

Present Status of Land Use and Land Use Changes, Deforestation in Tropics

Masakazu Kashio¹

Forest Resources Officer for Asia and the Pacific
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO/RAP)
Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Abstract

Land use information is handled by different sectors, e.g. agriculture and forestry, and has not been consolidated yet, at least from the users' point of view. The reliability and usability of the information also differs according to the assessment technologies, institutional capacities of the governments, and modes of presentations.

Regarding the land use information in the forestry sector, FAO's regular assessment of forest resources at the global scale every ten years is the most comprehensive source of information. The latest FAO Forest Resources Assessment 2000 (FRA 2000) indicates that the natural forest resources in tropical areas decreased from 1,945 million ha in 1990, to 1,803 million ha in 2000. The absolute deforestation figure that was lost to other land uses during this period was 142 million ha, while 10 million ha was retrieved from this category and returned to natural forests. This is in sharp contrast to the forest resources changes in non-tropical areas: the absolute deforestation rate was four million ha and 26 million ha was retrieved to natural forests. Thus, it is understood that the majority of deforestation is taking place in tropical areas.

The forest resource situations and the changing trends in tropical Asia differ among the sub-regions. The biggest net deforestation figures were recorded in the Southeast Asian sub-region, with an annual deforestation of 2.329 million ha, mainly due to the large figures in Indonesia (1.312 million ha/year) and Myanmar (0.517 million ha/year). However, it is noteworthy to see the remarkable increase of forest plantations in tropical Asia. This increase offsets the absolute deforestation figures to the net deforestation figures, which appear much less than those in the 1980s.

Patterns of deforestation and the land use change matrix differ from country to country, depending on their land use (including the forestry land use) policies, nature conservation movements, and the socio-economic situation of the people. International agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), or recommendations from the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), etc. can also influence the national policies.

¹ Tel: 66-2-697-414, Fax: 66-2-697-4445, E-mail: Masakazu.Kashio@fao.org