
[Reflections on the Global Workshop's conclusions](#)

What follows is Mia Siscawati's (Focal Point for Asia) presentation during the final plenary session of the Global Workshop on January 22nd:

World forests are in crisis, especially natural and indigenous forests. We do not only face a loss of ecosystems, species and genetic resources of the forests; we also face loss of their ecological functions as well as their social, cultural and spiritual functions. The 1997 and 1998 forest fires, extensive floods, landslides, and other well-publicised natural disasters in several countries, were an example of a long process of deforestation and forest degradation. Floods brought on partly by deforestation have killed thousands of rural Asians in recent years.

As I come from Indonesia, one of six mega-biodiversity countries in the world and yet one of the countries with highest deforestation rates in the world, allow me first of all to share my serious concern. The deforestation rate in Indonesia is higher than the average rate of tropical forest deforestation in the world; it is almost three times faster. Primary forest coverage left nowadays is only 37% of total forest area in the year 1966. This year marks a critical year for Indonesia. Before 1966, Indonesia had not suffered by structural adjustment programs, debt, and aggressive private capital flows.

Up to 1966, 75% of Indonesia's territory -or 144 millions hectares- were still covered by forest. In the beginning of the forest resource exploitation that started the 'timber boom' era in the seventies, it was also known as the 'Forest Development Olympiad' era. During this era, with the assistance from foreign companies (the involvement of those companies was possible due to the 1967 Foreign Investment Law), Indonesia became the largest log exporter in the world. In 1982, when the oil price was declining, the forestry sector became the second highest contributor to foreign exchange in Indonesian economy after the oil and gas sectors.

In 1980, the government restricted log exports and began to promote plywood industry development. By the end of the 90s, Indonesia was the biggest plywood producer in the world and managed to fulfill 75% of the world market demands at the time. Meanwhile, the overestimate on forest resources, the weakness in management and law system, and the over-capacity of the plywood industry, caused an even higher acceleration rate of primary forest exploitation.

To start the reflection, I would like to comment on the whole process of this joint initiative on addressing the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation.

The process leading to this Global Workshop has involved the preparation of case studies and consultation processes of seven different regions of the world and one indigenous peoples workshop. The regional and indigenous peoples processes, as well as the global workshop, have been highly valuable to develop constructive dialogues amongst various stakeholders which should be continued. Indigenous peoples, local communities, NGOs, and other interest groups joined the process with high enthusiasm and expectation to produce a clear message to stop and to reduce deforestation and forest degradation all over the world.

Now, allow me to comment on the outcomes which we all produced in this Global Workshop.

Under such enthusiastic atmosphere, this Global Workshop has produced a set of recommendations, most of which are innovative for the IFF process.

Under the theme of consumption and trade, this workshop identified actions to change unsustainable patterns of consumption and production of both forest products and other products that impact on forests and to steer trade to an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable path. This workshop also identified a set of actions to change the fundamental philosophy and framework of international trade agreements including WTO/GATT and a potential Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI), and to increase the legal enforceability of human rights and environmental agreements at national and international levels and to balance vested interests (governments and industry) with the interest of other parts of civil society in international negotiations.

Under the theme of involvement of indigenous peoples, local communities and other stakeholders and solving inequities in land tenure, this workshop produced a set of actions that aim at ensuring that individual and collective rights, social existence, traditional knowledge, spirituality and land tenure of indigenous peoples and local communities including women are recognised, protected, and guaranteed through the process of national, regional and international legislation and conventions. Further along this line, there is a call for all governments that participate in the IFF process to ratify and promote participation in the ILO 169, the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and to develop linkages amongst those two treaties and environmental conventions. As an NGO activist concerned with the serious problems of mining legislation and operations in Indonesia which are influenced by transnational corporations, I am glad that there is a strong recommendation of this workshop to promote environmental, oil and mining legislation that guarantees and protects the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. As Asia Regional Focal Point for this joint initiative, I should congratulate this workshop which adopted one of the recommendations of the Asian Regional Workshop to address the lack of transparency and accountability and the inappropriate and increasing power of government bodies and corporations in land tenure including corruption, militarism and dictatorship, and the inability of indigenous peoples and local communities to access information on, influence, support, or oppose development plans or projects. As you might be aware, forest governance in Indonesia and many Asian countries opens up opportunities to create corrupt political and government systems. Often, such corrupt regimes foster militarism that further contributes to deforestation, forest degradation and violation of human rights.

To address counter productive investment and aid policies and finance flows, a set of actions was identified to overcome issues of perverse incentives and subsidies, private capital flows, inappropriate development strategies, structural adjustment programs, and good governance. A call to establish national level independent consultation mechanisms to improve transparency of decision making with respect to structural adjustment programs, and a call to reform the Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and donor countries. Following this line there is a call that Multilateral Development Banks and private ones to adopt policies which forbid investment in corporations which unsustainably exploit natural and indigenous forests.

As a forester by formal education, I would like to note that I am glad to see the recommendations under the theme of valuation of forests. One of them is a call to change the FAO definition on forests and forest related concepts (deforestation, afforestation, reforestation, plantations), to include the ecosystem approach as defined in the Convention of Biological Diversity, and to emphasize quality of forests. Along this line, there is a call to change curricula of formal education to reflect ecosystem, social, spiritual values of forests. To be frank, I learned about a holistic concept of forest from elders

of the Dayak Peoples in East Kalimantan, which is much more comprehensive compared to curricula of forestry education. With respect to German-based forestry knowledge which was historically developed since the 16th century and widespread almost to the whole world since then, it is now a time for Indonesia and many other countries to adopt traditional knowledge and practices related to forest resources into curricula of formal education. I am personally hoping that this action will affect political will among politicians, bureaucrats, professionals, and managers.

Before I close this reflection, I would like to deliver the message of one leader of indigenous peoples who participated in the Asia Regional Workshop: that he and his peoples need immediate actions to abruptly stop deforestation and forest degradation. I believe we all here share the same expectation with him.

To conclude this reflection, I would like to invite all workshop participants to jointly follow up the workshop's recommendations. Survival of the world's forests and all forest values and functions, including social and spiritual values, are in the hands of all main actors we identified in our workshop. The recommendations will simply become a beautiful background document if the main actors who should take actions do not appropriately respond. Further along this line, I would like to urge the main actors who are present here to take urgent and consistent actions; otherwise, millions of indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as all of us here, will keep suffering from deforestation and forest degradation.

(*) Mia Siscawati, 'Reflections on Summary and Recommendations of Global Workshop on Addressing Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation'