

PJW-39  
INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS  
The 10th World Forestry Congress

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Dear Peter,

The Institute of Current World Affairs (ICWA) has been associated with my attendance at World Forestry Congresses. In 1978, I attended the 8th World Forestry Congress in Jakarta, Indonesia. At that meeting, I met three ICWA Fellows -- Dianna Donovan, Gary Hartshorn, and Bill Knowland. All three were just beginning their fellowships -- Dianna was en route to Nepal, Bill to work in Southeast Asia, and Gary to cover Latin America. Through meeting them I learned about the Institute and its special fellowship program on people and forests.

In 1985, two years after beginning my own fellowship, I attended the 9th World Forestry Congress in Mexico City (see PJW-18). Once again, I saw Dianna Donovan there. At that point, Dianna was working on a forestry research project in Indonesia. Last month, I went to Paris for the 10th World Forestry Congress. This time, however, I was the only ICWA Fellow or former Fellow in attendance.

What does this reflect? The ICWA Forest and Society Fellows have all focused their work on the relationships between people, or human societies, and forests. The 10th World Forestry Congress examined the theme, "Forests: A Heritage for the Future." Much discussion centered on the role of forests in economic development and private enterprise. Some development aspects of forestry and people's participation in forest management and conservation received scant attention.

The Paris meeting ran from 17 to 26 September. It was well-attended, with over 2500 registered participants. Many sessions were held in plenary, while the technical sessions were in three groups. A few small satellite meetings were held.

The 10th Congress was highly organized -- to my mind, too organized. When we arrived to register, we were given copies of the eight volumes of the Proceedings. The Congress papers had been due more than eight months in advance, so they could all be translated and printed before we arrived. This was the first World Forestry Congress where the papers had been printed in advance. While some participants thought this was a wonderful development, and congratulated the Organizing Committee on its accomplishment, others muttered about why had we bothered to even come, if everything was so fixed in advance -- they could have just mailed out the papers.

Due to the size and structure of the conference, opportunities for participants to contribute to the discussions were severely limited. When some technical sessions were held, members of the audience were permitted to contribute

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

questions or comments, usually written in advance. The session moderators then generally chose which questions to entertain. A few satellite meetings, e.g., one on legal issues in social forestry, were more participatory and more satisfying.

The Congress was dominated by traditional forestry concerns -- and paid limited attention to development issues that were highlighted at the 8th World Forestry Congress in 1978. Much discussion focused on the "private sector," emphasizing private small or medium-sized forest landowners, e.g., individuals or families running small commercial forestry operations. Such private owners are quite common in France, where they are organized into an association. Private forest owners are also significant elsewhere in Europe and North America. The agroforestry activities of farmers in most developing countries, or the activities of non-governmental organizations working with such farmers or other resource users received less attention. Some sessions dealt with economic and institutional incentives needed to foster private forestry enterprises.

The Congress began with a series of formalities. The honorary geographical Vice-Presidents of the Congress were introduced: one of the three for Africa came from the Republic of South Africa. Only one, from Brazil, was a woman. President Francois Mitterand opened the Congress.

Despite the overall traditional focus, we did, nonetheless, have a few provocative speeches. Prince Bernard of the Netherlands, who is the honorary President of the WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF), gave an opening address. He commented on how important it was for the Northern countries not only to preach forest conservation, but also to practice and support it. For example, he suggested, France should conserve some of the over 7 million hectares of tropical forests in French Guyana, perhaps creating a Man and the Biosphere reserve. (The French reply was that the tropical forests in French Guyana are already a "domain of the state," implying that the state foresters are looking after them...)

The major paper on forestry education was quite startling. The author, Laurence Roche, from the University of Wales, contended that foresters should forget about agroforestry and social forestry (leave those issues to the agriculturalists) and instead return to a focus on traditional forest management of forest reserves (or forest estates). Roche, thus, seemed to think that foresters should confine themselves to a very narrow niche. Roche stated his belief that forestry does not differ between developed and developing countries, and that this "false distinction" has hindered technology transfer.

Although no direct rebuttals came within that session, other speakers presented contrasting viewpoints. E. Giordano, an Italian speaking about forestry education at the university level, noted that technical education is insufficient. He said that social aspects are gaining importance. Giordano expressed concern, however, about foresters losing their professional image. He suggested that flexibility is needed to deal with specializations. Ab. Oguntala, a Nigerian funded by FAO to train forest technicians in Lesotho, agreed that forestry colleges shouldn't lose their forestry identity. But he argued that environment and social problems need to be considered. He noted that the training of women, education of children, and public information will become more important. In another session, C. H. Murray, who heads FAO's Forestry Department, called for greater training of foresters in social sciences, anthropology, communications, and extension.

Peter Posnen, of the International Labour Organization, spoke about the situation for forest workers. Over the past 10-15 years, increasingly forestry work is contracted out. Consequently, in many countries woodworkers face increasing safety and health hazards on the job, and decreasing bargaining power vis-a-vis their employers. Woodwork tends to be "3-D: difficult, dangerous, and dirty." Laborers often receive little or no training. In addition, often these contracting arrangements do not provide any long-term benefits for the local community. Posnen recommended several policy changes to protect workers. He also noted that concern for workers should be linked with efforts to promote both privatization and popular participation in forestry (often forest workers are also farmers).

