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On International Forest Governance

deforestation and forest degradation – policy instruments – good forest governance – policy learning – training – capacity building

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO ADDRESS FOREST DESTRUCTION

Efforts to address global deforestation and forest degradation first gained international prominence in the 1980s, which led to an array of global initiatives including the signature of the International Tropical Timber Agreement and the establishment of the International Tropical Timber Organization. This was soon followed by a concerted, but ultimately failed effort, to achieve a binding Global Forest Convention during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

Recognition that both these early international efforts and domestic regulations were insufficient to address the drivers of forest loss, led to the introduction over time of a variety of international and regional institutions and mechanisms including National Forest Programmes, Criteria and Indicator Processes, and forest certification/eco-labelling of forest products. While important, each of these, by themselves, has been unable to reverse forest destruction.

## TWO NEW AVENUES TO PROMOTE "GOOD FOREST GOVERNANCE"

Despite this historical record, increased optimism and concerted global efforts to address global forest challenges are emerging over two fairly new policy instruments: **legality verification**, which aims to provide global markets with assurances that traded wood products come from forests that were not illegally harvested; and **reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD)** – a mechanism which has emerged to address how to manage forests in order to mitigate and adapt to global climate change.

This instrument has later been expanded to include the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+).

Both of these efforts have also been heralded as avenues to promote "good forest governance" within forested countries by providing international incentives and capacity building generally seen as reinforcing, rather than detracting from, national sovereignty.

While important scholarship is being undertaken, its strategic policy implications for fostering durable and effective governance institutions need to be better developed and disseminated.

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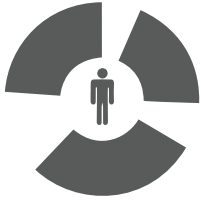
KNOWLEDGE GAPS

One key formative question is whether legality verification, REDD+ and other innovative efforts might succeed in finding new ways to improve forest conditions and livelihoods where previous efforts have failed. To answer this question, policy learning, training and other forms of capacity building that bridge and stimulate a two-way dialogue between the research community and on-the-ground practitioners are a key starting point.

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PROBLEM-FOCUSED POLICY LEARNING

Problem-focused policy learning is a concept that could guide efforts towards more effective international forest governance. It is enabled by including from the start a broad group of stakeholders and institutions inside and outside of the forest sector and by gathering practical advice, practitioners' knowledge, insights and the best available research. In addition, impacts between various policies and policy levels need to be better understood.

IUFRO'S TASK FORCE "INTERNATIONAL FOREST GOVERNANCE"

This Research Letter summarizes the findings of IUFRO's Task Force "International Forest Governance" between 2011 and 2014. The Task Force aimed at assessing how policy integration and stakeholder learning might be fostered to improve the practice of responsible forest management around the world. It focused on understanding and assessing the implications of scholarship on forest governance integration and learning for encouraging problem-focused research, and addressing on-the-ground and enduring forest management challenges.

The work of the Task Force has emphasized balancing sustainable forest management with the livelihoods of forest-dependent peoples and indigenous communities. As such, the Task Force's work has fed – and continues to input - into a number of United Nations (UN) processes, including but not limited to the development of sustainable development goals and a post-2015 development agenda by the 69th UN General Assembly in 2014-2015, the negotiation of a new climate change regime by the end of 2015 under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

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We turn to policy learning as a way to adjust the goals or techniques of policy based on past experience and new information about the causal impacts of policy decisions and interventions.

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LESSONS LEARNED

Political science research can make an important contribution in helping develop insights for practitioners seeking to address a range of forest sustainability challenges including deforestation, forest livelihoods and biodiversity loss.

To do so, a much more sustained effort is needed to translate these insights into concrete actions and options that policy makers and non-governmental organizations might pursue.

CONCLUSIONS

Environmental governance challenges, while grounded in local contexts, also contain global dimensions and translatable analytical frameworks, which, in turn, can inform policy solutions.

Engaging in robust policy learning processes to share knowledge is critical. The process of policy learning is critical for informing and continually improving best practices for forest governance.

PRACTITIONER-ORIENTED MATERIALS

The Task Force developed a series of **"Issues & Options Briefs"** that focused on identifying strategic insights on key practical challenges in different local contexts. The papers were designed to link scholarly insight to the practice of forest and resource stewardship within a particular national or local context. For reviewing the briefs, please visit http://www.iufro. org/publications/series/occasional-papers/