

“How to stop forest destruction?”

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Ladies and gentlemen,

distinguished colleagues,

it is a great pleasure to speak here today at the Marcus Wallenberg symposium, and an honour to follow Johan Rockstrom, Peter Holmgren and Göran Ståhl and their enriching presentations.

I have been asked to respond to a question of fundamental importance to our planet: *“How to stop forest destruction?”*.

This is not a new question for us – the world has been struggling with the question of how to stop forest destruction for several decades...and with mixed results...

Indeed, from a certain perspective, things could be a lot worse. Population growth and increased consumption and demand for natural resources are commonly cited as underlying causes of deforestation. But when we look closer, the relationship is less definite. Since 1960, the world’s population has more than doubled, from around 3 billion to 7 billion in 2011. Over the same period, consumption has increased several-fold.

And yet, despite this, the deforestation rate over the same time period has remained fairly constant - and today it is even showing signs of declining. Some countries have shown great progress over the last few years. Brazil, the second most forest-rich

country in the world, recently saw annual deforestation plummet by 70% in 5 years - from 2.7 million in 2004 to less than 700,000 hectares in 2009.

Similarly, the 2020 target of having 17% of the world's forests within legally ordained protected areas is looking attainable: at the last count in 2010, we had reached 13%.

Forest certification is increasingly established and applied as a forest management tool: between 2009 and 2010, the global area of certified forest increased by 8% to 355 million hectares, equal to 9% of the world's forests, with most of the recent growth in North America and the Russian Federation.

Our collective efforts on REDD+ are showing real promise of paying off, too. While it cannot be the only solution to global climate change mitigation, we know that REDD+ has the potential to provide up to one-third of the cost effective reduction necessary to reduce annual global carbon emissions to the required levels by 2030. With around 50 countries currently building REDD national strategies, REDD is now emerging as a major finance mechanism that could, in theory, sustain conservation, and contribute to sustainable forest management and forest landscape restoration.

But of course, despite all these encouraging signs, it is far too early for complacency, and there is still much cause for alarm.

Deforestation – mainly the conversion of tropical forest to agricultural land – does show signs of decreasing in several countries, but it continues at a high rate in others.

Globally, around 13 million hectares of forest were converted to other uses or lost through natural causes each year in the last decade. Thanks to a forestation and natural expansion of forests in some countries and regions, the net loss in forest cover is actually around 5.2 million hectares, per year. But that is still a frightening amount. Think of it: an area of forest the size of Costa Rica disappearing every year!

Countries such as Uganda are reported to be experiencing rates of deforestation that could leave them forest-less by 2050, unless something is done. Even the recent success story of Brazil that I just mentioned had a sudden reverse in its fortunes earlier this year, with reports of deforestation rates having risen by six times between April 2010 and April 2011. The fact that this came as a surprise to most involved reminds us to stay on our toes; to work towards making sure our successes are secure and not ephemeral; and that the conditions that contribute to positive trends be identified, reinforced and expanded to maintain and ensure long term gains.

We must constantly question our data and our reasoning, to be sure that our understanding is a fair and up-to-date reflection of what is happening on the ground...

As well as the well-documented issue of forest loss, there are persistent problems – yet to be tackled properly – of ongoing simplification and degradation of forests.

Then we have the host of emerging challenges posed by the impact of climate change, such as surface erosion, desertification, forest fires and specific phenomena such as the Amazon die-back.

Considering this brief snapshot of the state of the world's forests, it would seem to be clear to state that, while some of our efforts to slow and halt forest destruction over the past few decades have been having a positive impact, other responses have not worked, or not worked enough. It might even be that at times they have exacerbated the situation.

So what are some of those things that have not worked well, and what successful methods do we need to do more of?

Well, what hasn't worked well - or worked only partially - are major international initiatives and donor-driven, sectoral planning processes. One major reason – amongst others - for the failure of such schemes has been their top-down nature and their blueprint, one-size-fits-all-type approach.

