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INTERLAKEN+10, Governing forest landscapes: Lessons learnt from ten years of experience and the way for- ward post-2015

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The UNFF CLI's on forest governance – impact and the way forward

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Dear colleagues

This is the region of Toppwald, a forested landscape less than 30 kilometers from here. In the 1850ies, the Canton of Berne embarked to devolve forest rights that the state had claimed for centuries. In one disputed case between the canton and a farmer's community, this process lasted almost half a century.

It is just a little more than one decade since Switzerland and Indonesia organized the first Workshop on Decentralization in Forestry here in Interlaken, and quite a few of you were already participating at that time. A short time, ten years, all the more so in the context of sustainable forest management, which is not so much about trees and forests, but in its essence about people and organizations and the way they interact.

What was debated here in Interlaken in 2004 was part of a growing mainstream discussion with an ever increasing number of tributaries. Forest governance has surfaced as an important theme almost everywhere. Highlights in chronological order were e.g. the establishment of the Rights and Resources Initiative in 2005, a global coalition with a wide spectrum of organizations engaged in forest and land policy reform. In autumn 2007 the General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Shortly after, the Conference of the Parties of the Climate Convention in Bali recognized REDD as mitigation action, and in 2010, the Climate COP in Cancun adapted important governance elements such as transparency, participation or protection of the rights of local people as elements for the successful implementation of REDD+ actions. In 2012, the Committee on World Food Security of the FAO endorsed the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests.

The Interlaken stream continued its flow during all these years. Since 2004 four other international workshops have been organized biannually, most of them as country-led initiatives in support of the UNFF, bringing together countries undergoing decentralization and governance reform, from around the globe and within regions, in a spirit of mutual exchange and learning. All were designed to draw lessons and recommendations for action by the UNFF and its member countries.

In 2006, the Government of Indonesia hosted the second workshop in the series, on the theme "Forest governance and decentralization in Asia and the Pacific", in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The Yogyakarta Workshop continued the discussion on issues identified in Interlaken, but with a sharper focus on corruption and illegality.

The third workshop on the theme "Forest governance and decentralization in Africa", was held in Durban, South Africa, in 2008. The Durban workshop sought to identify opportunities for coordinated policy responses, capacity-building and implementation of best practices and approaches to decentralization and SFM at different levels.

In 2010 followed the CLI on "Forest governance, decentralization and REDD+ in Latin America and the Caribbean", hosted by Mexico and held in Oaxaca. The workshop examined our issues in the context of global efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, discussed rights and tenure for forests and carbon, and also SFM in indigenous and community territories.

The journey around the globe was concluded in 2012 with the Lviv Forum on Forests in a green economy for countries in Eastern Europe, Northern and central Asia. The Forum was hosted by the Government of the Ukraine and explored opportunities to enable the forest sector in this region to make a full contribution to the emerging green economy, including forest governance aspects.

From the workshop titles you can easily see that the underlying main issue of forest governance and decentralization has constantly been adapted to relevant driving themes in the international forest related arena. The fact that the CLI's produced reports to the United Nations that have all become official documents of UNFF sessions, has enriched forests within the UN with new concepts and wording. When parties to the Climate Convention for example submitted their views on REDD+ in 2009, Switzerland brought in concepts and wording that were developed in the CLI series and later incarnated as social safeguards in the REDD+ negotiations.

When drawing a balance of the last decade in forest governance, we can safely say that at the multilateral level it is now widely accepted that the real custodians of much of the forests are indigenous and local communities with deep cultural connections to the land, including the knowledge to sustainably manage the forest – and with no fear to sleep with ants and snakes on the moss. Research provides us with ample evidence that deforestation rates inside community forests with a clear legal recognition by higher levels of the government – and also with a strong government commitment on strength of these rights – are often dramatically lower than in forests without such legal and institutional support.

Nevertheless, if we observe to which depth governance issues diffused into forest relevant global instruments and processes, we observe a quite uneven landscape.

The most advanced is certainly the REDD+ process of the Climate Convention. Parties at the COP in Cancun recognized seven “safeguards” to guide implementation of REDD+, among them transparent and effective national forest governance structures, participation and respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous and local peoples, and conservation of natural forests and biodiversity.

There is more of a divide in the biodiversity community. Although governance of protected areas is animatedly discussed within working groups attached to IUCN, in the multilateral negotiations of the CBD, forest governance is surfacing rather slowly. This is all the more surprising as biodiversity hotspots often tightly overlap with areas of high cultural and linguistic diversity. Biodiversity has developed in co-evolution with humans, even in the large forest areas which often are romantically labelled as primary or pristine.

Also within the United Nations Forum on Forests, forest governance certainly did not get the attention that it deserves for the implementation of SFM. The Independent Assessment of the International Arrangement on Forests mentions the restricted ability of the UNFF to react to important emerging issues such as forest governance, in spite of the technical background provided in inter-sessional activities like our series of CLI's.

It is certainly a goal of this workshop here to provide an opportunity to once again come back to forest governance as an issue of fundamental importance to achieving SFM and by this way also to the contribution of forestry to sustainable development.

This is also lead out in the objectives of Interlaken+10 as they are stated in the outline of our workshop. In the coming days:

- We will take stock of the experience gained since 2004 and of lessons learnt on governance and decentralisation;
- We will reflect on developments over the past ten years related to governance of forest landscape;
- We are going to identify key issues that need to be addressed in a global forestry context;
- and we will develop proposals and recommendations on how to foster good governance of forest landscapes to the UNFF and also as contribution to achieving the objectives of the post-2015 agenda.

As we heard from Thomas Gass, the Sustainable Development Goals contain some promising elements for the International Arrangement on Forests. The SDGs, their scope, targets and indicators will have direct influence on forest governance, for example in addressing the growing concern with respect to property rights, or with such issues as legitimizing local forest management approaches, secured tenure in forests, or converting traditional forest use rights to modern legal rights.

I sincerely hope that our event here helps to prepare the 11th session of UNFF with a view to successfully taking on board governance aspects. May UNFF11 re-shuffle the cards and empower the future forest arrangement to fully exercise its convening power, tackle the real relevant policy issues and slow down the ongoing fragmentation of the global forest agenda.

May Interlaken also contribute to accelerated progress at national levels – fifty years as in the example of Toppwald is definitely a timeframe from the distant past and not acceptable in the present context and the ever increasing challenges that forests and sustainable forest management face today.

Dear colleagues, I am sure we have exciting days before us, and I wish you all a very fruitful workshop. Thank you!