

2 International Dialogue on Forests: Impact on National Policies and Practices

(Keynote Address)

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Introduction

During the past two decades, forests have emerged as a priority issue on international policy and political agendas. This international focus on forests is associated with the alarming rates of deforestation and forest degradation that continue, and the consequent loss of multiple benefits provided by forests, many of which extend beyond the borders of countries where the forests are located. The international community has been actively engaged in forest policy deliberations since the initiation of the preparatory process and at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. Notable progress has been made in international forest policy development since the Earth Summit at Rio.

This chapter provides a background to the emergence of forests as a global issue, describes some of the highlights of the progress during the past decade and notes the implications of these international deliberations on national forest policies and practices.

A Global Overview of Forests

Forest cover

Forests are a predominant feature of planet earth's landscape. According to the current estimates: the total area under forest and open wooded lands is about 3.9 billion ha, or about one-third of the world's land area, of which nearly 95% is under natural forests and 5% is planted forest. About 47% of the total forest cover is tropical, 9% subtropical, 11% temperate and 33% boreal. Forest and open wooded lands are unevenly distributed around the world. About 85% of the total forest cover is located in only 25 countries. Only seven of those countries, namely, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Russia and the USA, account for about 60% of the world's forests.

Changes in forest cover

It is estimated (FAO, 2001) that during the past decade, tropical forest cover decreased at the rate

of 12.3 million ha per annum, non-tropical forest cover increased by 2.9 million ha per annum and the total global forest cover decreased by 9.4 million ha per annum. While most of the conversion of the forestland to non-forest land-use is attributed to the need to create agriculture land, devastating forest fires in many parts of the world and recent severe storms in Europe have also contributed to forest removal and forest degradation.

Forest protection

About 10% of the world's forests now have protected status, as defined by IUCN categories I to VI. A number of neighbouring countries are working together to establish transboundary protected forest areas.

Wood production

Total worldwide production of wood is estimated to be 3300 million m³ annually. Approximately half of the wood extracted from the forests is used as fuelwood, 90% of which is produced and consumed in developing countries. On the other hand, nearly 90% of the wood harvest in developed countries is utilized for industrial purposes.

Human well-being and forests

In addition to supplying fuelwood and industrial wood, forests and open wooded lands simultaneously provide a wide range of benefits and environmental services including: biological diversity; carbon sequestration; combating desertification and land degradation; soil and water conservation; and wildlife habitat. It has been estimated that nearly 400 million people in developing countries live in and around forests and depend on them for their daily subsistence, for example, food, fuelwood, shelter, forage and medicinal plants, among others.

While extensive tracts of natural forests still remain in Africa, Asia, Russia and the New World countries, centuries of harvesting and manipulation in Europe and other parts of the world have

altered the structure and composition of forests. Large areas of forest land worldwide are now under pressure from increasing population and enhanced demand for forest products, as well as for recreation, environmental benefits and services.

Forests as an International Issue

The sovereign right of countries to manage, protect and utilize their forest, in order to meet their national policy objectives and priorities, is unquestioned and universally recognized. However, a number of considerations, including the following, have internationalized the issue of the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

Negative impact of deforestation and forest degradation

In many parts of the world, the alarming rate of deforestation has resulted in many negative impacts, for example: threats to the subsistence and livelihoods of the people who live in and around forests; concerns about the displacement of forest dwellers and loss of their human rights and of property rights as well as an impact on their social and cultural integrity; and concerns about inequitable sharing of economic benefits with the local population. The impact of deforestation on the lives and livelihoods of people has been and continues to be a cause of considerable international concern.

Environmental concerns

The environmental role of forests has received increased recognition during the past two decades and many of the environmental benefits and services extend beyond the borders of the countries where the forests are located. Some of the environmental consequences of deforestation include loss of biological diversity and wildlife habitat, impact on hydrological and biogeochemical cycles including carbon sequestration, as well as soil and water conservation. Extensive and prolonged forest fires in a country, for example in Indonesia, have raised

concerns beyond its borders in neighbouring countries, in terms of haze, air pollution and its potential impact on human health, such as respiratory problems.

