

Razing the Rainforest

Challenge Overview Sheet

Although deforestation has been on the global political and social agenda for a number of decades, it is only now with the link between deforestation and climate change that there is new funding and a new awareness about the severity and consequences of the problem. With 20% of the world's population relying directly on forests for their survival and the vital role forests play in our global ecosystem, this 21st century challenge is centred round the use of forests and how this use, and the ecosystem itself, is managed.

Warren Evans, a key spokesperson for the World Bank, highlights how an increased and ever growing concern about climate change has led to greater funding for forest related issues. Forests are under pressure from a variety of different sources ranging from government policy (agricultural, mining) unsustainable logging, cattle ranching and slash and burn cultivation of indigenous peoples. At present, many LEDCs are unable, both financially and developmentally, to manage their forests and unfortunately government corruption is often a major issue. He goes on to say that forests are greatly undervalued and until their potential is assessed, sources of degradation and deforestation will continue. He argues that in order to reduce deforestation, forests must be managed, but the focus needs to be less on the forest itself and more on the sources which lead to deforestation. Approaches like sustainable forest management, reforestation and afforestation are not just about reducing deforestation, but also about the potential for improving the climate situation.

In her speech, **Senator Marina Silva** reminds us that the challenge is on a global scale and therefore demands a global response. Unless LEDCs can reduce usage and MEDCs reduce carbon emissions, forests, biodiversity and indigenous communities remain under threat. The challenge today is to evaluate 'environmental services' that are provided by the forest and utilise these areas, both economically and socially, in a sustainable way. She highlights the importance of working with and alongside communities who live in the forest and the need to encourage sustainable projects with economic incentives. She describes how, when she was Brazil's Environmental Minister in 2003, she led strategies to reduce land clearing, combat illegal activities and strengthen the environmental system: strategies which had a direct impact on the Amazon Rainforest. In three years there was a 47% reduction in deforestation. 1 500 illegal companies were removed as well as 37 000 illegal properties. In 2004, 27 000KM² of forest had been lost to deforestation. In 2007, that figure had been reduced to 11 700KM². However, since then, figures have started to increase again and urgent measures are now needed. She argues that in order to continue to combat illegal activities and support sustainable ones, the Amazon requires diversified economic activity which brings together tourism, biodiversity and certified forest management. Senator Silva goes on to highlight the link between deforestation and climate change. A 47% decrease in deforestation in Brazil will equate to half a billion ton decrease of CO² emissions over a ten year period. However, this is still only 40% of what LEDCs should be reducing by 2012. As a multilateral problem, everyone should contribute to solving it and there needs to be a global commitment to reducing carbon emissions and biodiversity loss.

Opening with a look at why previous efforts to tackle deforestation have not solved the problem, **Simon Counsell**, director of Rainforest Foundation UK, suggests that previous efforts have focused on the systems of deforestation rather than the drivers of forest loss. He argues that one of the most basic failures is the lack of understanding of the role people play in the forest and in particular their systems of tenure, rights and control over their local environment. As a result, the last 30 years has seen a string of failed national and international policies to protect global forests. As touched on by his fellow speakers, Simon Counsell highlights the fact that the protection of tropical forests has gained a lot of

international significance recently due to the realisation that deforestation is one of the major contributors to the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and accounts for an

estimated one fifth of all greenhouse gas emissions. He emphasises the need for caution with 'quick fix' policies which may make the situation worse and instead encourages a more long term, sustainable approach. One of the suggestions is to generate money for rainforest protection by allowing large producers of greenhouse gases, like the UK, to be allowed to carry on polluting, so long as they invest in preventing tropical deforestation. 'Trading' in forest protection credits/carbon credits could start as soon as 2012 and would provide a more long term approach to managing the problem. He goes on to suggest that the major challenges that lay ahead are that of governance, lack of clarity regarding laws and uncertain ownership of forest land. Many LEDCs have very little capacity to manage, conserve or absorb and immobilise large amounts of money effectively: Brazil might be the exception. In order to tackle the challenge, countries will need to support a wide range of approaches including reforming forest policies and route out corruption. They will need political willing and develop a financial plan so that money is invested effectively. However, Simon Counsell argues that most importantly of all, land for local communities needs to be secured to establish sustainable livelihoods and prevent further deforestation. Where this has already taken place, there is direct link between community ownership and a reduction in deforestation rate.