

IISD Working Paper**Socio-economic Issues in the International Forest Policy Dialogue**

Karl Hansen, November, 1995

International Institute for Sustainable Development**Introduction****Socio-economic Issues: The Orphan of the International Forest Policy Dialogue**

It comes naturally to think that forest policies are about trees and not about people. Ultimately, however, successful policy requires 'buy-in' from people - and hence equitable solutions that address the concerns of all major stakeholders in forests. Stated so plainly, this seems obvious. Yet the international forest policy dialogue has nonetheless been dominated by discussions of tree-specific management regimes - most notably at the April, 1995 meeting of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), where the forest-related discussion tended to focus mainly on criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management (SFM) and certification schemes for sustainably-produced timber. This, despite wide recognition that it is social patterns like poverty, economic disenfranchisement and lack of control over local resources that fundamentally underlie much global forest degradation (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992; Commission on Sustainable Development, 1995; and World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development, 1995). Undoubtedly, sound forestry practices are an important part of the solution to global forest conservation. But unless the international community can also come to grips with the difficult cross-cutting issues, which extend well beyond the forestry sector per se, real solutions to global forest problems will likely remain elusive. Many often-cited 'underlying causes' of global forest degradation - issues of land tenure and fair compensation for non-industrialized countries, for example - actually pertain more to social, political and economic forces than they do to technical factors. Hence the focus of this paper, on socio-economic issues in the international forest policy dialogue.

The aim of this paper is to provide a preliminary framework for systematically addressing socio-economic problems in forest-related policy. This is desirable in order to move beyond vague recognitions of the importance of such issues in countless policy documents, and arrive at useful tools required for analyzing and addressing them. It is hoped that those who are keen on forest issues will, by identifying the underlying socio-economic problems and policy options associated with their work, be better equipped to deal with the sometimes intractable problems associated with tree-covered landscapes.

The Socio-economic Context of the International Forest Policy Dialogue

The international dialogue on forests does not, of course, proceed in isolation, but rather within the grim context of worsening poverty pressures around the world. According to a report of the International Fund for

Agricultural Development (IFAD) (1992), it is estimated that today more human beings suffer from chronic deprivation than ever before - the tally of people classified as 'poor' by governments recently topped a billion individuals, and is still rising. Far from being evenly distributed across the world's population, however, human squalor is concentrated in less industrialized countries, particularly in rural areas. Based on current trends and policies, some projections envision a continuing deterioration in global poverty from 1 billion to 1.5 billion as early as the year 2000.

It may be a sad indictment of the international development agenda that, despite the dire and worsening situation, systematic efforts at identifying and alleviating the problems of poverty have been limited and are generally not considered a 'priority concern' (IFAD, 1992). Of the estimated 939 million rural people today classified as falling below national poverty lines, 633 million live in Asia, 204 million in Sub-Saharan Africa, 76 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 26 million in the Near East and North Africa. Most of the rural poor are either smallholder farmers (defined as having 3 ha or less of crop land) or completely landless; the remainder are often artisanal fishermen, nomadic pastoralists, indigenous ethnic tribals or, increasingly, refugees. Rural women have been particularly affected in recent years. Over the last two decades, the number of rural women labouring under absolute poverty increased by about 50 % - from 370 million to 565 million - compared with a 30 % increase among rural men.

The IFAD report further poses the question of whether it would be advisable or indeed possible to maintain growth 'while allowing the talents of the bulk of the population to languish.' In addition to noting the obvious moral and ethical questions this raises, the report questions the approach on more traditional economic grounds. It argues that the enormous untapped talents of the rural poor represent major new economic opportunities - and that, in order to become part of the drive toward sustainable development, the rural poor must simply be allowed to participate, fully and fairly, in the world economy. Those fundamentally interested in protecting vested interests still stand to be persuaded by arguments of enlightened self-interest. As Idriss Jazairy, the head of IFAD, argues in the Foreword (1992),

... Better-off groups share a common interest in helping the poor to tap their potential, and [this] justifies some short term sacrifices on the part of the former. For the better off will be the prime beneficiaries of the resulting higher and sustainable rate of growth. Moreover it is the better-off who will appreciate, and value the most, the improvement in the quality of social life - reductions in crime and social tension - that poverty alleviation will bring. This emerging community of interest provides a viable basis for a new social compact to accelerate development on the basis of raising the productivity of the poor.

Such thinking, linking broad social and economic concerns, is scarcely audible today in the international dialogue on forests. Utting, for instance, analyses mainstream international development policies on forests from a social perspective, and finds that large gaps still remain to be addressed (1993):

The type of mainstream environmentalism being espoused by governments and leading development agencies ... has been somewhat limited in scope and beneficiaries. What may be labelled 'environmentalism for nature' and 'environmentalism for profits', tend to hold sway, while a third facet which is essential to sustainable development, namely, 'environmentalism for people' often comes a poor third. This is apparent in various respects ... : The failure to integrate many conservation initiatives with the livelihood concerns and priorities of local people; the failure to locate conservation policy and strategy within a coherent development policy framework; and the failure of many agencies to support the organized efforts of local people to defend

their natural resource base.

