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Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Discussion paper on social development and indigenous and other local and forest dependent communities, and forest land tenure

Summary

Social development has been significantly neglected in discussions of ways to strengthen sustainable forest management to improve livelihoods and reduce poverty. Strengthening social relations within and between communities is fundamental to increasing the economic benefits and improving the environmental impact of sustainable forest management. Capacity building, addressing the rights of women and of youth, increasing the security of land tenure rights, and strengthening the role of associations, unions and networks are key components of social development. The specific measures needed are well known and many examples of good practices are present throughout the world. Major Groups request an urgent collaboration with Governments and other agencies to identify and promote “best practices” to foster significant, positive social development as a vital foundation for sustainable forest management.

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I. Sustainable forest management and social development
1. As is the case with sustainable development in general, the sustainable management of forests has economic, environmental and social dimensions.
2. In efforts to strengthen the sustainable management of forests, economic and environmental issues have received most of the attention. Understanding is growing of the importance of the economic activities of indigenous, community and family forest rights holders, managers, and owners, and within and beside these groups, of labour, women, and youth. The environmental value of good quality forest management work is also well understood. The social dimension of this work and of its environmental impact has been largely ignored.
3. The social dimension is concerned with the quality and extent of the relations that exist between families, communities, and regions. These relations are the foundation for sustained progress in forest management practices and the generation and distribution of increased economic benefits from sustainably managed forests. This foundation includes the cohesion within and between communities that provide the ability to cooperate in areas of common interest and to manage conflict. It nurtures a sense of shared identity and purpose at the community and landscape levels that is a powerful source of motivation for improving sustainable forest management.
4. The relative strength or weakness of this foundation has a profound effect on the ability of communities to contribute to lasting improvements in management practices and the resulting improvements in economic benefits, conservation of biodiversity, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. The economic viability of family and community enterprises and healthy social relations are prerequisites for sustainable forest management. They are closely interconnected. Depending on their strength or weaknesses, each will enhance or undermine the other.
5. These principles apply to the sectors represented by Major Groups: youth, women, labour, and community, indigenous and family forest owners, managers, and rights holders, the scientific community, and environmental organizations.
6. Development of the social dimension involves strengthening the web of relations that make up the social foundation for sustainable forest management. Building the capacity of families, communities, and indigenous people to more effectively undertake forest management and the processing and marketing of products and services from the forest involves both technical skill and the skills required to strengthen social relations. Development of strong, clear and enforceable tenure rights and of effective associations are two central components of capacity building. Meaningful participation of women and youth in all relevant processes and structures is an overriding concern that applies to all dimensions of sustainable forest management.

II. Capacity building
7. Families, communities, indigenous peoples, workers and associations representing the Major Groups contribute immeasurably to the current benefits that derive from sustainable forest management and sustainable forest management-based economic activities.
8. That contribution can be greatly increased with greater investment in a range of capacities.
9. These include improved management skills for community forest-based enterprises, improved market access and marketing structures and related networks, and strengthened forestry extension training and, education programs.

10. Establishing and maintaining the conditions that provide for decent, safe and fairly-paid work (according to the principles set out in the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda), supported by adequate skill-development programs, is a further area of capacity building of direct relevance to sustainable forest management in all communities.

III. Women

11. In many circumstances, women are the primary users of forests; their full participation is therefore essential in efforts to improve sustainable forest management and increase the flow of benefits from forest-related activities to people.

12. While they are important users of the forest, they often have no rights to the forests they use and care for. They are excluded from information, decision-making, and the resources needed to improve the quality of their work and the benefits which flow from it. In many cases, they are denied equitable incomes and representation in leadership positions.

13. This exclusion is due to several factors; one of the reasons the work women do has been grossly undervalued or ignored is because it is often small-scale in nature.

14. It is essential that governments and all parties in civil society recognize the work, knowledge and special needs of women and include them as leading partners in all matters relating to sustainable forest management.

IV. Youth

15. Active and meaningful participation of young people is an essential component of any activity that seeks to be sustainable in the long-term.

16. All governments, agencies and associations must actively seek much greater involvement of young people in all aspects of their work.

