

Press release:

## Moving towards good forest governance in Asia and the Pacific:

### The questions are the answers

"We can manage forests resources but the first thing we have to do is manage people. Those who are hungry will become more so if they cannot have access and use forests to meet their needs". So a forest monk reflected at a village meeting in Northern Thailand. He added the government uses *nitisat* (strict rules and regulations) to manage forests: *nitisat* is used for criminals. Rather the government should use *ratthasat* (diplomacy) to build structures, mechanisms to accommodate different interests and needs placed on forests.

The respected monk touched upon an issue that has been rarely discussed in forestry debates at the national or international level. National policies rarely recognize or reward local forest management efforts, and forest agencies tend to downplay local capacities and knowledge. Despite the rhetoric at the global level, international agencies and initiatives rarely pay attention to local views or concerns.

Addressing these issues does not center around which forest management regime is most appropriate, rather how decisions are made and how stakeholders beyond the forest sector influence forest policies and practices.

If forests are used by many, how can we balance the environmental concerns, market demands, and rural peoples' rights to access and manage their local forest resources? While we don't pretend to have the answers, we do believe a "forest governance" approach is a useful starting point to begin asking the right questions.

Forest governance emphasizes that there is a role for civil society, forest users and other government agencies in determining the direction and nature of how forests are used. It focuses on clarifying the relationships, rights, responsibilities and incentives among key actors and providing a framework to craft the structures, mechanisms, and cross linkages necessary to tackle future challenges.

It is for this reason a number of regional and national partners have come together to better understand the practice of good forest governance. The goal is to ensure forest health and rural peoples' rights to access and manage their local forest resources are recognized. We aim to do to this by creating better understanding of the wider social, political and international forces affecting forest policies and practice and by improving linkages among local, national and international processes.

As part of this process, we are currently asking critical questions to better understand and realize the practice of good forest governance in Asia. Over the coming months, we will be holding a number of initiatives in which your inputs and feedback are essential:

1. *Ensure that international commitments on community-based forest management are taken seriously* as seen in the Convention on Biological Diversity and the draft Chairman's paper for WSSD (41h). Also identify strategies to create a global movement for community forestry beyond WSSD, Johannesburg.
2. *Comment and provide feedback on our draft position paper:* To stimulate dialogue, a draft position paper is being circulated at PrepCom IV and available on our website which outlines some initial reasons why good forest governance is needed and how it is linked to many of the proposals and

initiatives within the WSSD agenda. Your comments and suggestions are vital to further refine the position paper.

3. *Creating space for effective action towards an Asian Association on Good Forest Governance*

We also believe that one way forward is to explore the formation of an Asian Association on Good Forest Governance. The association would aim to collectively define, promote and strengthen good forest governance by developing an agenda for joint action within and across countries in Asia and creating linkages to the international agenda.

The Association would be an independent body comprised of interested individuals and organizations committed to promoting good forest governance and working in partnership with other actors. Such a multi-stakeholder base would be in a better position to support change processes occurring throughout countries in the region. It builds on experiences in international, regional and national networking over the past 20 years that have demonstrated the benefits of different multi-level and partnership based learning processes.

Rather than developing a formal organization, the main emphasis will be on a two-year feasibility, learning and development process to test the assumptions of the association, support strategies and efficacy of such an Association.

Some possible functions and roles for the Association include:

- Monitoring the affects of wider global and national political processes on forest governance and strengthening capacities' of all actors to understand and influence such processes.
- 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 a bridging organization and facilitating dialogue between a diverse and often divisive group of stakeholders.

Interested to learn more or want to get involved?

We encourage you to visit our website or contact us at the address below

THE INITIATIVE ON PROMOTING GOOD FOREST GOVERNANCE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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