SFM and indigenous peoples

The United Nations General Assembly defines sustainable forest management (SFM) as a "dynamic and evolving concept, which aims to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations".[1] The SFM concept encompasses both natural and planted forests in all geographic regions and climatic zones, and all forest functions, managed for conservation, production or multiple purposes, to provide a range of forest ecosystem goods and services at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Criteria and indicators developed for boreal, temperate and tropical forests provide a framework to assess, monitor and report on the implementation of SFM based on: the extent of forest resources; biological diversity; forest health and vitality; productive functions; protective functions; socio-economic functions; and the legal, policy and institutional framework. Certification processes and best-practices guidelines have been developed to guide, assess, attest to and monitor SFM at the forest management unit level.

There has been significant progress in implementing SFM, but many challenges remain. The objective of this series of fact sheets produced by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests[2] is to inform decision-makers and stakeholders about some of the issues and opportunities facing the implementation of SFM in the 21st century.[3]

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What is at stake?

Forest-dwelling indigenous peoples and local communities have been marginalized and dispossessed for hundreds of years. Many of the estimated 60 million indigenous people who are almost wholly dependent on forests today[4] and the 350 million people who live in or close to forests (many of whom are indigenous) have customary rights to those forests. Some also have statutory rights, but many do not and tenure is often unclear. Overlapping claims to forests by indigenous peoples and local communities, the state, agro-industrial, timber and mining concessionaires, and developers can lead to conflict, including violence. Many countries lack effective mechanisms for managing such conflict, for instituting tenure reform, or for the participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in forest management. Such mechanisms are necessary for achieving sustainable forest management (SFM).

Key issues

Legal ownership. In many countries there is a lack of legal recognition of the rights of indigenous forest-dwelling people and local communities. For example, less than 2 percent of forest in Africa is legally owned or designated for use by forest communities or indigenous groups.[5] More progress towards legal recognition has been achieved in Latin America (see below).

Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous peoples and local communities have a wealth of knowledge on forest ecology, traditional forest and agroforestry management practices and the nutritional, medicinal and other properties of diverse forest products. SFM practices commonly employed in indigenous communities include rationing access to resources through ownership rights and quotas; placing upper limits on resource use; setting aside refuges; forbidding the use of vulnerable species; and adopting production techniques that increase biodiversity.[6] To a large extent, however, the consideration of indigenous traditional knowledge in debates on forests is limited and there is a risk that it will be lost.

Participation and inclusion in decision-making. Even though they have a daily presence in forests and are competent and legitimate stakeholders, indigenous forest-dwelling communities often have little involvement in forest-related decision-making. Some indigenous groups have been marginalized on their own customary lands by the creation of protected areas or agro-industrial, timber or mining concessions that do not involve them in management, decision-making or benefit-sharing and restrict their use of the forest. Some international institutions and national governments have developed mechanisms to increase participation, but generally the influence of indigenous peoples and local communities on decisions remains low.

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CIFOR FAO ITTO IUCN IUFRO CBD gef UNCCD United Nations Forum on Forests United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change UNDP UNEP World Agroforestry Centre

Access to finance and markets. Even when indigenous peoples and local communities have the right to harvest and market forest goods and ecosystem services they may be hindered by complex and/or perverse compliance procedures and a lack of access to credit and markets.

Capacity. Many indigenous forest-dwelling communities are in remote locations and lack organization, experience in the management of entrepreneurial enterprises, and the capacity to engage in participatory processes and public debate. Many such communities also lack the capacity or willingness to engage in processes that require culture change and to adopt technological innovations.[7]

Conflict-management mechanisms. Worldwide, the allocation of the customary lands of indigenous peoples for other purposes can lead to conflict. For example, there were 359 documented forest conflicts in Indonesia between 1997 and 2003, of which 34 percent were in protected areas, 27 percent were in timber concessions and 39 percent were in agro-industrial plantations.[8] Many countries lack effective mechanisms for managing disputes over forest tenure, which may be exacerbated by unequal access to information, unbalanced power structures and weak capacity.[9]

Experience and knowledge

Increasing international recognition. There is increasing recognition that indigenous peoples have legitimate claims to forest lands. The 2007 adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) has built on the work of the International Labour Organization and others to greatly raise the profile of indigenous rights in forest-related dialogues. All members of the Collaborative

Partnership on Forests have policies to ensure respect for the rights of indigenous peoples.[10]

Free, prior and informed consent. UNDRIP stipulates that the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of indigenous peoples should be obtained before any development that affects them can take place. It states, for example, that "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned ..."[11]

Tenure reform. Worldwide there are increasing examples of ownership of forests by indigenous peoples and local communities. According to one study of the world's 25 most-forested countries (accounting for 80 percent of the global forest estate), indigenous peoples and local communities increased their ownership of forest from 246 million hectares (7.7 percent of the total forest estate in those countries) to 296 million hectares (9.1 percent) between 2002 and 2008. The area of forest designated for use by indigenous peoples and local communities also increased, from 49 million hectares to 76 million hectares.[12] Secure community tenure rights have been shown to be highly correlated with SFM.[13]

Participatory mapping. The use of participatory mapping (also called community mapping) involving indigenous peoples and local communities is increasing. Such mapping can be used to show customary land use, customary ownership and ecological features in a landscape. In Sarawak, Malaysia, for example, community maps have been recognized by the courts as evidence of customary use.[14] While participatory mapping has helped to address conflicts, it has also been criticized for potentially increasing the risk of disenfranchisement because mapped lands or resources are easier to sell. There is also the risk that mapping processes that lock in place boundaries

and relationships will lack the flexibility and resilience of customary systems, potentially increasing conflict.

