Talking about forests and family farms: growing relationships on fertile ground

A conversation between forest-and-farm producers and governments

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Forest and Farm Facility
TALKING ABOUT FORESTS AND FAMILY FARMS: GROWING RELATIONSHIPS ON FERTILE GROUND

A conversation between forest-and-farm producers and governments at the “Family Forestry is Family Farming” event, Thursday 26th June 2014, World Forest Week, FAO, Rome

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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INTRODUCTION

This publication summarizes the conversation that took place at the “Family Forestry is Family Farming” event co-organized by the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) and the International Family Forestry Alliance (IFFA). In the celebration of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF), the conversation testifies to the power of cooperation between forest-and-farm families and governments in preparing fertile ground.

The first part of the conversation introduces some of the challenges faced by smallholders in forested landscapes and the role of forest-and-farm producer organizations in helping overcome such challenges. In the second part, we hear from governments and forest-and-farm producer representatives on the great things they are achieving by working together.

The event was moderated by Chun Lai, guest facilitator from the Philippines, and made possible through funding from the Swedish Ministry for Rural Affairs.
In the frame of this International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) event, it is an important occasion to also highlight forests, as they are owned and managed by families and smallholders. Therefore, through the celebration of this event, we have tried highlighting the bridge between forests and family farming. I wish to express what an honor it is for FAO to host the FFF and also my appreciation to the donors for supporting the work of the Facility. I especially want to highlight the social architecture that is behind the work of the Facility in all the different countries, many of you which represent the different communities, indigenous people and smallholders that we want to strengthen in the future. I wish you a very fruitful day.
We are very pleased to have the International Family Forestry Alliance, represented by Peter deMarsh and many members from Finland, Sweden, Kenya Mexico and elsewhere. We are promoting the Year of Family Farming because it is very important to us. We are trying to show the links between family farming and forests in farmers’ markets which offers products from not just agriculture, but also forests. This event builds on the momentum generated by the conference on forest producer organizations (FPOs) in China, and we are pleased to release two important publications that build on the recommendations. One is a policy brief, the “roadmap”, which takes the recommendations and turns them into guidance for policymakers. The second paper is a working paper, “Making change happen”, because we recognize the important roles of governments, the main partners of FAO. We thank the Swedish government for generous funding for this event, and the other donors of the FFF: AgriCord, Finland, Germany, and the United States.
We are coordinating the IYFF, and since the beginning, FAO has been stating that family farming is about more than agriculture, including aquaculture and forestry. Any farm managed by a family and predominantly relying on family labour is a family farm. It’s not just a mode of production, it’s a way of life. The IYFF recognizes the indispensable role of family farming in sustainable development – it is crucial for mitigating climate change and conserving biodiversity, and for many other reasons. Family farming needs to be repositioned at the centre of agricultural, social and environmental policies. The IYFF is an opportunity for us to say: if you are serious about sustainable food production systems, family farming is a key actor to get there. We are using this opportunity to place family farms and forests in their rightful places in the policy dialogue.
Peter de Marsh

On behalf of the International Family Forestry Alliance, welcome! I will provide background on the conceptual framework for the discussion. The four fundamentally enabling conditions that are necessary to support a process with breadth and impact are: 1) secure tenure, 2) fair market access, 3) good-quality government support services, and 4) the presence of effective forest producer organizations. These represent specific risks that family farmers and forest owners are very sensitive to.
SESSION 1: KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE SHARING ON THE IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF FAMILY FORESTRY
The first session will look at and examine the importance of family forestry. We are going to hear directly from small community and indigenous producer organizations on both the opportunities and challenges for family forestry and farming in wider forest landscapes.
We come from Liberia and bring you greetings from our land. People say family farming is important but don’t give priority to it, yet it is essential for building a strong economy and for social cohesiveness. It is important for development; we say over and over that agricultural concessions will never bring development; it is the smallholders who are the key to our country and our economy.

