of deforestation in tropical countries.

Addressing underlying causes is directly related to changing the present unequal and destructive economic model of production and consumption, dependent on many natural resources found in tropical forest areas. At the same time, addressing underlying causes means pushing for locally sustained economies, more with 'everybody living well' as a criterion, rather than 'increasing a huge consumption for a few'.

To halt deforestation in an effective way, a joint effort to question and change the present hegemonic economic model must be a priority of all committed to forest conservation.