Reflect &act

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OVERVIEW

IIED Natural Resources Group

Project name:
Forest Connect

Project leader:
Duncan Macqueen

Time frame:
April 2012 – September 2014

Objective:
To avoid deforestation and reduce poverty by better linking sustainable, locally controlled, forest enterprises to each other, to markets, to service providers and to policy processes.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Poor rural people can't afford to stop clearing forests unless they have a more profitable way to make a sustainable living from them. Forest Connect is an ad hoc alliance of organisations who support locally controlled forest enterprises to do just that. Co-managed by IIED, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, and the Center for People and Forests, the alliance directly supports member organisations in 15 countries. Members assist a range of locally controlled forest enterprises, exchange practical tactics, capture guidance in toolkits, and develop strategies for joint work. Forest Connect also offers an open online platform where over 1,000 members from 94 countries have been sharing their experiences and resources.

CHANGE IN ACTION

Eight in-country prioritisation exercises and one international workshop in 2013 allowed Forest Connect members to assess whether to support some enterprise types over others. Members ranked the impact of different enterprise types against six criteria linked to their impact on climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation, soil fertility enhancement, gender balanced income generation, food security and energy security. Because members led this process, they designed evaluation methods to suit their own context and shared these different approaches at the workshop. The exchange of ideas increased everyone's

Focusing support for locally controlled forest enterprise

Funding to Forest Connect led to diagnosis of effective investments, clarified our strategy and attracted new members

If local people in developing countries cannot make a living from the forest around them, many will clear the land for farming or other uses. Organisations in the Forest Connect alliance work in 15 countries to help build profitable, locally controlled forest enterprises. A perennial challenge is the limited resources available for the intensive engagements across a wide area that are required. Funds from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) are partly used to do this. At a DFID-funded workshop, Forest Connect members broadened their understanding of how best to prioritise resource use and expanded Forest Connect's regional membership in critical forest areas.

Workshop participants undertook a prioritisation exercise, which building on the alliance's earlier work. Organisations in the alliance have backed a wide variety of enterprise types: timber and ecotourism in Guatemala, charcoal and wood fuel in Ghana, honey and coffee in Ethiopia, baobab juice in Mali, bamboo furniture and coconut-husk craft in Mozambique, among others. Many projects successfully connect isolated forest people with potential business partners and buyers, business and financial services, and policymakers. But resource constraints mean that what cannot be supported usually dwarfs what can. The alliance needed to weigh up the benefits of support to different enterprise

types — should members focus support on fewer types with better impact or keep their options broad? One key issue is that forest enterprises are expected to deliver against multiple criteria — both environmental (climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation and soil fertility enhancement) and social (gender-balanced income generation, food security and energy security).

Focus or keep options open?

IIED asked eight alliance members to answer this question themselves, using at least the six listed criteria in order to think deeply about their strategies, exchange creative approaches and own the solutions they reached together. Each team decided independently how to categorise enterprise types and then how to weight the criteria. Meeting in Nepal in February 2013, they shared and discussed findings, and jointly agreed a strategy for the way ahead.

Although their methods differed, the country presentations reached a common conclusion. No one subsector delivers on all criteria — instead, every country needs a portfolio of complementary enterprises. The team from Tanzania portrayed this graphically, showing that different kinds of enterprises could be layered together to provide all the desired benefits (see Figure). For example, timber plantations in Tanzanian forests would boost incomes

capacity to target support, and in discussing their results the alliance reached agreement on long-term strategy and important next steps. This gives IIED the opportunity to help resource an alliance-owned vision. The agenda also drew in new partners to extend the reach of Forest Connect to new regions. DFID funds also continued to finance on-the-ground work by new and existing members.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- Forest Connect members help remote forest people develop the business skills and connections they need. But the high costs of reaching such groups raise the stakes in choices about what to fund.

- Asking member organisations to rank the most beneficial subsectors of forest enterprise against multiple criteria allowed them to learn from each other and think through what to prioritise.

- The alliance concluded that no one enterprise subsector can furnish all that is expected from forest landscapes. It will therefore be necessary to equip teams with the capacity to support portfolios comprising multiple enterprise types not focus in on one subsector.

- Capturing and sharing a compendium of successful business models, and how they were enabled, across multiple enterprise types, was agreed as a highly sought resource that IIED should develop.

