

Trust as the most precious resource for forest agencies

Key findings from the 2017 - MegaFlorestais meeting

British Columbia, Canada | October 15 – 20, 2017

The 2017 meeting of MegaFlorestais convened forest agency leaders from eight of the world's most forested countries—Canada, the United States, Brazil, Peru, Sweden, the DRC, Cameroon, and China—for a weeklong series of meetings, exchanges, and field visits in British Columbia, Canada.

The meeting focused on social and technical innovations to more effectively advance forest agencies' roles in promoting sustainable forests and communities. This included discussions on six key topics: the opportunities and challenges of creating a sustainable bioeconomy; the importance of collaboration and embracing new technological and institutional innovations in forestry; the need to strengthen community tenure in order to prevent or resolve land-related conflict; the importance of encouraging and promoting community forest enterprises (CFEs) to create more vibrant economies locally and nationally around forest resources; the need to holistically address gender justice in forestry; and the overarching theme of the effectiveness of fostering collaboration and trust among diverse interests within forestry in order to resolve complex, value-laden issues.

Participants made tentative plans to hold exchanges between MegaFlorestais forest agencies and conduct a learning event on the roles of forest agencies in clarifying forest and land tenure. At the end of the meeting, participants discussed what had been achieved and what they had learned from the meetings—as well as what they stood to gain from the next meeting in Sweden, in the summer of 2018.

Glenn Mason, co-Chair of MegaFlorestais and Assistant Deputy Minister with the Canadian Forest Service-Natural Resources Canada, summed up how the network achieves its results, noting that “trust and collaboration is the key to success for all of us in forestry going forward.”

Key findings

- **The need to construct a sustainable bioeconomy** will be an important opportunity and goal for forest agency leaders for the foreseeable future. Forest agencies will play a key role in managing the sustainable production of natural resources going forward and helping to ensure forestry's contribution to reducing carbon emissions and adapting to climate change. Participants agreed that given the scope of the economic, environmental, and human rights challenges facing forest communities, the need to work with communities to construct sustainable bioeconomies is more urgent than ever. Forest agencies are starting to recognize the value of innovations in the bioeconomy: for instance, the U.S. Forest Service has [encouraged](#) community enterprises to use wood biomass for heating schools in Alaska. Participants also looked forward to further work on this topic at the next MegaFlorestais meeting in Sweden in 2018.
- **Technical and social innovations are essential to the future of forestry** and the role of forest agencies. For instance, the use of drones as a technology to map forestlands more precisely can play a role in clarifying the cadaster and helping to resolve land-related disputes going forward. Institutional innovations such as collaboration between Indigenous Peoples, civil society, the government, universities, and community forest enterprises can also help advance the livelihoods of forest communities. Innovations within the forest industry—such as improving the yields of plantation crops with modified species, or using Lidar technology to monitor

appropriate areas for logging—can improve efficiency and outcomes for a wide range of actors. During a showcase of innovations in forestry, Canadian not-for-profit company FP Innovations demonstrated the potential of [innovations](#) in the timber industry that has made creating tall buildings out of wood feasible. Promoting women and minority representation and leadership towards full equality is also an important step towards strengthening institutions.

- **Recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and forest communities to their forests is a key strategy for preventing or resolving land-related disputes.** In the 1990s and 2000s, Canada's Great Bear Rainforest had been the site of a dispute between First Nations communities who had never ceded the territory and private companies seeking to log the area—further complicated by the involvement of environmental NGOs and the government of British Columbia. While the conflict had once seemed intractable and the positions of these four actors at odds, over time and as a result of a process to foster trust between stakeholders, all sides came to a satisfactory agreement in 2016. The [presentation](#) on this conflict and its resolution underscored the importance of government and private concession holder recognition of the customary tenure rights of the First Nations communities involved in the dispute. Another example of the role forest agencies can play in resolving land conflict and improving conservation came from Brazil, where the Brazilian Forest Service's new [Rural and Environmental Cadaster](#) (Cadastro Ambiental Rural) has laid the groundwork for clarifying rural land ownership.
- **The value of encouraging CFEs as a way of generating sustainable growth for communities and countries.** One [presentation](#) noted that such enterprise (formal and informal) currently generates between approximately US \$869 billion and US \$1.29 trillion in value globally for these communities each year. Thus, promoting and supporting such enterprises can play a crucial role in sustaining and generating prosperous livelihoods for forest communities. And in spite of various policy and regulatory constraints, some agencies are encouraging CFEs as a way of improving both forests and local communities. In Cameroon, for instance, local civil society organizations have worked with communities to catalyze and scale honey production.
- **The urgent need to address gender justice in forestry.** Presentations from leaders and invitees focused on the key role that women in forest communities play in managing forest resources as well as the fact that in many countries forest and land laws do not provide equal rights to women to own or access forests, to have a role in their governance, or to own or manage forest enterprises. Among other solutions, leaders agreed on the need to address the lack of legal protections for indigenous and rural women and the need for greater representation of women within forest agencies. Presentations also underscored the benefits that communities and countries can reap when women are empowered as forest managers, exemplified by the success of [women-led community forest enterprises](#) that have boosted incomes for entire communities throughout central and western Africa.
- **The key role of collaboration and trust in forestry.** The week's discussions dealt with the broad array of interests at work within the forestry sector, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, local and national governments, private companies and investors, and civil society and environmental NGOs. National forest agencies must play a central role in fostering trust and collaboration between all these actors—and with their counterparts internationally—in order to affect positive change within forestry globally. The example of Canada's [Great Bear Rainforest](#) offered a concrete example of how such collaboration can create winning outcomes for all actors, even where it is not clear that the different actors' interests will align.

The participants traveled to Quadra Island in British Columbia, where representatives from the Canadian Forest Service, the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural

Development, and local stakeholders shared insights on forest management, sustainable exploitation, and the resolution of tenure disputes with First Nations communities. This was followed by in-depth presentations over the next several days on community forest enterprises, trends in the global market for timber and forest products, the global bioeconomy, a new digitalized land cadaster in Brazil, and how forest agencies can promote resiliency in forests and forest management.

Participants also learned from the people and history around them in British Columbia. In the case of the Great Bear Rainforest, **all parties agreed with the legitimacy and primacy of First Nations land rights—even when those rights have not yet been formally recognized in the law or official policy—and adjusted their positions to ensure respect for community aspirations and roles on leading development in the Great Bear Rainforest.** Remarkably, representatives from the four constituencies involved—First Nations communities, logging companies, environmental NGOs, and the government of British Columbia—recounted this story together to the assembled participants, who remarked on the lessons that this history could bring to bear on their own contexts; as one participant noted in reaction to this story, “no one stakeholder can do what they want—rather, through the process of solving conflicts, one finds a balance of interests.”

The meeting ended with a review of the proposals and commitments to follow up, including a workshop to share experiences on the role of forest agencies in securing community land tenure, in collaboration between the Brazilian Forest Service and the [Tenure Facility](#), and technical exchanges on community forest enterprises hosted by the Peruvian forest agency, in collaboration with the Rights and Resources Initiative and Rainforest Alliance.