



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

3 – 6 February 2015 in Interlaken, Switzerland

Welcome Address by Josef Hess, Vice-Director, Federal Office for the Environment FOEN, Switzerland

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues

My cordial welcome to Interlaken on behalf of the Federal Office for the Environment!

Forests, their use-rights or property status have always been extremely contested in the rugged regions that later became Switzerland. Part of our history are heroic epics, for example the battle of Morgarten that took place exactly 700 years ago. Recent historical research comes to the conclusion that the reasons for this event in 1315 were conflicts over grazing lands and forests. The army sent by the Austrian Landlords of Habsburg wanted to punish the local people for trespassing – ironically, logs that were rolled downhill blocked the foreign knights and prepared their dramatic defeat.

Conflicts like this one are a constant of our forest history – fortunately they did not always end with so much blood. One of the recipes to reconcile such resource conflicts was to devolve use- or property rights to the lowest possible levels, very often to the community level. The decentralized forest governance structure that we have today is a result of devolution processes that mainly started in the 1850s, which have undoubtedly become a key for the decentralized sustainable forest management responsibility as it is practiced in Switzerland today.

Other important elements for SFM are provided by the first federal forest law of 1876. This law already contained very strict protection of the forest area, not allowing any further decrease of forest land, which constitutes the main reason for today's mosaic

forest landscape that you might have observed when flying in. The first national law also regulated the contributions from the national level to the salaries of the cantonal foresters. This allowed the foresters to become facilitators and forest management consultants interacting with the local forest owners. Their scientific knowledge affiliated well with local forest related knowledge, thus taking fully into account the cultural and biological realities of the different geographical areas.

Decentralized governance systems are complex and dynamic processes that need constant learning and commitment. The federal structure in this country means an ongoing process of constantly finding a new equilibrium between the central state, the cantons, the cooperatives, communes and communities which do have public forest ownership, and the private forest owners. In Switzerland as probably elsewhere, decentralisation and centralisation are two sides of the same coin. It is the way how the different governance levels interact that ultimately is determining the balance and the fate of the forest resources in all their aspects – economic, social and ecological.

In spite of the long federal experience sustainable forest management in Switzerland is constantly facing new challenges – I will give you a flavour of them later in the panel. In spite of this we are convinced that our decentralized approach is best fitted and a precondition to find solutions to problems and to regain stability.

In 2004, when the Governments of Switzerland and Indonesia jointly organized the first workshop in Interlaken, the approach was to bring together countries undergoing decentralization and governance reform with countries that already had more experience in decentralized forestry. By then, many nations around the world had embarked on such reform programs. They were meant to achieve conservation and development objectives, including sustainable forest management, greater equity in distribution of benefits from resources, poverty reduction and enhanced democracy.

Interlaken was a kind of a global stock taking and encouraged Indonesia and Switzerland to continue this initiative and to strive for regional initiatives to refine the Interlaken results and to adapt them at regional levels. The first of these regional workshops that took place in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2006, was followed in 2008 by South Africa with the Durban Workshop, and two years later in Oaxaca, Mexico. The journey around the globe continued in 2012 with the Lviv Forum in the Ukraine, and

now, ten years later, we are here in Interlaken again to take stock of where we are, and what remains to be accomplished.

Let me express the sincere thanks of the Federal Office for the Environment to all the host countries that have worked so closely with Switzerland to organize the six events. And I would also like to thank the many other Governments which co-sponsored the events – you can see the impressive list on the screen. Our gratitude also goes to all the organizations that provided technical, financial and logistical support. Finally sincere thanks are given to the secretariat of the UNFF which always has been extremely cooperative in every regard.

I am convinced that this workshop will be a useful contribution to the outcomes of the forthcoming deliberations at UNFF11. Forests are still not duly reflected in their broad multifunctional importance, and it is high time in May in New York to forge a strong International Arrangement on Forests. Forest governance issues could be an important building block for this arrangement. It is our solemn duty as foresters to build trust and high standards for forest sector governance into the global forest arrangement, for the sake of the forests of the world, but also for our own professional pride.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues

Let me finish by reminding you that the series of governance workshops were always regarded as technical workshops to carry the issue of forest governance forward, and the impressive substance that has been developed in this workshops has only been possible because everyone has spoken in her or in his personal capacity. This is naturally an encouragement to keep it like that here in Interlaken!

I wish you all a very interesting and fruitful workshop. Thank you!