Forest certification. In some markets the certification of forest management is a prerequisite for the sale of wood products. Indigenous peoples and local communities are finding it difficult to certify their forest management, however, for a range of reasons including a lack of capacity and difficulties in reconciling the views of SFM held by indigenous communities and those expressed in certification standards.[15] Certification organizations have introduced measures to facilitate smallholder certification, such as by streamlining procedures and allowing owners of small forests to certify their operations as a group[16], but it remains problematic for many indigenous peoples and local communities.

Successful initiatives. There is an increasing number of success stories involving indigenous peoples and local communities, tenure reform and SFM.[17] The trend is most pronounced in Latin America, where indigenous peoples and local communities are attaining significant legal recognition of customary access and formal rights to forest resources. Many are forming collective institutions to govern resource use and management, developing capacity, and participating on a more equal footing in negotiations on conservation policy.[18] This is having an effect on forest management: a recent analysis of research in the tropics has shown, for example, that community-based forest management provides better fire management than some protected areas.[19] In Ecuador, a proposal to create a transboundary conservation area, largely (on the Ecuadorian side) in the customary territory of the indigenous Shuar people, was poorly received initially, partly because communities were not involved directly in negotiations.[20] Subsequent dialogue among the communities, the state and environmental

institutions, however, enabled the reconciliation of previously conflicting positions and led to the bi-national integration of previously separated communities and the implementation of SFM in a large area.[21]

Challenges and opportunities

REDD+. REDD+[22] could provide indigenous peoples with additional income through SFM and help them to secure rights to land. There is evidence that indigenous lands and other protected areas are relatively effective in reducing deforestation. Since 2002, for example, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has been 7–11 times lower on such lands than in surrounding areas, and modelling suggests that the areas established between 2003 and 2007 could prevent 27.2 million hectares of deforestation to 2050.[23]

Despite the potential benefits of REDD+, however, many indigenous people are suspicious of it.[24] There is concern that by adding value to forested lands, REDD+ could reinforce existing governance problems that deny rights to indigenous peoples.[25] There is also a risk of creating false expectations among indigenous peoples and local communities about the benefits of REDD+ when they lack the capacity to fulfil REDD+ prerequisites.[26] Ensuring that REDD+ initiatives benefit indigenous peoples and local communities is a major challenge.

Safeguards. At its 16th and 17th sessions, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change specified a number of safeguards that should be put in place in undertaking REDD+ activities. These include "respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities", and the "full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities".[27] The inclusion of these safeguards is an opportunity to further entrench respect for the rights of indigenous peoples in international policies on forests.

Increasing rights. Tenure reforms do not always bestow full rights to the use of forest resources, including wood and non-wood forest products, thereby limiting options for SFM and income generation. In many countries there is an urgent need to embark on, or follow through with, tenure reforms that increase the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Implementing free, prior and informed consent. Well-implemented processes to obtain FPIC can help to prepare communities for SFM, but they are rare.[28] Providing the resources for effective FPIC processes is a major challenge and opportunity.

Conflict management. The development of mechanisms by which participatory mapping or other conflict-management approaches can be better integrated into land-use planning is both an opportunity and a significant challenge.

Forest management capacity. Even in indigenous and local communities with secure forest tenure there is often a lack of capacity to implement SFM and develop income-earning enterprises. A major challenge for many communities is to develop the technical and organizational skills needed for successful commercial forest-based enterprises.

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What is still to be learned?

Better understanding is needed of:

- The role of indigenous peoples and local communities in SFM, including their participation in the paid workforce; their social, economic and environmental contributions; and the impacts of their subsistence use of forests.

- Enabling conditions to promote local entrepreneurship, community–company partnerships and SFM-related initiatives for small and medium-sized forest-based enterprises.

- Enabling conditions to improve the health and safety of forest workers.

- The effectiveness of indigenous lands in reducing forest greenhouse gas emissions and the best approaches for applying REDD+ in indigenous lands, including for distributing benefits within and between communities.

- Approaches for resolving the overlap between customary and state ownership and concessionary rights to forest use and to managing forest conflicts.

- The bureaucratic and market barriers facing indigenous peoples and local communities in developing successful forest-based enterprises and in certifying their operations.

- How best to empower indigenous peoples to implement SFM through appropriate capacity-building schemes.

- Approaches to understanding the needs, concerns and livelihood systems of indigenous peoples and engaging them in order to better tailor local development programmes.

Key messages

- Strengthening the rights and participation of indigenous peoples and local communities, and clarifying land tenure, are prerequisites for achieving SFM.

- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples can be used to guide management decisions in SFM concerning indigenous peoples at the international, national and local levels.

- The importance of traditional knowledge in meeting the challenges of SFM has been undervalued, and better integration between SFM, traditional knowledge and customary sustainable use is needed.

- There are encouraging examples of mechanisms for achieving SFM through the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities.

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Collaborative Partnership on Forests

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests consists of 14 international organizations, bodies and convention secretariats that have substantial programmes on forests. The mission of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests is to promote sustainable management of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end. The objectives of the Partnership are to support the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests and its member countries and to enhance cooperation and coordination on forest issues.

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Endnotes

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3. Topics: SFM and the multiple functions of forests; SFM and primary forests; SFM, food security and livelihoods; SFM and indigenous peoples; SFM and REDD+; SFM and biodiversity; SFM and gender; and SFM and adaptation to climate change. The Partnership hopes to periodically update these fact sheets and to prepare new fact sheets on other important topics, including financing.
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