

MegaFlorestais: A STRATEGIC VISION FOR 2016-2021

MegaFlorestais, an informal network of public forest agency leaders, was founded in 2005 and has met annually since. It has played an important role in accelerating sharing and learning between forest agencies over the last 11 years. This strategy is built upon the MegaFlorestais assessment of 2014, a 2016 brainstorming meeting to craft a new vision for the network, and discussions at the 2016 MegaFlorestais meeting in China.

Mission, approach and core values of the MegaFlorestais network:

Our Mission:

Focusing on the ten most forested countries in the world,¹ MegaFlorestais is an informal network of public forest agency leaders dedicated to furthering leadership and fostering international dialogue and innovation on transitions in forest governance, the ecological and social value of forests, forest industry, and the roles of public forest agencies. It aims at building stronger relationships and collectively strengthening forest governance and sustainable forest management into the future.

Our Approach:

MegaFlorestais is a truly unique forum. It links change agents of forest agencies and helps them to improve forest governance and find solutions to challenges. It has quickly become an effective tool to accelerate learning, innovation, and implementation of a common suite of new policy issues among forest agencies in three ways:

- **INFORM:** Create a framework enabling forest leaders to exchange experiences and ideas in an open and frank setting, influence their vision of the world, and come away with new concepts, approaches or policies that are useful in addressing the challenges they are facing. Expose leaders to cutting-edge information about the latest global trends affecting the forest sector.
- **INFLUENCE:** Promote the implementation of new practices and policies for strengthened forest governance. Enable Leaders to be better informed and equipped for national and international negotiations. Contribute to strengthening and growing more efficient and resilient forest agencies and agency leaders.
- **IMPACT:** Reinforce their ability to anticipate emerging issues and help generate and disseminate lessons and best practices that can be used by other countries (e.g. publications and side events in key fora). Accelerate innovation and implementation of actions that support key policy objectives.

¹ MegaFlorestais countries are Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, DR Congo, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Sweden and the USA. They collectively represent over 65% of the world's forests.

Our History:

MegaFlorestais was created in 2005 by a small group of government forest agency leaders that met at a conference in Beijing, China, convened by Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), the State Forestry Administration (SFA) of China and the Chinese Center for Agriculture Policy (CCAP) to discuss public forest tenure reform. These leaders from Brazil, China, Mexico, and the US reflected on the few opportunities they had to discuss the real issues facing forests in their respective countries, problems like climate change; forest ecosystem health; volatile forest products markets and their impact on forest management; deforestation and conversion of forest land from multiple pressures; demand for forest land for uses other than forestry; and the decline in support for forest agencies within their own governments. Forest leaders saw great value in meeting, sharing ideas, discussing challenges, and learning from one another in an informal, honest and safe environment, one not dictated by politics or political correctness, placed under the Chatham House rules. Since 2006, the group has been expanding and meeting annually.

Our Core Principles:

Regardless of the differences in public forest agencies—institutional age, organizational structure and even the political system in which they operate—MegaFlorestais Leaders believe in a core set of principles:

- **Continuous learning** and the importance of building individual and organizational connections that promote peer learning and the sharing of both good and bad experiences on common issues, innovations and solutions to inter-jurisdictional issues, are essential. To be effective, MegaFlorestais should remain small but, through example, seek to expand its impact and influence beyond core countries, and take advantage of key opportunities (e.g., be used as an incubator for trainings and learnings).
- **Forests are important** by virtue of new commitments to deliver on the Paris Agreement and the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)², among others, and will play a much greater than anticipated role in addressing multiple global challenges and concerns in the coming decades. Forests contribute to community health and well-being and sustained forest-based economic growth. Given their important role, forest agencies must be successfully led organizations and must be able to adapt and learn. This requires that we, as Leaders, have a strong understanding of the global environment and global trends that impact forest conservation and the forest sector. We must also promote good governance by preparing future forest conservation leaders and strengthening transparency, accountability, and community engagement. We must push for continual improvement and, in certain circumstances, organizational and program changes, to better position forest agencies to face climate change and other major challenges for the future.
- **Transparency and inclusion of all citizens is essential to good forest governance.** Governmental systems that effectively engage citizenship and stakeholders are able to make more resilient, informed and sustainable decisions because of the trust and support that can result from inclusive governance.
- **Leadership is key to change:** investing in current and upcoming leaders and promoting the adoption of new skills by forest agency staff will be essential to equip them for future

² On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit — officially came into force. The SDGs build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. For more information, visit <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>.

challenges and to ensure enduring effective governance of public forest agencies. Leaders must set ambitious goals and lead their organizations and political leaders towards them, in order to respond to the challenges facing the world's future.

