
[What Kind of Future for the World Rainforest Movement?](#)

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In 1999, the report “Addressing the Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation¹: Case Studies, Analysis and Policy Recommendations” [was published](#). It resulted from a collaboration between the United Nations Intergovernmental Forum of Forests (IFF) and a large group of NGOs, including the World Rainforest Movement (WRM).

Groups involved in the report prepared more than 60 in-depth case studies about the main underlying causes of deforestation at the national and international level, and organized nine international workshops. The aim of the process was to increase knowledge and raise awareness around the underlying causes of deforestation among policy makers, as well as to formulate recommendations of how policy makers could address these causes.

In 2019, twenty years and significant additional forest loss later, the WRM International Secretariat decided to revisit this process. Our first idea was to identify and analyse which underlying causes of deforestation are still relevant, and which new causes might be drivers of forest loss. However, in the course of the discussions, we asked ourselves if there wasn't another perhaps even more important question to ask: What can we as WRM learn from that particular process of 20 years ago?

WRM's engagement with that process was based on a number of assumptions. Some of these have changed. What has also changed as a result is WRM's approach towards attending international forest policy forums. While we continue to follow what is being discussed at such forums in order to alert grassroots organisations and activists about upcoming threats, we question the assumption which underpinned the Underlying Causes process: that policy makers will take the necessary decisions if only they are given the right information. What prevents deforestation, however, are the community struggles against appropriation and/or destruction of their land. Thus, WRM is engaging more in processes that strengthen community resistance on the ground in tropical forest countries and regions.

We asked Larry Lohmann – a long-time member of the WRM Advisory Committee - to reflect on what the assumptions 20 years ago and now around halting deforestation could mean for WRM's future work. His text is the result of an exercise that included conversations between the author and the WRM Secretariat team, the WRM Advisory Committee, and close allies of the WRM International Secretariat in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

This document confirms that the analysis of the underlying causes from 20 years ago still broadly holds. Even more importantly, the document opens the door for a self-critical reflection on WRM's work and role over the past 20 years, raising a number of issues for further discussion and challenges for WRM's work in the years to come.

Although focused on WRM's work, we think that this document may also be of interest to a larger group of national and international organizations, movements and activists committed to critically reflecting on the consequences of engagement in international policy processes and support to social struggles in the forests.

Montevideo, December 2020
WRM International Secretariat Team