One example is the Tropical Forest Action Plan, or TFAP, launched in the 1980s, and the first major international initiative to tackle tropical forest deforestation. The TFAP stimulated too little institutional and policy reform at the national level and generated little new information on the status of tropical forests. TFAP was designed as a singularly sectoral process, and participation by various sectors, such as ministries of agriculture or finance, was severely limited. In the end TFAP did not take adequate account of the root causes of deforestation or reduce it.

Analysis that underpins such globally-driven, top-down initiatives has tended to focus on the management of forests primarily for the supply of a single or limited number of goods and services. Critically, they have excluded the role and involvement of forest-dependent communities, small-scale forest owners, and other local level stakeholders adjacent to the forests themselves.

And this brings us to the point of considering what has worked.

As a first point, I would like to highlight that initiatives that are based on partnership tend to work much better than those implemented unilaterally or in isolation. One of the best examples of a partnership-based initiative in this sense – and how they can work – is the story of certification. The global certification initiative was led by NGOs and the private sector, working towards a common goal. Now, we have a host of recognized certificates with – as I mentioned already – 9% of the world's forest under certification.

Certification is increasingly picking up speed in key countries such as Russia, which has working groups for certification initiatives across the country. Between December 2008

and May 2010, the area of FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)-certified Russian forests rose from 18.3 million to 23 million, with 15 of the 20 largest Russian forest companies having certified at least *part* of their forest area to FSC standards. And that is just the extent of FSC-certified areas in the country, let alone the other existing certificates.

Another truly worldwide example of partnership-based forest initiatives is the Global Partnership for Forest Landscape Restoration (or GPFLR), coordinated by IUCN.

GPFLR is a proactive network that unites governments, organizations, communities and individuals with a common goal: to catalyze and reinforce the restoration of forests and degraded lands which deliver benefits to local communities and to nature; and to fulfil international commitments on forests.

The GPFLR partnership does not seek to establish a parallel policy process or duplicate the efforts of others. It aims to operationalize existing activities, commitments and institutions to encourage and reinforce their respective, positive roles and contributions.

With its partners, GPFLR's research has identified over 2 billion hectares of opportunity for restoring degraded and deforested landscapes across the planet.

Building on that research, the most recent success of the GPFLR partnership was the commitment of ministers, CEOs of influential companies and representatives of international organizations to the target of restoring 150 million hectares of lost and degraded forest landscapes by 2020 – agreed and announced just last month at an inter-ministerial meeting in Bonn.

Aside from the massive benefits to biodiversity and climate change mitigation, preliminary research by IUCN has calculated that the 150 million hectares to be restored will generate approximately 85 billion dollars for local and national economies.

Partnership-based initiatives are not just meeting success at the global level, they are also fundamental to a multitude of successful efforts at the national and sub-national

levels. To cite one: the Ghana Voluntary Partnership Agreement, or VPA, comes to mind. The VPA multi-stakeholder process worked through a bottom-up process of building trust and dialogue to work through complex issues of tenure and use to reach a solution upon which further collaboration in sustainable forest management could finally be built.

So partnership would appear to be one key to success in mitigating forest destruction.

And what else is working in current initiatives? Well, a second important characteristic is taking an ecosystem-based approach. This is the opposite of the sectoral approaches which, as I mentioned earlier, tend not to work.

Taking an ecosystem-based approach means, in other words, to tailor-make responses that are built from the bottom-up, by different actors, to deliver locally defined priorities. When compared to the one-size-fits-all attitude of blueprint-style approaches, ecosystem-based approaches tend to produce more resilient and adaptive outcomes.

If we are to think of William Easterly here, and his division of the development policy landscape into ‘searchers’ and ‘planners’, we might think of the ecosystem-based approach as corresponding to a ‘searcher’ technique, whereas the ‘planners’ would push for the blueprint-style initiatives that—as we now know—tend to work less well.

IUCN has been implementing a 5-year project called the “Livelihoods and Landscapes Strategy”, or “LLS”, based on the principles of taking such an ecosystem-based approach. In fact, LLS goes even further in taking a ‘landscape’ approach, which looks at and manages forests as part of a broader and more complex ecological and socio-economic system.

Now drawing to the end of its first phase, the LLS project has delivered custom-made responses in diverse landscapes across 23 countries worldwide.