Forest-related policies are mostly oriented to technical initiatives, like new silvicultural regimes or enhanced processing capabilities. Scant regard is generally given to the socio-economic context in which forest use occurs. The end result is that forestry practices may improve, but little if anything is done to redress persistent patterns of impoverishment or root problems of disempowerment. These in turn often continue to exert a powerful detrimental impact on forests. It would be difficult to argue, therefore, with the conclusion that, "Until the social and political dimensions of deforestation and forest protection schemes are understood, measures to prevent or slow deforestation are likely to involve technical interventions which will prove ineffective in the long run, and may well result in further impoverishment and environmental degradation." (Utting, 1993)

The International Dialogue on Forests to Date

Following on from the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro was the first major international conference to produce anything approaching substantive agreement on global forest management. Together, Chapter 11 of Agenda 21 (the final negotiated text of the conference) and the Non-Legally-Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests (or Forest Principles) represent a first attempt by governments to establish a baseline of suggested guidelines for international policies on forests (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992). The Forest Principles proved too controversial to be included in Agenda 21 proper because of unresolved disagreements between nations, mostly along North/South lines. They were preserved separately, however, in a weaker, non-legally-binding form, meaning that all their 'teeth' for enforcement went missing at the conclusion of the Rio Summit.

The dialogue remained in this soft, unresolved state until countries at the April, 1995 meeting of the UN CSD took another step beyond merely 'agreeing to disagree' over lingering points at Rio, like the desirability of a forest convention. Numerous regional meetings on forests, leading up to the CSD's review of the sector in April, 1995, supported the idea of a higher-profile, more systematic dialogue on forests than would have been possible at the one CSD session. This led to the eventual establishment of an Inter-governmental Panel on Forests (IPF) to make advances on forest issues over a two-year period, for incorporation into the CSD's Spring, 1997 final review of the progress of countries in implementing Agenda 21.

If the discussion on forests at the April, 1995 CSD session is any indication, however, there seems to be significant momentum to discuss scientific yardsticks for technical forestry practices - most notably of trade-related concerns like criteria and indicators of SFM and timber certification - rather than the more intractable socio-economic problems. Certainly, the lead-up to the establishment of the IPF saw no lack of general statements on the importance of addressing cross-cutting structural causes of forest degradation. The problem is that these statements generally went unaccompanied by any concrete proposals for translating talk into action. As noted in the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (1995),

... the Panel is not a guaranteed solution to managing the world's forests. Some fear that politically divisive issues such as finance, technology transfer and farmer's rights could sidetrack the work of the Panel. Others are worried that trade in forest products will dominate the discussion. The top priorities of the Panel should be

to examine the underlying causes of deforestation and how to address them and to complete an independent review of all forest-related institutions and instruments to determine what is missing and where there is overlap.

Yet another international dialogue on forests feeding into the 1997 CSD review is the World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development (WCFSD), which recently began its deliberations with a meeting in June, 1995. Rather than being comprised exclusively of members from government delegations, as is the IPF, the membership of the WCFSD encompasses a broader cross-section of forest-related concerns, including civil society, industry, parliaments, research institutes and academia. As such it may prove better suited to the 'independent reviewer' task mentioned above. The mandate of the WCFSD includes addressing difficult forest-related issues that may prove too divisive for government delegates alone; working in a complementary manner to the IPF, and feeding concrete recommendations for forest-related policy and institutional reform to the CSD/IPF process as well as to the public at large (WCFSD, 1995). High-level representatives from both processes, the governmental IPF and extra-governmental WCFSD, are in dialogue and have expressed their joint intention to work in tandem with each other, with the desired result of producing concrete recommendations for policy reform in 1997.

The first meeting of the IPF recently took place in New York in September, 1995. Eleven program items were agreed upon as a foundation for the Panel's work. These include:

- (i) National forest and land use plans
- (ii) Underlying causes of deforestation
- (iii) Protection and use of traditional forest-related knowledge
- (iv) Monitoring of African forests and assessment of the impact of airborne pollutants on forests in central and eastern Europe
- (v) Needs of countries with low forest cover
- (vi) Co-ordination of bilateral and multi-lateral assistance
- (vii) Valuation of the multiple benefits of forests
- (viii) Criteria and indicators
- (ix) Trade in forest products
- (x) Identification of overlaps and gaps in existing institutions and instruments
- (xi) Options for future action

The IPF's work program as outlined certainly promises comprehensiveness, and a number of key socio-

economic factors appear to be on the agenda. Whether or not these concerns will continue to receive short shrift, however, depends to a large extent on how much political will can be generated among governments to address the difficult socio-economic issues related to forests.

A Framework for Addressing Socio-economic Issues in Forest Policy

(i) Putting It All Together: From Understanding to Action

Box 1 represents a preliminary attempt at identifying steps for nations to follow in order to negotiate equitable solutions to socio-economic problems in forests. By explicitly and systematically linking forests to the wider socio-economic context of their use, this box aims to increase the profile of socio-economic issues in forest policy. There is one major caveat, however: The successful implementation of these steps relies heavily - and rather hopefully - on the existence of sufficient *political will* in the international community of nations to:

- (i) deal with underlying causes of forest degradation, and
- (ii) undertake international and national reforms to enhance the equitable treatment of nations and individuals.

