



# Forests as Resources for the poor

The Rainforest Challenge Partnership





CIFOR / Edmond Dounias

## What is the Rainforest Challenge Partnership?

The humid tropics are home to more than 500 million people. Most are very poor, and the landscapes in which they live and work – rural mosaics of forests and farms – are changing rapidly.

Two leading conservation organizations and two international research centres have joined forces with local communities, district authorities, development organizations and other partners to take on the challenge of reducing rural poverty in the tropics and conserving unique forest ecosystems. They are IUCN - The World Conservation Union; the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF); ICRAF - The World Agroforestry Centre, which hosts the Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn Programme (ASB); and the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).

'Win-win' solutions for livelihoods and the environment are rare. Tradeoffs are inevitable and must be explicitly identified and addressed at a scale where there is room for discussion, looking for approaches that offer the most benefit for people and nature – at the least cost. Attempts to achieve both environment and development goals within projects have often failed to provide workable solutions for poverty reduction and conservation. There are solutions to be found, but they can only be discovered by working with stakeholders across the full range of land-use systems from forests to agriculture. The balance is dynamic, changing as the environment, people's needs, and knowledge develop over time. Decisions made now can either enhance or reduce future options.

The Rainforest Challenge Partnership will find concrete ways to address the central challenge of equitably balancing tradeoffs between development and conservation, by bridging local knowledge, science, policy and practice.

The founding members of the Rainforest Challenge Partnership are seeking support to identify priorities among research needs for locally-driven adaptive management at key learning sites, and to involve more regional, national and local partners in the tropics. Ongoing work at many of the sites is already funded, so financial assistance will be directed to bringing together partners working in the same area for stronger integration in each region, as well as cross-regional collaboration. The partners form a powerful alliance that spans the spectrum of capacities and disciplines needed to tackle the problems of poverty and tropical forest loss and degradation on a sufficient scale to produce real, replicable impacts over large areas.

Bringing together development, conservation and research in a long-term partnership to deliver results that matter for the poor through learning, adapting, building capacity, and influencing public policy across the tropics.



WWF-Canon / Edward Parker

## 10 Ways the Rainforest Challenge is Different from Previous Approaches

The Rainforest Challenge partners believe that a bold new way of working is necessary to deliver success on a large scale and avoid the mixed results typical of the first generation of integrated conservation-development efforts. Working together, the partners will:

1. Operate at multiple scales of analysis and action with a landscape focus;
2. Ensure local relevance of initiatives and results, driven by local priorities, interests, and urgency;
3. Empower stakeholders who are politically weak to engage actively in the search for solutions;
4. Confront the reality that “win-win” for livelihoods and the environment is rare and put greater emphasis on “winning more and losing less”;
5. Deliver locally appropriate and scientifically-valid practical strategies for balancing poverty reduction and conservation;
6. Engage in active learning by all partners, using a science-based management approach, with performance indicators and feedback across scales;
7. Refine and make use of mechanisms that can accelerate adoption of improved development options around the world;
8. Ensure that local realities enrich policy processes at national, regional and global levels including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the Millennium Development Goals;
9. Put into practice proven organizational models which emphasize interdisciplinary teams, scaling-up results, flexibility, and new relationships among resource managers (fishers, farmers, foresters, etc.), researchers, policy makers, environmentalists, extension workers and other groups; and
10. Establish a long-term, cross-regional coalition of partners from conservation, development and research who bring a strong capacity for field level implementation, strategic research, policy dialogue, and effective communication across local to global scales.

## Grounded in Reality and Experience

IUCN, WWF, ICRAF and CIFOR have decades of experience working at strategic sites across the humid tropics to meet human needs and conserve the environment. As shown in the examples of ongoing work below, more than one partner is active at many of these sites. These opportunities for inter-institutional collaboration are the starting point for the Rainforest Challenge Partnership, which aims to accelerate learning through a cross-site approach.



IUCN-EARO / Edmund Barrow



ICRAF-ASB / Dagmar Timmer

In the Mount Elgon ecosystem, the conventional policy of excluding local people from the protected area in Uganda failed – as it has in so many places in the tropics. With the assistance of IUCN, the Uganda Wildlife Authority has worked with both the protected area authorities and the local communities in parishes bordering the park to test collaborative management approaches that allow access for people to harvest certain wild resources – such as bamboo shoots and wild fruits – in exchange for self-regulation and resource protection by the community. To date, more than 25 agreements have been signed in over 20 parishes. ICRAF also works at Mount Elgon, promoting agroforestry interventions that help increase the productivity of farmers' lands outside the protected area. There has been collaboration between ICRAF and IUCN on promoting alternatives to resources found in the park.