- **Clarification of tenure (land rights and ownership) is a priority** and a key step for governments in promoting effective governance. Public forest agencies should be willing partners and leaders in policy changes on forest tenure.

New context, challenges and opportunities:

- There is a growing demand from consumers and pressures on companies to fight illegal timber harvest and request legality, zero deforestation policies and cleaner supply chains. This culminated in the broad endorsement of the New York Declaration on Forest (2014).³
- The global sustainable development agenda agreed to in September 2015 clearly calls for global and landscape-scale approaches to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development. The role of forests in meeting these objectives must be understood and emphasized.
- In the Paris Agreement, the world's nations agree in principle to limit global warming to well below 2°C and many countries flag the importance of forests in their nationally determined contributions to move towards that goal.

All these represent a great opportunity for forest agencies to be part of decisions and negotiations at the national and international levels. The role of forests in social stability, addressing poverty and mitigating climate change is acknowledged. Within this context, there are many challenges and opportunities for forest agencies to reposition themselves and rethink their work and approaches. By connecting forest agency leaders around the world, MegaFlorestais remains an invaluable tool as the work of forest management agencies respond to these challenges and opportunities.

The future of the MegaFlorestais network:

Given the upcoming opportunities and challenges, MegaFlorestais remains a much needed initiative and forest agencies around the world continue to want to learn, exchange, and discuss among peers their ideas and concerns. A new framework of engagement is being proposed to guide our actions over the next 5 years to ensure the network's effectiveness and added value.

Key elements for success:

We have identified two key elements that will be essential for the success of MegaFlorestais going forward:

- **Engagement of influential leaders:** as emphasized in the MegaFlorestais assessment of 2014, having a "critical mass of leaders" is crucial to the value of the meetings. Going

³ The New York Declaration on Forests is a voluntary and non-legally binding political declaration which grew out of dialogue among governments, companies and civil society, spurred by the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Summit held in New York in 2014. Read the full Action Statement: <http://www.un.org/climatechange/summit/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/07/New-York-Declaration-on-Forest-%E2%80%93-Action-Statement-and-Action-Plan.pdf>. Consulted on January 29th, 2016.

forward, consistency in participation of influential leaders (either the leaders themselves or their immediate deputy) is needed and stricter guidelines for participation will be enforced.

- **Co-ownership of the network:** stemming from the previous point, MegaFlorestais won't succeed unless agencies and their Leaders become more involved and willing to contribute more actively to the network, not only at the time of the annual meeting but throughout the year.

Tools and activities:

We identified a diverse set of tools and activities aiming at maximizing the network's impact, strengthening relationships between core countries, and building a stronger sense of ownership to keep Leaders more engaged throughout the year. While the Secretariat can provide support and lead some activities, the full potential of MegaFlorestais will only be achieved if all Leaders and core countries are more actively engaged and willing to jointly work together to increase our impact on forests worldwide.

Cultivate leadership and promote peer to peer learnings and exchanges:

- Between MegaFlorestais Leaders: there is consensus that Annual Meetings of MegaFlorestais are essential to engage top leaders and build relationships. Leaders should also take advantage of key international events to meet whenever possible.
- Between the next generation of MegaFlorestais Leaders: Leaders all agree that engaging the next generation is key and they highly valued the seminar that has focused on these emerging leaders since 2010. We suggest to continue with it, if funding allows, and explore ways to connect next generation alumni from different countries (a similar project between Canada and the US is underway).
- Within agencies: Leaders should systematically promote dissemination of learnings from the meetings within their organizations, take advantage of the next generation course to develop a mentoring relationships with alumni, and promote exchanges between alumni.
- Between agencies: Agencies could organize post-meeting continuous learning sessions (virtual or in-person) on specific topics of interest to share research and challenges, support the development of communities of practice or specific exchanges/study tours to accelerate learning (e.g. visit of a delegation from Indonesia to Brazil to learn about the Amazon Fund in 2009). Agencies could learn from cross-sectoral initiatives around issues of mutual benefit, between the municipal water sector and forestry, for example (the SUNASS project in Lima, Peru).

