Entering the fray. International forest policy processes: an NGO perspective on their effectiveness

Forest issues have been the focus of heated debate on the international stage since the late 1980s. This paper is a perspective from one of the debate's NGO protagonists on what has been going on. It addresses the question - are international forest policy processes effective? It also considers the role of NGO involvement in international forest policy fora: though such involvement has been limited to date, it has enabled the formation of strategic alliances with others and engagement with civil society groups at local level.

Case studies of the major international forest policy initiatives developed in recent years are presented, together with analysis of the ways in which they have created change. The paper concludes by considering how international policy can create a supportive context within which policy and initiatives at all other levels can be more effective. Tangible progress towards sustainable forest management requires a mutually supportive relationship between all policy levels.

Policy that works for forests and people series

Forest issues often concern large amounts of money, long timeframes, huge areas of land, and diverse livelihoods. The issues are complex and vary from place to place. However, a pattern of forest problems is common to many countries: continuing loss of natural forests; over-concentrated control and inequitable access to forests; an ill-informed public; and poorly-resourced, inflexible forestry institutions. Policy is the root cause of many of these forest problems.

This series consists of six country studies - from Costa Rica, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Zimbabwe - a review of international initiatives for mitigation of climate change by forestry, and an overview report, in addition to this report. The series aims at a better understanding of the forces at play in contests over policy, the winners and losers, and the factors that affect policy outcomes. It also describes the processes that make and manage good policies and the policy instruments that work in different contexts. By dealing with policy in practice - in the 'real world' of people and their institutions - the series aims to go beyond the frequently heard complaint that there is a lack of 'political will' to change, by showing *how* policy can change for the better.

This report was financed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands Development Assistance (NEDA). Production of the report was made possible through IIED's 'First' fund which is contributed to by Swedish Sida, the Swiss Development Co-operation agency, Danish DANIDA, and the Ford Foundation.

ISSN: 1028-8228

iied

International Institute for Environment and Development

Forestry and Land Use Programme

Policy that works for forests and people No:9 Mankin

Policy that works for forests and people: Discussion paper

Entering the fray

International forest policy processes: an NGO perspective on their effectiveness

William E. Mankin

DISCUSSION PAPER

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International forest policy processes: an NGO perspective on their effectiveness

Author:
William E. Mankin

Series editor:
James Mayers

1998

Copies of this report are available from:

Publications, International Institute for Environment and Development
3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, UK
Tel: +44 171 388 2117 Fax: +44 171 388 2826 e-mail: bookshop@iied.org

The author can be contacted at:
Global Forest Policy Project. Suite 210,
1400 16th Street NW, Washington DC 20036, USA
Tel: +1 202 797 6560 Fax: +1 202 797 6562 e-mail: bmankin@igc.apc.org

Citation: Mankin, W.E. 1998. Entering The Fray. International forest policy processes: an NGO perspective on their effectiveness. Policy that works for forests and people series no. 9. International Institute for Environment and Development, London.

Cover photos: Forest and people in Ghana by James Mayers; international meeting by William Mankin.
Design and production by Eileen Higgins/Bridget Tisdall at IIED.
Printed by: Russell Press, Nottingham, UK. Printed on Highland Velvet Pro 115 gsm, 100% chlorine free

Policy that Works for Forests and People is a project coordinated by the Forestry and Land Use Programme of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) supported by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UK Department for International Development. The *Policy that Works for Forests and People Series*, which is edited by James Mayers, derives from this project. Other studies in the series to date are:

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Executive summary

Forest issues have been the focus of heated debate on the international stage since the late 1980s. This paper is a perspective from one of the debate's NGO protagonists on what has been going on. It addresses the question - are international forest policy processes effective?

To start with there are problems of interpretation and differences in the values people hold. What is the purpose of international efforts? What constitutes "effective", and who decides this? Whilst there is much agreement that the general goal is "sustainable forest management", there is much disagreement on its meaning. These disagreements reflect the varying, and sometimes conflicting, perceptions of the purpose of international forest policy amongst different actors in government, the private sector and civil society. Some assume that international regulation is required to address all the major forest problems. However this has confused the distinction between truly international problems and common national or local problems. The latter may be unaffected, or possibly exacerbated by international attention. In any case, the sheer distance between the forest and international decision-making fora makes it very difficult to assess the specific effects on the forest of their decisions. There are also changing views on the definition of international policy, with many now considering non-governmental and/or non-binding approaches to often be of equal legitimacy.

There has been a slow but steady opening of doors to NGOs in policy-making fora, although there are still relatively few NGOs which have both the resources and inclination to enter. Those that have done so have attempted, to varying degrees, to form strategic alliances with others and engage with civil society groups at local level. Many government and institution officials have begun to realise that when NGOs and other members of civil society are brought to the table early, and are given a meaningful role in helping to craft a policy, all actors are likely to have a better appreciation of the 'collective challenge' at hand, empty rhetoric tends to disappear, and the different actors are less likely to reject the result.

The author presents case studies of: the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO); the parallel processes that have developed Criteria and Indicators (C&I) to assess the state of forests at the national level; the non-governmental Forest Stewardship Council (FSC); the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO); the World Bank; the central multilateral forest policy-making arenas of the 1990s - the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and its successor Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF); and the non-governmental World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development (WCFSD).

It is concluded that some of these international forest policy initiatives have created change by:

- increasing collaborative dialogue and re-defining critical concepts (e.g. C&I)
- raising the profile of key forest problems and potential solutions (e.g. IPF/IFF)
- galvanising political aspiration and creating political tools (e.g. ITTO's Objective 2000)
- setting targets and the bottom-line (e.g. World Bank policy not to support logging in primary forests)
- catalysing and setting the pace for other initiatives (e.g. FSC processes causing others to make progress in support, or sometimes opposition)

When governments perceive they have something in common, and are not forced to come to the table purely to defend themselves against the contrary interests of others, they tend to develop more innovative approaches to addressing forest problems. Examples of this are the Central American Forest Convention - the only binding, multi-nation forest treaty so far in existence - and the C&I initiatives. This has a bearing on the arguments for and against an global forest convention. Rather than forcing governments to spend years of hard negotiation creating a lowest-common-denominator forest convention, perhaps regional initiatives could be a more effective approach (along with various civil society and private-sector initiatives).

The paper concludes that at its best, international policy can create a supportive context within which policy and initiatives at all other levels can be more effective, e.g., by providing political and even financial support to otherwise weak national forest agencies. At its worst, bad international policy can undermine strong national or local policies, e.g., by setting an international norm or standard that is considerably weaker than domestic requirements, or restrict non-governmental innovations and initiatives. Tangible progress towards sustainable forest management requires a mutually supportive relationship between all policy levels.

International forest policy does matter. Although the results may not be seen for many months or years, the repercussions of regional and global policies can be massive. Progressive institutional and policy reforms now taking place within the UN, within the multilateral development banks, and within parts of the private sector are due in large part to the hard work of NGOs and others in civil society who have been chipping away at change over the last few years. But there are many challenges ahead, and it is important for NGOs to keep entering the fray.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Scott Paul for his assistance in reviewing and improving this paper.

The series editor thanks colleagues Elaine Morrison and Steve Bass for comments on an earlier draft.

The **Policy that works for forests and people** project was supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Production of this paper was made possible through the additional support of IIED's innovation and development fund 'First'. Contributions to this fund have come from Swedish Sida, the Swiss Development Corporation agency, SDC, Danish DANIDA, and the Ford Foundation.

The opinions reflected in this discussion paper are those of the author and not necessarily of the above-mentioned organisations.

About the author

William E. Mankin has been an environmental activist in the non-governmental community for twenty years. During that time he has been based in the United States and has worked primarily on land and natural resource management and protection, mostly in association with the Sierra Club. He began working on international issues in 1985. In the preparatory processes leading up to 1992's Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Mankin helped lead the NGO effort to influence the forest negotiations, and headed the Sierra Club's delegation to the Summit. In late 1992, Mankin helped found the Global Forest Policy Project (GFPP), a collaborative initiative of three of North America's most prominent environmental NGOs - Friends of the Earth-U.S., National Wildlife Federation, and Sierra Club. Since the Earth Summit, the GFPP has served as the collective advocacy voice of these three organisations in most of the world's major international forest policy arenas and negotiations, and in the founding of the Forest Stewardship Council.

Acronyms

AF&PA	American Forest and Paper Association
C&I	Criteria and Indicators
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSD	Commission on Sustainable Development (of the UN)
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (of the UN)
EMS	Environmental Management System
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GFPP	Global Forest Policy Project
IFF	Intergovernmental Forum on Forests
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IPF	Intergovernmental Panel on Forests
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
ITFF	Interagency Task Force on Forests (of the UN)
ITTA	International Tropical Timber Agreement
ITTC	International Tropical Timber Council
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organisation
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (of the CBD)
UN	United Nations
WCFSD	World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund (US), World Wide Fund for Nature (International)

Contents

1

How to assess "effectiveness" of international forest policy?

It may be quite easy to determine the effectiveness of a forest policy that is both developed and applied locally. Simply stated, this is because of the close proximity among the actors who develop, apply, and are affected by the policy, and the forest itself. The policy is close to the people, and the people are close to the forest. The feedback loops are short, even immediate. Conversely, when policy is developed at a broader level, and the number of, and distance between actors increases, the question of determining effectiveness becomes considerably more complicated.

In more ways than one, you cannot get further away from a forest than when engaged in a global policy-making arena. In fairness, in part this is because policy crafted at the global level is rarely designed to apply to any individual nation, and much less so to any specific forest. Global forest policy must be broad and general enough to apply to many different political, social and cultural realities as well as to a wide range of forest types and unique ecological conditions. Furthermore, there may be several steps and routes of transmission between completion of an international policy agreement and its actual implementation by a local actor. The time lag between policy *development* at the international level and an ultimate determination of its *effectiveness* on the ground may entail years.

Finally, when considering forest 'policy', it is useful to note that it can take many shapes and forms. It may be legally-binding or non-binding. It can be developed by governments and intergovernmental bodies as well as by non-governmental organisations. Considering that the concept of 'global forest policy' is a relatively new notion in the first place, emerging from the years building up to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, judging its effectiveness may require a new set of assessment tools.

In such a context, and assuming that the highest purpose of such policy is to promote sustainable forest management[1], how is it possible to measure the

effectiveness of global forest policy? One answer may be to measure all points along the way from the policy-making arena to the forest on the ground. This would include an assessment of:

- Whether the *process* and its *actors* have changed. Has the international policy-making arena itself, including its working procedures, its operations, or its overall influence been modified during the policy-making process in a way that will enhance or further promote sustainable forest management from that point forward, or in a way that would enable previously disenfranchised actors to play a more influential role?

- Whether the *vision* and the *language* have changed. Has the process of policy-making significantly and/or permanently changed the nature of the forest policy debate such that basic definitions, understandings, or public awareness of important concepts have shifted in favour of more sustainable forest management?

- Whether the policy has been *transmitted* to the ground. How effectively has the internationally-set policy been delivered and translated to the national level, and has this process itself incorporated components that further promote sustainable forest management?

- Whether people have been *empowered*, *educated*, or had their *rights protected*. Have the processes of both creating international policy and of implementing it at the national level enhanced the ability of citizens to better understand and to participate more fully and equitably in sustainable forest management?

