

“A Conservation and Development Perspective on Forest Conflict”

**REMARKS**

By

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At

*Building Partnerships to Reduce Forest Conflict in Asia*

**I. Introduction and Background**

Good morning. I'm very pleased to be here today, in what I think is quite an important forum on an issue whose importance has in some ways been overlooked, but that affects the lives of many thousands of people in forest areas around the world. And, through its links to illegal logging – which are many and complex – it in fact affects many of us here, even if only indirectly.

I'd also like to thank U.S.AID, The Forests Dialogue and ARD for sponsoring this meeting and focusing our attention on the issue of forest conflict in what I think is a very constructive manner. I'd like, in particular, to thank Mary Melnyk for leading on this issue and on the organization of the meeting.

In fact, I am here this morning not to voice my own opinion on the topic, but to present the collective thinking that resulted from a meeting of about 15 non-governmental organizations on November 8. On that day, about twenty representatives of development, conservation and conflict resolution organizations were able to spend the day at WWF to discuss forest conflict. Our goals were three-fold:

- To identify and define the impacts related to forest conflict that are of concern to the three major NGO sectors

- To identify some broad, preferably synchronized actions that can be taken by government, donors, NGO's and industry to reduce and manage forest conflict.
- We also were invited to provide input to the agenda for this meeting.

I'd like, then, to quickly go over some of the many good ideas that emerged from that meeting. I'd also like to thank Ben Campbell, of WorldVision, who couldn't be here today but who helped a great deal in distilling the ideas from the November 8 meeting.

## II. Key Issues and Ideas Identified in the NGO Consultation Meeting

### State of the World's Forest Report?

First of all, why do development, relief and environmental NGO's care about forest conflict?

Just a few quick numbers can paint the picture :

By best estimates, some 60 million highly-forest dependent indigenous people live in the rainforests of Latin America, West Africa and Southeast Asia. An additional 400-500 million people are estimated to be directly dependent on forest resources for their livelihoods. Many of these people live at very low economic levels – at times with incomes below a dollar per week -- as part of the rural poor in their country. Forest conflict often is a major block to development for these groups.

### **A. Development and Forest Conflict**

How does forest conflict hinder development and welfare improvements? The WorldVision, Catholic Relief Services and other development group representatives at our November 8 meeting identified several keys ways:

- Timber resources fuel conflict

- Forest areas can become staging areas for open armed conflict
- Poverty levels rise when forest dependent groups find their access to forest resources blocked or limited through conflict

Weak governance and therefore unclear resource management regimes at various levels were identified as possibly the key factors behind forest conflict. This includes lack of clear tenure (with the resulting conflict); poor enforcement and even political decentralization, when carried out with weak local capacity for governing any resource, including forests. Increasing population pressure was also identified as a frequent cause of forest conflict.

## **B. Environment and Forest Conflict**

And many of the forested areas are home to high rates of biodiversity and thus, are of interest for conservation. The conservation group representatives at the November 8 meeting identified a set of conflict and environment linkages that complement those of the development group:

- First of all, conflict can certainly degrade the forest, as armed groups move through and indiscriminately burn or cut down trees.
- At the same time, conflict can displace communities and force them to live in the forest in an unsustainable manner.
- And, in general, the natural resource base is vitally connected to development in rural areas, so resource management is critical for addressing conflict.
- Standing, intact forests are not currently assigned a very high commercial or economic value. This understates the value they provide through environmental services, such as water capture and climate stabilization. This low economic value means that governments often do not care to invest in clarifying the resource management regime for forests.

In general, the NGO's basically focused on the importance of thinking of forests as having many values for many different groups – commercial value to companies of certain species; value of NTFP's to households in the forest, value for shelter materials and spiritual values. A government's role is to resolve the conflicts that arise from competing uses of forests for these values. Government capability or, in its absence, local governance capabilities are therefore a very central theme of concern for all the NGO's.

It's also important to think about how the issues of governance and equity issues surrounding the use of forest resources in developing countries relate to the topic of legality or illegality. Because laws governing forest resource use are often poorly developed, they won't always have much resonance or legitimacy in a society. This could be the case of indigenous communities whose traditional use of a forest is blocked through modern laws or concessions. If the indigenous communities cut a tree in their former community forest to meet a family emergency, this may be an illegal action. Some people concerned with equity and governance issues relating to forests would argue, however, that maybe this type of activity shouldn't be illegal. So when talking about legality and illegality I think it's very important to also address the legitimacy of the statutes that define legality or illegality and talk about how such statutes affect equity issues in a given region.

### **III. Current Approaches and Actions**

The NGO's in the November 8 meeting generally work at the community level, delivering services and strengthening capacities for governance. Several of the organizations also, however, have the ability to get involved in policy advocacy, whether for pro-poor policies or for policies that support sustainable development.

As a general matter, we asked ourselves, "how and when should we address the fact that our actions, whether aid or conservation oriented,

often take place in situations where conflicts are already under way openly or are latent?” NGO’s have in fact devoted quite a lot of effort to thinking about how our actions could exacerbate or help address a conflict. WorldVision has come up with a framework for analysis that I think has many useful elements and so I wanted to just briefly look at that.

### **Introduce iPAD framework**

This framework looks at how aid processes affect key dynamics in the local community where they are carried out. (central column) It is then used as a tool and guide for discussions with local community representatives about whether the proposed or designed aid processes will augment the tensions and dividers and capacities for war that already exist at the local level or whether – on the other hand, they support the dynamics that connect people in a positive way and build local capacity for conflict management.

I think that this is a useful framework for any organization coming in from the outside into a local community setting in a developing country to use.

The NGO’s then identified a range of specific current approaches and actions that they currently have under way to address the causes and the symptoms of forest conflict. These include:

- A. Community Based Forest Enterprises
- B. Community level work more generally, focused on
  - building effective conflict management systems and
  - capacity for decentralized natural resource management.
  - Building skills among paralegals at the community level
  - Building systems, such as WWF’s Global Forest and Trade Network, that provide positive market or economic incentives

for sustainable or responsible management of forest resources and looking for ways to link communities into those systems.

- WRI's Partnership for Principle 10

Last but not least, we identified some possible avenues for collaboration with government and private sector groups to address forest conflict.