Promote and increase the impact of MegaFlorestais by engaging external audiences:

- Highlight the role of forests in solving society's problems and contribution to economic development, and make the case for the forest sector's role in a transition to a green economy (e.g., demonstrate how it contributes to wider national and international development goals and communicate this to the public, policy makers and other sectors).
- Increase efforts and synergies around projects or topics of interest at the national and regional levels, through events, meetings or any other appropriate tools, capitalizing on the current global attention to forests.
- Increase awareness of the work MegaFlorestais is doing with additional countries, key institutions and donors (refer to it on a panel or discussion, organize side events during international meetings, accept to represent MegaFlorestais during conferences, etc.).

- Continue to produce and actively disseminate publications promoting best practices and lessons learned like the one on “Rethinking Forest Regulations, Overcoming the challenges of regulatory reform” (2016).

Widening and enriching the discussion:

- Engage with civil society: Organize next generation seminars that would include both public forest agency officials and indigenous and/or community leaders to promote a better understanding and collaboration; Invite civil society representatives or indigenous and community leaders to be part of annual meetings of MegaFlorestais; Use connections made during meetings to deepen relationships, shared values and work more collaboratively.
- Better connect with public and private initiatives and actors that are committed to sustainable forest management and zero deforestation policies (e.g., the Interlaken Group⁴, the International Land and Forest Tenure Facility⁵). Use connections made during MegaFlorestais meetings or through the MegaFlorestais network of contacts to identify mutual interests with private sector companies (e.g. discussions between the US Forest Service and Nestlé on watershed stewardship; collaboration between the Cameroonian Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife and TMP Systems on the Dryad project that channels support to community forestry enterprises).
- Collaborate more actively across agencies/ministries (e.g., agriculture, land, mining, environment, energy, water): Since the greatest sources of deforestation in the world lie outside of the forest sector, there is great value in breaking down traditional organizational silos and exploring collaboration with the sectors having an impact on forests and their stakeholders to include them as part of the solution. Explore topics that are at the intersection of various sectors (e.g., urban forestry, watershed management).

Leverage the expertise and reputation of the network of former MegaFlorestais Leaders:

Use this network as resource (advisors, key speakers, access to a broader network of contacts, etc.) and as a powerful tool to convey key messages they can provide as former government forest sector leaders (as was done in 2 publications already: “Public forest agencies in the twenty-first century: Driving change through transparency, tenure reform, citizen involvement and improved governance” (2014) and “Ten Years of MegaFlorestais: A Public Forest Agency Leaders’ Retrospective” (2016)). Another idea would be that countries could solicit their help on key issues. Some of them would be advisors on technical assistance teams and the Secretariat would then support them to develop practical guidelines to share lessons learned more broadly.

Provide technical assistance to other forest agencies that are not part of MegaFlorestais:

Requests to provide assistance and share expertise with other forest agencies facing specific issues/challenges that have been tackled by some of their members could be made to the MegaFlorestais Secretariat that would then identify the most relevant agencies that might want to be involved. This assistance could take different forms, such as a learning exchange, policy assistance, workshops, or regional meetings.

More targeted communication: The Secretariat is currently developing a communications strategy to more effectively engage members of the MegaFlorestais network and to better promote the work being done by the network.

- Internal communications: increased use of available communications tools (website and blog at www.megaflorestais.org; LinkedIn Group; list serve) to share specific information

⁴ For more information, visit <http://www.interlakengroup.org/>.

⁵ For more information, visit <http://thetenurefacility.org/>.

relevant to the network's activities and interests, or the work done by forest agencies themselves (significant internal initiatives, policies, or programs, relevant speeches, papers, etc.).

- External communications: we all should be advocates and promote current MegaFlorestais tools and publications.

