

DRAFT

Moving towards good forest governance in Asia and the Pacific

A draft position paper prepared as part of Indonesian People's Forum during PREPCOM IV of WSSD
to stimulate dialogue and interest in good forest governance

Moving Towards Good Forest Governance in Asia and the Pacific: Putting action before the rhetoric

The last 20 years have seen significant shifts in how forests are managed, valued and perceived. From a discipline focused primarily on timber extraction and enforcement, forests are now influenced by a wider range of interests and concerns.

Despite these changes and progress, forestry still lacks the necessary governance structures and mechanisms needed to enable different actors to factor in their values and clarify their roles, rights and responsibilities in relation to one another.

Harmonizing linkages between the environment and sustainable development is the main goal of WSSD. If forestry is going to contribute to this then the practice of good forest governance will be essential in order to link forest health to wider economic considerations, conservation values, and reinforce the crucial role forests play in the majority of rural Asians' livelihoods.

It is for this purpose that we submit for consideration to Section 10 of the Chairman's Paper that the promotion of good forest governance be a key strategy to achieve the goals laid out in Agenda 21, particularly in relation to achieving social and economic equity and environmental sustainability in the management of natural resources.

We also submit one practical strategy to actualize Agenda 21. A sub-regional initiative is proposed to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of an **"Asian Association on Good Forest Governance"**. The association would be member driven and focus on partnerships and joint learning. It would also contribute to a better understanding of the practice of good forest governance and create linkages between local and national actors and the international agenda.

The intention of this draft position paper is to layout the rationale for a governance approach in forestry and to receive feedback on the efficacy and appropriateness of such an Association and suggestions for key questions and issues that it should focus on over the coming two years.

Forests play an integral role in all our lives and produce an astonishing array of goods and services. Yet their long term viability is affected by significant challenges in balancing environmental concerns, market demands, and rural peoples' rights to access and manage the forest resources they depend upon.

Conventional forest management approaches still focus on "managing" forests and were not developed to accommodate or deal with the multiple demands placed on forests today. Little emphasis has been given to defining the roles and responsibilities of different actors involved and understanding the affects of wider political and international forces. The result has been further forest degradation, increased conflicts among stakeholders, and retrenchment of power to larger and better equipped interest groups (such as multi-nationals and conservation groups).

The key challenge today is not merely about which management regimes are most appropriate. Rather they concern how decisions are made and how stakeholders beyond the forest sector influence forest policies and practices.

We recognize that there are no ready-made solutions and that forests are a contested resource and politically sensitive subject. However, we believe using a "forest governance" approach can be a starting point to begin answering these complex questions by providing a framework to craft the structures, mechanisms, and cross linkages necessary to tackle future challenges.

Most importantly, the practice of good forest governance is critical if we are to meet forest production needs, attain conservation goals, and ensure local livelihood concerns are addressed.

What is important about good forest governance?

Forests are used by many, managed by a few but the arrangements to govern the multiple interests and needs of different actors have yet to be clearly defined or understood.

The underlying premise is that until effective institutional arrangements, organizational structures and delivery mechanisms are in place, there will be little change in the livelihoods of forest communities and further decline in forest quality and health.

A forest governance approach doesn't only look at government structures, but shows there is also a role for civil society, forest users and other government agencies in determining the direction and nature of how forests are used. Good forest governance achieves this by clarifying the relationships, rights, responsibilities and incentives among these key actors.

By examining how wider economic, social and environmental factors influence forest policies and practice, a forest governance approach can also act as an entry point to support wider change. Gains made in forestry can contribute to better public participation and inclusion of civil society, make decision-making processes more transparent and accountable and strengthen the livelihoods assets of rural people who use and manage forest resources.

We also believe good forest governance will:

- Ensure power imbalances between stakeholders are recognized and addressed. This means not only strengthening local voices, but also guarantying that more powerful stakeholders understand, respect and recognize the rights of others.

- Improve local governance structures and their capacities to sustainably and equitably manage forest resources by clarifying the rights and responsibilities of local actors and their willingness to collaborate with one another.
- Strengthen the capacities of actors at all levels by creating learning processes and partnerships to implement forest management activities.
- Improve cross-sectoral linkages between international initiatives and national forest strategies for sustainable development.
- Create more transparent and inclusive decision-making processes by setting norms and good codes of practice.

Where does forest governance occur and how is playing out?

Forest governance happens at all levels: locally, nationally, regionally and globally. In the last decade, international initiatives and agendas have played a greater role in influencing forest policy and practices.