In the Peruvian Amazon, many of the hundreds of tree species used by farmers are disappearing or declining in quality around farming communities. Led by farmers working with ICRAF's agroforestry researchers, a new strategy of on-farm domestication of valuable trees helps conserve genetic resources. By selecting and domesticating these species, farmers are shifting away from reliance on annual cropping to more sustainable agroforestry systems and creating new income opportunities while protecting local biodiversity. WWF, CIFOR and ICRAF each have longstanding programmes of work with local and national partners in the Amazon Basin, advancing complimentary aspects of the conservation-development agenda.

In Indonesia's Lampung Province in southwest Sumatra, the Krui people plant a tall-growing timber species called damar, a source of valuable resin that provides them with a steady flow of income over the long term. These agroforests were threatened with conversion to large-scale oil palm plantations. A consortium of research institutions, NGOs and universities supported local communities in their efforts to obtain government recognition, by providing convincing scientific evidence on the social and environmental benefits of the Krui system precisely when it was needed. The Minister of Forestry used these results to develop an innovative decree in 1998. That decree recognized the environmental benefits of this indigenous system, and guaranteed communities' rights to harvest products from their trees, benefiting at least 7,000 families directly. The Krui consortium includes local partners and institutions like ICRAF-ASB, and CIFOR.

Scientists add value through bringing awareness of how similar problems are being addressed elsewhere, and contribute to developing the basket of options. As one example, ASB researchers have developed a matrix where natural forest and the land use systems that replace it are scored against different criteria reflecting the objectives of different interest groups. Drawing on ten years of empirical work, these researchers have filled in this matrix for representative sites across the humid tropics. The matrix allows researchers, policymakers, environmentalists and others to identify and discuss tradeoffs among land use systems, both as they are currently practiced and in the alternative forms that could be possible through innovation. ASB brings together scientists from ICRAF and CIFOR, as well as from 50 other international, national and local partners.



ICRAF-ASB / Thomas Tomich



ICRAF-ASB / Dagmar Trimmer



ICRAF-ASB / Thomas Tomich



- Candidate Sites

The polygons represent ecoregions which fall within the Tropical and Subtropical Moist Broadleaf Forest Biome. The ecoregions in yellow are not classified as Global 200 Ecoregions.

## A Learning Network of Sites

Rainforest Challenge 'benchmark sites' will be linked across the humid tropics (*see map*). They are landscape-level sites where the livelihoods of many poor people are dependent on the biodiversity around them. The initiative will concentrate its learning efforts on sites where one or more partners are active.

The partners already work through strong local collaborative arrangements to maintain and restore tree-based ecosystems that bring benefits for people and nature. They share a commitment to building local capacity and bringing scientific expertise to these issues, as well as fostering links for sharing, assessment and adaptation of local insights and institutional innovations.

Since each partner works with hundreds of projects, the lessons learned at benchmark sites will be shared around the world. While benchmark sites have specific problems and characteristics, a set of basic operational principles offers the opportunity to replicate research results widely, in addition to having a significant and immediate local impact.



ICRAF-ASB / Thomas Tomich



WWF-Canon / Frederick J. Weyerhaeuser



WWF-Canon / Nigel Dickinson



ICRAF-ASB / Jessa Lewis

## Bringing Together Science and Local Knowledge

The Rainforest Challenge Partnership is a global science-based approach to managing large forest landscapes. In this partnership, science and local experience work together to generate useful knowledge. Each will build on its own knowledge base and practices, blending them with new ideas. Local knowledge is united with state-of-the-art georeferenced data sets, historical trends analysis, scenario building, and local participatory research.

The partnership also unites disciplines, linking the competencies of different scientific fields with those of local resource managers and decision-makers. Emerging insights and challenges will be used to adapt the strategy over time. Stakeholders will work together to develop a combination of social, environmental and economic indicators for assessing progress, negotiating outcomes and adapting management.

The Rainforest Challenge will learn from these actions at specific sites and will apply the lessons across scales from the local level to that of the global network. The partners aim to shape the direction of international, national and local policies that influence land use over large areas in the tropics.

"If we don't respect our traditions, it's the same as disrespecting our elders. If we disrespect our elders, it's the same as disrespecting the forest. Trees give us shade and shelter, and will provide for the next generations of our people. Water will continue to flow out of the forest, as long as the elders continue to pass on the knowledge and traditions of our culture."

