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IMFN Halifax Forum Synopsis

The International Model Forest Network (IMFN) Forum, held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, on September 10, 1999 brought together all current network members and a number of outside experts and observers for a one-day working session to deliberate the question of how to improve networking.

In an earlier series of regional and national consultations IMFN members had already been clear that networking must provide mutual benefit to participants, and add value to planned activities and already identified goals. To realize such benefits network participants need to be very deliberate in seeking the most effective ways to encourage and accommodate networking activities. This is not only because resources tend to be limited but also because networking will simply not take place in a passive environment.

In the Halifax Forum, participants were encouraged to present their views and deliberate on the merits of a range of model forest network activities and mechanisms over the full range of networking levels: i.e., local, regional, national, and international.

Participants confirmed the value of networking activities relative to capacity building, economic diversification, and measuring and assessing progress toward sustainable forest management. Among the many possible mechanisms for realizing these activities, participants rated highest those involving education, training and extension activities, specialized workshops, and dissemination of reports and publications. Also highlighted was the need for communication activities and tools, which focus on public relations and promotion.

While participants readily prioritized and provided detail on each of the above, there were important cautions noted as well. These clearly underlined the view that successful networking – at all levels – will require



considerable self-examination on the part of participants to ensure that they have well chosen objectives and resources commensurate with the level of effort required to achieve them. While national and regional networks will continue to develop, the role of an IMFN Secretariat was seen as a desirable enabling feature of the emerging international network.

***Report on the International Model Forest Network Forum
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
September 10, 1999***

The International Model Forest Network (IMFN) convened a Forum in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, on Friday September 10, 1999. Representatives from Chile, China, USA, Mexico, Japan, Russia, Canada, Argentina, Cameroon, FAO, CIFOR, and others participated in a one day workshop on the theme of model forest networking. The Forum was chaired by Dr. John Naysmith, Professor Emeritus of Forestry at Lakehead University, in Thunder Bay, Ontario, with panel discussion moderated by Dr. Daniel Welsh, Canadian Forest Service, Ottawa. This report, as well as a full list of presenters and participants will be posted on the IMFNS web-site (<http://www.idrc.ca/imfn>) in November, 1999.

The Forum was preceded by a two day meeting of the Canadian Model Forest Network, to which Forum participants were invited, and which showcased the positive impacts that Model Forests are having at the

operational level. The text below is an elaboration of a presentation drafted by workshop rapporteurs, Ms. Mette Løyche Wilkie (FAO Rome) and Mr. Peter Besseau (IMFNS), and presented to the Forum plenary at the conclusion of the day.

Workshop Theme

Workshop participants attended the Forum to consider what “Networking” means within the context of the International Model Forest Network and in particular to consider two networking issues:

1. What are IMFN members’ networking priorities?

2. How can networking be made to work better (what is needed and what can be contributed by model forests)?

Why Focus on Networking?

The IMFN Forum focused exclusively on networking because networking has repeatedly been identified at IMFN fora and international meetings as a key element of model forests and as being in need of greater definition and emphasis. Networking is viewed as an efficient way to pool limited resources. It is seen by members as an effective way to share information and experiences on new approaches to sustainable forest management, by learning from both successes and failures. However, networking does not occur without a deliberate strategy to encourage, accommodate, and facilitate it. The IMFN Forum therefore presented an opportunity for individual model forests to learn about the priorities of other model forests so that each might develop their networking mechanisms to be responsive to the needs identified - both as contributors and beneficiaries. Equally, the Forum provided an opportunity for the IMFN Secretariat to understand better from members how it can best organize itself in support of member needs.

Structure of the Forum

The Forum was conducted with a morning plenary session from the speakers listed below, which focused on networking priorities within the context of activities and mechanisms (see below).

Dr. Eduardo Casas Dias, SEMARNAP, Mexico
Mr. Juan Carlos Collarte, Ministry of Agriculture, Chile
Mr. Alexei Kornienko, Federal Forest Service, Russia
Dr. Jian Chunqian, Academy of Forestry, China
Mr. Ichiro Nagame, Forestry Agency, Japan
Mr. Tang Hon Tat, Pacific Islands Forests and Trees Support Program, Fiji
Mr. Rick Blackwood, Foothills Model Forest, Canada

In his presentation, IMFNS Executive Director, Mr. Frederick Johnson offered the following working definition of networking to the Forum: “Exchanging or sharing knowledge and experience in activities considered to be of mutual benefit to the parties involved”. It was emphasized that, as defined, networking occurs at multiple levels: at the model forest level, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Presentations were followed by Panel discussion on networking mechanisms.

