

Global forestry institutions call for more community-based forest management

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The leading international organizations working to protect and manage the world's forests are calling for governments across the globe to increase communities' role in forest management. Doing so could contribute to lifting close to a billion people out of poverty, as well as improve the health and vitality of forests.

'The Collaborative Partnership on Forests' (CPF) is comprised of 14 international organizations specializing in the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. On the occasion of this year's Earth Day on 22 April, the group has come together to speak as one to send an unequivocal message: If we are to see an end to global poverty and the preservation of endangered biodiversity, communities living in and near forests must be involved in decision making about sustainable [forest](#) management.

"People who live in forests and are highly dependent on them for their food, fuel, and medicines, are most often not those who control the decisions on how these resources are used and managed." says Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Director General of International Union for Conservation of Nature. "Our work in countries across the world has proven that strengthening community rights over their own forests helps reduce poverty and also benefits forest biodiversity."

A total of 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihoods. About 1.4 billion of these live in the developing world, and 1 billion live in extreme poverty. Recently-released data by IUCN and the Global

Partnership for Forest Landscape Restoration show that approximately 1.2 billion hectares of deforested or degraded areas could be restored through better, locally-controlled management.

Guinea is a prime example of a country that could benefit from community forest management, as it has long experienced widespread environmental degradation and loss of forests, largely due to illegal logging, land clearing and poaching by people who rely on the forests to eke out a living.

"We brokered a co-management agreement between the local community and the government and introduced a programme to improve incomes of people living in villages around the forests" says Dennis Garrity, Director General of the World Agroforestry Centre. "Incomes dramatically improved, the pressure on forests reduced, water sources flowed again and tree cover is steadily increasing."

The CPF has seen again and again that by increasing local people's ownership in the management of forest resources, communities are frequently in a better position to start forest product-based business, from which they can derive better incomes. Such businesses include an array of activities, encompassing everything from processing and marketing of shea nuts and butter in West Africa, to community forestry enterprises managing forest concessions in Petén, Guatemala. The ability to build increased household wealth is critical as it often results in improved food security, investments in children's education as well as increased engagement in community and social improvement activities.

"When local people become equal partners in the benefits and responsibilities of sustainable forest management, many opportunities open up for them," says Eduardo Rojas-Briales, Director General of Forestry at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "Reliable access to forest resources means they can increase

their cash income and engage in developing sustainable enterprises. What's more, there is a clear incentive to better manage their lands to ensure the sustainability of the forest resources."

The current international efforts to develop mechanisms for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and enhancing forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD+) represent new possibilities for local communities to benefit from sustainable management and conservation of forests.

However, according to a book published by the International Union of Forest Research Organizations "... unless considerable progress is made in securing the rights of local people to access, manage, and benefit from forests ... it is unlikely that deforestation and illegal logging will be curbed."

International Tropical Timber Organization is another CPF member that promotes a holistic approach to involving communities in its various forestry projects throughout the tropics, and sees such involvement as a crucial link to improvements in both livelihoods and sustainable forest management.

At the recent United Nations Forum on Forests meeting in February, ministers stressed the crucial role of local people, including women, and local and indigenous communities in achieving sustainable forest management.

"When you have ministers from around the world recognize that communities are vital for sustainably managing forests, it becomes clear that the time to act is now,' says Jan McAlpine, Director of the United Nations Forum on Forest Secretariat. "If we don't see wide-scale investment in locally-controlled forestry we will ultimately fail in some of our most important, and venerable goals, including reducing poverty

and ensuring sustainable development for all."

Provided by World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)

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