17. This participation is partly about providing opportunities for learning, but it is much more than that: all of us need the perspective of those who will be alive during the later stages of this increasingly challenging twenty-first century.

18. Not only do young people provide this unique perspective. They also offer a tremendous resource of idealism and enthusiasm for volunteerism and a sense of duty to the community and the environment that are an invaluable asset to communities and associations wise enough to put this resource to use. This energy can be expressed in many valuable ways. It can contribute to the work of existing community organizations and can be given specific expression in youth-led initiatives. Opportunities of particular interest lie in the area of sustainable development education: young people can make a special contribution to helping shift values and lifestyles towards greater sustainability.

19. Constructive cooperation between generations is a necessary basis for a better future. It is not enough to merely provide opportunities for the involvement of young people: they must actually be present and actively participate. When that does not happen, it is important to ask them: What do you need in order to participate?
V. Tenure rights

20. Tenure in this context refers to the rights for use of some or all of the resources present on and beneath forest land. This covers a wide range of legal and customary arrangements, from outright family or community ownership to very restricted community use-rights to a single minor resource. Between these poles are many combinations of more or fewer resources and uses, covered by stronger or weaker management rights and responsibilities.

21. Tenure rights both limit and empower the connection of local people to the forest. These rights also reflect the extent to which the larger society understands and values the role of forest dependent families and communities in managing forests.

22. Tenure rights are directly related to the commitment to long-term sustainable forest management of a family or community. Many studies show that in regions where families and communities are involved in the management or co-management of forests or natural protected areas, the forests are better conserved. With clear and secure tenure and use-rights, both a sense of responsibility and an interest in sustainable management of forest resources can be developed and maintained. An assured opportunity for long-term income from the forest has a significant impact on social stability, eliminating conflict over land and reducing the pressure to migrate and the disruption of family and community life that results from migration.

23. In all tenure arrangements, however broad or limited, the contribution of tenure rights to the commitment to sustainable forest management is increased in proportion to the clarity and enforceability of the tenure.

24. The stronger the tenure arrangement, the greater the benefits to both the family and community, and to society as a whole. This contention should be the subject of a serious and urgent international dialogue: what are the concrete outcomes for livelihoods, biodiversity, and climate-change adaptation and mitigation of examples of clear and strong tenure arrangements in various parts of the world?

VI. Associations/Unions/Networks

25. The freedom of workers, farmers and small landowners, women, young people and communities to form associations is a basic right.

26. Associations provide a means through which their members can share experiences and know-how, present a common position to Governments, and have the capability to effectively negotiate with other parties.

27. Associations provide a vehicle through which local people can contribute their detailed traditional and local knowledge of the forest to both policy development and local decision making.

28. Associations can also act at the community and other levels to promote and undertake sustainable forest management-related activities that contribute directly to improving livelihoods. For this reason, associations are instrumental in implementing international commitments on the ground.

29. Associations play an essential role in contributing to the effectiveness of government policies and programs in both initial design and implementation; the potential value of this contribution is all the more important in times of budget constraint.

30. Associations sometimes criticize governments and no one likes criticism, especially in the increasingly challenging circumstances of the early twenty-first century. However,
such criticisms could serve to challenge governments in improving and strengthening policies and strategies towards sustainable social and economic developments.

31. Associations also collaborate as partners with government agencies, with great mutual benefit that outweighs the perceived risks and pitfalls.

32. Governments should consider the development of associations favourably and work to establish effective partnerships with them.

VII. The way forward

33. The specific issues discussed in this paper require concerted actions by governments and civil society. While most of the required actions have been repeatedly debated, few have been adopted or implemented. Major constraints include budget restrictions, institutional resistance, and political risks due to differences within communities and civil society.

34. Significant and durable progress on poverty reduction and improved livelihoods requires substantial attention to the social dimension of sustainable management of forests. In all countries, regions and at the international level, examples can be identified of significant, positive social development in forestry or related sectors. We propose that these positive examples be identified to form the framework for a set of guidelines for best practices in capacity building, inclusion of women and youth, meaningful improvements in tenure rights, and the development of effective associations/unions/networks.