Land, forests and food are linked: no land, no forest, no food. That’s why it’s important in this International Year of Family Farming that we build the linkages between land, forests and food because they are interdependent. Forests and farms must get full policy attention; our voices must be heard and our rights respected. People are rarely included in the design and implementation of development programmes, but we must get forest farmers involved. If they participate from the start, they can take ownership of implementation. Another issue is capacity - people expect much of smallholders, but investment is needed to make sure they have sufficient capacity and also access to finance.

These are some of the issues we want you to know about. We want to stop importing poverty and exporting wealth; we want to build family farms.
Robert Bimba is the national coordinator of the Farmers Union Network of Liberia (FUN), which was established in 2008 as a voice for smallholder farmers. FUN works with more than 35 000 registered farmers countrywide, including forest farmers, through 15 county coordinators and seven platforms.
In Liberia, forests are divided by county and then by district, clan, village and family. Families own these forests, but the government has the right to take away the forest whenever they want. We say that Liberian women own 50 percent of the wealth of the forests. As Robert said, without the forest there will be no farms, farmers or food – and when there is no food, there are no people.

Forest peoples are marginalized. Concession companies – oil palm, rubber – are taking large parts of the forest. Women use the forest for survival – food, energy, medicines, women are the management team in the forests. Forests provide livelihoods, food security and market opportunities. We use the forest to train our children on our culture and values. There is no way we can live without forests.

What is the way forward? We need to create more awareness about deforestation. Our people move from one county to another to be able to farm and so we need to trade. We need capacity building. And we need secure ownership of the forests and family farms so the government cannot take them away at their will.

“Women use the forest for survival, food, energy, medicines. There is no way we can live without forests.”

Ethel Wion
Ethel Wion is FUN’s officer responsible for gender.
“Community forestry is a social-inclusion process involving water, agricultural and forest resources. It is also about equality in the distribution of benefits, social justice, social mobilization, and democratic norms and values.”

Apsara Chapagain is chair of the Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN). FECOFUN, which was established in 1995, is the largest civil-society organization in Nepal, with a membership of 11 million people in nearly 18,000 community forest user groups.
We have much experience in community forestry in Nepal. The government has handed management rights to more than 18,000 forest user groups, mostly in the Middle Hills. Community forestry is about people’s participation; it is a social-inclusion process involving water, agricultural and forest resources. It is also about equality in the distribution of benefits, social justice, social mobilization, and democratic norms and values.

There is a regulation that states that community forest user group (CFUG) committees should comprise 50 percent women, and also that each household nominates one male and one female for participation in the CFUG. The CFUG movement has organizations at the grassroots level and the national level; 30 percent of the nation’s population is part of the CFUG movement. The continuing key challenge is to secure user rights over the forests – the government is trying to roll back those rights. Mining, construction and other development projects also pose threats.
Getting organised for market opportunities

Alagie Basse Mboge

In the Gambia there is an agricultural and natural resource policy, a forest policy, the Local Government Act, the programme for accelerated growth and employment, the national agriculture program – all these, and the national Constitution, provide space for the formation of associations. Community-based organizations exist at various levels, and at the national level there is the National Farmer’s Platform.

The freedom to form associations helps in bargaining with enterprises. For example, women’s groups collect firewood and take it to the capital. Coming together makes it easier for them to bargain on the cost of the transport lorry. Associations also make it easier to share experiences – we can exchange ideas on best practices in farming. A big issue in the Gambia was that we didn’t have a standard way of measuring products. Coming together we have created a measurement system. Previously, everyone was cutting down trees to grow rice, but by sitting together and talking, even the rice farmers are coming to understand there is no need to cut down more trees. The rice-growers are also experiencing human–wildlife conflicts close to rivers. The associations are helping us tackle these issues.
“The freedom to form associations helps in bargaining with enterprises.”

