Global efforts to reduce deforestation have been initiated and increased as part of climate change mitigation schemes and recently have also been promoted as a target of the post-2015 sustainable development goals of the United Nations. However, there are concerns about the current strategies with respect to their high cost, low effectiveness, and potential to damage tropical countries and local people. It is unclear which policy options are largely effective in halting deforestation because underlying causes of deforestation remain unclear. I examined main factors influencing forest area changes, using the results of our deforestation studies from 1990 to 2014, including a multinational data analysis, Malaysian socio-economic survey, and Indonesian household surveys. My study finds that poverty and land rent are principal factors leading to deforestation and forest area change. My results confirm that poverty has strong impacts on forest area change and support the theory that increases in land rent accelerate deforestation. I represent the relationships between deforestation, poverty, land rent, and forest scarcity using logical formulas, based on my findings and those of other previous studies. From these formulas, I derive clear and reasonable explanations about the causes of deforestation, and evaluate the effectiveness of various policies and REDD plus strategies to halt deforestation. I suggest that poverty reduction strategies can be sound and effective policies for reducing deforestation in the tropics. The findings would contribute to the development of sustainable strategies that have a long-term effect for reducing deforestation and that reconcile forest conservation with social welfare.