

ITTO Tropical Forest

UPDATE

A newsletter from the International Tropical Timber Organization to promote the conservation and sustainable development of tropical forests

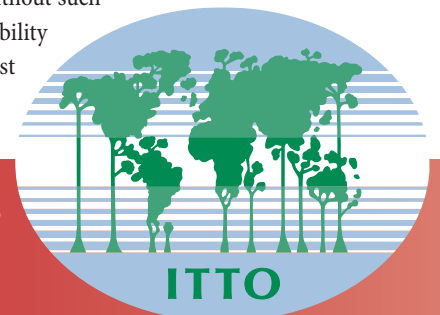


Owning forest in Asia

Forest-tenure reform is coming to Asia. It has already arrived in China—there, 58% of forests are now owned by communities. Asia-wide, just under one-quarter of the total forest estate is owned by communities and indigenous groups, and another 3% is designated for use by them (see page 8).

Some countries lag behind, however. In Indonesia, for example, less than 1% of the forest estate has been designated for use by communities, and none is owned by them. Laws governing tenure are unclear and usually disadvantage communities. Often, large companies—forest concessionaires, miners and

developers of industrial plantations—are given rights to forest land that is under the customary ownership of communities and indigenous peoples. This can lead to conflict, including violent conflict, and there is no effective mechanism for resolving disputes. A lack of dialogue between government, concessionaires and communities greatly reduces the likelihood of effective forest-tenure reform. And without such reform there is no real possibility of achieving sustainable forest management.



Special edition ▶ *International Conference on Forest Tenure, Governance and Enterprise: Experiences and Opportunities for Asia in a Changing Context*

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In July 2011, ITTO, the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry combined to host, on the island of Lombok, the *International Conference on Forest Tenure, Governance and Enterprise: Experiences and Opportunities for Asia in a Changing Context*. It is the third of a series of such conferences: the first was held in Acre, Brazil, in 2007 and the second in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in 2009.

The conference was attended by about 300 participants from Indonesia and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region (Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam), Europe, Africa and the Americas. Participants comprised representatives of governments, civil society, local communities, traditional authorities, regional and global organizations, and donors.

One of the prerequisites for resolving conflicts and injustice associated with forest tenure is political will. It is becoming clear that while this is increasing in some countries in Asia, it is yet to manifest in others. Forest-tenure reform is never likely to be easy, but done well it can solve, reduce or at least bring to light many deep-seated problems—such as those related to gender (page 15). It can also create opportunities for communities, the private sector and nations to simultaneously increase wealth and reduce forest loss and degradation (page 19 and page 21). Participatory mapping is increasingly being used to distinguish customary rights; it also helps to prepare communities to manage the rights that such processes help them acquire (page 25).

The offer made by the Government of Indonesia during the 46th session of the International Tropical Timber Council in November 2010 to host the Lombok conference was a signal that Indonesia is ready and willing to tackle forest-tenure reform. A further sign was the presence at the conference of Indonesia's Vice-President, Boediono, the country's Minister of Forestry, Zulkifli Hasan, and the head of the

President's Special Delivery Unit, Kuntoro Mangkusubroto.

Many in Indonesian civil society were skeptical. It was just window-dressing, they thought. Nevertheless, by the end of the conference they had begun to change their tune (see 'Closing comments' on page 32). The conference was an opportunity for leaders of disaffected communities to air their grievances to an international audience, but it also enabled officials of the Government of Indonesia to make overtures to such communities and to commit to a multi-stakeholder dialogue. A meaningful process to address forest tenure is now a real possibility in Indonesia.

Conference participants agreed that the time has come in Asia to move community forestry to a higher level in order to unlock the potential of forests to make a significant, consistent and sustainable contribution to community and national development. They formed a consensus on the steps that must be taken in Asia to promote, initiate and continue forest tenure reform (page 27) and invited donors and international organizations to advance a new generation of tenure reform and community forestry initiatives.

Alastair Sarre¹
Jenna DiPaolo²
Steve Johnson¹

This special edition of the TFU summarizes many of the presentations of the Lombok conference. For a complete set of presentations and other materials generated by the conference go to <http://www.rightsandresources.org/events.php?id=432>.



Editor Steven Johnson
Editorial assistant Kenneth Sato
Design DesignOne

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International Tropical Timber Organization
International Organizations Center – 5th Floor
Pacifico-Yokohama, 1-1-1 Minato Mirai, Nishi-ku
Yokohama 220-0012 Japan
t 81-45-223 1110
f 81-45-223 1111
tfu@itto.int
www.itto.int

Cover image Village trees: The Indonesian government wants to increase the area of forests designated for use by communities. Photo: Tetra Yanuariadi