Better document impact and achievements:

- Better track and measure quantitative and qualitative impact of MegaFlorestais engagements and information exchange to the quality of forest management activities and practices (recognizing that some policy changes take time and may span over several years). Leaders should provide key input to the Secretariat so they can measure impact effectively and thoroughly.
- Focus on impact stories/storytelling to show ongoing efforts and successes.

Governance:

In terms of organization and governance, we recommend that the functions and role of the Secretariat remain the same as no concerns were raised, and RRI is willing to keep playing that role. Similarly, the current co-chairs system with one active and one former Leader should remain the same. We recognize that current leaders are often too busy to facilitate the signing of correspondence and managing some of the day-to-day operations with the Secretariat, leaving much of that to the former leader/co-chair.

In an attempt to make the co-ownership of the network more visible and effective, we propose the following options (which are not mutually exclusive):

- Establishing subgroups of current Leaders dedicated to specific topics (e.g., fostering engagement with the next generation, working on a publication to highlight the importance of forests, keeping track of key innovations in the forest sector).
- Creating a steering group of current Leaders that would collectively be responsible for making decisions on the governance of MegaFlorestais and its key annual activities.
- Promoting the signature of letters of intent/Memorandum of Understanding between RRI, as the Secretariat of MegaFlorestais, and different forest agencies to formally recognize the ongoing cooperation and engagement to the MegaFlorestais network, in line with the agreement signed in 2014 the European Forest Institute and the U.S. Forest Service. This would considerably strengthen funding proposals and make MegaFlorestais more appealing to donors.

Funding:

Until now, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) has been the main funder of the MegaFlorestais network, aside from a grant from the US Forest Service, host countries covering local costs of the MegaFlorestais annual meeting, and developing countries covering travel and lodging expenses for their participants in the different meetings. RRI's commitment averaged about US\$500,000 a year over the last 5 years (with about \$300,000 for programmatic activities and \$200,000 for consultants and staff time). Funding, however, will significantly decrease starting in 2016 due to a global reduction of official development aid for forestry and development, and it is likely that this trend will continue. In this context, and with grants that are increasingly tied to specific activities, RRI will not be in a position to support MegaFlorestais unless additional resources are committed.

Given this situation, Leaders agreed during the 11th annual meeting in China to measures that will encourage fair, distributed ownership of the network through collective leadership and by ensuring event costs are managed as equitably as possible. To this end, a new funding model was developed for your consideration, acknowledging the differing situation countries are in based on the UN income classification per country:

Country	Airfare	Lodging & Meals	Conference Costs*	Sponsor low-income country**
High and upper middle income	✓	✓	✓	Optional
Lower Middle Income	✓	✓	RRI or local host	
Low Income	***			

* An equal share of overall conference costs (speakers, logistics, interpretation, local transportation room rental, etc.), which could be billed as tuition or conference costs for the event. If billed as tuition, the Secretariat would then send an official diploma to each participant.

** Full or partial sponsorship of the travel, accommodation and conference costs for a low-income country or delegation of their choice (Countries willing to sponsor a delegation will inform the MegaFlorestais Secretariat **6** months prior to the event).

*** Incentives will be provided for low income countries to pay a reasonable portion of their costs, but the MegaFlorestais Secretariat would look to establish options for sponsorship by RRI or developed countries, as needed.

To raise additional funds for MegaFlorestais, RRI, as the Secretariat of MegaFlorestais, is also proposing to approach traditional donors, foundations and climate funds. However, it is quite clear that promoting the co-ownership of the network will make funding proposals more solid and appealing to donors; this is why all MegaFlorestais Leaders will be expected to contribute more actively to this effort by:

- Helping the Secretariat document impact;
- Informing the Secretariat of new funding opportunities and helping RRI explore them;
- Signing with RRI a Memorandum of Understanding or letter of intent outlining agency support and commitment to MegaFlorestais.

Another option discussed during the Vision Meeting is to have forest agencies of developed countries contribute to their fair “share” of the Secretariat’s costs. Not only would this option ensure MegaFlorestais has sufficient funding to pursue its core activities, but it would certainly prove the importance of this initiative to other donors and strengthen the value of the funding proposal.

The above funding options will be tested and further explored in the coming years with the aim of having a long-term solution for funding by the end of the 5-year period.