

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Involving NGOs in Tropical Forest Policy

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Dear Peter,

In 1985 major action plans for the world's tropical forests were proposed, which call for increased spending on tropical forestry management and development. The World Resources Institute (WRI), a policy research organization based in Washington, DC, in collaboration with the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), convened a task force to look at needs for forestry development. The Forestry Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), headquartered in Rome, also established a committee to consider tropical forestry priorities.

The WRI report, Tropical Forests: A Call to Action, argues that at least US\$ 8 billion needs to be spent on forestry development in the tropics over the next five years (1987-1991). Half is recommended to come from international donors and lending agencies: this amount of external funding -- \$800 million per year -- is twice current levels of donor expenditures on forestry and related agricultural development. Financing of the other half is assumed to come from national governments (in developing countries) and the private sector. Over US\$1 billion is recommended as investments for African countries. FAO's Tropical Forestry Action Plan suggests US\$ 14.7 billion in funding over the next ten years.

These tropical forestry plans have received much public attention and comment. Some donors, such as the World Bank and French and Dutch bilateral assistance agencies, have already pledged increased funding. Others, such as the U. S. Agency for International Development, have cut overall levels of funding for international development -- due to domestic economic constraints -- thus, decreasing forestry project support.

The next step, The World Resources Institute believes, is one of garnering increased public support, in terms of funding and concrete development action. WRI has decided to call a meeting of 29 world policy makers to be held at the Rockefeller Foundation conference center in Bellagio, Italy in July 1987.

Increasingly, planners have been recognizing the importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in forestry development. NGOs often work closely with rural peoples, and thus may be the most effective organizations to bring about sustainable development at grassroots levels. In addition, many donors believe that NGOs can accomplish more with development monies than can international development agencies, due to lower salaries, overheads, and other expenses.

The Canadian government, for example, has made working with NGOs one of their current development priorities. At the UN Special Session on Africa held in May 1986, the Canadian government announced the creation of an "Africa 2000" fund, to focus on development priorities of agriculture, reforestation, and food security, with an overriding emphasis on women's participation. The government is promising to spend \$20 million (Canadian dollars) on social forestry projects over the next five years. In addition, Partnership Africa Canada (PAC), a consortium of Canadian NGOs, plans to provide \$75 million (Cdn) to NGOs for development work in Africa.

To discuss ways of improving NGO-government-donor collaboration and cooperation and to obtain NGO input on the tropical forestry action plans, the World Resources Institute and the Environmental Liaison Centre (ELC) are sponsoring regional meetings in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. WRI plans to write up the recommendations of the three workshops as a background paper for the upcoming Bellagio meeting.

The first regional meeting was held 24 - 28 November 1986 in Nairobi, Kenya. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) provided meeting rooms with simultaneous translation facilities. Attending were representatives from African non-governmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations, African governments, international development banks, bilateral donors, and international agencies. Approximately forty people participated in the workshop: roughly half were Africans and half non-Africans.

The 12 African non-governmental organizations participating represented a wide range of interests. Most represented national-level consortia of NGOs, such as the Association of Zimbabwean Women's Clubs, the Zambian Forestry Association, Joint Energy - Environment Projects (JEEP) in Uganda, the Kenyan Network of Energy NGOs (KENGO), and the Council of NGOs Active in Togo (CONGAT). In addition, participants came from international non-governmental organizations, such as the African Network of Environmental NGOs (ANEN), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), and the World Wildlife Fund (in Madagascar), African governments, such as Cameroun and Kenya, international banks, such as the African Development Bank and the World Bank, donors, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and international agencies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNDP, including the Tree Project.

On Monday the meeting was restricted to representatives of non-governmental organizations, both African and international. The focus of the day's activities was for the NGOs themselves to identify salient issues regarding their participation in forestry development and global tropical forestry plans. After a morning session explaining objectives, the attendees were split into two working groups in the afternoon -- one English-speaking, the other French-speaking.

On Tuesday the NGO representatives were joined at the workshop by representatives of the donor community, governments, and other international organizations. The workshop objectives were reviewed and reports on the previous day's working sessions were presented. That afternoon, discussions in the smaller working groups continued.

By Wednesday, some major issues had begun to emerge. The question of what, exactly, constitutes a non-governmental organization (NGO) was not explicitly discussed in the workshop, but came up in informal conversations. NGOs can range from small grassroots organizations, such as local cooperatives or village development groups, to national "umbrella" consortia, made up of smaller NGOs, to major international organizations. NGOs vary enormously in scale, objectives, sources of funding, client groups, history, professional expertise, and other characteristics.

