

Civil society participation in national forest programmes: towards joint implementation of forest policies

Experiences from Honduras, the Philippines and the Niger illustrate how government and civil society can work together in pursuit of sustainable forest management.

How to improve civil society involvement in sustainable forest management was a recurring theme at COFO 2005.

The National Forest Programme Facility and FAO, together with their partners, are engaged in promoting participatory national forest programme processes in member countries. They organized a side event on March 14 to share experiences and further the learning process. Discussion was based on examples presented from Honduras, the Philippines and the Niger.

The Agenda Forestal Hondureña, an autonomous organization, gathers 19 organizations representing stakeholders interested in the use and conservation of Honduran forest resources. Loggers, forest industry associations, indigenous people's organizations, environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), central and local government institutions, academic and research units and cooperation partners sit together every month to discuss their commonalities and differences, in order to find harmonious solutions for the problems of the forest sector. Dialogue, joint decision-making and collaborative work became the keys to a successful implementation of Honduran forest policy and law.

The Philippines NGO Yakap Kalikasan Tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Pilipinas, Inc. has been working to engage local communities in the overall forest policy implementation process of the

country by guaranteeing their informed participation in community-based forest management (CBFM) activities. CBFM forms the backbone of the Philippines strategy to promote sustainable forest use for poverty alleviation.

The Niger is learning from the experiences of other national forest programme processes. The Direction de l'Environnement, with the assistance of the National Forest Programme Facility, is developing modalities for engaging local communities, civil society organizations and other government institutions in its national forest programme. Local NGOs such as the Organisation de soutien à l'émergence d'initiatives locales en matière d'environnement et de développement durable (OSE ILED) are now participating in common efforts to achieve sustainability and to improve the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities.

These few examples illustrate how forest policies are not the responsibility of a single agency in the society (be it government or non-governmental), but the result of a common effort towards sustainability. If policies are to succeed to promote adequate use and conservation of natural resources, all interested parties must participate in their development.

Experiences such as those presented from Honduras, the Philippines and the Niger are, in one way or another, influencing civil society participation in national forest programmes worldwide.

If policies are to succeed in promoting sustainable forest management, all stakeholders must participate in their development (forest community meeting, Honduras)



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