Somkit Kirikumsap, village head of a Karen community in Northern Thailand (ASB Voices #6: Preserving traditions, conserving resources)

## Working with the Rural Poor for Prosperity

The Rainforest Challenge Partnership aims to produce lasting improvements in the well-being of the world's rural poor, as well as enhance the integrity and resilience of the most important ecosystems.

Achieving rural prosperity is at the centre of this initiative. The Rainforest Challenge partners recognize that conservation and development must join forces to achieve the most urgent sustainable development milestone of reducing absolute poverty by 50% before 2015. The outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit reflect this fundamental link, making it clear that the achievement of all eight Millennium Development Goals requires fully functional and healthy ecosystems.

This relationship is readily apparent in rural areas, where poor people are strongly dependent on natural resources for everything from food to medicine, shelter to flood control. Indeed, forest resources *directly* contribute to the livelihood of 90 per cent of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty, according to The World Bank. The partners are committed to genuine and equitable participation of all stakeholders in decisions about natural resources, especially those who have been marginalized yet are heavily reliant on these resources for their daily existence. Reforming property rights and improving resource access are essential steps towards empowering these disenfranchised stakeholders.



WWF-Canon/Edward Parker

WWF-Canon / Nigel Dickinson

## What Can Be Achieved?

At each of the Rainforest Challenge benchmark sites, tradeoffs between conservation and development will be identified and addressed actively, in the search for equitable solutions that work for local people and the environment. Measures of success will include:

- Rural people having secure access to resources and an expanded range of livelihood options, enabling them to move out of poverty;
- Poor people empowered through tenure reform to participate as equals in the quest for solutions;
- Disadvantaged groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, having an effective voice in land use decisions;
- Science and technology harnessed for sustainable development;
- Young people having the skills and options to choose a better future;
- Diverse landscapes with more trees and more biological diversity; and
- Local people being fairly rewarded for nurturing their land and their forests.

Producing tangible results that really do matter for the poor means reforming, and sometimes developing anew, those policies, technologies and market incentives that can directly improve rural incomes, strengthen disenfranchised people's voice and minimize vulnerability to economic shocks and natural disasters. The Rainforest Challenge will make the link to broader macro-economic issues such as trade patterns and globalisation. The partners will use lessons learnt to build the capacity of countries' environment and natural resource sectors and to enhance these sectors' relevance to poverty reduction, through explicit links to poverty reduction goals within their sectoral planning processes as well as by direct contributions to national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). At the global level, partners are working with existing international environmental commitments and mechanisms, such as the Proposals for Action associated with the *United Nations Forum on Forests* and the Clean Development Mechanism of the *Kyoto Protocol*, so that their implementation benefits the rural poor.



"I want to look into ways to use the forest remaining on my farm instead of clearing it. Someday, maybe I 'll even be able to reforest some of my pastures."

Virgulino da Costa Nascimento, a colonist in the Western Amazon of Brazil  
(ASB Voices #3: Coming full circle in the Brazilian Amazon)



WWF-Canon / Edward Parker

## Building Assets for People and Nature

Revitalizing landscapes offers an extraordinary opportunity to serve the interests of both conservation (by reviving habitats) and poverty reduction (by creating valuable assets for the rural poor). There are over 850 million hectares of degraded primary forest, regenerating secondary forest and degraded forest land in the tropics.

What replaces cleared or degraded forest matters both for poverty reduction and conservation. Restored landscapes would be mosaics of secondary forests, agroforests and other tree-based systems, pasture and cropland, and protected primary forest. It is the combination at the landscape level that matters, focusing not on restoring pristine forest cover but on bringing back the goods, services, ecological processes and future options that forests provide.

**Harnessing landscape restoration for poverty reduction is a major point of collaboration among Rainforest Challenge partners.**



WWF-Canon / John E. Newby

## Working Together for Change

In addition to IUCN, WWF, ICRAF, ASB, and CIFOR, other potential partners in the Rainforest Challenge Partnership include the Amazon Initiative Consortium, led by Embrapa (Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária) and CIAT (Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical); the 'Rewarding the Upland Poor for Environmental Services (RUPES) project' in Southeast Asia; CARE; the Congo Basin Forest Partnership; and many more institutions from the local to global level.

These partners form a powerful alliance. The research strengths of CIFOR and ICRAF are complemented by the policy advocacy and public-awareness capacities of IUCN and WWF, who draw on their strong links with national governments, the private sector, intergovernmental processes and the general public. The on-the-ground conservation programmes of IUCN and WWF are matched by ICRAF's and CIFOR's networks of national research institutes, universities, farmers' groups and other local non-governmental organizations. The majority of the staff of the four founding partner organizations is located in developing countries.

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ICRAF-ASB/Thomas Tomich

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