To mention just one of the many examples, in China, we've been working in the Miyun watershed, which supplies up to 80% of the freshwater used in Beijing. Worsening water shortages in Beijing have been directly linked to the disappearance and degradation of much of the original forest in the watershed.

When they first recognized this, the government attempted to resolve the problems by imposing a strict logging quota – but the forest quality and water supply continued to be less than ideal.

IUCN's LLS project worked with local authorities and communities to introduce a more integrated form of landscape management and restoration which recognized the multiple needs and functions of the watershed, and which brought together the many different stakeholders. This included piloting a partial lifting of the logging quota.

A new set of forest management practices were introduced, representing a shift from a strict protective approach, towards more sustainable resource use, through active management by forest-based communities.

This has resulted in a formal agreement that recognizes different forest management and forest use regimes, merging the technical information held by government foresters with local knowledge and priorities. Forest regeneration projects are being carried out by local communities, resulting in natural forest regeneration and improvements in forest structure, quality and function.

There are other positive outcomes: A permit for harvesting timber has been secured - the first to be issued in more than 20 years - and a new system of harvesting fuel wood has been established. Community-based cooperatives are being established to develop the market potential of forest goods and services, with the aim of increasing and diversifying local livelihoods in the long-term.

And we were delighted to hear a few weeks ago that the party secretary of Beijing municipal government has recommended to the Beijing Municipal Parks and Forestry Bureau that a scaling-up plan be devised, following the Miyun model.

As a third and final observation on what is working in forestry conservation today, I would stress the importance of working towards increasingly community-based, locally-controlled forests. At IUCN, with our partners, we have been working on many varied examples of this, and we have found in many cases that - in addressing the issues of local rights and tenure of forested landscapes - it is often small, subtle changes that can unleash wide-scale, positive change.

In the area around Mount Elgon in Uganda, for example, we worked with the local community and partners and authorities on locally-developed land-use by-laws which went on to gain government recognition and approval. This resulted in multiple benefits, including significantly increased agricultural yields, decreased soil erosion and reduced sedimentation, and also reduced tensions between stakeholders and neighboring communities.

So, to conclude, if we want to stop forest destruction, we need to acknowledge that there is no 'blueprint', and to be wary of overly top-down approaches.

We must move beyond narrow, sectoral approaches or single-commodity strategies, and adopt wider approaches, such as ecosystem-based, and landscape-based strategies.

This has implications: we need to expand our knowledge base from a cross-sectoral, integrated perspective. For example, recent research by IUCN and others indicates that forest reliance world-wide varies between about 25% and 40% of total annual household cash and non-cash income. Such figures clearly demonstrate that forests do

not serve merely as a safety net during difficult times, but are integral to household subsistence and cash budgets.

This kind of new knowledge presents a point of departure for expanding the opportunities that forests can provide to increase incomes on the more local level, but also to national and international economies.

Adopting an integrated, cross-sectoral approach also has implications for emerging forest financing mechanisms such as REDD+. In fact, taking a sectoral approach would be a probable cause of its downfall.

We should reinvigorate local partnerships to respond to global challenges and opportunities. Including local stakeholders across sectors is crucial. This includes REDD+, for which the planning is currently mostly at a government and NGO level. Communities, forest owners and private sector representatives must be brought to the negotiating table, with trade-offs identified and negotiated.

And we mustn't forget the broader political economy, taking into account the wider context of our various efforts. For example, what we have learnt from those countries where preparing for REDD+ is at its most advanced, is that making mechanisms like REDD+ work requires a concerted drive for increased transparency and accountability at the national level. At the same time, systems and processes need to be in place to guarantee that the benefits flow fairly and smoothly, beyond the national government level, to the local level, through equitable and transparent mechanisms.

Finally, we must not limit the aim of our interventions to simply that of avoiding deforestation, or focusing only on managing working forests better. These are of course both important, but we need to find ways to interface better with other land uses, particularly agriculture.

As I mentioned earlier when talking about our work with the Global Partnership for Forest Landscape Restoration, the potential for working via innovative landscape restoration is truly enormous: more than 2 billion hectares.

That's pretty much twice the size of Europe.

Thank you.