PARTNERS' VIEW

The Kathmandu Forest Connect workshop aided the 'Enhancing Livelihoods and Markets' thematic area of RECOFTC - The Center for People and Forests, to increase its focus on identifying and prioritising the fundamentals of viable pro-poor community forestry business models practiced in the Asia-Pacific region. One result of this is that RECOFTC is working on identifying best practices in pro-poor business models in the region, and the workshop in Kathmandu allowed us to work with Forest Connect Asia partners and community members to shape our planned work.

Martin Greijmans
Enhanced Livelihoods & Markets
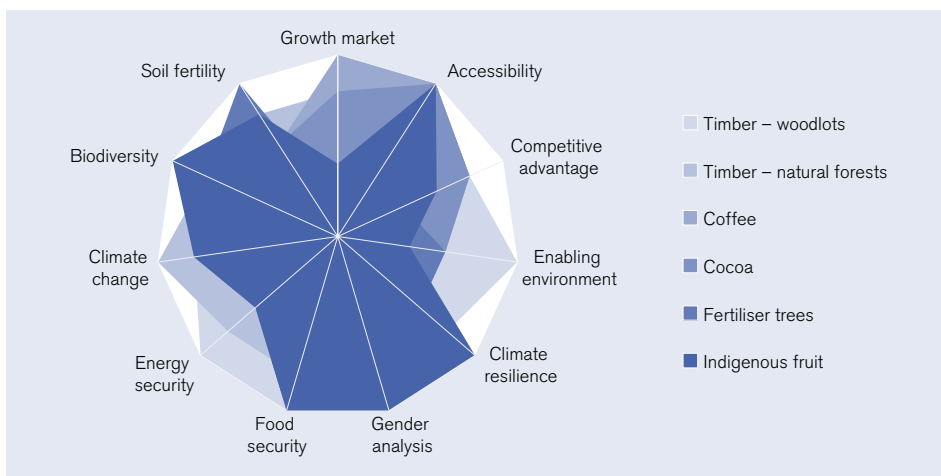
Forest Connect members came to a common conclusion that different kinds of forest enterprises can be layered together to provide all the desired benefits. (Figure by Simon Milledge, IIED).

more than domestication of native fruit trees, but fruit enterprises do more to improve biodiversity and climate resilience.

The general conclusion on the value of portfolios of complementary locally controlled enterprises, which deliver multiple goods (both locally and globally), cannot be overemphasised. It flies in the face of policies favouring large-scale monotypic land uses on economic efficiency grounds alone.

Other lessons could also be drawn. The Burkina Faso group, for instance, evaluated different land management options for each forest product. In the case of fuelwood, their analysis compared harvesting from naturally regenerating trees, intensive agroforestry or dedicated wood lots, and emphasised how the choice of production method alters the benefits.

By comparing different approaches, further insights emerged — for example on the value of balanced views in ranking different criteria. Nepal was one of the countries with an expert-led analysis more weighted toward technical issues such as biodiversity, whereas the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) surveyed communities, who focused on income and food security.

Next steps

After building capacity to set priorities and learning how different sectors complement one another, the group agreed on next steps. To nurture a variety of beneficial forest enterprises, what the alliance needs most is detailed examples of successful business models in all sectors. IIED is seeking funds to create a compendium of these models.

The prioritisation workshop also attracted new Forest Connect members

from forest-rich areas such as Mexico, Brazil and DRC. We also wanted to reach new partners in Southeast Asia, and invited the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC) from Thailand and Vietnam along with groups from Cambodia and Myanmar to discuss these prospects. This led to the decision to add RECOFTC to the alliance's management team. A follow-up meeting led by RECOFTC in August 2013 developed Forest Connect activities in Asia. IIED has channelled DFID grant funds to help start work on small forest enterprises in Myanmar, as well as financing ongoing projects in Ghana and Guyana.

The strategic visioning supported by DFID positions Forest Connect strongly to influence powerful forest agendas. For example, the alliance's models for getting people out of poverty while conserving forests are relevant to REDD+. Formalising such enterprises will also be critical to ensuring that domestic markets do not undermine the legality assurance schemes that are now required for export trade with the European Union. Spreading successful and locally controlled business models across a range of enterprise types will make a major contribution to such agendas.

Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.