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Former Forest Agency Leaders From Across the World Call for Transparency, Tenure Reform, and Citizen Involvement in Forest Governance

Eight senior forestry officials make recommendations to forest agencies on how to best prepare the world's remaining forest land for widespread global changes

Washington, D.C. (May 9, 2014)— Eight former leaders of public forest agencies across the world have come together to call for sweeping reforms in the way forest agencies are governed and prepare them for rapid changes in citizens' demands, increased pressure on forest landscapes, and global trends affecting these lands in coming decades.

These leaders are associated with a unique, informal group called MegaFlorestais, which is comprised of current and former heads of forest agencies of the world's most forested countries. The network has met annually since 2006 to discuss challenges and share experiences on critical issues affecting forests and forest peoples, including climate change, market transitions, forest tenure, poverty alleviation, and public governance. The group is meeting this week in Buea, Cameroon, on May 5-9, 2014.

Public forest agencies officially control some 75 percent of the world's forest land, with the vast majority of this land in MegaFlorestais' core group of countries—Australia, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, and the United States.

“Changes in the world's forests are coming at a dramatically faster pace, and new—and sometimes radically different—approaches to forest governance are required to tackle them,” said Tasso Azevedo, former director general of the Brazilian Forest Service.

Azevedo and seven of his fellow former officials co-authored a [think piece](#) highlighting five key recommendations—stemming from the lessons learned during the first nine years of [MegaFlorestais](#)—that forest agencies need to embrace in order to address a future challenged by declining natural forests in the tropics (due largely to deforestation and climate change), fires, pests, droughts and other climate disturbances, as well as expanding investments in mining, agriculture and energy development in forest areas. Future forests everywhere will be younger, simpler in structure, and more fragmented.

“These changes will make forests much more difficult to manage and in many ways much more costly, and the products from them will be less predictable, potentially affecting the supply to markets, employment, the livelihoods of local people, and revenues to governments,” added Sally Collins, former associate chief of the United States Forestry Service, current co-chair of MegaFlorestais, and an RRI Fellow.

Many public forest agencies, including those of Russia and the US, were established more than a century ago and were culturally and organizationally designed for a different time. Nearly 80 percent of the

world's poorest people live in and depend on forests for their livelihoods, and they are often the first in line to be affected by the changes MegaFlorestais is designed to address. Forest governance must transform to meet these emerging challenges.

“Issues such as climate change, increased demand for forest land and products, and rapidly changing market conditions affect forest land, forest agencies, and forest peoples alike,” said Andy White, coordinator of the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), the secretariat of MegaFlorestais since its inception in 2005. “One of the most transformative ways forest agencies can adapt to this rapidly changing environment is to invest in local peoples, and embrace the legal, political, and market systems that affirm local communities’ and Indigenous Peoples’ rights to land and land-based resources.”

The group also points out the need to increase communication and coordination across ministries whose involvement in international dialogues, negotiations, and processes whose outcomes have major impacts on the forested areas of the world:

“Forest ministries alone cannot guarantee the preservation and sustainable management of their forests—other ministries and agencies play pivotal roles in related decision making processes, such as the ongoing climate change negotiations, REDD+ and carbon sequestration, and bilateral trade agreements like the European Union’s agreements on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade,” said Doug Konkin, former Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, British Columbia, Canada. “These globally pervasive issues have to be tackled together—and not just by the forest ministries of the world. We must productively engage with our fellow countrymen; those other ministries and agencies in our own countries whose decisions deeply affect forest land, forest use, and forest people.”

All eight former officials and ministers believe that the following five principles are essential for forest agencies across the world to guide the future of effective forest governance in the 21st century:

- 1. Transparency in governance:** Data on forests should be freely available and easily accessible to citizens, who must have a voice in creating and adapting the forest plans, strategies, laws, and regulations that affect them. There should be clear and fair grievance procedures for resolving disagreements.
- 2. Clarification of tenure (land rights and ownership):** Recognizing the rights of communities and Indigenous Peoples is an essential step in advancing human rights, alleviating poverty in forest areas, and preserving forest land. It will also inspire public and investor confidence. Public forest agencies should be willing partners and leaders in policy changes on tenure.
- 3. Inclusive governance:** Governmental systems that effectively engage citizens in forest management make more resilient and sustainable decisions because of the trust and support inclusive governance brings. Organizational structures, policies, plans, and regulations must be designed to actively engage all stakeholders in forest governance. Key best practices include using technology to reach citizens in remote areas; developing regulations that can be readily understood and enforced; engaging forest users in monitoring and enforcement; and establishing effective citizen/stakeholder advisory boards to incorporate wide-ranging perspectives.
- 4. Evolution of forest agencies:** Public forest agency leaders must be accountable to citizens for the effectiveness and efficiency with which they are managing their forests. Many agencies are

considering how to restructure to serve the growing class of new forest owners, and they are shifting from a focus on managing public lands to enabling the sound management of forests by communities. Policies in the mining, water and agricultural sectors often undermine policies on forests and forest-dependent communities. Such conflicting policies must be reconciled.

- 5. New skills for forest leaders:** Across the world, public forest agency leaders are facing challenges unlike any they have faced before; they must hone their skills and those of their staff if they are to lead effectively. They operate now in a global environment, where a change in policy or regulation in one country can have international, even global, impacts. Public forest agency leaders must therefore understand the global complexities of human rights, community organizations and enterprises, global trade, and emerging trends in new technologies, markets, and climate change.

“While the best approach is likely to differ among countries, the convening power of public forest agencies should not be underestimated,” said Collins. She and her fellow authors believe that this power can be used to proactively engage other land-based ministries, citizens, and the private sector actors with whom those ministries work, to ensure that rational and transparent decisions on land and land use are made and, in the process, local peoples’ rights are protected.

“Clearly this century will bring unprecedented changes to the world’s forests. Forest agencies can either positively influence this future or become casualties of it,” Collins concluded.

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MEGAFLORESTAIS

MegaFlorestais is an informal network of public forest agency leaders dedicated to advancing international dialogue and exchange on transitions in forest governance, forest industry, and the roles of public forest agencies. The group includes the heads of forestry agencies of the largest forested countries in the world, and provides the opportunity for these leaders to share their experiences and challenges in a frank and open manner. The process aims to foster stronger relationships between forest agencies, collectively strengthening their abilities to play leading roles in addressing forest governance and sustainable forestry issues. For more information, please visit: www.megaflorestais.org.

THE RIGHTS AND RESOURCES INITIATIVE

The Rights and Resources (RRI) Initiative acts as the Secretariat of the MegaFlorestais network. RRI is a global coalition of 14 Partners and over 140 international, regional and community organizations advancing forest tenure, policy and market reforms. RRI leverages the strategic collaboration and investment of its Partners and Collaborators around the world by working together on research, advocacy, and convening strategic actors to catalyze change on the ground. RRI is coordinated by the Rights and Resources Group, a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC. For more information, please visit: www.rightsandresources.org.