

Where have all the forests gone?

Analysis of data reveals regional differences in the nature and causes of deforestation

Changes in forests in Africa are dominated by transition from closed forest, through intermediary stages of depletion, to shrub and short fallow. This would indicate an extension of subsistence farming under the pressure of rural population growth.

Changes in forests in Latin America are dominated by a more abrupt change involving deforestation from closed forest to other land cover, such as permanent agriculture, cattle

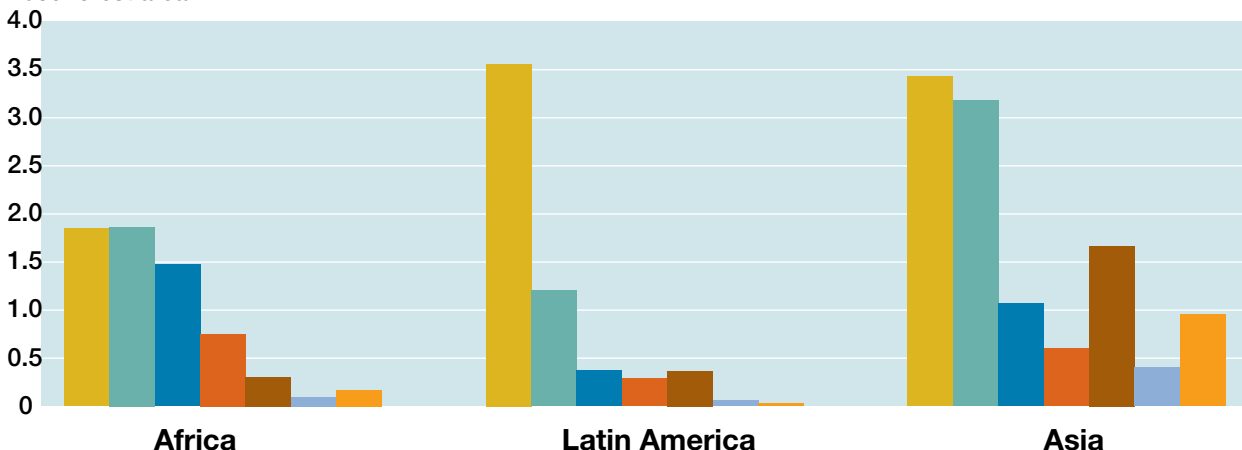
ranching or water reservoirs. This appears to reflect centrally-planned operations such as government resettlement schemes, large-scale cattle ranching and hydroelectric reservoirs.

Forests in Asia are undergoing two types of changes of nearly equal measure: gradual changes as a result of rural population pressure; and abrupt changes due to centrally-planned operations including government resettlement schemes and large plantation programmes.

Main categories of forest cover change by geographic regions, 1980–90

(changes as percentages of 1980 regional forest area; closed and open forest)

percentage of
1980 forest area



deforestation to other land cover
(includes permanent agriculture, cattle
ranching, water reservoirs, etc.)

conversion to long fallow shifting cultivation

deforestation to other wooded
land (shrubs and short fallow)

fragmentation

amelioration (increase of density)
from open to closed forest

converted to plantations

degradation (loss of density)
from closed to open forest