- Whether the policy-making process has been a *catalyst* for separate actions. Has the policy debate provided an effective venue for calling attention to a particular trend or situation within a given country, thereby creating an incentive to change at the domestic level (e.g., by drawing attention to an embarrassing problem or an innovative model, focusing international opinion, attracting financial or technical assistance)?

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[1] The term 'sustainable forest management' has become a widely used 'term of art' in forest policy despite the fact that it has no universally agreed definition. It also has become a widely used public relations tool, with many parties anxiously employing it to make claims about their forests or forest products. It is generally regarded as implying a highly refined quality of forest management that protects a wide range of environmental, social and economic values. However, there is still a great variety of perspectives, and a lively debate, on its practical meaning. For the purposes of this chapter, we will define the term as follows: forest management that maintains the forest, its ecological functions, processes and overall structure, in healthy condition, in perpetuity; and that is capable of producing a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits to society without producing any irreversible consequences or losses to soil or water quality, to biological diversity (including genes, species, and ecosystems), or to unique areas and values.

- Whether international policies create domestic *leverage*. Have policies created or pledges made at the international level been used by actors at the domestic level to facilitate or force change in domestic policies?

- Whether *financial and technical resources* have been mobilised. Has a particular policy instrument, policy-making process or debate increased the availability of financial and technical resources in support of improved forest management?

- Whether *trust* has increased and *reconciliations* have occurred. Has a policy-making process led to a new or more cordial dialogue, or created new partnerships, among diverse interest groups, stakeholders or constituencies, particularly those that previously had been at odds with each other?

- Whether *forest management* has *improved*. Has the condition of a specific forest actually changed for the better?

2

Varying perceptions of the purpose of international forest policy

Leaving aside for a moment the question of whether international forest policy is effective, or even desirable, it may useful to look briefly at the *purpose* of it, which is clearly perceived differently depending on one's viewpoint. Theoretically, *international* policy is best applied to problems or issues that affect either all or a large number of different countries. In the context of forests, however, even though a lot of countries *possess* forests, to what extent their loss or mis-management is either caused by, or produces consequences for, other nations or their citizens is still a question of some debate. Assuming that question can occasionally be answered, the question of whether *international* policy is required to address a particular forest problem generates wide differences of opinion.

Clearly, the relationship of forests and their carbon sequestration functions to the global atmosphere and climate could be considered an international issue. So could the affect of large-scale forest clearance or burning on regional weather patterns and air quality. The loss of forests in a neighbouring country's upstream watershed can produce, and in many areas has produced, disastrous consequences for countries downstream. These issues involve cross-border impacts from domestic forest management activities. It would seem clearly within reason to consider these to be appropriate issues to resolve through international policy-making.

But what about biological diversity, the earth's irreplaceable bounty of life-forms, the bulk of which reside, at least terrestrially, in forests? While some would argue that biodiversity is the common heritage of all humankind, others would say that any living species is the sovereign property of the country or other legal jurisdiction in which it lies, and any economic or non-economic value it may have should be governed by the rights of the owner, not of the "international community". Traditional knowledge about the

values and uses of biodiversity is considered by some to be the *intellectual property* of those who possess it. And some governments even consider *information* about the condition of their forests to be a sovereign asset.

What about the traditionally dominant economic resource of the world's forests - timber? Should commercially traded timber be subject to international rules that might require the forests from which it comes to be managed in a certain way? Since most countries seem to consider forests and their timber to be a near-term, domestic *development* asset rather than a long-term legacy for the planet, these questions are not easy to resolve in an international setting.

What about the people who live in and depend upon forests for their survival and livelihood? If their rights are not recognised or protected by their own national governments, can the "international community" create policy to require such recognition and protection? And who, exactly, *is* the *international community*? Is it governments? If so, who represents those governments? If governments are not democratic or representative, who speaks for the citizens of those countries? If the role and authority of governments can occasionally be questioned, then what is the appropriate role of intergovernmental institutions? And what about trans-national corporations, many of which seem to have far more power and influence than most governments, and which, in the view of many, may be answerable to no one? Where do NGOs, indigenous peoples and local communities enter this picture?

In this context, we can begin to identify some of the basic components of international forest policy that one group or another might perceive to be such policy's primary *purpose*, again without any judgement at this point as to whether these perceived purposes can actually be effectively *fulfilled* through international policy. It is not hard to see how, in a given policy-making arena, some of these may end up at political *cross*-purposes to each other. In no particular order, some of these purposes are:

- Regulation of forest management to prevent negative environmental or economic consequences in other countries or internationally, as well as to produce a variety of benefits to global society
- Protection of national sovereignty and control over forest resources
- Protection of unique and important forest areas and biodiversity for the international community
- Compensation to forest owners and managers for a particular form of forest management, forest product or service desired by the international community

- Protection of the rights of people who depend on forests for survival or livelihood
- Provision of incentives and other financial and technical resources by donor institutions or nations to influence, enable and support certain actions in recipient nations
- Empowerment of traditionally weak or disenfranchised actors and constituencies in the processes of policy-making and forest management
- Regulation of international trade, corporations, investments and financial transfers to ensure that they support and do not undermine sustainable forest management
- Monitoring the state of the world's forests and dissemination of information
- Establishing international norms, goals and obligations for forest management and for the sharing of benefits from forests

3

NGOs as key actors

A proper assessment of the purpose and effectiveness of forest policy must take into account the key actors that participate in both policy-making and policy implementation, particularly the myriad and extremely diverse non-governmental and civil society organisations. These include environmental and social development organisations, indigenous peoples' groups, and community groups. For the purposes of this discussion, and unless otherwise noted, they will be referred to collectively as NGOs. Ironically, though these groups are widely acknowledged to be among the most critical proponents and practitioners of sustainable forest management, they have been the most often excluded from policy-making processes.

To understand how these actors interface with the international forest policy-making process, it is important to look at the levels at which most NGOs operate. It is not an understatement to suggest that the vast majority of NGOs do not operate at all at the "global" level, nor are they likely to. Their activities and members are usually concentrated in a single country, mostly in a single town, city or region, and are focused entirely on issues in their immediate area. Most rarely if ever communicate with other NGOs outside their own country, and their means of communication often are not the most up-to-date (such limitations are, of course, most apparent in developing countries). This relative isolation limits their ability to influence broader policy. At the same time, many such NGOs and community groups are the closest to the forest, understand the forest most tangibly, and are the most directly involved in and affected by sustainable forest management, or the absence thereof.

For the relatively few NGOs that are in any way active at the international level, only a small percentage have the luxury of sufficient budgets and staff resources to enable them to participate regularly in the variety of forest policy processes that are underway around the world. These NGOs, not surprisingly, are concentrated mostly in industrialised countries. Whether "Northern" or "Southern", few NGOs anywhere can manage to monitor global policy-making processes more than intermittently, to devote staff

members exclusively to such international issues, or to frequently travel to important international policy meetings - where NGO lobbying efforts can often exert considerable influence. While this situation has improved quite a bit since the Earth Summit, these limitations remain significant.

This disjunct between some of those most directly involved in sustainable forest management and the important international forest policy-making processes raises important questions regarding participation and implementation. If international policy is to be effective, it must be informed by the knowledge and expertise of people in-country, on the ground, who must in turn be expected to support and implement such policy. Consequently, there needs to be a way for the knowledge and the views of such people to be inserted into the international policy-making process.

Unfortunately, countless barriers exist to prevent such linkages from developing. These barriers include not only financial and technical resource limitations, but also significant political barriers to the democratic participation of non-governmental actors in many aspects of policy-making and policy implementation. It is a sad fact that a lot of governments and other powerful actors still prefer not to permit the organisations of civil society to be full partners in either process. These closed doors, combined with the other constraints, often force NGOs to enter policy-making arenas in a *defensive* or even provocative mode, rather than with a constructive approach. This is routinely decried by governments, when ironically it is often the exclusionary attitude of governments that either creates or aggravates the defensive posture of NGOs.

Given these challenges, NGOs have taken several approaches to influencing policy at the international level. They have made extensive use of electronic mail for sharing information and policy documents with each other, for the development of collaborative lobbying strategies, and for the creation of global coalitions; they have created regional and issue-based NGO alliances to strengthen their voice and represent their views; they have developed common positions and statements for international policy fora; they have interacted with their own governments at the domestic level as a means of influencing their government's positions in international policy negotiations; and they have raised funds to enable their colleagues to attend important international meetings. Also, when their goals converge, NGOs create strategic alliances with government delegations and other actors. Many of these approaches will be explored in more detail below.

4 Case studies in the international policy arena

It is illustrative to examine several recent policy-making processes and fora to determine whether and how international forest policy works, and what are the factors that influence its effectiveness. We will look in turn at the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) and the renegotiation of the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA); the several parallel processes that have developed Criteria and Indicators (C&I) to assess the state of forests at the national level; the non-governmental Forest Stewardship Council (FSC); the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO); the World Bank; the central multilateral forest policy-making arenas of the 1990s - the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and its successor Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF); and the non-governmental World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development (WCFSD).

4.1 The International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO)

The ITTO is an intergovernmental membership organisation that oversees the implementation of the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), a commodity agreement originally signed in 1983 designed to promote the trade in tropical timber and the improved management of tropical forests. The ITTO is comprised of twenty-eight tropical timber *Producing* member countries (mostly developing nations) and twenty-six tropical timber *Consuming* member countries (mostly industrialised nations), and is managed by a secretariat in Yokohama, Japan. Twice a year the governing Council (ITTC) meets to discuss issues, evaluate and fund project proposals, review the progress its members are making to improve their trade and forest management, and attend to the management of the organisation.

Two aspects of the ITTO bear examination here: the renegotiation of the ITTA, and whether the ITTO has achieved its goals in relation to sustainable forest management. For both of these it is important to note that the ITTA is an odd hybrid between a conventional commodity agreement and a more enlightened approach to sustainable use of natural resources. At the same time it lacks any formal enforcement mechanism.

Because the original ITTA of 1983 was set to expire within ten years, a renegotiation process was initiated in late 1992. Although it was an intergovernmental negotiation, NGOs were permitted to participate as active "observers". From the beginning of the renegotiation, NGOs took a position criticising the ITTO's failures, promoting improvements to the original ITTA, and, most significantly, advocating the expansion of the ITTA to include the entire timber trade — temperate and boreal as well as tropical. Within only a few months, the Producer countries adopted the "all timbers" expansion proposal as a major negotiating position, with the Consumer countries united in opposition.

Since the Earth Summit forest debate had been marked by intense North-South acrimony over discrimination and fairness, and 'development' versus 'environment', it was significant that environmental NGOs and Producer governments came together in support of a common position on "all timbers". For years previously, tropical country governments had chafed as NGOs criticised the destruction of those countries' tropical forests. Suddenly, the two groups found themselves in a unique alliance in support of a common goal - a significant political moment for both.[2]

It is interesting to note that the ITTO membership structure institutionalises, and thus perpetuates, a North-South, "us versus them" confrontational approach to policy-making. The Producer and Consumer categories of membership are evenly balanced in votes within the Council, and during the ITTA renegotiations the two behaved exactly like opposing blocs. At the same time, the membership definitions have become ambiguous - and embarrassing: due to the loss of most of their forests, some of the Producer countries are now actually net importers, i.e., *consumers* of tropical timber from other nations.