International trade

Increasing population and expanding economic development in many parts of the world have led to a steady increase in the demand for pulp, paper and other wood products. In many developed countries, there is now a demand for products derived from forests that are certified to be sustainably managed. This has resulted in the need to establish an international agreement on the parameters and norms (Maini 1993, 1996) that characterize sustainable forest management (SFM) as well as to the establishment of many certification schemes.

Among the main international forest policy concerns factors that have placed forests, a national resource, on the international agenda are the negative impact of deforestation and forest degradation on: environmental benefits and services provided by forests; the lives and livelihoods of forest dwellers and people who live around forests; and the demand for international trade in products from sustainably managed forests.

Geographical Scope of Forest Issues

It is widely recognized that the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests, at the national and sub-national levels, is primarily the responsibility of countries where the forests are located. However, there are also transboundary issues that require close co-operation among neighbouring countries. These include the management of forests located in the watersheds of international rivers or protection of the forest habitat of wildlife that migrate across the borders of the countries; mismanagement of forests and landscape, or deforestation in one country could have a negative impact downstream in a neighbouring country.

Many environmental dimensions of forests also require a regional and eco-regional perspective and action. For example, the conservation of biological diversity of the Amazon forest would

require collective efforts by all the countries that share the Amazon basin. Similarly, the role of forests in hydrological and biogeochemical cycles, such as carbon sequestration, requires global cooperation and action.

The scale and scope of understanding and addressing these forest issues has expanded during the past decade. Sound approaches towards sustainable forest management at the national and sub-national level now need to consider the transboundary, regional and global contexts. National forest policies can no longer be formulated in isolation from this broader geographical context. Consequently, while countries have the sovereign right to manage and utilize their own forests, they also need to recognize their regional and global responsibility and consider the implications of their policies and practices on a wider geographical scale. A large number of regional and global fora have now been organized to address forest issues and foster cooperation at the appropriate geographical level.

Progress Towards International Forest Policy

Formulation of international forest policy requires three steps: first, recognition of the diverse priority concerns of various stakeholders; second, development of a common understanding of various components of forest policy; and third, formulation of agreed approaches to address the issues. While there is a universal agreement on the need to promote and practice SFM, there is, however, considerable diversity among countries about areas of priority concerns. This diversity appears to be associated with the level of economic development and the magnitude of forestland endowment.

Four realities

Based on per capita income as an indicator of economic development and per capita forest cover as an indicator of forest endowments, it is possible to recognize 'four realities' in the world (Fig. 2.1). As far as the forest cover is concerned, there are two broad categories of countries, 'forest-rich' and 'forest-poor'. From the viewpoint of economic

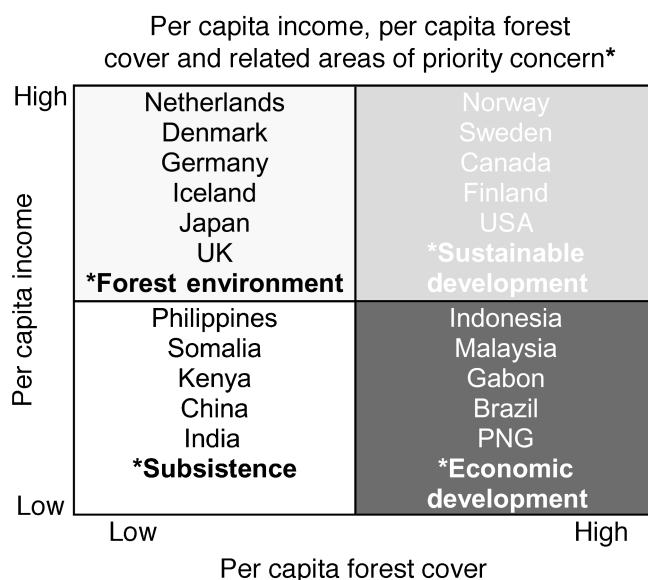


Fig. 2.1. The influence of per capita income and per capita forest cover on the areas of priority concern in different countries (after Maini, 1996).

development, countries are identified as ‘industrialized’ and ‘developing’.