Obviously opportunities or constraints to NGO involvement in forestry development differ with the particular NGO. Whereas some NGOs have no office, no telephone, perhaps not even a postal box, and no paid staff, other NGOs are major institutions, with elaborate offices, computers, paid staff, and other other resources at their disposal. Although some NGOs do not know where to begin seeking donor support for their activities, other NGOs are so well-financed that they act as donors themselves, dispersing money to smaller NGOs.

NGO needs include strengthening of technical, including managerial, skills, training of NGO staff members, development of information, education, and extension programs for clients, better documentation of activities and experiences -- to inform other NGOs, governments, and donors. For many NGOs, funding is central to expanding and strengthening their existing efforts. For some NGOs, additional funding would permit hiring paid, full-time staff members, and acquiring resources (such as an office or vehicles) to facilitate work.

A major problem for outside donors is dispersing funds. For many donors, the bureaucratic procedures for administering a grant are the same, irregardless of whether the funding is for \$10,000 or \$1 million. Consequently, donors find administering larger grants more cost-effective.

Donor representatives explained that their money could go further as large grants to governments, national NGO consortia, or umbrella organizations. These recipients could, in turn, then disperse the money in smaller grants to local NGOs. Most workshop participants agreed that NGOs in a given country should organize themselves into a national network to collaborate with the government and the donor community, rather than have the government or outsiders attempt to organize an umbrella organization.

Relationships between NGOs and the governments of their respective countries fundamentally affects the type of development activities NGOs can undertake. Throughout the workshop, participants stressed the need for partnership between the two. Most participants accepted the idea that governments work in the best interests of their citizens, and therefore, that NGOs can best help by cooperating with government. Roles of the two -- government and non-government -- can be complementary.

Governments sometimes consider NGOs to be adversaries rather than partners. NGOs often originate to respond to local needs unmet by governments. Thus, NGOs can constitute alternative sources of political power -- and hence threats -- to national governments. Moreover, sometimes governments and NGOs compete with each other for outside funding.

Donors can, however, encourage governments to collaborate with NGOs. In several recent national forestry sector reviews, for example, NGOs have participated with governments and donors in assessing forestry development activities, policies, and priorities.

Wednesday morning, a session was devoted to critiquing the draft document, "Tropical Forestry Action Plan", which constitutes a revision of the earlier WRI document, and will also serve as a working paper for the Bellagio meeting. This document states that five guiding principles underlie the Action Plan, which concern the need for: (1) political commitment to broad development, (2) massive public participation, including that of farmers and landless people, especially women, (3) attention to NGOs, (4) broadening forestry development, and (5) institution-building.

The plan then specifies actions to be taken in the areas of: (1) fuelwood and agroforestry, (2) land use on upland watersheds, (3) forest management for industrial uses, (4) conservation of tropical forest ecosystems, and (5) strengthening institutions. Forty recommended actions are specified and twenty-five policy issues identified. Of these, only two recommendations refer directly to NGOs:

For fuelwood and agroforestry:

"Promote decentralized seedling production involving schools, non-governmental organizations, farmers."

For Strengthening Institutions:

"Increase the participation of non-governmental organizations, community groups, and schools in extension work."

None of the policy issues refer specifically to NGOs. (Similarly, no recommendations nor policy issues refer directly to how women's participation can be encouraged.)

Workshop participants suggested ways in which the guiding principles could be more adequately spelled out in the recommendations. Some suggested specific areas where the participation of NGOs could be highlighted, such as in project design, conservation data centers, advocacy roles, and extension materials.

One argued that the plan was written by foresters for foresters, and needed to be broadened to address a wider emphasis. Several discussed how the plan needed to focus more on people and the social dimensions of forestry development. The importance of looking not just at the participation of farmers, but also of nomads, was stressed. Quite a few comments emphasized the need to expand consideration of land use to encompass mountain ecosystems (not just upland watersheds) and high rainfall coastal areas and mangroves. (Consideration of land use is more broadly construed in the FAO Tropical Forest Action Plan.)

In the late morning and early afternoon on Wednesday, representatives explained what their non-governmental organizations do. The latter part of the afternoon working groups met to develop concrete recommendations.

To what extent were the non-governmental representatives candid about their true perceptions? The donor group argued that the NGOs were being too polite, telling the donors what they thought the donors wanted to hear.

The francophone group underwent a noticeable change in demeanor between the first working session, which was restricted to NGOs, and the second, which was open to donor and governmental representatives. The first meeting was quite open and frank. At the latter meeting, unfortunately, donors and government representatives dominated the discussion. Particularly noticeable was the silence of one NGO participant once a member of his own country's government. Consequently, by the third day of the meetings, the donors and government representatives were organized into a separate working group of their own.

