
[How forest policies and agencies promote sustainable destruction](#)

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Since 2012, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has promoted March 21st as the International Day of Forests. This year's theme is "Forests and sustainable production and consumption".

One question arises: What is sustainable in production and consumption when millions of hectares of forest are destroyed every year? Clearly, the many forest-related sustainability initiatives and policies, created with the support of FAO and other international actors, have failed to halt the devastating destruction.

On the eve of March 21, the day FAO celebrates its International Day of sustainable forest destruction, WRM is releasing a briefing that looks back at a UN-led process on the Underlying Causes of Deforestation that took place more than 20 years ago. The Underlying Causes identified in 1999 do not only remain as significant today as they were more than 20 years ago. They have even been reinforced in many ways.

The [underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation](#) – different from the more visible direct causes such as logging, agribusiness or mining – tend to be hidden from view, less discussed and poorly understood. They are closely tied to the capitalist-racist-patriarchal system, and also related to the colonial legacy. Examples include the non-recognition of the territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent communities; centralized control over forest facilitating the advance of both destructive and “nature conservation” activities; and macro-economic policies, just to mention a few.

By choosing to not address the Underlying Causes of Deforestation, FAO and the international policy processes it spearheads will continue to be a cause of deforestation.

One case in point is [FAO's forest definition](#). This definition is a long standing obstacle to halt forest loss. It considers an industrial monoculture tree plantation a forest, which means that chopping down a forest to set up a monoculture tree plantation does not count as deforestation for FAO.

Furthermore, the policies and initiatives promoted by FAO on days like March 21st, which suggest that corporate destruction has become sustainable and green, are key contributing factors. Examples are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), the Roundtable for Sustainable Soy or the 400-member Consumer Goods Forum promoting “zero-net deforestation” by 2020 in beef, soy, palm oil, pulp and paper supply chains. Such initiatives are not designed to interrupt the dynamics of forest destruction on which their corporate patrons depend for profitability, we note in the briefing.

The briefing alerts that producing policies and regulations that simply ignore the underlying causes of deforestation are not just doomed to fail, they fuel large scale deforestation further.

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