

# DISAPPEARING LUNGS OF THE EARTH

By Basil Tan



The disappearance of the forest is directly linked to human activities.

Logging, urbanisation, mining, farming and agriculture are some reasons why forests are cut down everyday to satisfy human's insatiable appetite for consumption.

New reports claim that the world's population is expected to reach 7 billion by October 2011. The increase in human population results in higher consumption, which eventually leads to a greater demand for agriculture. It has been estimated that 15% - 45% of deforestation stems from agriculture.

As quoted from *Something New Under the Sun* by J. R. McNeil, "crop land expansion played a central role in

forest disappearance". In Northeastern Madagascar, Malagasy, the cultivation of coffee beans have forced governments to exploit most of the biologically rich forests on Earth.

Unfortunately, agriculture is not the only culprit. Mining results in an increase in erosion, loss of topsoil and habitats, and water contamination. One such example is the Gold Rush in America. Waste that comes with these extracted minerals is washed into watersheds and basins, polluting and destroying everything in its path. Mining sites are difficult to restore and considered useless due to their terrains.

According to David Carle, the author of *Introduction to Earth, Soil and Land in California*, the Earth's topsoil contains 1,500 gigatons of carbon and the level of atmospheric carbon dioxide is increasing due to burning of fossil fuels caused by human activities.

So what is the worst thing that can possibly happen? Slash and burn agriculture. Studies have shown that such an unsustainable activity is second to the energy sector in producing greenhouse gases. Not only are we losing the fertility of topsoil at a fast rate but creating a gradual rise in the temperature of the planet that causes the erratic weather conditions experienced in recent years.

We have recognised that humans are the major cause of Earth's destruction. Our greed and consumption drives us into carrying out destructive activities such as digging holes in the ground, laying concrete over fertile soil, destroying habitats, wiping out species, and producing artificial fertilisers and pesticides that kill organisms beneficial for soil fertility and regeneration. We are destroying the hand that feeds us.

In 2006, McKinsey Report and Stern Report mentioned that forests offer the "single largest opportunity for cost-effective and immediate reductions of carbon emissions". However, forest-rich countries such as Indonesia and Brazil are still giving up these precious 'lungs of the Earth' for a bit more soy, a bit more urbanisation, and a bit more economy.

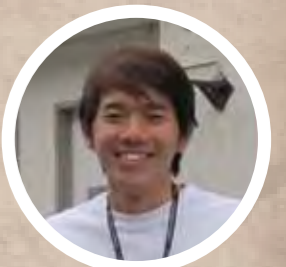
According to McNeil, "the political power of the beneficiaries of deforestation was far too great". He attributed that to the loss of rainforest the size of India between 1960 to 1990. Governments that were supposed to ensure our well-being, our freedom, and our longevity are causing harm to us.

However, in recent years, some countries and organisations are doing what they can to stop such rampant destruction of forests. For example, the EU offers a subsidy of 200 per hectare

to farmers for leaving their land fallow. Yet, in undeveloped countries, no value has been placed on these desolate forests. These forests make up more than 50% of the life on Earth but cover only less than 7% of the Earth's surface.

Organisations such as Greenpeace has been putting up a strong front to lobby against companies that indulge in unsustainable practices. In June 2011, Greenpeace launched a 'green' attack on Mattel, the world's largest toy company, in their California office. Greenpeace accused Mattel of using paper from unsustainable logging in Indonesia.

Perhaps, there is still hope. Perhaps, the Earth is still fit for the habitation of man. However, 'perhaps' is not a good enough answer and definitely not for very long either. We have to stand up against such unsustainable practices and keep Mother Earth living, thriving and sustainable. ♦



**ABOUT BASIL TAN**  
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