



## FRIENDS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING OF OUR POSITION, 2008 COMMUNITY BASED FOREST GOVERNANCE

Community-based forest governance (CFG) refers to the regulations and practices used by many communities for the conservation and sustainable use of the forests with which they coexist. This type of governance is collective-communal, and by tradition identifies with the protection of the forests with regard to their industrial and commercial use. It also identifies itself with traditional knowledge as an alternative to the classic “forest science” . The latter approach is based on simplified models, assumes that destruction is “reversible,” and has facilitated multiple cases of forest devastation as well as severe social injustice.

CFG is a concept that opens new horizons and new spaces for communities to exercise political control of their territories and resources. Through horizontal decision-making mechanisms, it allows for community transparency and accountability.

The principle actors identified in this framework have typically been villagers who have traditionally lived in forests and maintained their timeheld knowledge and conditions. However, since many of these communities have suffered cultural and organizational deterioration, and because many other rural and urban communities have been increasing their efforts toward sustainable forestry, it is necessary to expand the range of possible actors.

As well as communities, entities such as rural organizations can relate to - or be formed- in relation to this concept of forest governance. Similarly, the presence of a forest at the outset may not be a necessity; it is possible that a forest or other type of original ecosystem could be restored as a result of CFG. We identify the following potential or essential actors for communitybased forest governance:

- Indigenous villages living in a territorially-defined community;
- Indigenous villages that have lost their communal territory and a considerable share of their traditional knowledge;
- Rural communities that own communal forest areas;
- Rural communities that own parcels of private property and can organize to restore, conserve and make use of forest areas;
- Urban communities that conserve forest areas.

CFG integrates a wide range of possible situations; from the knowledgeable, fine-tuned use of forests by some Indigenous societies, to rural and urban communities that use and care for natural reserve areas; from the small-scale commercial use of primary forests by Amazon rubber tappers, to the restoration by rural communities of forests that have been severely degraded.

Communities that have successfully organized and sustainably governed their forests share a series of characteristics. The presence or absence of one or several of these characteristics can be decisive to the success or failure of community-based forest governance. Here we present some of these characteristics:

- **clarity on community forest area boundaries:** having clarity on the area boundaries prevents conflict with other property owners, facilitates better resource knowledge and the production of maps and other helpful tools, and gives the community greater confidence about their land tenancy;
- **community knowledge of resource characteristics:** the more precise the inhabitants’ knowledge of the forest and its elements, the better the planning and regulation of its use. Traditional or acquired knowledge of the area, along with information on climate, geography, biology and the use of biodiverse elements, among other things, is vital for the planning and governance of resources,

and guarantees respect for their different components;

- **vision for the future:** the sustainable governance of a resource will be challenging if one does not consider long-term co-existence with that resource. If the long-term view is not taken, there is a tendency to make immediate short-term use of the resource, which is generally unsustainable. This is therefore a decisive consideration. A vision for the future implies that the community takes ownership of the forest and the area in general; that older as well as younger generations understand that negotiations made now determine future well being, so that they will manage the resource decisively and with care;
- **participatory community design of resource-use regulation:** in successful cases of CFG there is ample participation in the regulation of resource use, good information, and good agreement with respect to the norms. Achieving this is part of a process, whereby effective forms of education and communication need to be developed;
- **system of vigilance and flexible monitoring:** complying with forest-use regulation demands some type of fiscalization of the community governance processes, accountability, and a flexible, effective monitoring system.
- **capacity for conflict resolution:** when it comes to governing community resources, conflicts are common. It is helpful to develop mechanisms to encourage dialogue, for monitoring, and for accountability, along with other tools to enable the community to resolve internal conflicts in a creative and transparent manner.
- **legal recognition by the state and state legislation:** in today's world of politically-defined states, community governance of resources is seen as a decentralizing action. Yet community governance is not about taking strength away from the state, but rather supporting it through promotion of sustainable resource use. The recognition and normalization of community governance facilitates and legalizes this kind of relationship with the forest;
- **capacity for resource governance and administration:** the community and organizations responsible for CFG need to have basic tools for administration, decision making, governance, innovation, and creativity in the face of change.

For more information on CFG read our publication on [www.foei.org](http://www.foei.org)