Differences emerged between the anglophone and francophone groups on how NGOs are allowed to operate by their governments. The francophone governments represented at the workshop seem to want to more closely follow -- and in some cases, control (through law or financing) -- the activities of NGOs. These differences probably arise from the differences in legal codes and forms of government adopted from former colonial powers.

The francophone group raised three issues not mentioned by the anglophone group. First, NGOs must obtain "juridical recognition", or legal authority, to operate in their respective countries. While requirements for this vary from one country to the next, in some the process for obtaining legal authorization can be quite complicated and time-consuming. Second, several francophone NGO participants represent quasi-governmental organizations, or parastatals, whereas many anglophone NGO groups seemed more truly autonomous of their respective governments. A third, and perhaps not surprising, issue stressed is the need for NGOs to achieve financial self-sufficiency, for more autonomy and longevity.

On Thursday, a field trip was organized to visit the KENGO research station located at the Jomo Kenyatta Agricultural College and the Kenya Renewable Energy Development Project's (KREDP) demonstration site at Ngong/Jamhuri. The first site is located about 30 miles outside of Nairobi. KENGO is conducting trials on the propagation and growth of indigenous species. The site includes a nursery, an arboreteum, and several trials in seed germination, propagation, and management of planted seedlings. The site is used for teaching agricultural students from the nearby college. While we were there, three members of the workshop planted tree seedlings in the arboreteum. (Tree-planting is a ritual and symbolic activity that usually occurs at any forestry workshop or conference.)

Some workshop participants visited the KREDP site, while others returned to the hotel for a working group meeting. The session was a beginning effort to pull together the week's discussions and major points. The Thursday afternoon session pointed out how a whole host of topics -- such as the role of "food aid" or of "international volunteers" -- in supporting NGO activities in forestry had not yet been addressed at the workshop.

Unfortunately, however, NGO representatives were underrepresented at this meeting, as most continued with the field trip. As some NGO personnel

rarely travel and visit NGO activities elsewhere, they were particularly interested in concrete project ideas.

On Friday, we debated recommendations and conclusions of the workshop. The summary focused on the role of NGOs in forestry development, constraints towards expanding their involvement in this area, and recommendations on ways to overcome constraints. The summary did not, however, specifically frame these issues in terms of how NGO participation could contribute to the realization of the tropical forestry action plans.

An issue that had been touched on earlier in the workshop, but which began to be seriously debated on Friday, was the question of women's involvement in NGO participation in forestry development. Unfortunately, however, in addition to ELC support staff, only one out of the twelve African NGO participants in the workshop was a woman. (Two others had been invited, but unable to come.) Of the non-African, or "Northern" participants, one-third were women.

Some participants assume that women's participation should be encouraged, but think either that nothing in particular needs to be done or that women's participation in all activities needs to be strengthened. Others made specific recommendations, such as development efforts focusing on use of trees for food production and small-scale rural industries or training of women extension agents. Consequently, the group as a whole was unable to agree upon other than the most general statements about the need for women's involvement.

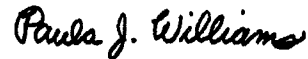
This situation illustrates, perhaps, why many conferences and documents discuss women's participation in only vague, general terms -- because consensus on more detailed, specific recommendations is impossible to achieve. Possibly, however, it is more a question of budgeting adequate time to examine the question in depth. Consequently, some workshop attendees proposed organizing a specific meeting to consider ways of enhancing women's participation in forestry development projects in Africa.

Others argued that it might be more fruitful to consider women's participation within the context of national NGO meetings on forestry development. This latter approach may work in a country such as Kenya, where the NGO presence is large and women are already quite active in participating in forestry development: half the members of KENGO, for example, are women's groups. For other countries, where women's participation is yet minimal, a international meeting could provide a good catalyst for increasing women's participation.

One of the workshop's real benefits was, I believe, the education that participants obtained on how the situation for NGOs varies so dramatically from one organization to the next, and from one country to the next. We all came away with a much better understanding of how NGOs, governments, and donors can better work together on both national and international levels. If the African workshop was any indication, the regional meetings in Asia and Latin America, and the meeting in Bellagio should be good for provoking both thought and action.

It will also be instructive to see what conclusions the African NGO community will come up on their own, after the proposed meeting of ANEN in Dakar, Senegal, scheduled for May 1987. As commendable as the initiatives of WRI are -- in catalyzing this type of discussion -- the NGOs will have to determine themselves how best they can contribute to enhanced tropical forest management and development.

Sincerely,



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Further Reading:

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