


PREFACE

A number of leading institutions from across the world have joined forces to assess and report on the critical questions facing one of the world's most important and fastest growing regions: the Tropics.

Over the past half-century the Tropics has emerged as an increasingly critical region. More than 40% of the world's population now lives in the Tropics and this is likely to be close to 50% by 2050. The region generates around 20% of global economic output and is home to some 80% of the world's biodiversity.

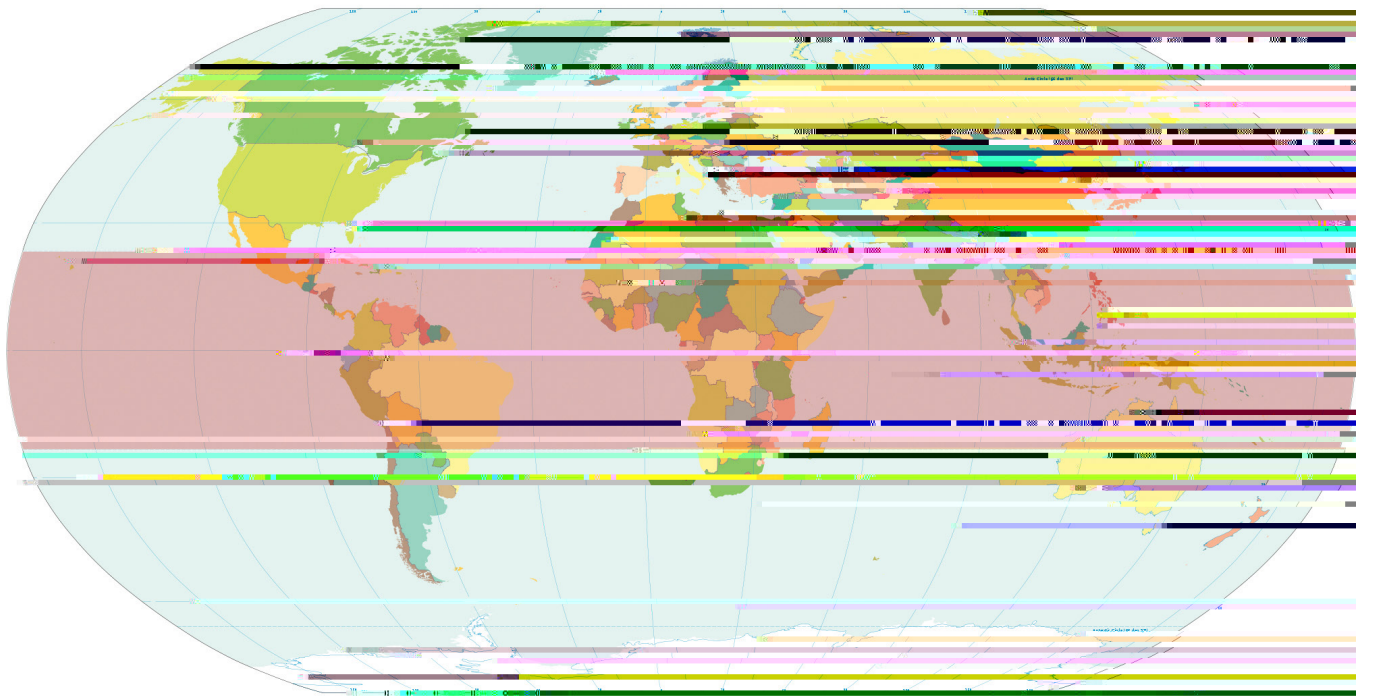
However, the resources to sustain larger populations and

economic growth are imposing ever-increasing pressures. Issues of concern include relatively poor health outcomes, with more than one billion people suffering from tropical diseases, unacceptable levels of infant mortality and reduced life expectancy; extreme poverty; poor educational outcomes; environmental degradation; and, in some cases, political and economic instability.



In early 2011 a group of leading institutions decided to examine the condition of life in the Tropics. The group met in Singapore in mid-2011 to scope a project, and decided

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Forests deliver a wide range of ecosystem services to the environment and to humanity, through provisioning (food, wood etc) and regulating (nutrient, water and carbon cycles) services. As such, habitat destruction through deforestation or other impacts that affect forest biodiversity may not only affect species diversity, but also the performance of broader ecological systems and regulatory processes. Focusing conservation efforts on protecting habitats is therefore more likely to conserve both biodiversity and underlying systems¹⁵.

The importance of primary forests in protecting biodiversity is increasingly acknowledged, but demand for timber products, industrial and subsistence farmland and access to resources is putting pressure on the stock of primary forests. For example, something as simple as a road through a primary forest to a remote mine site can open up vast areas of forest to exploitation.

Growing concerns about the ever increasing impacts of anthropogenic pressures on tropical biodiversity and natural ecosystem services have led to increases in the number and extent of protected areas across the Tropics¹⁶. Protected areas are now a key part of global conservation efforts and, as such, an important indicator for policy makers.

Nonetheless, as with forests, not all protected areas are the same, and the performance of each will be affected by factors such as the effectiveness of enforcement and the quality of management activities, the proximity to adjacent areas, and the 'health' of adjacent areas.

Recent research suggests about half of all protected areas are not effectively managed.

Nonetheless, policy makers should consider the importance of primary forests in protecting biodiversity and the need to manage them sustainably.

