

Forests in the Global Balance - Changing Paradigms, Results of IUFRO-WFSE Phase I (2002-2006)

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In the forests-society-environment interrelations, the critical points covered by the WFSE network of 150 researchers were governance; environmental services; contribution to livelihoods; and planted forests.

The bulk of industrial timber production is moving from the North to the South and from west to east. Global policies and changing societal values – first in the North – are increasingly emphasizing other forest functions than timber production. Diverse interests of actors are displayed by strengthened global trading relationships and simultaneously by political mobilization of civil society for environmental services and more equitable socioeconomic development. With the emergence of participatory democracy and increasing local control over forests various, less formal networks are emerging and providing a policy narrative that evolves over time. The institutional challenges are most demanding in the developing world. As policies affecting the use of natural resources become more complex, the limitations of old governance have become apparent. Yet, there is no blueprint for good governance, but rather a series of arguments supporting general openness to policy learning and change.

Re-evaluation of governance, decision making and forest ownership underlines the need to reconcile conservation and development. Payments for environmental services (PES) shift the focus from the control of forest management activities to the value of the environmental services to people. Ecosystem use must be subject to local societal choice, and supply of these services a part of local livelihood strategies. In the current global focus on eradicating hunger and poverty all aspects of livelihood capabilities need to be considered: not only consumption and income from forests and other sources, but also food security, health, education, and empowerment. Thus eliminating poverty will require bold approaches beyond the potential from forests to the complexity of livelihood sustainability. To meet the multiple demands, forests need to be seen as part of the managed rural landscape of diversified land uses, including habitation, agriculture, and planted trees on plantations or on farms.