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ENDING TROPICAL DEFORESTATION: THE FIRST MISSING PIECE

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Never in history have there been more human and financial resources devoted to the protection of tropical forests. In Brazil and Indonesia, we are making progress in reducing the deforestation directly associated with soybean and oil palm cultivation. But we are not winning the bigger war. Annual deforestation is creeping back up in the Brazilian Amazon after an astonishing precipitous fall that bottomed out in 2012. In Indonesia, the fall is yet to come.

A course correction is needed.

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In a new Commentary in Mongabay, I describe a critical element of strategies to end tropical deforestation that deserves far more attention: the case for governmental action. In my next Commentary, I will describe a second critical element: the case for farm sector action.

The governments of tropical forest regions control most of the critical levers that must be pulled and aligned to reconcile economic growth with the stewardship of forests. It is extraordinarily difficult, however, to get elected and re-elected on an agenda of zero deforestation in forest frontier states and provinces, where the real chainsaw action is taking place. Special interests wield enormous influence and the short-term benefits of deforestation are often more visible and real to voters the long-term rewards of healthy forests.

Forest stewardship must become locally synonymous with better livelihoods and greater prosperity if the governments of tropical forest regions are to build the policies and programs that are essential to end and eventually reverse deforestation. Governors Tião Viana of Acre, Pedro Taques of Mato Grosso (Brazil), Victor Noriega of San Martín (Peru), and several others are proving that effective strategies to end deforestation are fully compatible with successful political agendas. Bold political leaders like them need collaboration and partnerships to take their visions to scale and be emulated by others.

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Em Português

En Español