

PREFACE

The Dipterocarp forests of Southeast Asia constitute a dominant and particularly valuable component of the world's tropical rain forests. As such, they are intertwined with a Pandora's box of problems that have plagued the world for decades: Over- and underdevelopment, political instability, poverty, hunger, population growth, the debt crisis, reckless exploitation of natural resources, degradation of the local and global environment, and, of late, climatic changes. The fate of the world's remaining Dipterocarp forests will certainly depend to a large measure on resolution of these persistent global problems.

The world community, aware of the forces threatening these forests, has also recognized their crucial role in the fate of nations and of our planet. Strict protection of the remaining Dipterocarp forests in the virgin state is highly desirable, but, unfortunately, not a feasible option: survival and maintenance of their vital functions will depend on benign, sustainable and economically viable management practices, including the option of leaving some of these forests completely untouched.

Nations and international bodies have responded to this challenge with funds, a myriad of institutions, initiatives, projects, conferences, and publications. It is neither a lack of efforts, nor a scarcity of internationally available funds that hampers refining, dissipating and applying sustainable management practices. Extraneous influences aside, one obstacle to progress in Dipterocarp forestry is the fragmentation of the involved groups by location, language, education and professional discipline. They include line foresters and project staff in very remote, isolated corners of the world, administrators, forest politicians, graduate students, scientists from a wide variety of disciplines, members of non-governmental organizations, a multitude of international bodies and — last but not least — people who live in, near and from the forest. Unfortunately, and detrimental to the common goal, these groups rarely share realms, readings or reasoning.

Foresters at all levels of operations as well as national administrators, invariably very involved with the challenges of day-to-day forest management, may long remain oblivious to state-of-the art knowledge. Traditionally, though, they encounter problems first-hand, find solutions as best they can, and, significantly, are most aware of practical constraints. Moreover, it will ultimately be their responsibility to implement management on the ground. Very rarely do they publish.

Staff foresters in numerous national and international Dipterocarp forest projects usually have access to scientific backstopping and professional

networks, although not to many journals and books. Invariably, reporting consumes a large amount of time. Frequently, however, extremely valuable experiences and insights gained on-site in the Dipterocarp forests end up in internal organization files, project pamphlets, conference proceedings, or semiobscure publications of the “gray literature” which rarely reach the scientific circuit, and, hence, never enter policies for these forests.

Local researchers in developing nations, although often highly engaged, qualified, and actually aware of regional and national problems, sometimes fare no better. Communication may be restricted due to lack of contacts and the ever-present language barrier, research is often hampered by local financial and institutional constraints and by very limited access to the professional world literature. Many of their institutions cannot afford reputable journals and new books. With the possibility of instant computer access to many of the world’s major library catalogues and scientific abstracts, an undergraduate forestry student, writing a term paper in the USA, for instance, may start work with a more up-to-date knowledge of a particular topic than a professor or decision maker in a remote corner of the Dipterocarp region.

In a time of jet travel, fax machines, and the internet, international scientists and the staff of international bodies communicate very effectively within their circle. Countless close personal relationships exist. Work is usually published in first-rate, peer-reviewed journals; before publication, years may pass. While colleagues are aware of the gist of an article long before it actually appears, conclusion may reach target groups and decision makers in the field only after a prolonged dormancy period, if at all. Members of this community rarely interact with “dirt foresters” described above.

Finally, we as foresters are at times amazed at how under represented our profession appears in the entire international Dipterocarp forest community, at how often even rudimentary forestry knowledge is overlooked. Interdisciplinary work is of course essential, but often, as in the discussion of the role planted and natural tropical forests play in climate change mitigation, proposals and resolutions would benefit from feedback and input from experienced forestry professionals.

It was our objective to narrow this perceived communication gap among foresters and all members of the international community concerned with tropical forests in general, and Dipterocarp forests in particular. These groups also constitute the contemplated readership of this book, which was born out of immediate experience in and admiration for the Dipterocarp forests in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Originally conceived barely two years ago as a compendium of Dipterocarp forest ecology, management and use, practical difficulties quickly whittled away the book’s overly ambitious initial concept. Spurred on by our shared experience across cultures in forest science, practical forest management and academic teaching, we did not, however, give up the goal of linking customarily isolated and widely scattered domains, and of bridging their conventional perimeters, in spite of great difficulties.

Leech socks may complement some of the books author's usual attire, while other rarely get out of a lab coat. Some are at home in Universities, others have almost turned into Dipterocarp forest dwellers. Many professional disciplines are represented, among them, to our satisfaction, a large group of seasoned forestry professionals with considerable experience in practical Dipterocarp forestry. Contributors hail from thirteen countries, with major representations from Southeast Asia, the USA, Scandinavia and Germany. Only a minority are native English speakers. As many participants at international scientific conferences will testify, to communicate well on a professional topic in a foreign tongue is difficult. Competency to write for professional publications in a foreign language is even more exceptional. Finally, even if the intended meaning is understandable and technical terms fit, style may not.

The book would, therefore, quite simply never have reached the printer, had it not been for the work by Myrna HASLE, who labored through some very rough first drafts, second drafts, corrected, edited, even rewrote sections and who refused to reject any submitted contribution merely on grounds of inadequate language skills. She agonized about the possibility of doing an author's personal style injustice and adamantly would have preferred at least one more editing cycle. Unfortunately time ran out. Therefore, for all the remaining flaws, editors and authors take full responsibility, while thanking her for a task extremely well done.

Some articles originated as unpublished research reports, others in the form of conference or workshop representations, which, in our view, deserved to reach a larger audience. We realize the efforts necessary to prepare book manuscripts from these beginnings. We like to thank all authors for their cooperation, and numerous reviewers for their assistance.

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The Editors