

Deforestation

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Since the beginning of human civilization man has destroyed forests for its own needs, the main being need for agricultural land. This trend has continued into the 21st century, the only difference being that this act of deforestation is now trying to be controlled as its consequences are dire.

In most rich countries pressure on forests has eased however, in the poor and developing countries-which contain most of the tropical forest- this is not the case, as the demand for land is increasing as the population of these countries is rising. For example in Congo, country with the most rainforests after B Brazil, deforestation is mainly due to small holders whose number has now almost doubled. Thus, there is ever rising demand for food and biofuels as population is rising.

Clearing forests is definitely enriching those who are doing it but impoverishing the planet in the long run. As we can see, lowering the green cover has brought about major changes in the world climate, all of which are for the worst. Rainforests play the most important part in maintaining the water cycle. Also, forests contain almost twice the amount of carbon dioxide than that in the atmosphere, plant matter and the soil they cover, so destroying them means that there is a lot of emission of carbon dioxide, which leads to the greenhouse effect, that is increase in world temperatures. Forests also contain around 80% of terrestrial biodiversity, so deforestation leads to a loss in rich biodiversity. Trees also help in the prevention of various natural disasters like landslides and floods, as their roots bind the soil together.

Economic development causes both deforestation and slows it. Initially, when the economy is expanding people destroy forests for a living but as they prosper they think about the welfare of the future generations and the government too begins to pass laws, enforcing the conservation of the environment. Unfortunately, this transition between clearing forests and protecting them is really slow.

During the last few decades, the forest crisis has led to the rise of many regional, national and international preservation initiatives. For example the Chipko Movement, which started in 1974 in Uttarakhand, India, was a major social- ecological movement in which people hugged so that the trees could not be felled. Another example is of the Bolsa Floresta in Brazil in which traditional communities are rewarded for their commitment to stop deforestation. There have been many other such movements world over to protect the Earth's green cover. However, it is believed that these movements were too focused on the immediate cause of deforestation and neglected the underlying causes, some of which are related to major international economic phenomena such as macro economic strategies which provide a strong incentive for short term profit making instead of long term sustainability.

The main international effort to speed up the transition between clearing of forests and protecting them is the idea of Reducing Emission from Deforestation and

Forest Degradation or more commonly known as REDD. REDD is a set of steps designed to use financial incentives in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from forest degradation. Its basic concept is that it pays people in developing countries to leave trees standing. In the Copenhagen Summit of 2009 rich countries like Norway, America and Britain promised \$4.5 billion as a starter to this idea. The main difficulty of the REDD projects is that it requires an efficient government, which is missing in most of the tropical countries. However, with proper monitoring and verification that the money goes to those people who deserve it the REDD may work. As put by an environmentalist economist “forests and other ecosystems provide valuable service; and if they are to be conserved, people must pay for them.”