Although the controversy triggered by the 'all-timbers' proposal pushed the renegotiation process well beyond its intended duration, the Consumer countries' opposition was enough to kill the proposal in the end. However,

[2] The basic motivations of the two groups were, however, somewhat different: NGOs wanted the bulk of the world's timber trade, which comes from temperate forests, to be given the same close environmental scrutiny as the tropical trade, with the general goal of sustainable forest management for all; while the Producer nations primarily wanted parity in the timber marketplace.

Box 4.1 Taking advantage of policy "tools" and opportunities

Though non-binding, the ITTO's 'year 2000 commitment' by temperate countries is a high-profile international policy pledge that can be used as a tool by NGOs and others to push for action at the domestic level. The assumption, of course, is that in order to achieve the year 2000 goal, governments will need to change current policies to improve forest management. In the United States, for example, NGOs have persistently called attention to this pledge in a variety of public fora and meetings with government officials. The result is that the year 2000 goal has begun to appear in official domestic forest policy documents as a stimulus to improve forest management. Whether it becomes more tangible on the ground still remains to be seen, but it has become a useful political tool for some U.S. NGOs.

During the ITTA renegotiation process, NGOs sometimes promoted the 'all-timbers' issue by calling attention to problems in the temperate forests of specific Consumer countries. At one renegotiation session, an indigenous peoples' representative from British Columbia took the floor to make an intervention about the mis-management of forests in his Canadian homeland, thereby increasing international attention to the already high-profile controversy surrounding British Columbia's forests. Most NGOs believe that such international political and media attention has played a significant role in catalysing important forest policy shifts that have occurred in British Columbia in recent years.

the Consumers did have to give the Producers something in return - a concession to fairness. The concession was a non-binding commitment by Consumer countries (in a separate "statement" appended to the new ITTA) that they would achieve sustainable forest management in their countries' forests by the year 2000. This was intended to be the equivalent of the similar commitment made by Producer countries at a Council session in 1991.

In evaluating the overall effectiveness of the ITTO, we must first note the primary activities of the organisation: debating important issues, collecting information and producing reports, and funding projects. In addition, there have been two ITTO-sponsored fact-finding missions to Producer countries (Malaysia in 1989-90, and Bolivia in 1995-96). Here we will briefly discuss the ITTO's projects and one of its missions.

The ITTO's most active efforts are directed towards funding project proposals submitted by its members, ostensibly to further the aims of the organisation. Proposals range from the collection of trade data, to forest inventories, to marketing promotion, to technology transfer, and account for several million dollars of ITTO expenditures every year[3]. The process by which the ITTO evaluates and approves project proposals involves several

[3] The December 1997 Council session approved project funding of US $9.3 million.

Box 4.2 The potential for NGO influence

The potential significance of the NGO role in influencing project proposals can be illustrated with an anecdote from 1996. The U.S. delegation to the ITTO provided copies of pending project proposals to U.S. NGOs prior to a Council session in Manila (a customary practice of the U.S. Government). After reviewing a proposal for a project located in the Philippines, a U.S. NGO faxed copies to NGO colleagues in the Philippines and asked for their comments. As a result of their interaction, the U.S. NGO, which sent a representative to the Council meeting, was able to secure some significant amendments to the proposal, including a precedent-setting agreement by the Philippines Government to consult closely during the duration of the project with Philippine NGOs and indigenous peoples' groups.

steps, and has improved in recent years. However, although parts of the process are open to review and comment by NGOs and other observers, little evidence exists to suggest that more than a very few project proposals are ever developed in close consultation with NGOs or local communities in the sponsoring countries. Furthermore, NGOs have an extremely limited capacity to review the large number of project proposals pending in any given year. As a result, almost none of the proposals are ever examined by anyone other than ITTO members prior to approval - an indication of a common dilemma afflicting several multilateral project-funding agencies.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the final approval of project proposals, politics is a far more influential factor in determining whether a project is funded than either the merit of the project or its strict relevance to the ITTO's mandate. Even more significantly, ITTO's monitoring of projects once they are underway is minimal, no formal process exists to modify projects once they have begun, and Council discussion of the results of completed projects is virtually non-existent. Thus it is impossible to determine whether the many tens of millions of dollars that have been invested in ITTO projects over the years have actually moved ITTO Producer countries any closer to sustainable forest management.[4] In fact, a 1995 ITTO report on progress towards the 'year 2000 goal' suggests they have not.[5]

The ITTO's fact-finding missions seem plagued by a similar lack of review. In 1989 ITTO sent an international group of experts to Malaysia at the height of international controversy about deforestation in the east Malaysian state of Sarawak. After two years the group produced an extensive report[6]

[4] Perhaps this is why few Consumer countries fund ITTO projects. The majority of all ITTO project funding comes from a single country - Japan - which also regards housing the ITTO secretariat in Yokohama as a matter of national pride.
[5] 1995 Mid-Term Review of Progress Towards the Achievement of the Year 2000 Objective, ITTC (XIX)/6, 6 October 1995.

that made it clear that the rate at which Sarawak was depleting its forests was unsustainable, and recommended a significant reduction in timber harvesting rates.

Not surprisingly, Malaysian government and timber industry officials were not in full agreement with the mission's findings. Nevertheless, the public visibility of the mission's report combined with the ITTO's credibility among the timber trade could have exerted significant political influence in Malaysia. Unfortunately, no objective assessments are available on the impact of the ITTO mission, and no formal ITTO follow-up has been done. As a result, there is no way to determine whether purported reductions in timber harvesting rates in Sarawak are accurate or whether they can be linked in any way with the report of the ITTO mission. Without meaningful follow-up, the potentially influential mechanism of ITTO country missions is squandered.

In the post-Earth Summit era, the bulk of the international forest policy debate has taken place in other arenas rather than the ITTO, and in the wake of the 'all timbers' debate a narrow focus on tropical timber is seen as increasingly inappropriate and unproductive. Furthermore, little evidence exists to indicate that the ITTO has been an effective catalyst to promote sustainable forest management in its member countries. Thus, the ITTO has come to be seen by NGOs as anachronistic and irrelevant, and its projects as a waste of valuable resources; as a result, NGOs have essentially dropped out. Perhaps even ITTO's member governments have similar doubts about its relevance: after the renegotiation of the ITTA was completed in 1994, members were so slow in ratifying the new agreement that two deadlines for its entry into force had passed before a special vote was required by its signatory governments to formally bring it into force — three full years later.

4.2 Criteria and Indicators

At the Earth Summit, the world's governments agreed that forests should be managed to provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic goods and services for everyone on Earth, now and in the future. In the years since, the full meaning of this broad view has taken on much greater substance with the further elaboration of the practical components of 'sustainable forest management'. Among the most prominent arenas for this elaboration have been a variety of intergovernmental initiatives that have

[6] "The Promotion of Sustainable Forest Management: A Case Study in Sarawak, Malaysia", ITTO, April 1990.

developed detailed sets of Criteria and Indicators (C&I) designed to monitor the condition of forests at the national level. These C&I processes are part of a significant worldwide trend toward re-defining publicly acceptable forest management.

These national-level Criteria and Indicators are essentially assessment tools. The Criteria are the broad components, categories or goals of sustainable forest management, e.g., "Conservation of Biological Diversity", or "Maintenance of Forest Ecosystem Health and Vitality." Indicators are aspects of each criterion that can be measured or described, such as "Area and percent of forest land with significant soil erosion." As data on the indicators is collected and observations are made over time, the C&I can demonstrate trends in forest conditions. This data then becomes an invaluable tool that can enable citizens and policy-makers to determine whether forest management policies and operations are producing the desired results, and can provide a very powerful incentive to change policies to bring them more in line with sustainable forest management goals.

The C&I processes have been initiated mostly by groups of nations with either common borders or common forest types, e.g., European ("Helsinki" Process), non-European temperate and boreal forests ("Montreal" Process), Amazonian ("Tarapoto"), etc.. The first of these got underway in 1993. As models for collaborative policy-making, the C&I processes have a distinct advantage: by and large they are the product of nations who have come together out of their own common interests or a perceived need to create a common vision of forest management for their region. No external entity has forced them to a bargaining table at which they may feel more defensive than cooperative. (On such a foundation it is conceivable that additional forest policy agreements could be built in the future.)

One result of these C&I initiatives is that they have changed the global debate. It now has become increasingly difficult for policy-makers to promote the conventional view that forests should be managed exclusively for the production of timber, or that sustainable forest management can be achieved through the narrow management of a single forest commodity, value or service. The importance of biological diversity, ecosystem functions, soil and water resources, carbon sequestration, and a wide range of social benefits has been incorporated to one extent or another into all the sets of C&I. These and other forest values have now been combined by the C&I processes into an integrated, holistic concept, or vision, of the essential components of publicly acceptable forest management. From now on, when

sweeping claims are made about the state of a nation's forests, the public will increasingly demand objective data on a very broad range of criteria and indicators before accepting the claims. In the process, it also is possible that future debates over forest management goals will be based more on fact (i.e., on objective data) than on conjecture.

The main hurdle standing in the way of this scenario is that, to date, only a few of the scores of countries involved in C&I initiatives have begun to use the indicators to collect data on their own forests. Obviously, if these tools are not used they are of no value to either policy-makers or forest managers. There are other flaws as well.

For the most part, NGO involvement, as well as the involvement of other sectors, in the C&I initiatives has been limited, although some initiatives have been more inclusive than others. Surprisingly, some governments hosting international C&I meetings have not invited any NGOs from their own country, and when invited, NGOs have not often been accorded the privilege of self-selecting their own representatives or experts.

All of the initiatives to date have begun at the international/regional level. Consequently, for most countries, such initiatives have moved forward far ahead of any related process at the national level, meaning that few national NGOs or other stakeholder groups have been involved. Indeed, few national groups are even aware of the international C&I processes, which could make it difficult to secure domestic support for the eventual implementation of what these groups may perceive as "externally-developed", and perhaps unacceptable, C&I.

Some encouraging signs do exist. The early post-Earth Summit C&I processes (i.e., Montreal and Helsinki) set the pace for detail and thoroughness, and the later processes (e.g., Tarapoto, Dry Zone Africa, etc.) have followed their lead. The Montreal Process' inclusion of indicators for legal and institutional factors led the Helsinki Process to follow suit. Ultimately, the rapid pace of these developments led the ITTO to revise its own C&I, which it had completed in 1992 before the Earth Summit sparked the worldwide C&I movement. In a sense, this has become a process of 'cross-pollination' resulting in a series of catalytic improvements in the overall international development of C&I. On the down side, the mix of Montreal Process member countries at different stages of economic development (with some nations also having joined the Process after it was well underway) has more recently retarded the initial rapid pace at which the Process developed its set of C&I and may slow further progress.

One particularly interesting development that has occurred in the Montreal Process has been the grouping of three of the Latin American members (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay) into a "Southern Cone" implementation initiative. Although only in its initial stage, one meeting already has taken place that brought together NGOs, academics and government officials to discuss how to operationalise the C&I in their own countries. It is this kind of "bridge-to-the-ground" approach that could make international tools like the C&I of more tangible value locally. It is particularly encouraging that NGOs are full partners in this process. In fact, the enhanced dialogue among the different parties may be one of the most valuable outcomes of this regional initiative.

