

Shame and pride can be drivers of Reforestation

“Are you a driver or a passenger in deforestation,” asked Tony Simons, Director General of the World Agroforestry Centre, as he opened a discussion forum exploring regional differences and new patterns in the drivers of deforestation .

The forum was part of Forest Day 6, held on 2 December 2012 in Doha, Qatar in conjunction with the UNFCCC COP18. Forest Day brought together over 600 scientists, delegates and other interested people under the title “Living Landscapes.”

Three other speakers addressed the forum (see associated blogs). Meine van Noordwijk of the World Agroforestry Centre said that rather than talking about drivers of deforestation, we should be thinking about levers, through which we can actively move the process along. At the same time we need to develop a really transparent definition of what a forest really is. Seven different definitions give seven different rates, some of which even show that deforestation is actually going down. We need to look at which trees and whose trees are being counted, and cut down.

The challenge is to develop a transparent definition of what we mean by forests. Then we can look at the real drivers of deforestation in relation to the ways they are evolving across the landscapes. These drivers are extremely dynamic and fluid. Those we see today will be very different to those that will be operating in the future.

Tony Simons stimulated the audience to engage with the debate. Consumption in the developed world is being imported into developing countries and driving deforestation, like the demand for palm oil. But sustainable consumption, if it can be developed into a powerful popular movement, will also be a driver, on the positive side. Inevitably smallholders and subsistence farmers are an important driver, and they may well be more important than was thought, as some preliminary results are indicating in Indonesia.

Lack of transparency was also highlighted, especially the definition of deforestation. In Brazil it is simple: the clearing of forests. In Indonesia there is an absence of transparency and a confusion of definitions. However, the meeting agreed that identifying drivers in a participatory way with community leaders, often gave an alternative view. Of deforestation.

There was also a clear relationship between agricultural policy and deforestation. Population growth is another huge challenge. New policies are needed to increase the efficiency of agriculture to reduce the need to expand it. However, the question was asked, “Can we stop consuming to reduce impact?” We need to create deforestation-free products and timber. That, increase the demand for sustainable products. However, deforestation is not the fault of the consumer, rather it is a fault of the system.

How much forest does a country need? Why should Bhutan maintain 75% forest cover? Does South Sudan really need 60% coverage? The challenge is to develop a transparent definition of what we mean by forests. Then we can look at the real drivers of deforestation in relation to the ways they are evolving across the landscapes. These drivers are extremely dynamic and fluid. Those we see today will be very different to those that will be operating in the future. We need to look beyond forests to the landscape

level, and seek to make people feel so proud of the forests and trees around them that they want to conserve them. After all, increasing tree coverage is a sign of development. And at the same time, we need to shame governments into protecting their countries' forests through political action.