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The Forest Investment Program aimed at reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) does not mention the principal causes of DD. These are clearing forests and woodlands to supply more land for subsistence arable and pastoral agriculture and to grow cash crops. The underlying cause is population increase in developing countries.

Therefore, in order to slow down and reverse deforestation there must be significant efforts to increase agricultural productivity and to attack population increase.

I have tracked deforestation in all sub-Saharan African countries over a ten-year period, and there is a close correlation between population increase and deforestation. The latest country that was examined was Malawi. Only in 2006 and 2007, when the government subsidized fertilizers, was there an increase in maize productivity. Therefore, unless agricultural productivity is tackled investments in the FIP may give very poor returns.

The FIP seems to concentrate on 'forests', whereas trees outside the forests may be just as important. Farm tree planting, especially of nitrogen fixing species could help maintain if not increase unit agricultural productions. They could also assist in stabilizing 'shifting cultivation'.

Regarding degradation, some tropical forests are cut down and replaced with sugar, palm oil/ coconut/ jatropha species. This is driven by the desire to 'cash in' on renewable ethanol/bio-diesel. But inventories should be undertaken to see if the existing forest areas could be sustainably managed to provide wood and non-wood products and services to give the local population reason to manage rather than destroy the forests. The principal uses of wood are for fuel, poles and sawnwood in that order, yet the former two uses are often ignored. Rural electrification is a major goal of the WB, yet little attention is paid to using biomass as a boiler fuel for 6 to 12 MW power stations. Again, wood and other biomass waste can be converted to methanol (wood alcohol) to provide motive power or as a building block for other carbon-based fuels/chemicals. Such initiatives should be investigated to see if they are profitable. For unless the local population see that protecting and managing forest resources is worthwhile, no amount of forest investment will prevent the decline in forest areas. [<hr>]

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