In a session on the "social, cultural, and landscape functions of trees and forests," two U.S. speakers talked about urban forestry. G. Moll, from the American Forestry Association, noted that the average U.S. city has a tree cover of 30 percent. He also said that citizen participation is key to developing good urban forestry programs. Many developing countries participants were keen to learn more about urban forestry and peri-urban forestry activities. Many developing country forestry departments only focus on rural activities. Developing countries are becoming increasingly urbanized: it has been predicted that by the turn of the century, half the population of developing countries will live in cities. Urban people will need trees for various reasons -- firewood and charcoal for cooking fuel, trees for shade and aesthetics, and parks for leisure and recreation.

A session on economic and social values was provocative, as the speakers held very different points of view. Hans Gregersen, a forest economist from the University of Minnesota, argued that many forestry decisions are not technical, but political ones. The challenge, he suggested, is to increase the dialogue on forest values -- "who pays? who gains? who has the power to decide?" Päiviö Riihinen, from the University of Helsinki, disagreed about the extent to which decisions are political. You don't, he stated, take a public vote on matters regarding high-level technical expertise. Alfredo Sfeir-Younis, a Chilean resource economist working for the World Bank, spoke about a recent evaluation. Almost eighty World Bank projects with forestry activities were examined. The study concluded that the most important ingredients for project success were human resources and institutional capabilities -- not technical components. Successful projects include local participation from the very beginning. He argued that rather than putting the forest first, as foresters traditionally have tended to do, we need to put people first.

This tension seemed to be a recurring dichotomy at the Congress: to what extent should forestry management decisions be made by foresters, and to what extent by politicians or the general public. Many participants feel that foresters are the best qualified to make technical decisions on forest management. Others think that forest conservation and management decisions are necessarily political decisions, that must involve technical forestry advice as well as people's participation.

One speaker noted that forestry issues were receiving such world-wide attention for negative reasons -- the public feels that the foresters have not been doing a good job of management. It was not because forests are important, but because they are being devastated, that the media and the public are interested in saving forests. C.S. Maina, from Canada, noted that forestry has grown to be an important topic on environmental, but not yet on developmental, grounds.

Another area of concern was directions and priorities for forestry research. Some comments from the audience noted that the research discussions considered only formal forestry research, and did not deal with participative research.

John Spears, of the World Bank, explained current plans to strengthen forestry research. The Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) will establish a new research institute on forestry issues, to complement the work of the International Council for Agroforestry Research (ICRAF) in Nairobi. The new center will probably be set up somewhere in Southeast Asia.

Mohamed Nor Salleh, who directs the Forest Research Institute in Malaysia and heads the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO), lauded this initiative to set up a new CGIAR center. He spoke quite eloquently about the need to develop national research capability. He stated that countries without their own research capabilities cannot compete, and they can never be truly independent. With research, he argued, a group of people can evolve towards a thinking, innovative, and questioning society. Salleh also noted that in his forestry research organization, out of 100 scientists, only five are foresters.

Salleh also called for the establishment of a United Nations agency to deal specifically with forestry issues. He stated that FAO focuses on agricultural issues, and only provides 4.5 percent of its budget for forestry activities. Others at the Congress, such as Murray, the Assistant Director-General of FAO for Forestry, did not share Salleh's viewpoint that a separate UN organization is needed to ensure that forestry activities get more attention and support.

As I have previously written (PJW-38), several speakers at the World Forestry Congress mentioned preparations for the upcoming United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Although some information was presented on the UNCED process, the participants of the 10th World Forestry Congress were not asked to review or comment upon the proposed UNCED Forestry Principles. The Congress organizers hope the policy declaration of the Congress will be considered at the UNCED meeting. The policy declaration itself just calls upon decision-makers to integrate the Congress conclusions into the forestry principles, and biodiversity and climate change negotiations being prepared for UNCED.

Some discussions of the Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP) took place. This initiative had been proposed at the last World Forestry Congress in Mexico City in 1985. Since that time, 86 tropical countries have prepared National Forestry Action Plans. They have received technical and financial assistance from the donor community to prepare these plans. Many countries have been very disappointed, however, that the donor community has been so slow to fund programs and projects identified in the national plans. Furthermore, many donors continue to insist on funding activities that reflect the donors' priorities, rather than those of the recipient government.

One Indian speaker expressed this view, by stating that the foresters know what to do -- they just lack "vitamin M -- money." If the donors would provide the money, he said, then the foresters would carry out their national forestry plans.

Mr. Feldman, a member of the Brazilian Parliament, noted that the Amazonian rain forest had received much worldwide attention. Many Brazilians were surprised

that the international community has not responded with concrete actions and financing. Brazil would be interested in some "debt-for-nature" swaps, but so far none have been offered. Consequently, with the difficult economic situation, a growing backlash against environmentalists is emerging in Brazil. Many Brazilians, he stated, think the upcoming UNCED meeting in Rio de Janeiro is just a trick. Feldman expressed his disappointment in the UNCED preparations. If we don't move fast, he argued, we will lose the unique chance to discuss the relationship between environment and development.

