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United Nations Environment Programme

Research Report

The Question of:

Deforestation in Latin America

Introduction

Tropical deforestation is a modern-day issue that strongly links to climate change. In the year 2000, the UN proposed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were to have been met by 2015. 189 Member States signed this treaty, and one of the eight targets was to 'ensure environmental sustainability.' Tropical deforestation has been counterproductive to guaranteeing environmental sustainability, and therefore the origins of this problem must be addressed and solved.

Some of the causes of tropical deforestation include the production of agriculture, logging and the creation of land for development. For decades this has been a growing problem, and some solutions have been proposed by countries on an international and national level. Despite the efforts made, tropical deforestation is not seeing sufficient reduction. Half of the world's largest rainforest, the Amazon, is predicted to be destroyed by 2050, which is why further UN involvement is essential to curb the destruction of one of the most biodiverse ecosystems.

The Committee

The UNEP (United Nations Environment Program) is a UNO (United Nations Organization) introduced by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. It is the UN's main authority that sets environmental issues on the global agenda. Their main focus is to guide institutions, NGOs and governments on the way to a more sustainable world. Furthermore, they assess trends and environmental conditions on a global, regional or national level. The UNEP conducts many operations around the world, which are categorized under: climate change, chemicals and waste, disasters and conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, the environment under review and resource efficiency. This committee follows the standard Rules of Procedure, which means it is not an ad-hoc committee.

Key Terms

Deforestation:
The removal of all or most of the trees in a forested area by cutting or burning them.

Climate change:
A change in global or regional climate patterns, in particular, a change apparent from the mid to late 20th century onwards and attributed largely to the increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide.

Global carbon cycle:
The combined processes, including photosynthesis, decomposition, and respiration, by which carbon as a component of various compounds cycles between its major reservoirs the atmosphere, oceans, soil, rocks, and living organisms.

Ecosystem
A biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment. A rainforest (also known as a tropical forest), is a type of ecosystem.

Land degradation:
Is the process in which the environment is affected by human processes acting upon the land.

General Overview

The importance of tropical forests

Almost half of the species on this planet exist in tropical forests, making them very biodiverse. This is very important, because biodiversity increases the productivity of an ecosystem, meaning that it can survive natural disasters more easily.

Forests act as carbon storage. In the Amazon, the soil contains about 14 to 40 kilograms of carbon per square meter. The Amazonia alone produces 20% of all the world's oxygen. This is attained by using the biological process called photosynthesis, which oxygen is a bi-product of.

Furthermore, rainforests play an important role in the water cycle. Due to how close they are located to the equator, the environment is extremely humid and warm because of the strong sunlight. This causes an increase in the rate of evaporation, thus forming clouds. These are carried by the wind across the globe, producing large amounts of rainfall.

The causes of tropical deforestation

The businesses and people who play a role in deforestation disregard the clear, natural benefits that rainforests provide. The source of this issue is the profits involved with the business. Typically, the environment becomes vulnerable to logging and burning once roads have been built in and around the area. The development of the infrastructure is mainly controlled and directed by the State's government. The constructing of roads increases accessibility, making it easier for farmers, loggers, and civilians to move in.

One of the wrongdoers of tropical deforestation is large corporations selling their goods on the international market. This includes agricultural businesses that have cleared land for their commercial activities (they are accountable for 2/3 of all tropical forests cleared). The causes of deforestation differ per region, but in the forests of Southern America (such as the Amazon), the production of soy and cattle is a driving force for a decreasing tree count.

Timber companies are also participating in the destruction of one of the Earth's ecosystems. This is mainly due to the high global demand for wood that generates pressure on countries with rainforests to produce cheap timber. Lots of tropical forests are located in developing countries, making it inexpensive for companies to log there. Congo, for instance, is one of the poorest countries and they are actively destroying the natural habitat for easy profit. In Indonesia, rainforests are under a vicious attack because of palm oil plantations being set up to provide biofuels for export.

In most cases, the conversion from rainforests to pastures and cropland often results in a domino effect of civilians moving into the area. Particularly in developing countries, it is advantageous to build settlements where resources are available. This means that the little patch of forest that is left after the interference of corporations or the government is demolished too, as locals 'slash and burn' the remaining trees for small scale animal ranching. They may also perform illegal logging for, for example, firewood, and can take part in poaching (the illicit hunting of often endangered wildlife). Typically, these settlers have limited incomes themselves and have had

substandard education, making them little aware of their environmental footprint that is caused by their acts.

