



Rights + Resources Initiative

A global coalition to advance forest tenure, policy, and market reforms.

TRANSITIONS IN FOREST TENURE AND GOVERNANCE: DRIVERS, PROJECTED PATTERNS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

TRANSITIONS IN FOREST TENURE –

KEY FINDINGS

- Rapid globalization has led to dramatic growth in the global economy placing significant constraints and pressures on natural resources such as forests.
- Increased access to information and communication will empower civil society and local communities to demand greater security and rights over their resources.
- Any new global climate regime must strengthen local rights, reduce rural poverty, and protect forest resources.
- Ensuring secure rights of tenure and good governance plays a key role in reducing resource conflicts, alleviating poverty, and improving forest management.

The past few years have seen significant economic, social, and political changes worldwide. Rapid globalization has led to dramatic growth in the global economy, especially in Asia and Latin America. At the same time, the planet faces an impending ecological crisis due to climate change. These major changes are affecting forests and the

people and communities who rely on forest resources for their livelihoods; these trends will not lessen in the years to come. It is imperative to act now to ensure sustainable livelihoods, use, and management of forests resources before these problems are exacerbated and become intractable.

Forces affecting forests

The forest sector is integral to the global economy, and in the next few decades the influence of other sectors as well as global economic, social, political, and ecological changes will continue to impact forests, forest peoples, forest management, and ownership both positively and negatively. What are these forces?

CHANGES IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

In recent years, we have seen the growing and rapid emergence of the BRIC economies – Brazil, Russia, India and China – economies. Economic and population growth in these “emerging” and middle-income economies has and will continue to lead to the increased demand for energy, food, water, forest products, and other basic commodities for domestic consumption and export. This will create more intense competition for land and

pressure on natural forests, and more forested land will be converted to meet these rising demands.

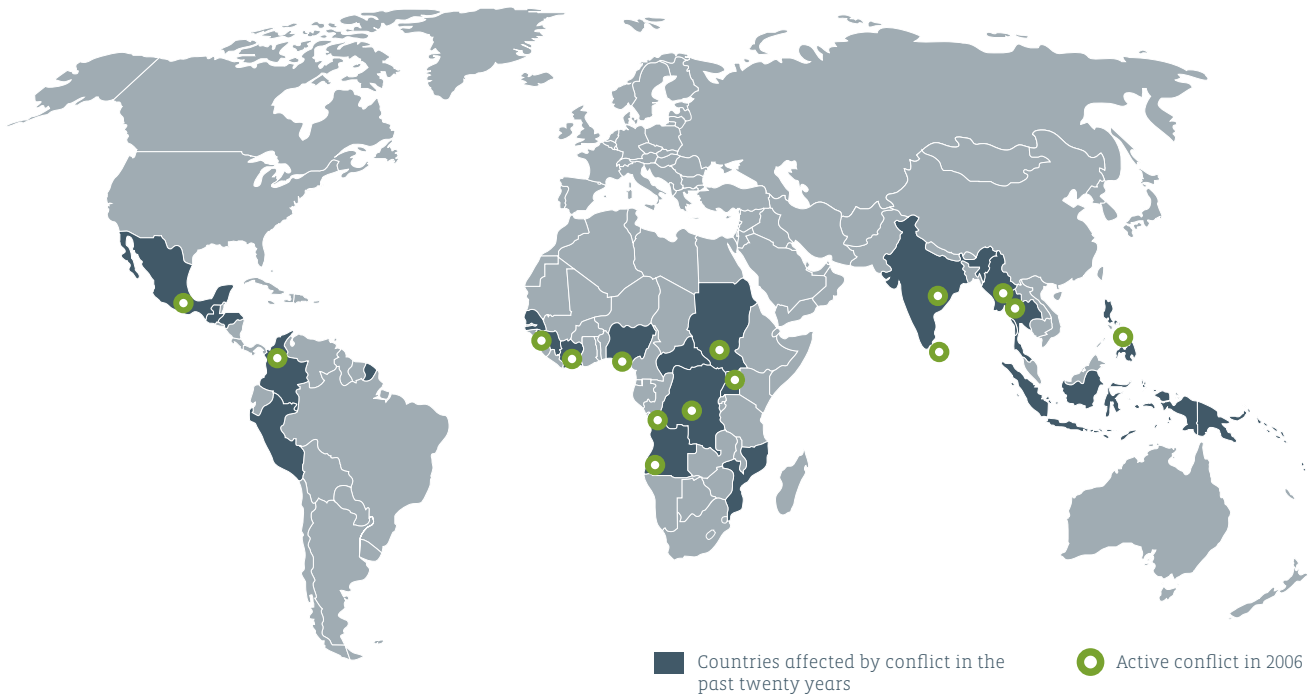
As developing countries continue to grow, domestic demand for forest products will also increase. Plantation expansion to meet rising demand could threaten land rights of forest peoples. Greater market opportunities will emerge, but may also expose local producers to market fluctuations. However, stronger domestic markets for forest products and forest fiber trade could provide incentives for improved governance and sustainable management of forest resources.

