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Search



News

- World
- Columnists
- Opinion
- Letters
- Open Forum
- Cartoon
- Stock
- Weather
- Today's Picture
- Classified
- Matrimonial
- Archives

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Dacey parameters

The seventh biennial issue of the 'State of the World's Forests 2007' (sofo 2007) by the un's Food and Agriculture Organization (fao) criticises poor countries for deforestation. Released in March 2007, the report does not acknowledge the role that rich countries play in wiping out the poor's forests. Weak on data, the report has been blamed by experts for wrongly defining forests.

sofo 2007 examines the progress of countries and regions, based on Sustainable Forest Management (sfm) criteria, which have been criticised by many for their little respect for rights of indigenous communities.

"fao disguises the fact that globally, forests are being replaced by monoculture tree plantations, affecting biodiversity and local communities," says Simone Lovera, of the Paraguay-based Global Forest Coalition, an ngo on forest policy.

Sharachchandra Lele, coordinator of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Environment and Development, Bangalore, says sfm criteria lack clarity. "sfm criteria are vague. The objectives of sfm can be divergent. A forest sustainable for, say, timber production, may not be so for biodiversity conservation," he says.

The report triggered quick reactions, with



Greenpeace calling Indonesia the "fastest forest destroyer on the planet". The report says Indonesia has the highest rate of deforestation at 2 per cent. sofo 2007 ignores factors that drive deforestation, some experts say. "A lot of factors, like the relationship of deforestation with colonialism, need examination," says Lele.

sofo 2007 says poor countries have a "very uneven" rate of deforestation. But it credits developed countries in temperate zones with strong institutions that check deforestation and increase forested area. It says developing economies and tropical ecosystems continue to lose forests, but is silent on the developed nations' quest for forest resources including agro-based fuel, affecting the resources of poor countries.

"fao embraces agro fuels, which are rapidly becoming the number one cause of deforestation and rural devastation, especially in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Brazil," says Lovera, aptly describing these fuels as "deforestation diesel".

sofo 2007 says southeast Asia has a deforestation rate of 1.3 per cent. A week after the fao report was released, the Worldwide Fund for Nature-India said, at a workshop on palm oil, that the Indian demand for palm oil also added to deforestation in the region.

Archi Rastogi, Via e-mail



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