Networking Priorities

Speakers were asked to prepare their presentations for the Forum within the context of the Draft IMFNS Strategic Framework Paper, tabled by the IMFNS for consideration of the Group of 12 Antalya Countries at a meeting held in connection with the Committee on Forestry Meeting (COFO) held in March 1999, in Rome. Discussions to date on model forest networking at the international level have resulted in the identification of the following priority areas:

1. Model Forest Development: Partnership and Capacity-building: The cornerstone of a model forest is an inclusive and effective partnership. As such, significant efforts would be directed to the creation and maintenance of these partnerships. Upon request, the Network would provide the experience of existing model forests and their partnerships in the form of technical assistance and advice to enrich model forest partnerships and assist in building their capacities to manage their programs effectively.

2. Economic Diversification within the MF: A priority objective for the long-term development of a model forest territory is economic diversification within its renewable natural resource sector. Such a focus recognizes the full range of wood and non-wood forest resources that can provide communities with sustainable development options. Efforts would be focused on providing technical assistance to model forests to realize these opportunities.

3. Measuring and Assessing Progress Toward Sustainable Forest Management (SFM): The value of the model forest approach must be demonstrable from a number of perspectives: the model forest organization itself must show that it is an effective vehicle for moving management of forests toward SFM. As well, the economic dividend of SFM must be felt by communities within the model forest territory. Finally, the social and ecological advantages must be made clear and be supported. Efforts would be directed to assisting network members in assessing their own progress toward SFM using generally accepted and newly developed tools.

4. SFM Tools: The decision-support tools available to a model forest partnership will range from complex computer-based systems to simpler systems including surveys and workshops. Whatever the mix of decision support tools used by a model forest they must ultimately be geared to drawing meaningful input and expertise from the full partnership and community. Efforts would be directed to assist model forests to identify and access the tools that are the most appropriate to their circumstances. This would include providing guidance to ensure that adequate training and support is available for their effective use.

5. Special Projects & Initiatives: These would tend to be short duration, highly focused initiatives that may or may not involve the entire network. They may involve regional initiatives, pilot projects, assessments and analyses, training, etc. They will often be done in conjunction and collaboration with other institutions and organizations.

In the main, presenters re-affirmed the high priority accorded these five activities. It was stressed that economic development and diversification should include a variety of support mechanisms, including joint ventures and other initiatives to mobilize resources.

Under the “Special projects” activity, presenters provided a number of specific examples of projects that they see as priority, namely: developing and monitoring local level indicators of sustainability, certification, the development of forest research networking initiatives, and the development of communication and information tools. Numerous points were made around this latter point, and particularly about the need to raise the profile of the IMFN and its model forest members.

Potential Networking Mechanisms

Following the above presentations panel and plenary discussions addressed the question of “how” the priorities identified were best addressed within a network setting: what mechanisms work best, and how mechanisms in place might be improved? Panelists and participants were invited to consider a list of five proposed networking mechanisms drawn from the IMFNS Strategic Framework Paper, and to prioritize and add to them as required.

The areas of networking focus for the IMFN would be supported and facilitated by the following proposed mechanisms:

1. The IMFN Annual Network Meeting: An Annual Network Meeting would be open to country-level and model forest representatives, donors and selected observers. The meeting would provide an opportunity for the network’s governing, executing, and technical bodies to report on their activities and to exchange information and experiences. Workshop and plenary discussions would be employed to facilitate these objectives. The event would also be an opportunity to establish networking priorities and objectives for the forth coming year.

2. Education, Training & Extension Initiatives: These would be an integral part of all of the five networking activities. The goal of the Education, Training & Extension component is to strengthen each model forest through technology transfer within the network, based on the professional strengths of the full model forest network partnership. Given the range and depth of experience across the network, it is acknowledged that model forests themselves will have strong comparative advantages in specific areas. As much as possible then, this experience and expertise would be actively engaged to make the education and training process relevant, accessible and replicable. Priority activities and themes may be identified during the Annual Network Meeting, however, all of the above networking objectives would be actively pursued by the IMFNS and members over the course of a given year.

3. Specialized Workshops: As with Education, Training & Extension activities, specialized workshops would be organized to focus on the transfer of know-how within the network. Topics may include the five principal networking areas of focus described on the previous page but they will tend to be more highly focused, technical and/or regional in nature. Examples of such workshops would be human resource management, decision-making structures and processes, information management, conflict resolution, project reporting, etc. Such workshops could also be used to initiate pilot projects in networking. Specialized workshops should be country or model forest driven.

4. IMFN Reports and Publications: The main purpose of network reports and publications is to broadcast the network's objectives, activities, needs and successes to its direct network constituency and broader strategic network. Topics would focus mainly on the five principal networking objectives but will also include traditional communications items such as event announcements, project profiles, network developments and so forth. Input for reports and publications would be generated within the IMFNS and by network members. All such documents would be made accessible through an on-line reference/documentation centre.

