

Learning from Community Forestry: Recognizing Rights and Advancing Democratic Forest Governance Globally

Declaration from the Community Forestry International Workshop
Pokhara -- September 18, 2009

Recognizing that local communities and indigenous peoples have demonstrated the capacity to organize and act towards sustainable management, utilization and democratic governance of forests; and their legitimate claims for the recognition of their land and forest rights worldwide.

Recognizing the wide range of institutional, entrepreneurial and governance innovations by communities and their partners;

Recognizing the emergence of grassroots networks, federations and associations influencing governance at different scales, and advocating for the rights of local, indigenous, poor and socially marginalized communities;

Recognizing the positive steps being taken by some governments to support community rights and initiatives through policies and legal frameworks

Admitting that creating equitable and inclusive livelihood outcomes is a long-term and challenging process in the face of prevailing social hierarchies, dominant private interests and state-centric governance legacies;

Recognizing the history of discrimination against women in forest and land laws, programs, policies, markets and institutions, as well as their strong contribution to forest conservation, livelihoods and development;

Acknowledging the positive role and potential of communities in achieving sustainable forest management and contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation processes;

Affirming the importance of legally acknowledging and practically supporting the rights and responsibilities of communities to determine their own destiny in the sustainable development of their socioeconomic condition (livelihoods) and resources;

We, the 200 representatives of diverse stakeholders from communities, governments, civil society and other development partners from over 30 countries working in forestry and development, hereby declare that:

1. Governments and policy makers should guarantee the human, civil, customary and property rights of local people over land and forest resources, including the recognition of the authority of forest communities to identify and pursue their own development objectives, by incorporating these rights into national laws, constitutions and all forest policies and programs.
2. National governments have a responsibility to ensure the transparent and democratic governance of forests with active involvement and representation of communities, including poor, women, indigenous and socially marginalized groups, in policy formulation and regulatory decision-making.
3. Laws and regulatory practices should affirm and encourage local entrepreneurship by affirming full community ownership over forest and land resources, and by removing barriers to community and small-scale forest-based enterprises and the transportation and sale of their products.
4. Governments and the private sector should properly acknowledge, account for and financially reward the contributions of communities in creating environmental public goods; and foster financial mechanisms through which local communities can realize greater value from their forests, such as payments for various environmental services;
5. International and national climate change agreements, policies and mechanisms, including carbon trading, should respect local rights and privilege payment to local communities conserving forests.
6. Governments and community leaders must empower poor, women, indigenous and socially disadvantaged groups to exercise their rights, responsibilities and participate in decision-making at all levels of governance; and to ensure their fair access to markets and an equitable share of all benefits derived from the forest.
7. Government policy should promote the development of community-based forest management institutions and expand the area of forest under community rights and management.
8. Government, civil society, the private sector and donor organizations should work closely together to capitalise on the lessons of democratization and civic participation emerging from the experience of community forestry, to drastically revise institutions and processes for the democratic governance of the entire forest sector, a necessary step to achieve the globally desired outcomes of social, economic and environmentally sustainable development in the forested areas of the world.