In the United States, the Montreal Process has had a similar benefit. Very early in the process the U.S. Government initiated stakeholder consultations that periodically brought together representatives from the forest industry, environmental NGOs, state-level foresters, and government officials to discuss drafts of the C&I. These stakeholders also have been invited to serve on U.S. delegations to Montreal Process meetings. This process of consultation in turn has led to a much more cordial dialogue between the participants on other, related forest issues.

Once the C&I were completed and agreed by Montreal Process members, the countries then agreed to assess their domestic data-collection needs, based on the data required by the new C&I, to determine whether gaps existed. In the U.S., significant gaps were discovered, leading some U.S. stakeholders to campaign for increased funding and a complete overhaul of the way the U.S. Government collects and disseminates data on the state of U.S. forests. Meetings with high-level government officials and testimony before the U.S. Congress followed, and subsequently the director of the U.S. Forest Service agreed to reorganise the government's data-gathering operations using the Montreal C&I as the central organising element.

Box 4.3 Forest assessment vs. performance requirements: different levels, different goals

In the international lexicon of forest policy, a great deal of confusion has arisen regarding the phrase "criteria and indicators". Some has been accidental, and some intentional. The result, however, is that productive discussion and policy-making often have been frustrated as parties talk past each other. The source of the confusion lies in different understandings of the *purpose* for which a given set of C&I have been designed, and the *level* at which they are meant to be applied (i.e., national, local, etc.). The most

significant differences exist between the national-level, intergovernmental C&I (e.g., those emanating from the Montreal and similar processes), and "C&I" that have been designed for forest certification, particularly those of the non-governmental Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

Conceptually, the national-level C&I and the certification C&I are quite similar and have evolved virtually simultaneously. They both view the forest holistically, and seek to examine its condition with a wide range of specific indicators organised under several generic categories pertaining to environmental, social and economic values. Beyond these similarities, however, the two are fundamentally different. Essentially, the differences are these:

- One set of C&I neutrally assesses forest conditions and trends, collects aggregated data at the national level, and makes no requirements of forest managers that any particular result be achieved in the forest (e.g., Montreal Process C&I).

- The other set of C&I (for certification) is actually a list of *performance requirements,* or *standards,* that forest managers must adhere to. These are used to assess the results of forest management in individual forest management units, and those who "pass the test" are awarded a certificate (and usually the additional right to use a particular symbol or label on forest products in the marketplace).

Quite obviously, these are simply two different tools designed to be used for different purposes. It is critical to acknowledge and emphasise that each of these tools has value on its own. The national-level assessment C&I are an excellent tool to stimulate public debate, to serve as a basis for defining national forest management goals, and to help guide national policy-making and land use planning. The certification C&I are an excellent tool to determine whether a given forest actually meets a specific set of management standards.

Much of the debate and controversy over the different types of C&I is driven by the powerful desire of governments and other forest owners to achieve public acceptance of their forest management decisions. What they want is a credible foundation on which to make public claims that the condition of their forests is "acceptable", or at least is not bad enough to warrant complaints or protests. Thus they want the results of an assessment, using some form of C&I, to provide that foundation and to *verify* that their forests are in acceptable condition. Quite obviously, as currently designed, some types of C&I cannot provide such verification.

In the process of debating the various purposes and types of C&I, some actors have proposed the creation of C&I "hybrids", for example by granting "certifications" based on national-level assessment, or without specific performance requirements. Others have sought to somehow "connect" the different types of C&I across levels and across purposes. Still others have sought alternatives, or have sought to intentionally create confusion, as a way of undermining the efforts of independent, non-governmental certification programs like the FSC. Regrettably, some of these efforts have muddled the distinctive, separate value that each of these different tools has in its own right.

4.3 Forest certification and the FSC

Although 'policy' is most often thought of as the product of governments and intergovernmental institutions, perhaps the most influential forest policy of the last decade actually has emanated from a non-governmental source. While the world's governments were gathering at the historic Earth Summit, frustration with conventional approaches to forest policy already was providing the foundation for a citizens' initiative that would soon affect the entire international forest policy debate - independent forest certification. Frustrated with the proliferation of misleading and fraudulent marketplace claims about "sustainable" or "environmentally sound" wood products, a group of NGOs, wood-workers, and foresters created an international organisation to bring consistency and credibility to such claims - the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). In an intricate, tightly-crafted package, the FSC created a strong set of international forest management 'standards' (known as the Principles and Criteria); a system for independent verification of forest management to those standards; a system for accrediting certifiers to conduct the verification; a system for labelling products from certified forests and tracking them from the forest to the consumer; and a system for linking everything together in an open and participatory process all the way from the international level, through stakeholders in individual countries, to the individual forest management unit on the ground.

Even before its official founding in 1993, the FSC had put the concepts of independent forest certification and "chain-of-custody" tracking[7] on the international forest policy map, and has consistently set the pace in redefining publicly acceptable forest management and in further elaborating the complex concept of sustainable forest management. The FSC has put independent certification solidly on the agenda of countless organisations around the world and galvanised the entire international forest policy debate. In the process, the FSC also has taken some degree of decision-making power away from traditional vested interests and shifted it to *independent, "third party"* entities and to individual consumers in the marketplace. Finally, in a growing number of certified forests, the way forest management is actually practised on the ground is changing for the better.

Essentially, the FSC was a product of industry and government failures. These groups had lost much of the public's trust regarding forest management, and independent verification of the state of the world's forests

[7] In addition to certification of the forest, the FSC also requires a separate "chain-of-custody" certification prior to the labeling of products from certified forests. A chain-of-custody certification assesses the route from the forest through the processing chain and verifies that an end-product is indeed from a certified forest.

was increasingly in demand. It also was felt by some NGOs that the policy tools available to concerned citizens were unnecessarily limited. They believed that forest product consumers and the general public needed something more than blunt instruments (e.g. boycotts) which were designed to bludgeon the "bad guys" for their destructive forest management. These NGOs wanted some new, more positive and more user-friendly tools added to their toolbox. They felt the FSC could be just such a tool. By making a purchasing choice in favour of an FSC-labelled product, a consumer could personally reward good behaviour by a forest manager. This in turn, it was hoped, not only would set the pace for good practice but would encourage industry leadership.

The FSC turns out to have been a substantial stone thrown into the forest policy pond, and the resulting ripples have become huge waves, and have spread far and wide... and fast. In their wake, countless other entities have been forced to respond.

For example, since the FSC's emergence, governments and forest industry groups in many parts of the world, who initially scoffed at the FSC's brand of certification, have initiated their own certification programs, in large measure to counter the rise of the FSC. While these programs tend to lack one or more fundamental components considered essential by FSC supporters, most incorporate stronger forest management standards than they had employed before the FSC arrived on the scene. For example, in 1996 the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), the main forest industry lobbying group in the U.S., initiated a programme requiring all its industry members to adhere to a new set of standards as a condition of continued membership. This was clearly a response to the FSC. After growing criticism by environmental groups of the industry programme's inadequacies[8], AF&PA has subsequently considered incorporating more FSC-like elements into its programme.

Some of the clearest evidence of the FSC's influence lies in the individual forests that have been managed and certified to FSC standards. For example, for most of the several million hectares of forests already certified by FSC-accredited certifiers, tangible management improvements have been required by certifiers in the form of "conditions" that had to be met before a certificate was granted. Even though many of these forests already may have been managed "above the norm", they now constitute a substantial and diverse collection of model operations that, with

[8] For example, weak standards (particularly for biodiversity protection), no independent verification of performance in individual forests, no chain-of-custody tracking.

continued monitoring, can set the pace for improved forest management.

Other indications of FSC influence include the degree to which other organisations have sought to link their programs to the FSC. For example, several U.S. state and city governments have considered legislation requiring FSC-labelled wood products to be used in government contracts; the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation is considering limiting its forest project support to only FSC-certified operations in certain parts of the world; a U.S. senator has introduced a bill to establish a certification system for Hawaiian forests based on the FSC model; "buyers groups" of wood-purchasing companies have been established in several countries with the intent of buying all of their wood supplies from independently certified sources by a specific date; and the World Bank has joined in a partnership with an international environmental NGO (WWF - a prominent member organisation of the FSC) to promote the independent certification of 200 million hectares of forest by the year 2005.

In addition to measurable improvements on the ground, one of the most lasting legacies of the FSC will be the collaborations and partnerships it continues to foster. The entire FSC system is based on an often unprecedented level of collaboration among a diverse range of organisations, interests and constituencies. Nowhere is this clearer than in conjunction with the development of detailed regional or national standards based on the FSC's international Principles & Criteria. The FSC requires the development of such standards appropriate to specific regions or forest types, and once they have been approved, it then requires certifiers to use those standards in that area from that point forward. Significantly, the FSC requires balanced and representative groups of local stakeholders to develop these standards. In many countries this type of collaboration had never occurred prior to the FSC.

Also often in conjunction with the FSC's regional standard-setting processes, public debates have been triggered on much broader forest policy issues, e.g., on the need for an adequate national protected area system or forest inventory, on how publicly-owned lands should be managed, on how the private owners of small forests can group together for more effective management, on the most appropriate mechanism for public discussion among diverse stakeholders, or on the responsibilities imposed on individual forest managers by "external" forces (e.g., acid rain). Although many of these issues are outside the direct purview of the FSC, it is significant that many of these critical debates would not have occurred, especially in such rapid succession, were it not for processes set into motion by the FSC.

Because of the substantial complexities of the international FSC *system*, the many challenges of operating it effectively have triggered additional debates on other difficult issues, e.g., on how to make certification affordable and procedurally feasible for all sizes of forest management operations, on whether and how to permit the certification of products with only a portion of their original materials derived from certified forests, on whether to certify conversion forests, on how to apply updated and modified Principles and Criteria to existing certifications, on how to prevent conflicts of interest by certifiers, on how to resolve appeals and impose penalties, on how to prevent the misuse of the FSC logo, and especially on how to satisfy the demands of the extremely diverse FSC membership. These and other challenges essentially are forcing the FSC to navigate entirely new waters, and to chart a new course, every step of the way.

In the face of such challenges, if fundraising and membership are any indication of success, it is significant that the FSC has been able to attract several million dollars (US) of support from governments, philanthropic foundations, and NGOs in its first four years of existence. And at the time of this writing its membership included over 200 major environmental and social NGOs, retailers, wood-workers groups, timber corporations, certifiers, and indigenous peoples' organisations from some forty countries.

4.4 International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO)

Where forest management is concerned, the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) has been a case of trying to push a square peg into a round hole. In 1995, timber industry interests from Canada and Australia who were opposed to the FSC decided they needed a credible competitor to the FSC and thought the ISO fit the task. They initially proposed the development of a new ISO standard for forest management that would be linked to customary ISO "certification" processes, and which they then hoped could be used to eclipse the FSC in the international arena. Instead, in the face of concerns raised by environmental NGOs and others, ISO instead developed only a low-level technical report that would simply assist forest managers in meeting existing ISO standards, but which created no new forest certification or product labelling components of any kind.

The ISO is a non-governmental federation founded in 1946 and is comprised of national standard-setting bodies in more than 110 countries. For most of

its history ISO focused on the development of standards for quality in manufacturing and for the harmonisation of product attributes (e.g., the size of nuts and bolts, the speed of photographic films, etc.). Following the Earth Summit, ISO's members decided to develop environmental standards. These standards are intended to apply generically to all sectors (e.g., apparel, automobiles, forest products). One such standard, for internal environmental management systems (EMS), had been approved as of the end of 1997.

