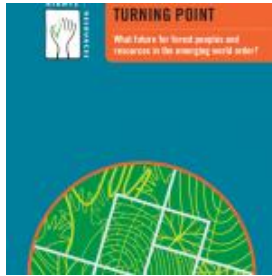


Turning Point: What future for forest peoples and resources in the emerging world order?

By Chris Lang, 2nd February 2012



Reports about REDD tend to focus on the forests. It's unusual for a report about REDD to start with an analysis of the economic crisis in Europe and the way in which the world is changing. Yesterday, the Rights and Resources Initiative released a new report that does precisely that.

The report is titled, "[Turning Point: What future for forest peoples and resources in the emerging world order?](#)" Written by author and journalist [Fred Pearce](#), the report is a fascinating overview of where REDD currently stands in the context of the economic crisis, collapsing carbon markets, climate change, population and consumption growth, inequality, land-grabbing, infrastructure, development and protests.

Pearce writes that "Nothing demonstrated the historic shift in economic power in 2011 more than the European Union going to China, hat in hand, asking for a bailout." The report points out that investment in infrastructure and mining is booming in Asia and Latin America. The investment is spreading to Africa, "potentially locking in unsustainable development for decades". In many poorer countries, development aid is being largely replaced by new players, such as the sovereign wealth funds of the Persian Gulf, China's Ex-Im Bank, and Brazil's National Bank of Economic and Social Development.

In November 2011, Fatih Birol, chief economist at the International Energy Agency, [told](#) the *Guardian*, that, "The door is closing. I am very worried – if we don't change direction now on how we use energy, we will end up beyond what scientists tell us is the minimum [for safety]. The door will be closed forever." But the signs are that we are continuing in the wrong direction. In 2006, 25% of the world's primary energy came from coal, in 2011, the figure was expected to reach 30%.

The UN climate meeting in Durban committed the world to a "lost decade", with little chance of preventing global warming of at least 2°C. In this context, "REDD is unlikely to play a substantial role before 2020 without a major injection of funds, the prospects of which seem dim."

Without secure promises of funds, developing countries were reluctant in Durban to cede oversight of their REDD activities. As a result, talks on creating international safeguards to protect the interests of forest communities made little progress. Governments that might host REDD projects agreed to provide summary information on safeguards but refused to accept rules on the collection of data or other specifics that would allow them to be held to account. “Without such rules”, [said Louis Verchot](#), CIFOR’s principal scientist at the talks, “we cannot talk about sustainability of REDD”.

The report refers to research demonstrating that “community control is the best long-term insurance for forests.” But adds that asserting community control could prove difficult, “under an international REDD regime designed to ensure carbon integrity”.

Indonesia is reported as an example of one government that has shown, “increased determination to help communities benefit from REDD”. This is based in part on a [speech by Kuntoro Mangkusubroto](#), head of the President’s Special Delivery Unit, given at a Rights and Resources Initiative conference in July 2011. In the speech, Kuntoro referred to The People’s Consultative Assembly Decree (Tap MPR) No. 9/2001 on Land Reform and Natural Resources Management, which mandated the review and revision of all land tenure regulations:

“The People’s Consultative Assembly Decree also instructs to conduct land reform with considerations on conflict resolutions and resolve land inequality for land-less peasants; to develop inventory and registry of land tenure comprehensively and systematically; to resolve and anticipate land tenure and natural resources management conflicts; and all should be implemented based on the principle to recognize, to respect, and to protect adat customary rights.”

As RRI points out, this statement is “the highest-level government pledge to recognize indigenous land claims made in Indonesia’s history”. Of course, Kuntoro’s statement should be welcomed, as should President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s [statements](#) on protecting Indonesia’s forests. But [many problems remain](#) regarding the recognition of the rights of forest communities and reducing deforestation in Indonesia. Logging, mining, oil palm and pulpwood plantations have not gone away, despite the two-year moratorium on new forest concessions.

The report highlights the impact of infrastructure development on forests, with descriptions of road-building projects in Pakistan, Bolivia and the Mekong Region. Land-grabbing is also an important driver of deforestation. In the last decade, according to both Oxfam and the International Land Coalition, about 200 million hectares has been bought or leased by agribusiness. In Liberia, most of the country’s land is under some form of concession. Six million hectares of land in Mozambique has been declared open to foreign investors. And South Sudan “was handing out land even before it raised its national flag for the first time”. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, 33.5 million hectares of forest are under timber, diamond or mining concessions. In Gabon and the Central African Republic the figures are 5.4 million hectares and 18.9 million hectares, respectively.

The report also looks at population growth. The world’s population reached 7 billion in 2011. But [consumption](#) is the crucial problem. “The global consumption bomb is ready to go off,”

Pearce writes. “Consumption drives resource demand and use, and the number of people living consumerist lifestyles in the world’s burgeoning urban areas is rising fast.”

The report considers the importance of protests against the destruction caused by land-grabs, plantations and hydropower dams. Protests in Liberia, Indonesia, Sudan, Brazil and China are highlighted:

Something is afoot. Frustrated by global financial forces and the abuse of their local rights and resources, the most unlikely people are rising up against authorities once seen to be too powerful to challenge.

The report refers to a [speech by Arundhati Roy](#) in New York in November 2011, in which she points out that the Occupy Movement, allied to movements in the South, can challenge conventional models of development. “The Occupy movement has joined thousands of other resistance movements all over the world,” she says, “in which the poorest of people are standing up and stopping the richest corporations in their tracks.”

The report ends with a series of questions:

- Will 2012 see the end of effective global action on climate change?
- Will REDD be reformed or overtaken?
- Where will Indonesia’s tenure reform road take them?
- Will Rio get real?
- Will respect for local rights be the hallmark of 2012?

For the answers to these questions, [read RRI’s report](#). It’s well worth it.