The effects of tropical deforestation

All the issues that follow tropical deforestation are classified as serious, but one of the most spoken of effects is the loss of biodiversity. Temperature, coniferous and tropical forests are home to 70 percent of all the plants and animals on the planet. Deforestation means habitat destruction. Animals and plants rely on their surroundings for nourishment, shelter and breeding, so when the trees are cleared, they no longer have the necessities for survival. A specific example is that when deforestation occurs, the canopies of trees are removed. The canopies are the key to regulating the temperature. When they are destroyed, the conditions of the surroundings will drastically change and there will be greater variations between the day and night. Many species cannot withstand this, ensuing population decline. When populations dwindle, there are smaller genetic bases. This means that wildlife will have more difficulty adapting to changes in their environment, such as changes in climate.

The aftermaths of tropical deforestation are experienced on other sides of the world too. With fewer tropical forests, there is less water in the atmosphere. This means that some areas will experience severe droughts due to a smaller annual rainfall, leading to negative economic, social and environmental impacts. Another point to consider is that less humid air results in drier soils, increasing the difficulty for growing crops, hence decreasing crop yield.

An ever-growing problem humans have been contributing to is the enhanced greenhouse effect. With more greenhouse gases like methane and carbon dioxide, more infrared radiation will be trapped in the atmosphere, heating the Earth's surface. Plants absorb carbon dioxide so that they can produce energy via photosynthesis. 150 acres of tropical forests are burnt every minute, meaning that less carbon dioxide is being absorbed, therefore increasing the rate of global warming.

The destroying of tropical forests means a higher risk of flooding because once trees have been removed, the soil begins to erode, leaving unproductive land in its wake. Mudslides often follow the creation of barren land, particularly wFin the rainy season. Additionally, the removal of vegetation by coastal regions allows storms in the ocean to have bigger impacts on human settlements.

A devastating influence of tropical deforestation is the disregard it has for indigenous tribes. In the first half of the 20th century, 87 tribes were wiped out in Brazil. Approximately 1000 native tribes still exist today, however, their future is not promising. Each ethnic group has its customs and traditions, but they all rely on their surroundings for everything in their hunter-gatherer lifestyle. This includes the finding and making of medicine using resources found within the rainforests. Indigenous people in South East Asia, for example, use certain herbs to cure illnesses like malaria. Sadly, government officials have been attacking these cultures. In 1998 in Indonesia, the military killed hundreds of natives because they were claimed to be slowing the mining projects down with their joint resistance.

Major Parties Involved

Brazil

Despite the Amazon rainforest covering many countries like Bolivia and Peru, a large percentage of it is in Brazil. Because of the burning of trees, this South American country has become one of the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases. Roads are believed to be the beginning of the deforestation cycle, and Brazil has 170 000 kilometers of (high)ways cutting through the Amazon.

Green Peace

Green Peace is known for their environmentally friendly campaigns. They mainly focus on stopping unsustainable crop growing and palm oil production, but disregard the damages of small scale agriculture. Despite this, they are campaigning for zero deforestation by the year 2020. Though an ambitious target, they are getting public attention by 'lobbying political power holders'. Works with the DRAPQUES.

The Latin American Technical Cooperation Network on National Parks(DPARQUES)

Was established in 1983 with the help of FAO. It helps to foster the management of protected areas in Latin America and the willingness of countries to share technical knowledge and to make the experience available in the region more effectively.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1985	The Tropical Forest Action Plan was founded
2008	The UN REDD (United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) campaign was launched
March 2016	UN International Day of Forests

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Ending deforestation means drastically changing the speed at which the globe is warming. Some transnational corporations have already become more sustainable regarding the choosing of their resources for their products. In 2010, Nestlé stopped purchasing palm oil from a company, Sinar Mas, that had been known for destroying rainforests in Indonesia. Their activities had been observed by Green Peace using satellite images, and by using public pressure via social media, Nestlé stopped co-operation with Sinar Mas for their Kit Kat chocolate brand. This is an example of how the market can be manipulated by creating campaigns.

In 1985, The Tropical Forest Action Plan (TFAP) was launched. Unfortunately, deforestation rates have only increased since then, as the organization promotes logging in tropical nations. Additionally, TFAP does not consider native tribes in their plans. This attempt can therefore be deemed unsuccessful concerning the issue at hand.

The UN REDD program stands for the Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries. Its main goal is promising: “to reduce forest emissions and enhance carbon stocks in forests while contributing to national sustainable development”. They have over 60 partner countries whom they support with funds to encourage sustainable forest management.

Further Reading

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