ISO's complexities and heavy meeting schedule are daunting to most NGOs (and indeed to small countries and small businesses), and although its standard-setting procedures ostensibly are open to NGOs, few NGOs have participated to date. This has left ISO mostly in the hands of large business interests and professional standard-setters. Furthermore, although ISO's standard-setting is supposed to be based on consensus, recent trends suggest that this often is interpreted by majority vote.

When the Canadian and Australian member delegations initially proposed an ISO forest management standard, the concerns of other ISO members about the inadvisability of creating a sector-specific standard, combined with the opposition of environmental NGOs, were enough to block the proposal. As a compromise, the issue was shifted to an informal working group chaired by the head of a New Zealand forest owners association. Although three environmental NGOs attended the first meeting of the group, they withdrew from further direct participation immediately following the meeting because they felt the group had failed to clarify its mission or to operate on a consensus basis.

The working group was subsequently given formal ISO status at the 1996 meeting of ISO's main environmental committee. However, environmental groups helped persuade the committee to give the working group a very narrowly prescribed mandate to develop a low-level technical report. Although still declining to participate directly in the working group, a few NGOs submitted written comments during the subsequent eighteen month drafting process.

The primary concern of NGOs has been to prevent misleading or fraudulent marketplace claims, based on ISO standards, about the results of a company's forest management. The ISO EMS standard has been at the centre of their concerns because a timber company that is destroying its forests could be certified to the ISO EMS standard just as easily as a company that is practising excellent forest management — because each company is free to set its own, completely different goals and targets for its *forests*. In fact, the

connection between an EMS and the *quality* of forest management *on the ground* is tenuous at best.

It is not ISO or an EMS approach *per se* that concern environmental NGOs. Indeed, many of the FSC's procedures are based on ISO guidelines, and the FSC's Principles and Criteria contain several management system components. Furthermore, the FSC's performance standards and forest certification requirements can easily be combined with an ISO EMS; this is a particularly important option since the ISO EMS standard lacks any requirement for a specific level of performance. Regrettably, the heated ISO debate has made it very difficult for proponents of either approach to acknowledge and promote this inherent compatibility.

Although nothing in the ISO system can enable a forest manager to claim a particular level of performance in the forest based solely on compliance with an ISO standard, misleading claims already have begun appearing in advertisements by forest companies around the world. Even the ISO working group produced an extremely misleading news release about the meaning and uses of its technical report. Surprisingly, ISO has no formal means of monitoring or preventing such claims. Thus the specific language in the technical report is of potential significance in terms of the guidance, good or bad, it may give to forest managers and companies.

4.5 The World Bank

In 1991 the World Bank adopted a forest policy[9] that contained an absolute prohibition on any projects involving commercial timber harvesting in primary tropical rainforests. The policy and its prohibition came after years of public controversy and NGO criticism over the environmental impacts of the Bank's development assistance projects. Although the policy contains other components, it is the primary forest prohibition that has had the most influence; it also is somewhat of a policy icon among many NGOs.

Although some observers and Bank staff have suggested that the primary forest prohibition is now preventing the Bank from supporting projects that can promote sustainable forest management, many NGOs have the view that the policy has in fact prevented Bank projects from destroying a lot of primary forest. Furthermore, since decisions and policies of the World Bank often have a significant influence on other multilateral development

[9] The Forest Sector: A World Bank Policy Paper, The World Bank, 1991.

institutions, the Bank's decision to stay out of primary tropical forests has had a much wider influence. For example the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation has said it will base its updated forest project guidelines on the World Bank's forest policy - including any possible revisions the Bank may make to its own policy.

In 1994, the World Bank undertook an initial review of the effects of its 1991 forest policy, but amidst criticism from NGOs that the Bank had not yet fully implemented the policy, the Bank ultimately decided to postpone a definitive evaluation. Near the end of 1997, the Bank announced that a full review would soon begin. At the same time, however, internal Bank memos revealed that some Bank staff wanted to relax or abandon the Bank's existing prohibition regarding primary tropical forests. The ostensible reasoning behind this is that the Bank needs to be able to support projects that promote sustainable management of such forests, particularly projects including independent certification. With this possible change on the table, the review process is not likely to be smooth. Furthermore, one internal Bank memo in November 1997 proposed that the review process should be rushed through a six-month timetable, with significant policy changes the pre-agreed outcome - even though a "full consensus among stakeholders on changes to current Bank guidelines could not be expected from this process."[10]

In June 1997, during the Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly, the World Bank and WWF International (an environmental NGO) announced the launching of a joint partnership with two main goals: (1) to promote the establishment of 50 million hectares of new forest protected areas by the year 2005, and (2) to achieve the independent certification of 200 million hectares of forest by the same year. The idea of such an NGO/Bank partnership is truly innovative and expands the horizons of forest policy-making. On the other hand, some governments and NGOs have raised concerns, fed by the lack of publicly available details on the partnership, including questions about how other actors would participate in designing and implementing the programme.

The relatively low level of participation of stakeholders and interested parties has long been one of the weaknesses of World Bank operations. Too often, the Bank has taken a "top-down" approach and has ignored the legitimate interests of those who may be affected by Bank projects. Although NGO criticisms of the 1980s led to important Bank reforms, old ways die hard. For example, in late 1997 Bank President James Wolfensohn invited the

[10] November 7, 1997, memorandum from Robert T. Watson, Director, Environment Department, World Bank, to Bank staff.

CEOs of a dozen of the world's major timber corporations to meet with him and environmental NGO CEOs in early 1998 to discuss the need for innovative ways to halt global deforestation. Only five NGO CEOs were invited, all of them from large, politically moderate NGOs based in industrialised countries of the Northern hemisphere. When this lack of balance was pointed out to Bank officials, they initially responded by offering to invite only a single NGO representative from a developing country. In the end, however, NGOs from Africa, Latin America and Russia were invited.

All of these new World Bank ventures are related in one sense or another to the Bank's new Forest Market Transformation Initiative, which it intends to manage through another NGO, the World Resources Institute. The Bank should be credited for embracing innovation, for openly pursuing partnerships with NGOs in the face of criticism from some governments, and for seeking direct dialogue with the timber industry. However, the coincidence of timing of the Bank's timber CEO summit, with its uncertain agenda and restrictive approach to NGO participation; the review of the Bank's forest policy, with the possibility that the Bank may drop its primary forest prohibition; and the still-evolving market transformation initiative and WWF partnership, will not make it any easier for the Bank to chart its forest policy course or to easily expand its ranks of NGO supporters.

4.6 Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) & Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF)

Following the rancour of the Earth Summit, the international forest policy debate subsided briefly but then resumed in a variety of fora. Although several of these were outside the United Nations system, it soon became clear that the need for a continuation of the high-level intergovernmental debate was felt by many parties. It also became clear that the numerous forest issues needing debate were more complex and time-consuming than could be handled by the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the body created to be the central follow-up forum for the agreements of the Earth Summit. Thus, in 1995 the CSD recommended the establishment of a separate Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) to examine a range of specific issues and to report its recommendations to the CSD in 1997. The IPF was comprised of all the member governments of the CSD, was open to any other interested U.N. member governments, and was also open to the participation of accredited NGOs[11] and other interested parties under customary CSD rules.

Because meaningful NGO participation is not possible unless NGOs know exactly what is going on during negotiations and can provide their views and reactions to governments, it is worth reflecting briefly on the rules of participation. During the intergovernmental preparatory process leading up to the Earth Summit, government delegations engaged in extensive debate and negotiation on two forest documents: the 'Forest Principles' and the forest chapter of 'Agenda 21'. The opportunity for NGOs to participate was basically limited to their representatives sitting silently in the back of the chambers observing some of the debate and to distributing position papers and conversing with delegates in the hallways. Whenever the debate got particularly heated or shifted to actual negotiation, the rooms were closed to NGOs and other observers.

The CSD's rules, on the other hand, permit NGOs to make occasional oral interventions from the microphones and to be present in most of the negotiating chambers. In the IPF, the extent of NGO participation was at the discretion of the chairman of each session or working group, with NGOs being permitted to make oral interventions numerous times during the debates and to observe virtually all of the negotiating sessions. This somewhat greater degree of openness allowed NGOs to combine their policy papers, oral interventions, and direct lobbying of government delegations in ways that gave them greater influence on the ultimate outcome of the IPF. NGOs also took advantage of the IPF's often two-week-long sessions to host a number of open fora and panel discussions on a variety of topics of interest to both NGOs and governments. Several of these made important contributions to the dialogue and brought diverse interests together to exchange views.

One of the more obvious benefits of NGO participation is that NGOs can sometimes introduce new issues into the intergovernmental debate, which can then become the subject of specific policy recommendations. For example, NGOs were responsible for pushing the IPF to discuss and make recommendations on the underlying causes of deforestation, the illegal timber trade, and various aspects of traditional forest related knowledge and community forestry. At the same time, NGOs were successful in helping to block several proposals related to trade, certification and C&I that could have led to recommendations contrary to sustainable forest management. The most controversial issue in the IPF debate, whether or not to pursue a global forest convention, was also the subject of considerable NGO influence (see box).

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[11] The process of NGO accreditation to the UN has been a subject of increasing debate in recent years. Normally, the process requires the filing of an application followed by a review and approval by the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). However, the process for accrediting NGOs to the Rio Earth Summit led to the subsequent extension of those accreditations to enable broader NGO participation in the CSD. Even so, for small NGOs and those having little or no substantive international activity, this accreditation process is still confusing and exclusionary.

Box 4.4 The Forest Convention controversy

One of the most difficult forest policy battles of recent years has centred on the question of whether there ought to be a new global forest convention. The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, which had been charged by the U.N. CSD with making recommendations on whether any new forest policy instruments were needed, brought the battle to a head in 1997 as it took up this subject on its agenda. The ensuing debate raised some very troubling questions.

In deciding whether to embark on the difficult and time-consuming negotiations necessary to craft a new international treaty, one would assume that the place to begin would be with a thorough review of existing forest related instruments and institutions. The purpose, of course, would be to determine how well these mechanisms are functioning and how effectively they are resolving the world's forest problems. If such a review is done properly, it should reveal whether any significant gaps exist that might need to be filled by a new instrument or instruments. Surprisingly, neither the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests nor any other entity managed to conduct such a thorough review prior to the commencement of substantial IPF debate on the question of new instruments, though a few attempts were made[12]. Regrettably, these were either just preliminary reviews, did not examine a wide enough range of mechanisms (e.g., including non-binding, non-governmental, or regional approaches), or were undermined by political bickering.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the debate over a forest convention arose almost immediately after the Earth Summit. Governments promoting a forest convention began blocking efforts under other existing instruments because they perceived them as possibly interfering with a subsequent forest convention negotiation. For example, as soon as the "all timbers" proposal had been put on the table of the ITTA renegotiation process, the Consumer countries raised objections. One of these objections, cited by countries who even then were pushing for a forest convention (e.g., Canada and the European Union), was that this issue - "all timbers" - should not be decided by the ITTO but in the context of a separate negotiation for a forest convention.

