
Underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation

As was informed in WRM Bulletin Nr.5, a group of NGOs present at the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests' (IFF) first meeting in October 1997, initiated a solution-oriented process to address the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, to be considered by the IFF. A number of governments were approached and their reaction was very positive to the initiative. The government of Costa Rica officially accepted to host a global workshop by the end of 1988.

During the Antalya (Turkey) World Forestry Congress, those same NGOs met and decided to create a Global Secretariat to coordinate the process and they elected the Netherlands Committee for IUCN and the World Rainforest Movement as a joint global secretariat. A project proposal was produced and initial funding was provided by the UK's Department for International Development. It was also decided that the process needed an Organizing Committee, composed by the regional focal points (see below), the government of Costa Rica -as host country- and a representative from UNEP -the lead agency for the Interagency Task Force on Forests. A Steering Committee, composed by the Organizing Committee and a number of other non-governmental (NGOs, indigenous peoples organizations and community based organizations), governmental and intergovernmental representatives was also created.

The first meeting of the Organizing and Steering Committees took place in New York in February and was attended by NGOs from Indonesia, Japan, CIS, Australia, USA, UK, Colombia, Uruguay, Netherlands, Paraguay, Costa Rica and Canada; two representatives of indigenous peoples organizations; one representative from a community based organization; representatives from the IFF and UNEP; representatives of the governments of Costa Rica, Nepal and Portugal (a number of other government representatives expressed their willingness to participate in the Steering Committee but were unable to attend the meeting).

The meeting was very positive and a general plan of action was approved. The general idea is to organize 7 regional workshops (Latin America, Africa, Asia, CIS, Oceania, Europe and North America) and one indigenous peoples workshop, all feeding into a global workshop to be held at the end of 1988 in Costa Rica. Case studies will be prepared for the workshops and the aim is not only to reach conclusions on the major underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, but also to agree on proposals for action to address them. The whole process will feed into the IFF, although its conclusions and proposals will not be mandatory.

Each regional workshop will include 5 case studies, as well as more general presentations by other stakeholders. The case studies will be undertaken jointly by a community facing deforestation or forest degradation and an NGO, and representatives from both will make presentations at the workshop. Each regional workshop will include at least one case including indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples workshop will take place after all the regional workshops, part of which will feed into their own process. Finally, the whole process will feed into the global workshop, where governments will also present their case studies, as requested by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests' proposals for action.

We believe that this process is a major step forward and a success for NGOs that have for years put forward the idea that forests were being destroyed by a number of direct causes (such as logging or conversion to agriculture), but that it was necessary to identify and address the underlying causes if forests were to be saved. This is a good opportunity for NGOs, indigenous peoples organizations and community-based organizations concerned over deforestation and forest degradation to influence both their governments and the IFF and to raise awareness at country and regional levels on the chains of causalities which lead to the destruction of forests. We therefore invite all our readers to get in contact with their respective regional or IPO focal point and to get involved in this process.

REGIONAL/IPO FOCAL POINTS

AFRICA

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ASIA

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Yoichi Kuroda - Alternate ASIA Focal Point, JAPAN

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ORGANIZATIONS

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