Basse is president of the National Farmers’ Platform of the Gambia, which represents more than 200,000 farmers and encompasses 425 farmer organizations in the agricultural, fisheries, (agro)forestry and livestock sectors.
Gender equity in the production chain

Grecia Magdalena Lopez Peralta

We are a group of women in the Mayan Biosphere Reserve and we tap into the potential of ramón. We want to increase productivity, market access – increase cash and income for our families and ensure the sustainable management of the forest. We want to improve the living conditions of producers. Our strategy is to consolidate alliances, impact the value chain and strengthen capacities through a gender-oriented approach that builds the capacity of women and men so they can contribute to the management and marketing of ramón. Activities include training sessions; participation in local and national fora to promote our producers; participatory diagnostic sessions; building capacity in administration; and building the capacity of women and men in the production chain. The ramón nut is organic and our product is innovative. But there are limitations, such as the lack of machinery to process the nut and bring it to market; a major challenge is to increase the area of forest within the value chain.

Guatemala is a country with much machismo, and women’s participation is often limited because men want to be up front. Lately, though, thanks to training workshops in our communities on gender equity, I think we have been able to overcome this hurdle. Now in the Petén we see that women are playing a very important role in society, and I am here representing a group of women producers. Ramón is naturally present in the forests of the Petén, and the majority of people who benefit are women. But women are not the only beneficiaries; men benefit too. We stress gender equity and our men are no longer blindfolded. They no longer believe that women should stay at home. In the past we couldn’t participate, and now we can. When it comes to gender equity, men and women are equal and should both play a role.
“We stress gender equity and our men are no longer blindfolded. They no longer believe that women should stay at home.”

Grecia is leader of the Women’s Ramón Producer Group in the Petén, Guatemala. This group focuses on the collection, processing and marketing of ramón, a traditional tree nut also known as the Mayan nut. Ramón seeds are easy to harvest non-destructively, and they are also highly nutritious and antioxidant.
Access to extension and other supporting services

Manuel Garcia Gonzalez

CONOSIL wants to raise the quality of life of our members, and we do this primarily through training and technology transfer. We develop capacities with a direct impact on the lives of member farmers, many of whom are limited by a lack of skill in producing in a diversified way effectively, efficiently and sustainably. How can we address this? All our plans are developed on the basis of consensus reached with producers in meetings with them. Assisted by academics, we develop projects to address the problems faced by producers, and we request support from the government institutions that allocate finance. What impact have we had through this triple alliance of forest producers, academics and the government?

We have a clear idea of what farmers are doing. We provide inputs into production and assistance in international marketing. We work on production chains, which are well defined with visions and missions. We are doing everything we can to make sure all this happens and that what we do produces the concrete results our families need.
“All our plans are developed on the basis of consensus reached with producers in meetings with them.”

Manuel is president of Consejo Directivo de la Conferación Nacional de Organizaciones de Silvicultores (CONOSIL). CONOSIL brings together 670,000 Mexican forest producers in 32 national associations, 218 regional associations and 52 local associations. Its main purpose is to strengthen the self-reliance of forest producers in the context of social participation.
The following questions were posed to the panellist and the audience:

1. Why is it important to strengthen the understanding and support for the connections between family forests and family farms?

2. What are some of the innovations in connecting family forest-and-farm producers to markets?

3. How can producer organizations balance the need to do advocacy with the need to improve services to their members?
COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS
In poor countries, the most educated people are young, but they are migrating to cities or abroad, and agricultural land is becoming abandoned. That land needs to be re-farmed – family farms and forests need to be integrated to produce more food, fuel and fibre. But, in many countries, governments treat forests and agriculture separately. There are so many ministers. We need a collective platform and action to link forests and agriculture. Family farmers are the custodians of both agriculture and forests. This must be recognized.
Rukka Sombolinggi, FFF Steering Committee Member from AMAN, Indonesia

In Indonesia, the problem of indigenous peoples is tenure security. The government needs to be enlightened; they put our forest-dwelling people in prisons and fine them for forest transgressions, but they support big miners and loggers to go into the forests. They recently opened one million hectares of food concessions that kill local farmers. The government must understand that it is the small-scale farming systems, and not the big companies, who will feed the world.