The most egregious example of this tactic has afflicted the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), one of the two legally binding agreements produced by the Earth Summit. Environmental NGOs interpret the CBD's mandate as explicitly encompassing a wide range of forest related goals and activities. They also note that most of the world's terrestrial biodiversity is found in forests. Thus, many NGOs felt that a substantial work programme on forests should be developed under the CBD. It soon became clear, however, once the CBD's Conference of the Parties began convening, that several governments intended to block or delay any work programme on forests, and that one of the primary reasons for their opposition was their desire to negotiate a forest convention. In other words, they were obstructing the legitimate implementation of an existing, legally-binding instrument in order to preserve their political options in a separate arena, where perhaps years of debate and negotiation over a forest convention lay ahead.

[12] The International Forests Regime: Legal and Policy Issues, Richard Tarasofsky, 1995, IUCN; Options for Strengthening the International Legal Regime for Forests, 1995, a report prepared for the European Commission by the European Forest Institute, IUCN, and the Centre for International Forestry Research; Swiss-Peruvian Initiative on Forests: Report of the Independent Expert Group, 1996.

Such obstructionism persists, and in September 1997 it emerged from a surprising source in another CBD forum, the third meeting of the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA). The SBSTTA was, after several years' delay, finally discussing the substance of a potential CBD forest work programme, and was to make specific recommendations for a decision at the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP IV) the following May. To inform its deliberations, the SBSTTA invited statements from a variety of experts and other U.N. agencies, among them a representative from the IPF/IFF secretariat. At the end of his statement, after outlining the jurisdictional relationships among various U.N. bodies regarding forest biodiversity, the IPF/IFF representative made the suggestion that it "may be premature for the COP IV to adopt a programme of work on forest biological diversity without receiving an input from the IFF on this matter."[13]

The implications of this statement for the entire multilateral policy arena are shocking: that the secretariat of an ongoing intergovernmental discussion forum (IPF/IFF) can ask the parties to a legally-binding treaty to delay the implementation of an important mission of that treaty for at least another seven months — and for no apparent legitimate reason. This and other incidents[14] have made it clear that many governments and other actors prefer to continue debating and negotiating, and perhaps *re*-negotiating, *all* forest policy issues in the IPF/IFF rather than to actually implement and fully use existing policy instruments.

The relationship, complementary or otherwise, among various institutions and instruments is an extremely important aspect of the forest convention debate, and is particularly relevant to whether a new global convention would be an effective approach to solving critical forest problems. For example, it is clear that many of the main issues being debated in this context are extremely controversial, with wide differences of opinion and a considerable degree of North-South mistrust still in evidence. At the same time, some of the more amicable, consensus-based forest policy initiatives of recent years have arisen not at the global, but at the regional level.

For example, the only binding, multi-nation forest treaty in existence at this time is the Central American Forest Convention, signed in October 1993 by the foreign ministers of six Central American nations. This regional treaty, as well as all of the C&I initiatives to date, suggest that when governments perceive they have something in common, and they are not forced to come to the table to defend themselves against the possibly contrary interests of others, they tend to participate more willingly and productively in crafting innovative approaches to addressing common forest challenges. Rather than forcing

[13] Presentation by Mr. Jaime Hurtubia, IFF Secretariat, at the Third Meeting of the SBSTTA, Montreal, Canada, 1 to 5 September 1997.

[14] At the Denver Summit of the Eight (the seven most industrialized nations plus Russia) in June 1997, the officially agreed "Denver Communiqué" contained a pledge by the eight heads-of-state to create a "practical Action Programme" on forests containing several specific commitments, including "establishing networks of protected forest areas" and "eliminating illegal logging." This was a unique pledge in the history of such summits, and required representatives from the eight countries to subsequently develop a document outlining the practical details of the Action Programme. However, once the process of negotiating a draft of this document began, it became very clear that some of the countries were inclined to block the fleshing out of a substantive action programme in order to leave the way clear for the negotiation of a forest convention containing, perhaps, some of the same elements mentioned in the Denver Communiqué. In other words: avoid concrete action - even if it was agreed - in favour of more talk and negotiation.

governments to spend years of hard negotiation creating a lowest-common-denominator global agreement, perhaps regional initiatives, at least for forests, could be a more effective approach (along with various civil society and private-sector initiatives).

At this stage, however, the promise of regional initiatives remains to be realised. None of the C&I initiatives has yet produced meaningful data on the condition of their members' forests, and the openness and transparency of several of their processes has to date been limited.

It would seem to make the most sense to craft policy instruments more strategically to apply to specific forest problems.[15] For example, if the problem is of a certain nature, it may require a truly global approach. If it is of another sort, a regional approach may be more effective. Some instruments could be focused on a single problem while others could encompass several related issues. In any case, it seems apparent that a lot of different tools are required. If all of them could be well coordinated, they might work together synergistically to greater effect than a single, all-encompassing, and perhaps unwieldy, global treaty.

Finally, the forest convention debate has been significantly influenced by NGO voices. Until the issue came to a head on the IPF's agenda, most NGOs had not adopted definitive positions on the convention question. Although many NGOs had supported a forest convention at the Earth Summit in 1992, the succeeding five years had forced a sea-change. During that time, these same NGOs had observed government delegations debating international forest issues at great length all over the world. They had begun to see very clearly what the real priorities of many governments were (e.g., free trade, access to markets, financial resources), and which critical forest issues governments preferred to avoid (e.g., eliminating perverse subsidies; reforming development policies; initiating cross-sectoral planning; establishing protected areas; ensuring indigenous peoples' rights; protecting biodiversity; independent monitoring, reporting and certification). They also had witnessed the progressive undermining of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Given these revelations, as the political rhetoric from convention proponents increased, NGOs felt forced to take a clear position. In February 1997 at the IPF's fourth and final session in New York, nearly one hundred NGOs from more than thirty nations released an "International Citizen Declaration Against a Global Forest Convention" expressing their reservations about the substance of a potential convention, about its effects on existing agreements and initiatives (e.g., the CBD), and about the underlying motives of convention proponents.

As the debate went along, it became clear that there were widely divergent views on the part of governments, the timber industry, and even among some NGOs on whether a forest convention was a good idea, and if so, when. In the end, the IPF was unable to answer the question, and it was carried forward onto the agenda of its successor, the new Intergovernmental Forum on Forests.

[15] For example, several existing international agreements could be said to contain components addressed to certain specific forest problems, such as the biodiversity and climate conventions, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the World Heritage Convention, etc.

One of the more interesting components of the IPF was a series of conferences and workshops sponsored and hosted by different governments on specific topics related to the IPF agenda. Several of these conferences considerably furthered and matured the debate on key issues, broadening awareness and understanding, and narrowing the political differences on controversial topics. Among the topics participants felt had benefited most from such meetings were Criteria & Indicators, financial resources, certification and labelling, and traditional forest-related knowledge, the latter having been the subject of a conference co-sponsored by indigenous peoples' organisations and the governments of Colombia and Denmark. Unfortunately, the degree of openness to NGO participation varied dramatically among the meetings, and NGOs often had to push very hard to get in the door. However, the general lack of openness catalysed the emergence of one of the more interesting participatory mechanisms to emerge in recent years — NGO self-selection (see box).

Box 4.5 NGO self-selection and other developments in NGO participation

Perhaps the most serious hurdle that NGOs and other civil society groups face in their efforts to influence public policy has been that the door has often been closed to their meaningful involvement in the policy-making process itself. Governments and international institutions prefer to control the process, and many of them still believe that NGOs simply make their lives more difficult. Democracy, as it turns out, is frustrating and time-consuming, so those in control often throw up roadblocks that make it difficult for NGOs to participate. This is certainly true in the international policy arena.

Two of the most common ways by which NGO participation is controlled is that NGOs are either simply not invited to participate in important meetings or processes, or they are offered token representation. This means that those invited are few and are always chosen by the hosts. During the multilateral forest policy debate that has followed the Earth Summit, NGOs have begun to push these hurdles aside in several ways. The first has been a persistent push by NGOs to increase both the numbers and diversity of NGO representatives invited to participate in conferences. The second, and perhaps the most significant, has been a growing demand by NGOs that *they* rather than governments or institutions be given the right to select who among their numbers will represent them at such conferences. This right to 'self-select' came into its own during the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF).

The first opportunity came when Switzerland and Peru agreed to co-sponsor a process to examine the effectiveness of existing forest policy agreements and institutions, and to report their findings to the IPF. To do so, they created a small group of governmental and non-governmental experts to meet several times. Common practice dictated that they give the various government blocs and regional groups the right to select their own representatives to the experts' group, and NGOs requested that they be given the same right. In discussions with NGOs, the sponsoring governments subsequently agreed that if NGOs could initiate a successful process to select three representatives, the sponsoring governments would accept the three nominees as members of the experts' group.

Since NGOs are numerous, diverse and scattered around the world, it was a challenge for NGOs following international forest policy to create a self-selection process where none had existed before. However, the key elements were already in place. The Global Forest Policy Project (GFPP), a collaborative initiative of three North American environmental NGOs[16], had an active electronic mail system already in place to distribute important forest policy documents to NGOs around the world. The GFPP agreed to facilitate the self-selection process by serving as a communications link to all the NGOs on its list. The Netherlands Committee for IUCN, which had been facilitating an ad hoc NGO working group during the meetings of the IPF, joined with the GFPP to create an international nomination process among NGOs interested in forest policy.

The process itself was relatively simple, though time-consuming. It involved an initial E-Mail announcement of the opportunity for self-selection, and included the details of the Swiss-Peruvian initiative. The recipients of the announcement were then invited to submit nominations for people to fill the three seats open to NGOs. As soon as nominations were submitted, they were immediately circulated by E-Mail to everyone else who had responded. As more names were added, the list was re-circulated. Eventually, when the list of nominees had to be pared, NGOs and nominees in each geographical region were encouraged to choose a single nominee from their region. Finally, with a North-South balance in mind, individuals from India, Peru and the United Kingdom were selected. Overall, the choices seemed to please both the NGO community and the government co-sponsors.

Subsequently, the GFPP was asked by other governments and institutions to facilitate several more self-selection processes, resulting in both more invitations for NGOs as well as occasional funding for NGOs to travel to the specific meetings in question. The concept of NGO self-selection has since spread and has become more widely accepted as a process that not only can enable NGOs to successfully work with their colleagues around the world to nominate their own representatives, but that can select NGO participants with the skills and attributes to meet the requirements of each situation.

A few other recent NGO developments bear mentioning here. The first is a beneficial by-product of NGO involvement at the international policy level. During the last few years, several NGOs have successfully raised funds to enable their colleagues from other NGOs to travel to policy meetings. These efforts have enabled not only specific individuals to participate more effectively, but also groups of indigenous peoples' representatives and other NGOs working on specific issues like community forestry. Without the fundraising efforts to cover their travel expenses, their voices would have been absent from important policy discussions.