Globally, the conservation movement has been quite successful in pushing its own agenda. While it purports to be “people” friendly, it remains to be seen whether their agenda will threaten or support local management systems. Alternatively, there has been little understanding of how economic liberalization impacts national policies and local decision-making.

Large-scale, inter-governmental programs such as the Tropical Forestry Action Plans and National Forestry Sector Master Plans proved to be too unrealistic in their scope and provided few opportunities for any meaningful participation. Such initiatives need to focus on strategic actions which foster partnerships

and move beyond the forest sector towards better integration with national development plans.

When significant progress was made, initiatives built upon the concerns of civil society, fostered dialogue among different actors and developed an agenda for joint action. A number of national forums, networks and working groups are good examples of this.

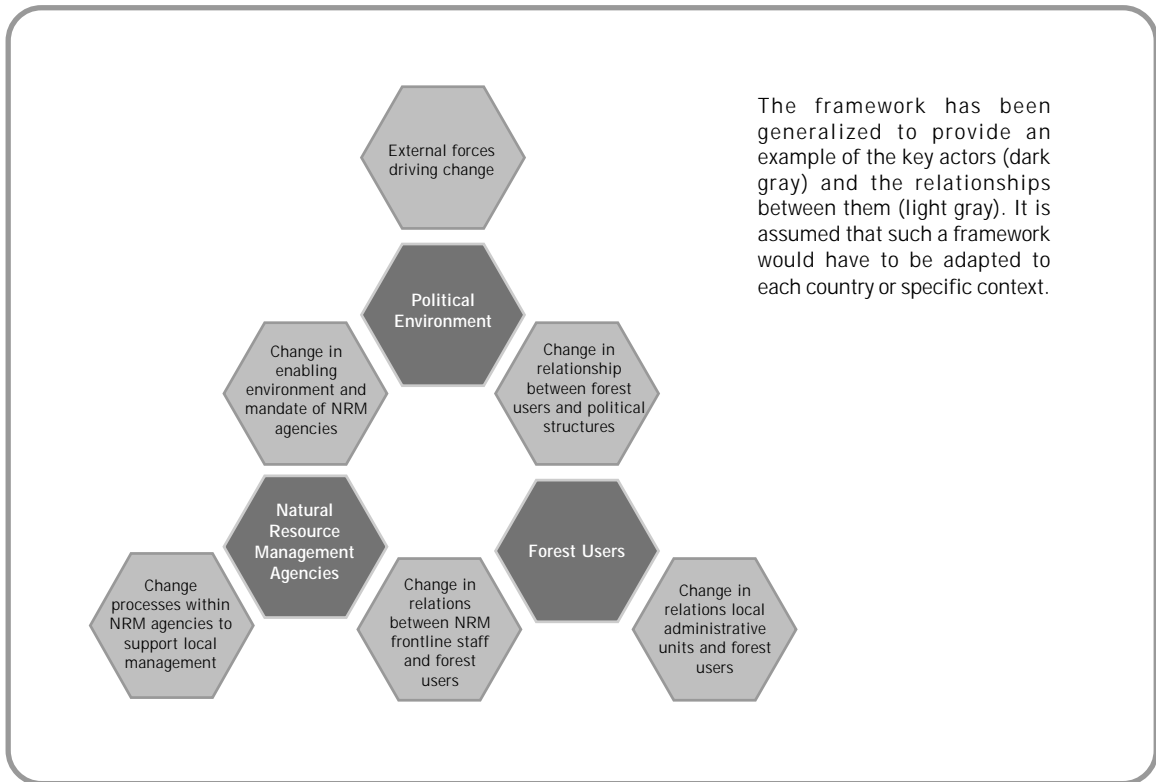
Another key stimulus for change is the various decentralization processes underway in many Asian countries.

Local forest management groups are gaining confidence. However, competing interests and interpretations of new policies have caused confusion and increased power imbalances. The lack of political stability has instilled a “use or lose it” attitude among many. Local leaders and government officials often have little experience or capacity in facilitating transparent decision-making processes and balancing a diverse group of interests and needs.

Within forest agencies, better mechanisms are needed to coordinate with other decentralization occurring and improve coordination of different units at the local, provincial and national levels. To meet the demands of new clients, forest agencies will also require fundamental changes in their structure, planning and management systems.