Duncan Macqueen, FFF Principal Researcher – Forest Team, International Institute for Environment and Development

I saw something in Mozambique that was innovative, because it was designed by a community charcoal producer association, an association of traders, and a governor, who sought to use Mozambique’s concession facility to supply the local market with charcoal. In managing the concession they had expenses that would have raised their cost of production above the cost of informal production, so they are working with a local non-governmental organization to improve the efficiency of charcoal kilns. And they are partnering with another NGO to market fuel-efficient charcoal stoves. The governor wants to push these in a particular district, so they have a target market.
Patrick M. Kariuki,  
Kenya Forest Service

"In Kenya in 2004, we picked up FAO’s farmer field schools methodology for agriculture and used it to develop farm-forestry field schools. We build capacity, bring a better understanding of enterprises in the farm-forestry sector; we are linking graduates to a commercial entity (the Bank of Kenya) for revolving loans. Farmers don’t always need a lot of money to move beyond subsistence. It’s working perfectly; this is an innovation in connecting family forests and markets through financing their production."

Geoffrey Wanyama,  
Farm Forest Smallholder Producers Association of Kenya

"One of the things that forest producer organizations can do to avoid losing focus is to build their capacity. When we started working with a national association, we realized that its leaders didn’t have the capacity to do what was expected of them. So we make sure they understand their role in farm forestry and keep refreshing that; the key thing is to build their capacity."
RESPONSES FROM PANELLISTS

Manuel Garcia Gonzalez

The issue of youth is linked with land tenure. The land is often subdivided over the generations and production becomes less sustainable. It’s difficult to give a role to young people, and they can’t stay on the land if they can’t develop economically. The role of organizations in this is important – they can link people who know about marketing and trade and have technical knowledge or provide services, and production can be increased. Many forest farmers use inefficient traditional practices. This is where we need to come in – to help build knowledge and to work with governments to create targeted programmes.
The National Farmers’ Platform brings together all kinds of farmers, including community foresters, and last week they had their annual general meeting supported by the Forest and Farm Facility. It is very important that these two groups – and other stakeholders, including government – come together on an equal footing to resolve conflicts.
Grecia Magdalena Lopez Peralta

In Guatemala, in Petén, we are getting young people involved. They are so important to us. We are stressing youth education in our association. We’re not here forever, so we need to train young people.
Ethel Wion

Capacity has to be built to strengthen the connection between family farms and family forests. If the people are informed about agreements and their effects, people will come together and have some bargaining power. If the people are informed and educated, they can push back against poor policies.

Robert Bimba

If we strengthen understanding, institutions and farmers will understand their roles. Farmers need a team to speak up for them on issues; it’s time for them to come together. Donors should provide direct, long-term support to producer organizations. On the other hand, donors and partners need to get out of the way. If you do our work for us, you take away our dignity. It’s time we allow people to do their own work; forest-and-farm producer organizations will make mistakes as they develop, but we must accept that because it is a learning process.
SESSION 2: WHEN FOREST SMALLHOLDERS AND GOVERNMENTS WORK TOGETHER: EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT IN SUPPORT OF FAMILY FORESTRY
Session 2 will focus on the enabling environment for family forests. Country teams from producer organizations and civil society will share their experiences – based on several guiding questions:

- How would you describe the working relationship between the forest producer organization and the government in your country? How did you arrive at the relationship that you have today?
- What benefits would you say are flowing from this relationship? Are there particular processes or policies that are helping to facilitate this relationship? What is working well, and what accounts for this success?
- What challenges do you anticipate in the future?
Sweden: a win-win outcome

Lennart Ackzell and Bjorn Merkell

**Lennart:** In the 19th century, farmers had little to do in winter; the state transferred the ownership of forests to farmers so they could increase their incomes and work throughout the year. A dramatic shift happened during industrialization, however: the forests increased in value as demand for wood escalated, leading to a deforestation crisis.