The typology (Fig. 2.1) represents a broad clustering of countries in accordance with their priority concerns, and the possible reasons that drive these priorities. It is interesting to note that:

- *forest-rich developing countries*, such as Brazil and Indonesia, view forests as an important instrument for economic development;
- *forest-rich industrialized countries*, such as Canada and Finland, recognize both the economic and environmental value of forests and have the economic and technical means, as well as political and public support, to practise sustainable development;
- *forest-poor developing countries*, such as India, Kenya and the Philippines, have nearly 400 million people living in and around forests who depend on forests for their subsistence and their daily needs for food, forage, fuelwood, shelter and medicinal plants;
- *forest-poor developed countries*, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, rely on forest-rich countries to meet their high demand for forest products and services. These countries place a high value on the environmental aspects of forests.

It is critical to recognize these ‘four realities’ and their respective areas of priority concern in order to build international consensus and to formulate a meaningful international forest policy framework.

Intergovernmental Forest Policy Deliberations

Institutional aspects

Forests have been an integral component of a large number of international agreements negotiated prior to the Earth Summit in Rio (e.g. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, World Heritage Convention), as well as agreements negotiated at Rio (e.g. Framework Convention on Climate Change, Biological Diversity Convention, Convention to Combat Desertification). However, the Earth Summit provided the first unique opportunity where management, conservation and sustainable development of *all* types of forests was the primary focus of the intergovernmental negotiations. At Rio, the forest issue was one of the most controversial issues negotiated by the participating countries. The

industrialized and developing countries were strongly polarized on priorities assigned to sustainable development and to environmental concerns by the North in comparison with the emphasis on economic development by the South. In spite of these divergent views and frequent confrontation between the North and the South, the successful negotiation of 'Forest Principles' at Rio is considered to be a landmark accomplishment in intergovernmental deliberations on forest policy.

The period between 1992 and 1995 was one of building confidence and trust between the South and the North, followed by the establishment of the *ad hoc* Intergovernmental Panel on Forest (1995–1997) as a subsidiary body of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD). In light of the significant progress made in building consensus on a large number of politically sensitive and complex forest policy issues, the countries decided to extend their deliberations under a new subsidiary body of UNCSD, namely, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (1997–2000). This was, again, a period of further consensus building and enhanced partnerships among various stakeholders. Both the IPF and IFF process resulted in defining the scope and scale of a large number of issues and in reaching agreement on a large number of proposals for action. However, a number of issues still remain unresolved. These include the need to initiate negotiations on a Convention on Forests, the need for enhanced international financial cooperation to support sustainable forestry in developing countries and to strengthen the mutually supportive relationship between international trade and SFM.

During the IPF/IFF process, about 25 international meetings were organized to clarify the scientific and technical aspects of forests and to propose policy options for the issues under intergovernmental deliberation. Most of these meetings were co-sponsored by governments in the South and the North as well as by representatives of the scientific community and non-governmental organizations. These meetings, which produced nearly 300 technical documents, and the multi-stakeholder co-sponsorship contributed significantly to building broad consensus (Grayson, 1995; Grayson and Maynard, 1997; Soderlund and Pottinger, 2001). Furthermore, the IPF and IFF process was greatly facilitated by the co-chairmen of IPF and IFF. Both bodies were co-chaired by senior scientists, policy advisors and diplomats

from both the developing and industrialized countries. The decade since Rio may be considered the period of richest international forest policy understanding, analysis and development.

In consideration of the significant progress made in the formulation of the international forest policy and the critical need to implement the agreed IPF/IFF proposals for action, the countries decided, in 2000, to establish the United Nations Forum on Forests as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. This new forum reports to the UN General Assembly through ECOSOC and is established at the highest political level to discuss and implement the various components of the international forest policy. UNFF particularly aims to mobilize political, financial, scientific and technical support in order to implement sustainable management of all types of forests. Also, the UNFF has made provisions to organize high-level Ministerial involvement as well as to facilitate the contribution of major groups, including the private sector, professional foresters, indigenous peoples and various other components of society.

