

# Second Regional Forum for People and Forests

*Local people hold the key to solving current and emerging issues*



2011 is the UN International Year of Forests and its theme, “Celebrating Forests for People,” highlights the growing challenges faced by forests, local and indigenous people from persistent poverty, deforestation, conversion of forests to other land uses, and climate change. Many of these challenges are exacerbated by the failure to recognize local people’s rights over forestland and resources.

Less than 12% of tropical forest in the Asia-Pacific region is managed sustainably, according to ITTO. Despite successful rehabilitation in some areas, huge amounts of natural forests are still lost every year. Deforestation contributes 18% of global greenhouse gas emissions, but reversing this trend will be difficult so long as poverty, weak law enforcement, and escalating demand for food, fuel and forest products persists.



## Key Forum Conclusions

The need for healthy and sustainable forest ecosystems cannot be overstated. Apart from producing important timber and non-timber products, forests absorb vast amounts of carbon dioxide, conserve biodiversity, and maintain watersheds, while helping protect against natural disasters.

Local people have a direct stake in forest resources and will significantly affect the outcome of any forest management strategy. With secure rights and adequate incentives, they have proved capable stewards of their forests, benefiting both the environment and society at large.

The need now is for community forestry to move beyond forest regeneration and protection to sustainable utilization of forest resources — not just for subsistence but also for domestic and international markets of both goods and services.

Governments are increasingly realizing the multiple contributions that forests make to different sectors of the economy and this must be reflected in national development plans. Indeed, governments must emphasize the importance of community forestry in regional initiatives that deal not only with climate change but also with natural disasters, Millennium Development Goals, world trade, devolved governance and recognition of the rights of minorities, indigenous peoples and women.

With this in mind, Forum participants developed a 'Vision for 2020' through a framework of 'rights,' 'governance' and 'benefits'. Strong grassroots institutions, meaningful local participation, shared decision-making, transparency and accountability are essential prerequisites for the wellbeing of forests and forest communities.

# Call for Action

Although Community Forestry can help slow and even reverse deforestation, only 26% of forests in the region are recognized as “community forests.” Constrained by regulatory frameworks and contradictory policies, local people are often denied the opportunity to sustainably manage their forests in ways that are appropriate to their situation. Key country decision-makers and over 200 participants from the Asia-Pacific region and beyond considered these issues at the *Second Regional Forum for People and Forests: Community Forestry—Key to Solving Current and Emerging Challenges*, held in Bangkok, Thailand, on 8 and 9 August 2011. With this in mind and a shared commitment to the Vision for 2020, Forum participants called for:

## National and Sub-national Governments to:

- Clarify and mainstream community forestry policies within national forest programs and development strategies.
- Develop and strengthen community forestry programs involving all stakeholders.
- Accelerate the recognition and protection of local communities’ rights to forest lands, and give access to sizeable, productive and good quality forest.
- Set up an independent agency and mechanism to resolve conflicts between stakeholders.
- Make the regulatory and incentive framework more enabling and transparent to promote the development of community-based timber and non-timber forest collectives and cooperative enterprises.
- Protect biodiversity and natural reserves while allowing local people access to food and medicine.
- Strengthen the capacity of forest and other agencies to become service providers to local forest managers.
- Increase funding and capacity building support to community forestry at all levels.
- Recognize, support and engage with community forestry networks.
- Fulfill international commitments (including MDG’s) and obligations with respect to indigenous peoples and women.

## Local People to:

- Develop and join community forestry networks that strengthen collective voice and action to secure rights and promote sustainable forest management.
- Work actively with civil society and national and sub-national governments to develop and implement national community forestry and development programs.
- Respect, identify, implement and adapt indigenous and local approaches to community forestry and share the experiences.
- Ensure that marginalized groups within communities can participate effectively in and benefit from community forestry processes, in particular women.

## Donors and International Organizations to:

- Encourage increased funding and explore alternative funding mechanisms that are transparent and flexible for development of community forestry sustainably at all levels.
- Support research, analysis, knowledge generation and capacity building to strengthen the theory and practice of Community Forestry.
- Strengthen international, including South-South, cooperation so community forestry can contribute towards fulfillment of MDG’s and emerging challenges.
- Simplify the procedures to ensure that local communities can participate in and benefit from REDD+.
- Fulfill international commitments (including MDG’s) and obligations with respect to indigenous peoples and women and adhere to social and environmental safeguards that protect local communities’ rights.



## Civil Society to:

- Support local and central governments to develop and implement national community Forestry programs.
- Raise public awareness and provide legal advice to communities on their rights and responsibilities, and the establishment of forest-based enterprises.
- Share good practices and lessons learned with national governments to inform policy and legislative changes.
- Support information sharing and understanding on community forestry and its role in addressing emerging issues and needs.

## Private Sector to:

- Develop and strengthen business models that are responsible, and equitably engage local communities in commercialization of timber and non-timber forest products and services.
- Invest in sustainable local businesses as an important element of rural economies.
- Maximize transparency and build trust with local stakeholders.
- Abide by national and international laws and regulations and adopt clearly defined social and environmental responsibility policies and safeguards, including Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

## Research and Educational Institutes to:

- Mainstream community forestry and relevant issues in academic curricula and other professional institutions.
- Develop research on current and emerging issues, including sustainable use and enterprise development, and provide recommendations for policy makers and other stakeholders.
- Conduct more practical and applied research to improve local community forestry practices. Engage and compensate communities for their contribution in designing and conducting community forestry research.



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***We urge Forum participants and all other interested parties to commit to these action points to ensure the best possible outcomes for the people and forests of the Asia-Pacific region.***