**Bjorn:** The government discussed how to stop this overexploitation, and the result was the country’s first forest policy in the early 1900s. We created the first Forestry Act, as well as regional forest authorities to support small forest holders with extension advice on how to manage their forests, and this resulted in a movement to reforest our degraded lands.

**Lennart:** So the state was supportive, but the problem was that we could not handle the market. Smallholders were vulnerable and could not negotiate prices. We were cheated. In response, in the villages, we started to form simple associations to defend ourselves, to seek at least a minimum price for our wood, and these associations grew stronger. The state established a cap (25 percent of the total forest estate) on forest ownership by companies, so today the majority of the forests is still family owned. The hundreds of small associations started to combine, reducing to 35 by the 1930s. We also needed to deal with the policymakers, and at that point we established a federation.

**Bjorn:** For the government, the creation of a national federation was good – it was easier for the government to talk to one group than to hundreds or dozens. We could also be sure that information and the results of our dialogues would be disseminated.
Lennart: We grew over time – in the war, the government asked the forest owners to provide cities with firewood, which generated important income. We entered into the sawmilling industry. In the 1970s, however, the growth of the environmental movement led to concern about how owners were managing their forests, and this started to affect forest laws. The forest owners were upset – we didn’t want the state interfering, so we strongly opposed this trend. We thought that diversity in decision-making was good for the forest.

Bjorn: The dialogue between government and forest owners had created a level of trust, and we realized that this move to write environmental regulations into the law was not the right way forward. There was too much detail and too much interference. So in the 1990s we revised the law, influenced by the outcomes of the Earth Summit in 1992; we were able to strike a better balance between environmental concerns and wood production.

Lennart: The owners enjoy the respect that is shown by the state; we want to improve policies, which should be realistic and sound. This maturity in our relationship has led to dual respect. We have doubled the amount of wood in the Swedish forest, and the forest has been restored and is still increasing. If you have property rights, the forests are an asset; we have achieved sustainable forest management because we are managing for our children. The state has to balance opinions, often from the big cities, who have many ideas about “my” forests. When they told us, in the 1970s, that we couldn’t touch the trees, well, the balance was lost.

Bjorn: Today, there is a good dialogue between the Swedish Forest Agency, forest owners and stakeholders to understand the different values in the forest and how they are perceived. The forest owners have their view, but we also have to take into consideration the views of others who also have access to forests, and that’s tricky.
**Guatemala: mutual socioeconomic benefits**

**Amauri Molina Alvarez and Marcedonio Curtave**

**Amauri:** The word “Guatemala” means “land of the trees”. When the Spanish arrived on our shores, they asked, what is the name of this place? “Guatemala” was the reply. But now only 34% of the country is covered by trees, and we are making efforts to restore the forest. The lives of communities have always been tied to the forest.

So we have this natural capital, the forests, but when we speak about development through the use forest resources, we need human capital, social capital. Over time, and with assistance from outside parties such as the National Forest Programme Facility, we have developed networks of indigenous communities, and we have “consultation desks” to build relationships. These networks have become stronger and are having a major impact in the country through their shared interests. As a representative of government, I can say that it has been difficult to keep these relationships going, and also to have the trust to allow them to be independent and to make their own decisions. But we have been able to do so; we have provided logistical support, but we have left them free to make their own decisions.

**Marcedonio:** I represent a forest group in the Petén and the national forest community alliance, which groups thousands of forest producers; I am also a member of the executive committee of the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests.

Amauri is Deputy Director of Guatemala’s National Institute of Forests, the country’s competent public-sector authority on forests.
Our relationships with local communities and, at the national level, with government have strengthened over a long period, not overnight.

The relationship with government is through the National Council for Protected Areas and the National Institute of Forests. We have come to have a close relationship. For six years I have been on the National Council of Protected Areas, and I’m a member of an expert group in the Council. So there is a close relationship, and a symbiosis has come about.

