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New Study Suggests Global Pacts Like REDD Ignore Primary Causes of Destruction of Forests

***In Analysis of Findings, Top Experts Call for Change to Slow Damage
Also Cite Narrow Focus on Carbon Storage; Risk to Indigenous Peoples***

Editor's note: The study and policy brief can be downloaded at the following URL:
<http://www.iufro.org/science/gfep/forest-regime-panel/report/>

NEW YORK (24 January 2010)—A new study issued today by some of the world's top experts on forest governance finds fault with a spate of international accords, and helps explain their failure to stop rampant destruction of the world's most vulnerable forests. The report suggests that global efforts have too often ignored local needs, while failing to address the most fundamental challenge to global forest management—that deforestation usually is caused by economic pressures imposed from outside the forests.

"Our findings suggest that disregarding the impact on forests of sectors such as agriculture and energy will doom any new international efforts whose goal is to conserve forests and slow climate change," said Jeremy Rayner, a professor at the University of Saskatchewan Graduate School of Public Policy and chair of the panel of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) that produced the new assessment. "With this report in hand, we can say with greater certainty that the success of current efforts to protect forests through a global climate change agreement will depend in part on whether negotiators integrate these findings into their policy proposals."

The product of some 60 experts in political science, policy studies, law and international relations, the new report represents the most comprehensive scientific assessment to date of international forest governance. The detailed results of the work of the expert panel, which was constituted under the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and coordinated by IUFRO, will be presented next week to the Ninth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) as part of the launch of the International Year of Forests.

Rayner and others on the IUFRO panel argue in an accompanying policy brief that the report's findings suggest the need for a dramatic shift away from "top-down" efforts to protect forests. Instead, they say, most international initiatives, including the recent global pact under discussion, known as REDD, should focus more on supporting regional and national efforts to impact the forces that are putting the forests at risk.

The new assessment of international efforts to improve forest governance is being released as the United Nations prepares to launch the International Year of Forests at the Forum on Forests in New York. The report will explain why tropical forests remain at great risk, despite adoption of initiatives such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and global boycotts of tropical timber. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization's Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010, for example, South America lost 4 million hectares per year, while Africa lost 3.4 million hectares annually between 2000 and 2010.

To address such dilemmas, many groups have embraced REDD as a cure-all for addressing a variety of forest-related problems, primarily for its potential to bring new money to poor forested regions through payments for environmental services. REDD—which stands for reducing emissions from deforestation

and forest degradation—is the effort formally negotiated in December 2010 at the Cancun climate change conference.

Although the authors cite some successful examples of efforts to slow destruction of forests, it is argued in the report that REDD shows signs of repeating many of the mistakes of the past. Even an expanded REDD effort, known as REDD+, falls short of considering the needs and roles of forest communities and other local inhabitants. "REDD+ is an improvement, as it names forest conservation as a goal and sustainable forest management as a solution," Rayner said, "But it continues to explicitly value carbon storage above the improvement of forest conditions and livelihoods."

In their policy brief drawing on the results of the new assessment, the editors argue that REDD is more likely to succeed if the final agreement reflects lessons learned from past efforts. This means REDD negotiators must sufficiently engage stakeholders outside the forest sector—such as in the agriculture, transportation and energy sectors—and stop an over-reliance on a "one-size-fits-all" global scheme to address situations that are vastly different from region to region and country to country.

"REDD has gone further than past global forest strategies in engaging agriculture and other key sectors. Nevertheless, there is still a long ways to go," said Constance McDermott, James Martin Senior Fellow in Forest Governance at Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute. "Unless all sectors work together to address the impact of global consumption, including growing demand for food and biofuels, and problems of land scarcity, REDD will fail to arrest environmental degradation and will heighten poverty."

McDermott notes that REDD's overriding focus on protecting and pricing the carbon stored in forests will lead to the "further exclusion of indigenous people from their forests and the criminalization of their traditional livelihoods." These concerns are heightened by the growing number of "land grabs" by governments and individuals who are motivated by a desire to take advantage of REDD's forest-based carbon credits, incidents that already are occurring without consultation with local forest users.

