

INTRODUCTION

Prof. Dr. R. Rabbinge

Chairman of the Seminar

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to this seminar organised by the Tropenbos Foundation. The reason for this seminar is a question raised some time ago by the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, Jan Pronk. He requested clarification of the integration of research results on tropical rain forests in the development process and, more specifically, what facts, insight and expertise resulting from intensive research programmes have contributed to policy making in development cooperation. An answer to this fundamental question is very difficult. It is nearly impossible to demonstrate an immediate relation between scientific analysis done by Tropenbos and decisions or strategic choices taken by policy makers. There is no simple answer to this question or a reaction such as: all knowledge and insight helps to strengthen the arguments that determine the final decisions.

However, there are other possibilities which this seminar will demonstrate, and that is exactly our intention. The seminar has five explicit objectives:

1. To present an overview of the role of Dutch research on tropical rain forests in an international context.
2. To identify crucial gaps in research on sustainable forest management and conservation.
3. To develop policy recommendations for improving the link between research and policy.
4. To develop recommendations for improving pre-conditions for effective research.
5. To motivate and inspire participants to continue their work in research and policy development.

These objectives require some explanation. During the last decade Dutch research on tropical rain forests has been promoted and stimulated through the Tropenbos Foundation that received its major contribution from the Ministry for Development Cooperation. The intention of that stimulus was to strengthen the scientific basis for policy decision making. It is important to see how that programme has stimulated the research and the impact of the results on policy making.

It will be clear that there are still gaps and insight lacking that are crucial for any decision making. These gaps should be identified and it should be made clear what efforts and research are needed to fill them. The gap between scientific activities and policy makers is often large. Many policy makers ask questions that cannot be answered by scientific research alone. The normative basis for many policy decisions should be made explicit to see how and why choices are made. The survival of humankind is, in many cases, not at stake and it may be advisable to point out that many arguments are of a cultural rather than a scientific nature. Many scientists tend to give answers to questions that have not even been raised by policy makers. During this seminar the dialogue between policy makers and the scientific world will be stimulated. There are not only policy makers asking questions; many non-governmental organisations and private companies ask questions on tropical rain forests with various objectives in mind. Those questions should be addressed by the scientific community.

It should be clear that much research in order to maintain tropical rain forests requires knowledge of the pre-conditions for identifying the questions which should be asked. In addition, clear identification of the issues which require research and the questions which cannot be answered through research is

essential.

Finally, this meeting and the many discussions that will take place will stimulate scientists to continue and strengthen their research activities. The communication between scientists, policy makers and other stakeholders may stimulate further discussions on research subjects. Prioritisation of the research agenda may be very helpful for the future and help to justify the continuation of Tropenbos.

I am convinced that by the end of this meeting we will have good presentations, stimulating discussions and the identification of well-motivated recommendations for the future.

I wish you all a good seminar.