Markets for food, fuel, and fiber will increasingly converge...increasing pressure on forest lands and exacerbating food insecurity, inequality, and conflict.

The recent surge in energy demand and rise in alternative energy sources such as biofuels will lead to the conversion of vast areas of forests. Biofuels made from forest products could increase the value of forests and help promote sustainable management; however, crop-based biofuels will also intensify pressure on forest lands.

Changes in social and political systems – Globalization has led to a growing middle-class, rapid urbanization, and a widening gap between rich and poor. This raises the potential for concentrated influence and decision making power in urban centers and “mega-cities,” threatening rights and authority of rural communities and forest

TROPICAL COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY CONFLICT IN THE PAST TWENTY YEARS



peoples. The economic and power gap between urban and rural, rich and poor means that rural areas will continue to face extreme poverty, inequality, out-migration, and conflict. In fact, in the past 20 years, at least 30 countries in the tropics have experienced significant conflict between armed groups in forest areas; most of this conflict is strongly linked to poverty and insecurity of access to resources.

Access to information has enabled civil society and informal networks to benefit not only from cross-regional learning, but more importantly, to hold their governments accountable.

On the other hand, globalization has also spurred one of the most significant changes in developing countries since the 1990s: the shift in authority from central governments to private sector and civil society. This process of “decentralization” and “devolution” (of power) has created the political space for local empowerment and for communities as well as civil society to challenge national laws, policies, and governance. Globalization has enabled the rapid expansion of telecommunications, the internet, and media and with it the dissemination of information, even to the most remote parts of the world. Access to information has enabled civil society and informal networks to benefit not only from cross-regional learning, but more importantly, to hold their governments accountable. In the forest sector, greater transparency and connectivity can enable forest peoples to take advantage of information and to build alliances to pressure their governments for secure land and resource rights.

CHANGES IN ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

Climate change is already having significant impacts on forests and forest peoples. The poor who depend on forests and other natural resources will be among those most exposed and most vulnerable to catastrophic events, including changes in weather, rainfall, vegetation, and the distribution of wildlife populations. Climate change will cause increased migration, and thus potentially increase conflicts between local and indigenous peoples and immigrants. In addition, climate change will make it difficult for established populations to adopt production systems that can reliably improve their incomes.

Deforestation and changing use of forest lands account for 18-20% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Forest lands and forest peoples must be intimately involved in designing and implementing the solutions. Any new global climate regime must strengthen local rights, reduce rural poverty, protect remaining natural forests, and restore degraded ones, while at the same time bring about a reduction of carbon emissions.

The future of forests

The amount of forest owned and officially administered by indigenous and traditional communities has doubled over the last 15 years. New trends, legislation, and land reform initiatives currently underway suggest that the percentage of community-owned forests is likely to double again by 2020.

These global forces will have both positive and negative impacts on forest and forests peoples. Greater local empowerment will bring continued and increased political pressure on governments to

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recognize and to devolve property rights. Until this happens, conflict will continue. Global economic growth and the climate change will put enormous pressure on limited land and resources. Yet at the same time these factors could provide the economic and ecological incentive and motivation for forest peoples to invest in sustainable management of forest resources.

The countervailing forces of these global, regional, national, and local trends will force governments to implement tenure reforms on forest lands. But without regulatory reforms ensuring that local people actually benefit from and have usage rights to forest resources, conflict and unsustainable exploitation of forest resources will continue. Governments should strengthen local rights,

ownership, and access to land and resources, especially in poor, heavily forested countries. Development agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society must enable forest communities to take control of their land by disseminating information about community forestry and the importance of tenure and good forest governance. The new global climate change regime and other conservation-oriented funding mechanisms must reward forest peoples for reducing emissions from forest degradation. From the local to the international, every effort should be made to secure rights of tenure and good governance – it is vital to reducing poverty and conflict and ensuring sustainable forest management for decades to come.

READ MORE

Rights and Resources Initiative. 2008. Seeing People Through The Trees: Scaling Up Efforts to Advance Rights and Address Poverty, Conflict and Climate Change. Washington DC: RRI. Available at www.rightsandresources.org.

The Rights and Resources Initiative is a global coalition to advance forest tenure, policy, and market reforms. RRI is composed of international, regional, and community organizations engaged in conservation, research, and development. For more information, visit www.rightsandresources.org.

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