To what do we owe this good relationship? The answer is, to mutual benefits in many areas. The government benefits – for example, the communities provide thousands of forest “rangers” who are not paid by the state but by the forest. The government is realizing that people care for the forest. Communities benefit from an incentives programme – called Programa de Incentivos para Pequeños Poseedores de Tierras de Vocación Forestal o Agroforestal (PINPEP) – for small-scale producers.

The symbiosis between governments and local communities and their representative organizations has reduced illegal activities and curbed deforestation and forest degradation. There have been socioeconomic benefits for the local communities, such as capacity building to enable people to improve their technical, administrative and entrepreneurial skills. We provide scholarships and grants programmes for training and to enable young men and women to study. We have people with professional skills, and they’re studying to develop and apply these in forests. We have installed capacity for the production of both wood and non-wood forest products. We have achieved this, and we have done it side by side with the state. There are many challenges – and one of the main ones is political stability. Governments change, and somehow we must keep the relationship going.

Marcedonio is Executive Director of the Association of Community Forests of Petén (ACOFOP), which has 22 local member organizations. ACOFOP has led a successful 15-year process to implement community concessions in half a million hectares of tropical rainforest in the Maya Biosphere Reserve.
Kenya: growing trees as an investment

Geoffrey Wanyama and Patrick M. Kariuki

Geoffrey: We now have a platform to engage tree-growers that previously didn’t exist. As smallholders, we are helping government achieve its goals because relying on government forests alone will not be enough. We have more awareness; people are starting to see the environmental and economic benefits of tree-growing. Many farmers are showing interest in tree-growing. We have a booming business in supplying government with electricity poles, which is helping farmers, although the focus on Eucalyptus for this purpose may lead to environmental problems down the track. There are other challenges: for example, value adding is minimal at the farm level; there is a lack of efficiency in the market value chain and a lack of data on private forest owners and markets; and local associations have inadequate capacity. Nevertheless, there is significant potential for creating employment and improving livelihoods. We are helping the Kenya Forest Service realize its mandate for forest development, and as smallholders we are happy to do so.
Patrick: We are handling a young working relationship between family forest smallholder producers and the government. The Family Forest National Federation was only established in 2013, but, having said that, the Kenya Forest Service has a long history of forest extension, which can be traced to a government policy shift in 1971. Our relationship with the Family Forest National Federation has started well; we have agreed on what we want to do together. The government is keen to expand the national production of wood and to increase forest cover; the latter is articulated in the 2010 Constitution, which requires that Kenya has at least 10 percent of its land area under forest. Many landowners across Kenya have accepted farm forestry as a concept. Geoffrey’s organization has been vibrant in its short existence, and there is much potential.

How did we arrive at this relationship? There was a deliberate government policy to support tree-growing outside state forests, and there was a community of farmers, and they are now organized into an association. Capacity building is a core business of the Kenya Forest Service, and our major role has been to encourage the formation of farmer networks so they can put their products in the market.

We have a vibrant private sector, which has been important in mobilizing farmers to move into the Family Forest National Federation.

There is a high level of awareness in communities about growing trees as an investment. There are 40 million Kenyans, who are creating demand for wood products for domestic use and industry, and there are good returns for family farms that sell trees. The need to forge a common front to market their products is part of the reason for the success they are having. Today, there is much interaction between the Federation and government and we look forward to building the relationship further over time.
Myanmar: an acknowledgment of indigenous land-use rights

U Win Pe, Tint Swe, Aung Thant Zin

Win Pe: The members of the Aleeaung Community Forest User Group, which include women and youth, manage their forest traditionally with the main objective of protecting the water resource. We applied successfully to the Forest Department to establish a community forest. The main objective of management in the community forest is protection of the water resource. We built a small dam, and from this we extract water for household use and to irrigate our agriculture and orchards; we have a system to ensure equal use of the water resource by user-group members. We also harvest fuelwood, poles and posts from the forest for household use.