"International approaches that aim to transform forests into storehouses for carbon, or for biodiversity or some other narrow purpose, are inevitably going to produce disappointing results," McDermott said. "Instead of generating 'grand plans' based on the simplification of complex problems on a global scale, we might be better advised to listen and learn from existing efforts, both public and private, across multiple scales and multiple sectors."

Despite noting the pitfalls surrounding REDD and other accords in chapters devoted to the topic, the report reflects optimism that conditions are ripe for reducing forest destruction worldwide, and with an international effort playing an important role.

The positive forces include an unprecedented amount of attention worldwide to the problem of illegal logging and a widespread acceptance of the concept of sustainable forest management. The report also cites a flurry of activity driven by NGOs to give local communities in many forested regions—and, in particular, indigenous groups and women—a stronger voice in forest planning processes.

Meanwhile, the IUFRO analysis finds many bright spots of forest governance work at the regional and national level. For example, the US, through its amendments to a law known as the Lacey Act, has made it illegal to import wood known to come from stolen timber. The EU is making a similar effort to exclude illegal wood from imports through its "due diligence" process that has forged important partnerships with major tropical timber producers like Cameroon. Brazil, long the target of an international campaign to reverse its forest destruction, has enacted new environmental and policy reforms that have the potential to slow forest loss in the Amazon Basin.

An example of a good start can be found within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has engaged in a number of forest-related activities, including developing a regional standard for monitoring illegal logging and establishing a clearing house for assisting member states with forest-related research. The hope is that such a process will allow decision-makers to learn from the mistakes of the past.

The report also points out that many national actions have had an international component. The US and EU actions on illegal wood imports occurred in the wake of intensive advocacy efforts from NGOs. NGOs also played a strong role in Brazil's reforms. In addition, political support for forest reforms enacted in Guatemala was boosted by the fact that they were based on concepts widely embraced at the international level.

"We are not saying we need to abandon a global approach to forest governance, but we do need to establish the appropriate roles," said Rayner, chair of the IUFRO panel that produced the report. "The REDD process, for example, might provide a great way to raise money for sustainable forest management and other forest programs, but much of the details and operational aspects would be undertaken at the regional and national levels."

Rayner and other colleagues on the expert panel believe that far more can be accomplished if there is a reassessment of the proper role of global initiatives in driving productive changes in national and local management of valuable forestland. A chapter in the report proposes the creation of a new framework called "Forests +" that would bring a more inclusive spirit to global discussions of forest governance, focus most international initiatives on supporting and coordinating national and regional efforts, and pursue global accords only when a top-down approach is broadly demanded.

"The goal of Forests+ is to solve problems by focusing on the many ways people use forests and by including from the start a broad group of stakeholders and institutions inside and outside of forests," said Benjamin Cashore, professor of environmental governance and political science at Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and director of the Yale Program on Forest Policy and Governance. "Specifically we identified new ways of having an impact that don't require a 'top down' approach. Instead they would help nurture national and local strategies that work, provide training where needed and encourage market incentives that allow consumers to pick products based on how sustainably they are produced."

Cashore added that such an approach would pave the way for efforts within the forest sector to provide transparent, accountable and problem-focused efforts that would be critical in assessing any regional or global proposal, and for moving forward toward long term solutions. In their policy brief, IUFRO experts conclude that endowing Forests+ with the prestige and "moral authority" required to succeed will involve establishing a new high-level institution or assigning the role to an existing institution or even a consortium of groups. They note that the office of the UN Secretary General has energized other related efforts by establishing special offices and advisory boards. One model for implementing a Forests+ endeavor discussed in the IUFRO report is the Secretary General Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, which has helped galvanize action around water issues.

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The International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) is the only worldwide organization devoted to forest research and related sciences. Its members are research institutions, universities, and individual scientists as well as decision-making authorities and other stakeholders with a focus on forests and trees. For further information, please visit: <http://www.iufro.org>.



Embracing complexity: Meeting the challenges of international forest governance. A global assessment report.

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