At the national level, the impact of the wider political environment is often underestimated. National policies are usually developed in response to political expediency, perceived threats or triggered by environmental disasters. National logging bans, increasing conservation areas, or handing out forest or agricultural concessions are often done with little consideration of their impacts at the local level.

Mapping the relations between actors: one possible governance framework



The framework helps to examine ways to “transform structures and processes” that influence local peoples’ access to forest resources and their livelihood sources by focusing on *the relationships between actors, rather than on the actors themselves* (Hobley and Shields 2000).

The model groups the actors into three levels: field, organizational and institutional. Change at one level will not necessarily lead to change at another and it is recognized that there are inherent inequalities of power between the different actors.

The framework emphasizes that forestry is public resource strongly affected by wider changes occurring in the socio-political, regional and international environment.

Creating space for effective action: An Asian Association on Good Forest Governance

Unlike other sectors, little attention has been given to forest governance. International forest initiatives tend to be too prescription oriented and leave little room for experimentation and learning.

It has also been difficult to effectively address forest governance issues on an individual country basis. Sensitive institutional and cultural considerations need to be taken into account, and important political dimensions need to be handled with caution.

Thus, we believe one way forward is to explore the formation of an Asian Association for Good Forest Governance. The association would aim to collectively define, promote and strengthen good forest governance by developing collaborative activities within and across countries in Asia.

The idea for the association builds on experiences in international, regional and national networking over the past 20 years which have demonstrated the benefits of different multi-level and partnership based learning processes.

How would the Association work?

It is proposed to initiate a two-year feasibility, learning and development process to test the assumptions, support strategies and efficacy of such an association in Asia.

As an open, democratic association it would embody and follow basic principles regarding:

Membership: should be open and inclusive, but follow clear and fair criteria.

Representation: Members should elect representatives through direct, democratic processes.

Decision-making: major decisions should be made by consulting all members and ensure consensus is reached.

Network processes: should be credible and transparent.

The association would enable cross-fertilization of ideas and experiences and improve linkages between local, national and international processes. Such a multi-stakeholder base would be in a better position to support change processes. Some possible functions and roles for the Association are:

Monitoring the affects of wider global and national political processes on forest governance.

Advocating and strengthening the role of the civil society and the ability of local users to interact and influence national and international agendas.

Acting as a clearing house on best practice, lessons learned, and providing accurate information to help inform policy and planning.

Acting as an informed outsider to support forest governance initiatives occurring in different countries.

Facilitating dialogue by acting as a bridging organization between a diverse and often divisive group of stakeholders.

How would this benefit and fit into the WSSD agenda?

Three often repeated themes discussed at various discussions leading up to WSSD form the basis for focusing on good forest governance and initiating a regional association as one practical strategy:

1. Supporting improved integration of policies and institutions including:
 - Linking to other international and national initiatives (point 95 – chairman’s paper).
 - Enhancing partnerships between governmental agencies and non-governmental actors (point 31 – Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development).
 - Promoting transparency in all parts of government and civil society (point 35 – Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development).
2. Promoting partnerships for capacity building that would be delivered through regional and sub-regional institutions (point 191 – chairman’s paper) including:
 - Fostering partnerships and supporting open and transparent, multi-stakeholder dialogue processes (point 18 – Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development).
 - Enhancing cooperation and synergies among the international organizations and instruments related to forests (point 96 – chairman’s paper).
3. Strengthen all actors’ capacities to enhance national governance arrangements including:
 - Encouraging new partnerships to tackle sustainable development challenges in the region and sub-regions (point 19e - Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development).
 - Strengthening national capacity building programs, especially the roles and capacities of local actors in implementing natural resource management strategies (point 29 – Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development).

References:

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Moving towards good forest governance in Asia and the Pacific

How can you get involved?

Forests provide something to all of us and we all can play a part in ensuring that they are used and managed equitably, efficiently and sustainably. Here are some suggestions for how you can make a difference:

- Help define the agenda by providing comments, suggestions and ideas as to how we can improve this position paper.
- Provide feedback on the feasibility and usefulness of such an association and what you think are some key questions and issues that an association could focus on and how it could link up with partners in different countries.
- Send us materials, stories, or case studies on your experiences on what has or has not worked and why in supporting good forest governance.
- Join us during the Open Forum sessions at the workshop on "Moving towards good forest governance in Asia and the Pacific" at the Indonesia People's Forum as part of PREPCOM IV in Bali, Indonesia from 1 - 2 June 2002 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel.
- Get involved or learn more about good forest governance and the association by visiting our website or contacting the address below.

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