With the support of the Forest and Farm Facility, we are forming a township-level family association with a view to developing marketable products such as elephant foot yam and rattan canes. The biggest challenge is land tenure; with the formation of the forest user group, we now have a 30-year land-use right; this is a major benefit.

Tint Swe: In 1995 we developed a new forest policy that highlighted the role of people in forest management, and we also issued a community forest instruction, which is based on the Nepalese forest rules with some modifications.

Forest dwellers are poor – they can’t wait for long-term benefits, they need immediate income.

Aung Thant Zin is Fund Manager at the Myanmar Environment Rehabilitation Conservation Network and FFF Facilitator - he is translating for U Win Pe.
Indigenous households are granted land parcels within community forest areas; this is the biggest merit of the community forestry programme.

Myanmar is emerging from isolation; when I was one year old there was a military coup, followed by a socialist regime and another military coup. We are still in a state of infancy, but we are trying hard to strengthen and develop community forestry, together with local non-governmental agencies and UN agencies. Through the Center for People and Forests we are trying to build a national multistakeholder platform to act as a dispute settlement mechanism and to obtain funding for community forestry initiatives.

The Forest Department may grant community forests only in areas where it has jurisdiction. But approval is needed from another ministry for community forestry in areas outside forest reserves. So land tenure is still unclear for community forestry outside the Forest Department's jurisdiction. My ministry was assigned to formulate a land-use policy and a land-use plan for the whole country. We have to acknowledge traditional and indigenous land-use rights, and this policy and plan might be a green light on the horizon. With the assistance of NGOs and other stakeholders, we can work more productively with forest-and-farm producer organizations in our country.

U Win Pe is Chair of the Alechaung Community Forest User Group in tropical deciduous forest in eastern Myanmar. The Alechaung Community Forest User Group formed in 2000 and received Community Forest Certificates from the Forest Department in 2003.

Tint Swe is Director of the Forest Department in the Myanmar Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry.
DISCUSSION OF SESSION 2
Floor is opened to the audience to hear their responses and experiences on work that is happening in their countries, both on regional and international level. There are three key questions:

1. What is needed for forest and forest-and-farm POs to engage in a constructive process with government?

2. What are some of the most practical steps countries can take in the short-term to improve the enabling environment?

3. Can you give us an illustrative example of some benefits when there is a good enabling environment for POs?
COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS ON SESSION 2
Integrating farms and forests provides multiple opportunities for governments to engage with community-based and indigenous peoples’ organizations on issues such as climate, national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and sustainable development. Indeed, it will be difficult to make progress on any of these without directly involving farmer, forest-farmer and indigenous peoples’ organizations. The essential commitment to always include them in discussions means we can take the issues forward. These organizations are ready to engage if the doors are open.

Establishing good alliances between governments and forest-and-farm producer organizations begins with recognition by governments of the important role played by those organizations in helping them implement programmes and achieve objectives. We need laws that recognize the importance and needs of forest-and-farm producer organizations to provide legal certainty that these services will be there over time.
Herman Savenije,
Programme Coordinator,
Tropenbos International

"A practical step to improving the enabling environment for forest-and-farm producer organizations is to go and see what is really happening on the ground. Many policies are made for forest producers, not with them, with the inevitable result that all kinds of requirements for management plans and financing mechanisms are specified that are not suitable. We should learn about what is already functioning in the field in an informal setting. Governments should engage with communities to develop their instruments and business models in collaboration with them."

Robert Bimba

"Sometimes the government and forest-and-farm producer organizations need to go into each other’s world to understand and respect each other. In Liberia, we have engaged government consistently, to the extent that, today, we have good collaboration. We have access to them at any time; I can even use an SMS to get to a minister, and I can walk into his office without pre-booking an appointment. That shows how far we have come. Initially they were afraid, but now there is mutual respect. At the end of the day, when producer organizations are supported, it helps everyone."
We’ve heard many stories today, all of them amazing. It is very clear that there are mutual benefits in governments and forest-and-farm producers cooperating. But building these relationships is a difficult and slow process. We have heard some good lessons; a big part is communication, of which there are many layers – within families, between younger and older people, between families and communities, and between representative organizations and government. Each layer is challenging. There is important learning to be done by governments so they can see producers as people who really care about their forests.
We are not part of the problem; we want to be recognized as part of the solution.