Box 1: *Six Steps to Successful Negotiation of Equitable Solutions to Forest Problems*

1. Recognize the Need to Address Socio-economic Problems in Forests
 2. Identify Socio-economic Problems in Forests (see Box 2)
 3. Identify Policy Options for Solving Socio-economic Problems in Forests (see Box 3)
 4. Negotiate Forest Policy
 5. Implement Forest Policy
 6. Monitor, Evaluate and Modify Existing Forest Policy
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Taken together, socio-economic forest issues can be viewed as forest 'equity' issues, because they highlight the fact that many forest problems share a common link to unbalanced power or control over forests. This does not automatically imply, however, that all forest-related resources should necessarily be equally redistributed among all stakeholders. Socio-economic issues are by their very nature often extremely complex and interlinked. They must therefore be viewed in whole-system terms, as an entire package, rather than

individually before a qualitative judgement can be made of overall equitability.

Of the six steps identified in Box 1, steps (2) and (3) - namely the identification of socio-economic problems in forests, and of policy options for solving them, respectively - demand careful attention. Both the problems and possible solutions will vary across regions, cultures and different social and natural histories. Despite the complexity of the issues, an attempt is made in Boxes 2 and 3 to review some of the major problems and potential solutions associated with people and power in forests.

(ii) Identification of Socio-economic Problems

Box 2 pulls together many of the most commonly identified 'underlying' problems of global forest degradation. The listing, though preliminary, hopefully provides a useful checklist to decision-makers and negotiators for identifying the major socio-economic problems in their forest areas.

Box 2: Some Commonly Cited Socio-economic Problems in the International Forest Policy Dialogue

Examples	Problem Area
Natural resources tenure rights rights	Land Tree tenure/Extraction Water
Man-made resources technology adequate transportation	Access to forest-related Infrastructure, including energy and
Financial resources capital burden	Access to Debt
Legal arrangements rights Rights	Extraction Intellectual Property

Structural-economic control arrangements	Trade
subsidies,	Market protectionism and
agriculture	e.g. in crop and livestock
Political imbalances in	Political participation
(IATPTF,	decision-making processes
rights	1995)
Cultural clashes	Voting
values	Conflicting
isolation	Economic
Gender issues	'Feminization' of rural poverty
(IFAD,	1992)
Poorly coordinated rural policy in	Integrated resource management
conservation	agriculture, forestry,
Diehl,	and other uses (Amelung and
	1992)

(iii) Identification of Policy Options

Box 3 pulls together a number of the major proposals commonly advanced for coming to grips with persistent socio-economic problems in forests.

Box 3: *Some Commonly Suggested Solutions to Socio-economic Problems in Forests*

Suggested Solution

Notes

Decentralization of control/ resources Local participation	Local control over forest
Institution-building social and 1992)	The engagement of appropriate 'actors' is critical (Cernea, 1992; MacDonald,
Rural infrastructure	
Macro-economic reforms	
Access to technology less emphasized negotiations	Technology transfer from more to developed countries is commonly at international
Land tenure for et. 1992)	Enforceable property rights marginalized groups (Concepcion Cruz al.,
Tree tenure/Extraction rights	
Correction of gender iniquities	
Access to credit	
Democratization	Equal representation despite poverty

or

diversity

Access to markets
vehicle

Trade agreements are a common

Cross-sectoral integration
(IRM)

E.g. Integrated Resource Management

consider

or Rural Land Use Strategies that

like

resource usage across activities

and

agriculture, forestry, conservation

urbanization

Intellectual Property Rights
seed
(IPRs)
rights

Recognition of farmers' rights over

varieties or indigenous knowledge

plants

over medicinal

Debt restructuring
the

One important initiative might be

versus

explicit valuation of financial

industrialized

ecological debts between

countries

and non-industrialized

Institutional reform (local)
the

E.g. Setting forest policy within

planning

wider context of sound land use

especially

across all rural sectors,

agriculture

Institutional reform (int'l)
World

E.g. Modifying voting rights in UN,

representation

Bank and IMF to give equal

countries

to poorer

Cultural Allowances forest social	Recognition for culturally diverse usage, based on different values or histories
Education campaigns	Public information and awareness
Accountability private	Full disclosure to public or owners

(iv) Conclusion

The success of the international negotiations on forests stands to be much improved with a more systematic analysis of the underlying socio-economic forces at play in forest. The analytical framework and easy-reference tables presented in this paper are offered as a preliminary means to this end. No doubt refinements - both additions and deletions - will suggest themselves over time, and any suggestions for improvements will certainly be welcomed. The international dialogue on forests to date amply demonstrates that it is possible to focus too much on certain details at the expense of others. If this paper helps to refocus world attention on the 'smoking gun' of the global forest crisis - namely, socio-economic issues - then it will have achieved an important aim. Ultimate success in the international negotiations will demand far more than this, however. Significant progress at resolving cross-cutting forest problems will require a degree of international political will without precedent in world history.

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