Sometimes, opening new arenas to these NGO voices has in turn opened other doors to the participating NGOs. Once NGOs are enabled to engage directly in policy arenas and to be introduced to more government policy-makers, their expertise is often later sought out by those policy-makers, including, perhaps for the first time, by members of their own government delegations. For example, at one policy meeting in 1993, a representative of a Chilean NGO first met a key official from his own

[16] Friends of the Earth-U.S., National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club.

government; once he returned home, he discovered he had a new level of access to dialogue with that official. In another case, after a Russian NGO representative was brought by his NGO colleagues to several policy conferences, the Russian Government delegation invited him to serve as an official member of the delegation at a meeting of the Montreal C&I Process. Finally, after representing her NGO at several IPF meetings, a representative from a Peruvian NGO was later invited to serve on all the official Peruvian government delegations to subsequent meetings. By the time the new Intergovernmental Forum on Forests was launched, she had begun serving as the head of delegation and chief spokesperson for Peru in several policy fora.[17]

Though progress is being made in the engagement of more NGOs in the international forest policy arena, if they are to be most effective, NGOs will need to work more actively at the domestic level to influence the negotiating positions of their governments *prior to* international meetings; to adopt much more active and strategic lobbying approaches to influence government delegations *during* international negotiations; and to follow-up at home to push for domestic *implementation* of the international agreements and commitments their governments have made.

The final outcome of the IPF was a report containing well over 100 Proposals for Action, which were non-binding recommendations directed to various actors, mostly governments. When the report was sent to the CSD, and subsequently to the Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly in June 1997, it was easily approved.[18] Significantly, however, two additional agreements were a part of this approval process: (1) all of the governments involved agreed formally to implement the IPF's recommended Proposals for Action, and (2) the General Assembly created a formal implementation process as part of a new Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), essentially a continuation of the IPF process focusing on major unresolved issues.

This is the first time in the modern global debate over forest policy, which began in earnest around 1990, that a formal mechanism had been created to promote and monitor the *implementation* of policies that have emerged from the debate. The potential significance of this is heightened by the pledge of governments to actually implement the IPF recommendations, which, in a sense, gives the recommendations' otherwise 'non-binding' status greater

[17] There often are trade-offs for NGOs in serving as *members* of their government delegations. Usually such membership comes with rules that prevent NGO representatives from revealing their government's private positions publicly, from doing anything to undermine their government's positions, and often from stating their own NGO's positions publicly. To some NGOs this equates to their being effectively silenced, so they prefer not to serve on government delegations. To others, this is a way to get inside and influence their government's often fast-evolving policies, position statements, and negotiating positions involving the nuances of official negotiating texts.

[18] Because the IPF had attracted the active participation of delegations from all the countries that had a strong interest in forest issues, once the members of the IPF had agreed to their final report there was essentially no other national delegation to the U.N. with substantive grounds for objection.

political weight. Since at the time of writing the new Intergovernmental Forum on Forests had only just begun its debate on such implementation, it is impossible to tell how seriously governments intend to pursue their commitment to act on the IPF recommendations. Indeed, in the face of continuing debate over a forest convention it is quite possible that IPF implementation will be politically overshadowed[19]. However, the new intergovernmental forum already has made it clear that IPF implementation will be given due prominence in the work of the forum.

Unfortunately, political reality would tend to suggest that most governments will not act on the IPF recommendations unless they are pushed very hard to do so. The role of NGOs and civil society becomes extremely important in this context. In the U.S., NGOs have lobbied their government's executive branch to create a formal domestic process to implement the IPF recommendations. Unfortunately, eighteen months after the IPF completed its report, the government had only just held its first meeting with stakeholders to discuss such a process.

One interesting by-product of the IPF process was the creation of a U.N. Interagency Task Force on Forests, comprised of representatives from the leading U.N. agencies responsible for forest-related matters. The task force was established to meet a need that had long been identified, i.e., improved coordination among these agencies, and to advise and assist the IPF secretariat. Because the task force had never opened itself to close observation or participation by NGOs or others, it is somewhat difficult to tell how successful it has been at its coordination mission. However, it already has shown that its procedures need improvement. In the wake of the IPF, the task force produced a report[20] outlining a plan for implementing the IPF's Proposals for Action by the task force. After the report was criticised by NGOs for its inadequacy on several counts, task force representatives met with NGOs during the first session of the new Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and agreed to make the task force's work more transparent in the future.

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[19] Because a forest convention is the highest political priority for some governments, they do not want other subjects, such as IPF implementation, to detract from consideration of a convention by the new intergovernmental forum. Furthermore, successful implementation of the IPF's recommendations, in the view of some convention advocates, may give the impression that progress is being made in solving the world's forest problems, and this could diminish the perceived need for a new convention. Also, the new forum's agenda is very crowded and IPF implementation will be a politically sensitive subject for many governments; thus they may actively seek to avoid lengthy discussions of how their domestic implementation efforts are going.

[20] Interagency Partnership on Forests: Implementation of IPF Proposals for Action by the ITFF, June 1997.

Finally, NGOs were successful at the first, organisational session of the new forum in pushing onto its official work programme several issues that had not been given adequate consideration by the IPF, including the subject of protected forest areas. Also, NGOs successfully began attracting government support and funding for a major international conference on the underlying causes of deforestation - one of the important recommendations of the IPF's Proposals for Action.

4.7 World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development (WCFSD)

As the forest debate was heating up in the multilateral arenas, a separate non-governmental initiative was getting underway to conduct a different debate outside the highly politicised intergovernmental context. Modelled after the World Commission on Environment and Development (a.k.a. the Brundtland Commission) which led to the Earth Summit, the World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development (WCFSD) was comprised of a collection of eminent persons including former government ministers and heads-of-state, scientists, and academicians. Like the Brundtland Commission, the WCFSD's intended mission was to bypass the conventional policy arenas, conduct regional hearings to gather the views of real people, and make recommendations unfettered by political pressures.

Although the idea that led to the creation of the WCFSD had emerged in 1991, its formative process was rocky, and it was not until 1994 that the commission was finally launched under the aegis of the InterAction Council[21]. Unfortunately, the commission's early organisers may have let their desire to attract well-known eminent persons as commissioners get ahead of the need for the ultimate acceptance of both the commission and its product by several important forest constituencies. Consequently, the organisers not only failed to adequately consult NGOs, but initially declined to consider nominating leading NGO representatives as members of the commission, and no women were included in the early organising effort.

These flaws raised unfortunate suspicions of the commission's goals[22] - goals which the commission's organisers had not very clearly articulated. Many

[21] The InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government is an international group of some thirty political leaders chaired by former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

[22] Even former U.S. President Jimmy Carter raised questions about the commission, including, in a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, about how the commission would relate to ongoing U.N. forest discussions.

NGOs maintained that forests were a very unique domain, with their disposition directly affecting the daily lives and survival of hundreds of millions of people, including indigenous peoples and small rural communities around the world. Any commission that sought the truth, they reasoned, ought to have among its members representatives from these key constituencies, and should seek to address issues of critical concern to them.

At the same time, several governments became suspicious of the proposed commission, for reasons quite contrary to those of many NGOs - they did not like the idea of a completely independent body claiming any of the international forest policy spotlight. More importantly, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests was just about to get off they ground, and many governments did not want to lose control of the debate. In the end, the WCFSD's organisers diversified the commission's membership, clarified its goals, and worked overtime to secure funding in the face of their critics.

Once underway, the commission held public hearings and heard from representatives of government, industry, NGOs, indigenous communities, scientists and others in Indonesia, Canada, Costa Rica, Cameroon, and Russia. Regrettably, funding limitations combined with the apprehensions of some of the host governments limited the participation of various constituencies at some of the hearings. Nevertheless, the hearings did serve to focus and publicise the commission's work, and to highlight key forest issues and problems.

The commission intends to publish its final report in 1998, and to then engage in an aggressive campaign to publicise it and to use it as a vehicle for several follow-up activities designed to bring together influential government decision-makers, forest industry leaders, and NGOs from key forested nations. It is not yet clear what the report will recommend, or how accurately it will reflect the input the commission has received both through its hearings and from others. The commission also squandered some of its time by wrestling with the forest convention question. However, throughout its tenure the members of the commission have been asking tough, important questions and raising issues that never would have made it to the table in the politically-charged intergovernmental arenas. They have been asking questions about the underlying causes of forest mismanagement and loss, about who is most responsible for this, about who could most effectively solve the problems, and about how conflicts can be most effectively resolved. Most importantly, they seem intent on seeking solutions that would shift more decision-making and policy implementation away

from governments and large institutions to local communities, NGOs and the private corporate sector.

It could be that the main legacy of the WCFSD will be that it provided a counterweight to the highly politicised IPF/IFF processes. Indeed, if through its final report the commission can force the intergovernmental policy debate a bit closer to reality and to truly effective solutions, it will have been well worth the effort. If at the same time it manages to catalyse innovative initiatives that begin to solve long-standing forest problems, it will have made an historic contribution.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Are international forest policy initiatives effective?

Before examining this question, it might be useful to first briefly consider the context in which policy is usually made and the motivations with which governments enter policy-making arenas. From one perspective it can be said that the primary goal of most governments in intergovernmental policy fora is to prevent the creation of any agreements or policy commitments that their own government is not *already implementing*, or cannot, with little additional effort or expense, implement in a reasonable time. Several governments have the political leverage to achieve that goal most of the time. Most do not, and so they often group together to create more collective leverage.[23]

At the same time, many governments are willing to consider new policy commitments *provided* they can gain something they want in return - usually in terms of financial resources, trade benefits, or technology transfers. If a government enters a negotiation but fails to get what it wants, and if sufficient incentives (e.g., financial resources) are not included in the resulting policy agreement to encourage them to implement the agreement, they very likely won't implement it.

From an equally dreary perspective it could be said that it is either impossible to craft effective forest policy at the international level, since it is so far away from forest realities and actors on the ground, or it is a huge waste of time and resources to try. After all, numerous examples exist of international agreements that lie idle, or that only a few governments are implementing.

In fact, a strong case can be made that, regardless of the level at which policy is made, many policies in many countries are never effectively implemented

[23] For example the European Union bloc, and "the Group of 77 and China".

unless the actors of civil society pressure their governments to implement them. Since international policy often is crafted in such broad, general, and even somewhat abstract terms, this makes it even harder for interested actors at the domestic level to push for implementation, since some degree of effort usually is required to interpret and operationalise the components of the policy so the policy is understandable and relevant on the ground.

From a completely different perspective, some governments do seem legitimately to favour new policies that promote sustainable forest management worldwide. Either in response to the democratic demands of their citizens or to their own perception of the benefits of sustainable forest management, some governments seem genuinely committed to pushing forest policy ever closer toward that goal. If they succeed, some degree of change, somewhere, is likely to occur.

If we accept the premise that, in some instances, international policy *can* create change, considering the variety of initiatives described in this chapter, a number of observations can be made about the international policy arena in terms of its effectiveness in addressing the world's chronic forest problems. First, we must accept that both policy-making at the global level and the solution of chronic problems take time, and thus we must accept that whatever policy is created at the international level is unlikely to produce immediate, dramatic results on the ground.

Once we acknowledge this time-frame, the effectiveness of the policies and policy-making arenas discussed in this chapter can be more realistically evaluated. Although some policy-making processes are still underway and cannot yet be fairly judged, it is possible to state that the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the national-level Criteria and Indicators processes, the World Bank, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), have had several noteworthy effects. The International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) also is worth examining in this context. With an emphasis on those that could be said to most clearly promote sustainable forest management, they can be summarised as follows:

- *Catalysing and setting the pace for other initiatives*. The FSC has significantly changed the global debate by re-defining and setting the pace for publicly-acceptable standards of forest management, and in the process has sparked countless related initiatives by both those who support and oppose the FSC. By creating a demand and a mechanism for *independent* verification of forest management performance, combined with chain-of-custody tracking and product labelling, the FSC has catalysed a slight

shift in political power away from those traditionally in control of the world's forest resources. The FSC also has produced a large number of new collaborations, dialogues and partnerships worldwide, e.g., through its regional standard-setting processes, and has sparked debate on a wide range of innovative forest management issues. Finally, the FSC has catalysed forest management improvements on the ground.