Another unique feature of the IPF/IFF/UNFF process is the fostering of close collaboration between a core group of major multilateral and international organizations and instruments. A Collaborative Partnership on Forests¹ (CPF) has now been established to support UNFF deliberations and to facilitate the implementation of its plan of action.

Policy aspects

International deliberations on forest policy have contributed to wide recognition of a number of characteristics of forests and forest policy including the following:

- Forests simultaneously provide a number of benefits and this feature has resulted in the organization of multiple constituencies and of special interest groups related to forests. Conflicts result when these different groups attempt to advance their specific agendas on the same forestland (e.g. harvesting versus conservation). Sustainable forest management now also requires an ability to build consensus among divergent demands and to resolve conflicts.

- Forest policy is a cross-sectoral issue and SFM requires harmonization of cross-sectoral policies at the national level. For example, approaches to address deforestation and forest degradation may lie in agricultural or energy (e.g. fuelwood) policy.
- Harmonization of cross-sectoral policies and resolution of conflicting demands requires open, transparent, inclusive and participatory decision-making processes.
- There are about 40 international and multilateral organizations (e.g. FAO, ITTO, World Bank, etc.) and about 20 international agreements that deal with some aspect of forest (e.g. sustainable forestry) or forest-related issues (e.g. carbon sequestration, biological diversity, indigenous people). Individually, these organizations and agreements do not have an adequate mandate or the capacity to address the forest issue in a cohesive and comprehensive manner. Consequently, close cooperation among key multilateral agencies and agreements is essential to coordinate the otherwise fractionated agenda (UNDP, 1997).
- During the past decade, there has been a significant shift in perspectives on forests, i.e. from sustained yield to SFM, which requires a corresponding shift from forest management to forest ecosystem management (Maini, 1989).
- Collectively, the 'Rio Forest Principles' and the IPF/IFF proposals for action represent the most comprehensive, intergovernmentally agreed framework on international forest policy. The UNFF has now been established with the primary focus to mobilize political and financial support and to facilitate the implementation of this agreed agenda for action on forests.

Impact on National Policies and Practices

Considering the transboundary, regional and global dimensions of forests, it is evident that national and sub-national forest policies are no longer isolated from international forest policy dialogue and from broad geographical context. In addition to the environmental benefits and

services that extend beyond the borders of a country, a number of international agreements and treaties (e.g. CITES, Biodiversity Convention) address forest-related issues. Countries that are signatory to these treaties have already committed themselves to accept certain international rules and norms. International trade in products derived from sustainably managed forests, for example, would necessitate the establishment of some internationally agreed standards and measures of performance regarding SFM. Recent progress in the formulation of criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management by several regional processes and the compatibility between these processes, is another illustration of the influence of international deliberations on national forest policies and practices.

Epilogue

The social, economic and environmental consequences of the alarming rate and magnitude of deforestation have transboundary, regional and global dimensions. Furthermore, the increasing demand by many industrialized countries for forest products from sustainably managed forests has also contributed to the emergence of forests as an international issue. It is important to understand various forces that drive the forest issue, recognize diverse interests, 'realities' and areas of priority concern. National forest policies and practices must take into account regional and international deliberations on forests.

Intergovernmental negotiations on forests at the Earth Summit at Rio and during the subsequent decade have been intense and have evolved from North-South confrontation to building North-South consensus on a large number of politically sensitive and complex forest issues. This consensus-building process has been facilitated by about 25 meetings of international experts, co-sponsored by both the developing and industrialized countries as well as non-governmental organizations. The production of a very rich body of literature on international forest policy and on SFM has further contributed to the progress in international forest policy. The establishment of UNFF, a body set up to consider and implement international forest policy at the highest political level, represents a major step towards the

promotion and implementation of sustainable management of *all* types of forests. This process is being facilitated by the inter-agency Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

Endnote

¹ Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on Combating Desertification (CCD), Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), Global Environment Facility (GEF), International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank (WB).

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