To foster communication it is important to link capacity building with communication and to raise the level of communication. Capacity building has to be viewed as a long-term investment. Mistakes will be made, but we learn more from mistakes than from successes; we must be willing to be proud of mistakes because they show we really tried.

A key group recognized here today was youth – this is a key challenge in building sustainable associations. What do we do with young people? How do we keep them or get them back on the land and involved in associations? Older people like to think of such involvement as an opportunity for the young to learn, but older people must also recognize that we can learn from the young.

Another group that was mentioned is city people. We cannot talk about sustainable forest management without raising the understanding of city people about issues so they will support programmes as they relate to them – on drinking-water, for example, and food security. We need new tools to communicate with city people.

Another important issue is the connection between forest and farm producers. Many of us are both. Part of the communication problem is measuring of the full value of the production of both forests and farms. Innovative tools are needed to improve measurement, connecting both. At a conceptual level, forests and farms should not be treated separately anymore, given their mutual benefits.

The simple message is: we have to focus more on how we, in each of our places, and working together, can improve the sharing of experiences – between governments, between governments and producer organizations, and among producer organizations. We want governments to talk together; those who have a basic distrust of this concept of working with forest producers need to speak with governments that have had positive experiences.

"There is important learning to be done by governments so they can see producers as people who really care about their forests."
In danger of stopping listening to the land, and to the people from the land

Jeff Campbell

I would like to think about what it is like to begin as a seed and to end as a forest. That seed has to find a place to germinate; it needs some water, a bit of light, and lots of luck. As soon as it starts growing, the plant sends out roots, and they start to feel other roots, they vibrate, the branches start to grow, they start to touch other branches. Thus, the plant moves from being a solitary piece of genetic material to something that is part of a complex web of relationships, and then that moves into a forest in which all living organisms are part of that community. We do not live in isolation; we live together; forests and farms can not be treated in isolation, the roots have to be tickling each other; the branches have to be interlocked.

I see tremendous potential from what I heard today for us to take this to scale in a big way. There is no better prognosis for managing the earth’s living landscapes than to have well organised deeply committed people who feel a relationship to those places given the kind of support that governments can give to ensure the livelihoods of all of us, and to keep this moving. Governments are pulling back, there is an idea to hand over everything to the private sector. But there are many different ways to define the private sector, we need to move away from a solitary vision of it as one big huge conglomerate, industrialised and mega monoculture, that is one model. It is not the main model, not given the sustainable needs we have for agriculture, for energy, and for efficiency. We have to promote a model which is distributive, community-based, and which is sharing. This is already started, we already have strong federations, associations, and community groups in many places.

Governments are seeing in this a way of meeting their reforestation targets, their need for better environmental benefits, and their needs for economy to represent the people. The challenge for us is to get this message out, how do we move to scale. There are tremendous opportunities, as mentioned today to build a bigger and better future based on discussions here, and the beauty of thinking across forests and farms is that we can raise this issue in many different venues.
Those old trees then have new seeds, and those new seeds need a good place. So what about the youth in rural areas? Who cares for the generations? Mostly women. Women have a critical perspective in this, and we need to think about economic and cultural and social rural living which attracts youth and has places for them. The fostering of forest-and-farm producer organizations allow a range of new skills to come into play, skills and new energy that are greatly needed.

These meetings are exciting because we heard the voices of leaders of people who are living on the land, and so were listening to the land. As long as we do that we will be rooted, and we will find the right solutions.

“I see tremendous potential for us to take this to scale.”

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