- *Fostering common-interest collaboration and re-defining critical concepts.* The national-level C&I initiatives also have helped change the global debate and re-define the parameters of acceptable forest management. Some of these initiatives have served as catalysts and pace-setters for others, and some have enhanced the collaborative dialogue among stakeholders. They also have demonstrated the political promise of 'common-interest' policy collaborations, e.g., those initiated by governments sharing common goals or problems[24]. Perhaps the greatest effect of these initiatives, however, remains to be seen - it is the *promise* of the C&I being used to collect important new data on the condition of forests in scores of countries around the world.

- *Establishing the bottom line and setting targets.* The most important forest-related policy impact of the World Bank has been the single component of its 1991 forest policy that prohibited commercial timber harvesting projects in primary tropical forests. This prohibition set a new 'bottom line' in international development policy that was subsequently emulated by several other institutions and agencies, and served to heighten concern over the loss of primary forests. The Bank's new partnership with WWF also has brought a new emphasis to the importance of setting very specific *targets* for forest protection and management.[25]

- *Raising the profile of problems and potential solutions.* As the central international forest policy arena of recent years, the IPF considerably heightened the profile of numerous important forest policy issues, and focused and matured the debate on several of them. It also catalysed a slight expansion in the ability of NGOs to participate in U.N.-system negotiations. Finally, although its scores of Proposals for Action are non-binding, combined with the focus on their implementation of the new Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, many of these recommendations can be considered important *potential* tools awaiting use by the citizens of forested countries worldwide. Whether they are ever used remains to be seen.

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[24] Another initiative that did this was the Central American Forest Convention, signed in 1993 by the foreign ministers of six Central American nations. (See separate box on The Forest Convention Controversy.)

[25] Without measurable targets, many NGOs believe that even well-intentioned policies can often fail to produce results.

- *Focusing political aspirations and creating political tools.* Although clear evidence is generally lacking that the ITTO has effectively promoted the implementation of sustainable forest management in its member countries, the ITTO's Year 2000 target has brought considerable political attention to the importance of setting such targets. This formal policy commitment remains an important *potential* tool that can be used by the citizens of every ITTO member country to encourage domestic efforts to attain the goal.

Regardless of whether such results are immediately apparent, or to what extent any other actors are involved, it seems clear that governments and multilateral institutions will continue for at least the next several years to make and change forest policy at all levels, including internationally. It then becomes a question of whether NGOs and other members of civil society wish to be involved, and if so, how they will find the financial and human resources, and the time, to be effective in influencing the policy that results. Obviously, if they are not involved at all, either by choice or from lack of resources, the dominant views that are likely to be reflected in the international policy mix are those of the governments that write the policy. On its face, this seems an undesirable option.

If for no other reason than that many of them have incomparable knowledge and skills, creative ideas, deep commitment and seemingly boundless energy, NGOs and other members of civil society represent a valuable asset to the international policy arena. Furthermore, the ultimate effectiveness of any forest policy can be tempered by the extent to which these actors support or oppose the policy. Thus, a case can be made that there is good reason to support their more effective involvement in the policy arena. Although to date most governments have been less than enthusiastic, and some are still hostile, to NGO involvement, it seems to everyone's advantage to embrace all actors as partners rather than relegate them to the role of subjects, or worse, opponents - which they are likely to be if they are unhappy with a particular policy they had no role in crafting.

During the past several years of the international forest policy debate, more governments have begun to understand this partnership imperative. The result has been a slow but steady opening of doors, an increase in invitations to NGOs to participate fully in policy-making fora, and an increase in funds made available to enable NGOs to travel to important policy meetings. Many government and institution officials also have begun to realise that when NGOs and other members of civil society are brought to the table early, and are given a meaningful role in helping to craft a policy,

all actors are likely to have a better appreciation of the 'collective challenge' at hand, the resulting policy is likely to be more effective, and the different actors are less likely to reject the result - assuming the policy is adopted on the basis of consensus[26]. If this is the case, due to their often high level of public credibility, NGOs can be very effective in promoting a particular new policy to a broader public or a particular constituency.

Critics often suggest that NGOs rarely have 'real resources' to bring to the negotiating table, meaning that they have no funds to contribute, low skills, no ability to carry out projects, and more often just bring rhetoric and complaints. While this may be accurate for some, there is still a very substantial group of the world's NGOs that exists in local communities in or adjacent to the forests themselves who possess significant human resources and traditional knowledge that can be extremely effective in the direct implementation of forest management policy. Furthermore, the number of NGOs with the resources to actually fund or conduct both policy and scientific research as well as on-the-ground projects is increasing. Finally, the more often NGOs are invited to the table and their views respected, the more quickly the rhetoric tends to disappear.

It is not just NGOs, however, that must be incorporated into new policy partnerships, but also the corporate and financial sectors, which together possess more power and influence than most governments. Over the last five years this power has manifested itself most clearly and negatively in an increasing number of financially-strapped developing countries where large transnational corporations (TNCs), many from other developing nations in southeast Asia, have secured huge forest concessions in return for unreasonably low concession fees and few, if any, commitments to sustainable forest management. The World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development has referred to such TNCs as "migratory" because, having often depleted the forests of their home countries, they then move on to the forests of other countries. At the same time, governments and international institutions are calling for a significant increase in the percentage of the forest management financial burden to be borne by the private sector. These trends cry out for new policy.

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[26] It is a nearly absolute rule that intergovernmental negotiations do not permit non-governmental actors to participate in the actual negotiation. Thus, the agreements that result do not, practically speaking, embody a consensus of the actors and stakeholders with an interest in (or who are affected by) the forest policy being negotiated. They are agreements written by government delegations, and they primarily reflect a consensus of those delegations. While some governments make a good faith effort to democratically and accurately *represent* the views of all their citizens, this is not the case for many other governments. And even in the most democratic and participatory countries, governments often are swayed by one or another particularly powerful interest. Consequently, the idea of a true policy-making *partnership* between governments and the myriad interests of civil society is still in its infancy.

It has been clear in the forest policy arena, however, that most governments are reluctant to discuss the role of private corporations, except in terms of encouraging voluntary codes of conduct and inviting greater private sector investment in forest management, and government willingness to directly regulate them is limited. However, the continuing rise of globalisation makes it imperative that the role of the private sector become a central element in the global forest policy debate.

Just as important as the creation of a more inclusive and participatory environment that builds policy-making partnerships is the creation of much stronger linkages between the various levels at which policy is created. Two examples can illustrate the case. The first example concerns Criteria and Indicators. As has been described previously, most of the C&I initiatives were launched at the international level and have had very mixed if not poor records at involving NGOs and civil society at the domestic level. Except for the Helsinki Process, none of the other initiatives appear to have incorporated concrete domestic linkages into their structure. As a result, some of these processes are now encountering difficulties in winning the support of domestic constituencies for the implementation phase of their initiatives.

The second example is the FSC's requirement that regional and national standards, based on the FSC's international Principles and Criteria, be set by local groups of stakeholders. Although these standard-setting processes have been a challenge, they have become the primary insurance policy that will enable certification under the FSC system to maintain the support of FSC members. They also provide a solid link between the FSC's international policies and forests on the ground; indeed, once the regional standards are approved by the FSC, they become the *primary* FSC 'policy' in that area, essentially flipping the previous 'top-down' relationship on its head.

One important type of policy linkage is catalytic. If the international forest policy debate and its resulting policies do nothing more than serve as a stimulus and foundation for change at other levels, they still will have served a very important role. Actually, it often is the symbiotic relationship between levels of policy-making that produces the most tangible results. That this relationship can be significant was illustrated by a comment made to this author by a representative from the Australian government, who asserted that international policy not only *influenced* Australia's forest policy, it actually *drove* it in some cases.

The catalytic influence of the FSC is one of the most significant examples of recent years, made even more remarkable by the fact that it is a non-governmental initiative and that it has driven change not only in the industrial sector, but in governmental and intergovernmental institutions worldwide.

At its best, international policy can create a supportive context within which policy and initiatives at all other levels can be more effective, e.g., by providing political and even financial support to otherwise weak national forest agencies. At its worst, bad international policy can undermine strong national or local policies, e.g., by setting an international norm or standard that is considerably weaker than domestic requirements, or restrict non-governmental innovations and initiatives. Ideally, all policy levels should be mutually supportive and work together synergistically to foster sustainable forest management

5.2 Entering the fray - is it worth it?

Reflecting back on this paper, some readers may feel pessimistic about forest policy set at the global level. If not, I invite you to sit at the back of a nondescript U.N. chamber, well past midnight on the final night of a two-week negotiation, and witness a bloc of developing countries insist on the addition of the phrase 'financial resources' on page 25, paragraph two, second sentence, only to hear a bloc of developed countries respond by insisting just as resolutely on the deletion of the words 'new and additional' from page 17, paragraph three, line five. At such moments you think of the last time you walked in the woods and wonder if anyone outside of that room will ever read the final text let alone try to implement any of it, and if so, whether it will make any difference to a forest anywhere.

It is not a simple matter to determine whether or not a forest policy that is developed in such a chamber will make a difference. As was noted previously, this is primarily because of the great distances and often convoluted chains of events that exist between those who craft such a policy and those who are affected by it. The feedback loops, if any, are long and twisted.

It is important to keep in perspective as well that at the intergovernmental level the concept of forests as a global policy issue, as a global concern of humanity, is barely a decade old. For many governments, coming to terms

with the fact that forests matter not just as a source of timber and cash, but now must be valued in much wider environmental, social, and economic terms, is not easy; this simply will not happen overnight. As part of this evolving vision of forests, most governments also see their country's forests within a wider geo-political context. Forests are entangled in a broad web of national and international trade and financial flows and political agendas, and a lot of high-stakes games are played out with forests caught in the political cross-fire. In this context, it often is very difficult, and painfully frustrating, for NGOs to enter the fray with the best interests of forests and forest-dependent peoples at heart. But enter the fray they must.

It is the contention of this paper that NGOs must be diligent, active and effective at all levels of policy formation. Policy does matter. The repercussions of national, regional and global policies can be massive, even if the results are not seen for many months or years.

The institutional and policy reforms now taking place within the U.N., within the multilateral development banks, and within much of the private sector are not happening by accident. They are happening in part due to the pressures created by the failures of previous policies, but also in large part due to the hard work of the NGOs and others in civil society who have been chipping away at change for years. Sadly, without a highly visible crisis most policy evolves painstakingly slowly (and even with a crisis international policy may still take years to develop), but it does evolve.

Global policy development is perhaps analogous to the steering of an ocean-going supertanker, with its crew quarters and storage tanks comparable to countries and their citizens and forests. Although a deviation of one degree in the ship's course is unlikely to be noticed by anyone on board, over time the tanker will arrive at an entirely different destination. If NGOs are concerned about where the ship is headed, they can certainly do a lot of work in the engine room. However, they also must occasionally make their way to the wheel-house to advise or argue with the captain and help chart the ship's course; it is difficult to do this from below decks.