5. A Web-site and Specialized Data-base: Both the proposed Web-site and Specialized Database would be housed on the Internet, with each fulfilling separate but complementary needs: the Web-site would provide general information on the IMFN, while the specialized database would function as an electronic collaboration system, highlighting MF's experiences, lessons learned and potential avenues for collaborative activities.

An unscientific ranking of these mechanisms showed education, training and extension initiatives to be the most highly valued networking mechanism, followed by specialized workshops, and reports and publications. It was proposed that some specialized workshops should be structured around the annual network meeting in order to maximize the effectiveness of both. Mechanisms noted in addition to these three were the following:

1. Web-site and specialized database;
2. Twinning of model forests;
3. Public relations and promotion
4. The creation of formal arrangements, such as Memoranda of Understanding, in support of model forest networking (bilaterally or otherwise); and,
5. The creation or encouragement of active links to other relevant regional or international networks.

What is needed?

Several valuable points were raised during the presentations and discussions which underlined the critical need for networking to be planned and sequenced so that it delivers the desired outputs. Outputs, it was emphasized, must address partner needs and provide measurable benefit for the MF region. Among these points the following were the most salient:

- There is a strong need for a clear understanding of the roles of participants and expectations on all sides from the outset;
- Similarly, there needs to be clear understanding of purpose. It must be a common purpose/desired outcome, and timelines must be compatible;

- The resources available to a networking objective must be commensurate with the identified roles and expected activities/outputs. Conversely, planners must bear in mind resource limitations when planning activities;
- Networking activities should be uncomplicated in process while being clear and realistic in their goals.

How can networking be made to work better?

The panel and Forum participants discussed the task of improving networking based upon all of the foregoing. In some cases discussants reinforced several of the points made in “What is needed” (above), for example identifying areas of mutual interest, defining desired outcomes, and ensuring compatible and realistic timelines. In addition, however, a number of other points were registered for improving the quality of networking. These include the following:

- Separating needs from wants;
- Using appropriate tools and processes;
- Making information available in the language of the user;
- Actively participating in national and international forest policy dialogue;
- Improving documentation and dissemination of lessons learned;
- Maintaining a central Secretariat while also creating regional networks.

Concluding remarks

If a network is to be developed and networking to take place it must address the needs of the partners (at the model forest and network levels) and add greater value to each initiative.

While the Forum succeeded in its aims of identifying networking priorities on a country basis, as well as mechanisms for improving networking, there was not complete airing of perspectives as to what each country is willing to contribute to networking. This should be revisited.

Additionally, a number of important questions were raised which deserve further inquiry:

- To what extent should a given networking mechanism involve non-model forest areas;
- How can the question of language barriers within a network be resolved?
- What is the most efficient way of networking, sharing knowledge and promoting SFM/MFs? Might it be through an expanded Secretariat and Network, through links with other networks and/or initiatives, or through regional networks?

It was noted that there is great value in drawing youth actively into the model forest program and supporting their education in the culture and techniques of sustainable forest management. Networking, in this context, needs to be pro-active and to draw in support and nourish expertise beginning with the local level and with the next generation.

The great majority of participants – including Canadian partners in their network meeting – identified improved communications as a key to the future success of the network. Within the communications theme there are many distinct sub-categories. These include lobbying governments, engaging donors, building effective local partnerships and having resources available in the language of the user.

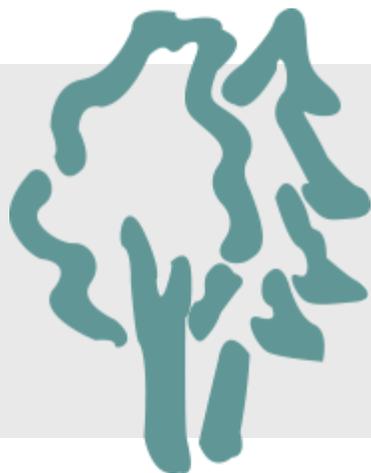
It was advised that the networking priorities and mechanisms identified be kept more flexible at national and international levels, and perhaps in these cases that they be generalized into a common set of “global” networking priorities.

There was also near consensus on the priority need for SFM to provide economic benefit to those whose livelihoods are attached to the MF territory and/or to demonstrate its longer-term economic merit. Network members can play a role in the technology transfer and capacity building necessary to secure those economic

benefits.

A strong local network is needed to achieve consensus on land-use planning and management issues. The point was raised that the partnership-based structure of a model forest brings with it the potential to replace competition with consensus in these areas.

The capacity of the Secretariat and network members realistically to achieve some or all of these networking targets must be considered in any strategy that aims to undertake them. It needs to be recognized by all participants that these networking opportunities will require adequate resource commitments.



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