This Congress did have more women in attendance than did the previous two that I have attended. At least two to three hundred women participated. For the first time, I saw some African women in attendance.

Nonetheless, in two weeks of meetings, I saw only three women stand before the Congress to give presentations. Aulikki Kauppila, from Finland, presented a report on the Ministerial Conference for the Protection of European Forests. Cristal Palmberg-Lerche, another Finn, who is one of a few long-term professional women in the FAO Forestry Department and heads the Forest Genetics section, summarized the discussion on "Conservation and Protection of the Forest Heritage," and participated in a roundtable discussion on "The Forest and the Greenhouse Effect." Claire Humbert, who is French, served as the Moderator for a discussion on the "Public forestry sector" and participated in a round-table discussion on "Ownership and Users." As some technical sessions met simultaneously, perhaps there were one or two other women speakers whom I missed.

The issue of women's participation in forestry activities -- on either a professional level, or as participants in social forestry activities -- was not identified as a major subject for discussion. Only a few speakers referred explicitly to women's participation, whereas many spoke about "man and the forest."

In contrast, at the 8th World Forestry Congress, women in forestry had been defined as an issue within the areas of forestry employment. Twenty-three invited and voluntary papers had been written on the topic (Williams 1978a, 1978b). At the 9th Congress, women and forestry had been considered within the context of development issues (Williams 1985a, 1985b).

Outside the conference rooms, however, the news was more encouraging. I met two colleagues with whom I attended a 1989 workshop on forestry technical training. Mr. Hassan said that now 30 out of 53 forestry extension officers in Sudan are women. Oguntala noted that over half of his forestry technical students in Lesotho are women.

Similarly, FAO has recently re-affirmed that involving women in forestry activities is important. The latest issue of Unasylva, FAO's international forestry magazine, interviewed Edouard Saouma, FAO's Director-General. Saouma (1991) noted that a priority for FAO's forestry activities will be enhancing the role of women in forestry -- "to increase the number of women forestry professionals and extension agents, and removing legal constraints to women's involvement in forestry by ensuring their equal rights to productive resources, credit, marketing channels, technology, and training." The Community Forestry Office of FAO has been working on women and forestry issues for some time, so it is encouraging that their efforts are finally being supported by the Director-General.

Some other participants shared my frustration with the Congress, and the limited attention paid to issues of people's participation. We seemed, however, to be in the minority. I hope that this situation is not indicative of the forestry profession as a whole. Many colleagues actively working on social forestry and related development issues did not come to the World Forestry Congress in Paris, knowing that the agenda would not focus on these issues.

Only a few NGO representatives had been invited to present papers on the role of NGOs in forestry, as part of a session on the "private forestry sector." Jeff Sayers, who is responsible for tropical forestry issues for IUCN, gave a paper and participated in a round-table discussion on the "influence of policies on the role of trees and forests in territorial development." Another NGO representative, from the Environment Liaison Centre, International (ELCI) failed to show up, and his paper was not presented by anyone else. Another invited speaker, who also failed to come, had also prepared a paper on NGO activities: her paper was also not presented. [In other Congress sessions where a speaker failed to appear, someone else presented their papers. The conference organizers felt that this particular session, however, was already overcrowded.]

The participation of environment and development non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this meeting was quite disappointing. Most NGOs participating were major organizations, such as the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO), the WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), and the American Forestry Association (AFA). As Sayers noted, many NGOs would say that this was not a World Forestry Congress, but a World Congress for Foresters.

This lack of NGO participation was particularly surprising as the French government hosted the World Forestry Congress. The French have publicly stated their support for NGO participation in the upcoming UNCED conference in Rio de Janeiro. To facilitate this NGO participation in UNCED, the French will be hosting a major NGO conference in Paris, 17-20 December 1991.

The final revisions to the draft policy declaration of the Congress were worked on by a committee of eight. One person was chosen to represent the NGO community. He told me, however, that it was a very frustrating process -- difficult to get the other committee members to see the importance of even mentioning people, let alone women. The final policy declaration of the Congress makes no mention of women, but the French text does have a reference to "tous les hommes de tous les peuples" (all the men of all the peoples).

The policy declaration had been drafted before we had arrived in Paris. It was revised in committee during the last two days of the Congress, then presented to a policy working group for review. Out of 109 members of this policy group, only seven were women. The final policy statement, the Paris Declaration, was read to the Congress participants in plenary on the final morning, and adopted without discussion. The organizers spoke of how the Congress had reached "consensus" on the policy declaration.

On the final afternoon of the Congress, we assembled in the conference hall to hear a concert by the National Youth Orchestra of France. Shortly after the

lights dimmed and the music started, four people rushed on stage. They went to stand or sit among the musicians, and unfurled sheets of paper with the words "Boycott au Bois Tropical" (Boycott Tropical Wood). Authorities for the Congress managed to hustle two of the protestors off the stage, but two others were allowed to remain, rather than disrupt the concert. The conductor looked at the sign, as he continued with the performance.

After about five minutes, three African delegates got up and walked to the top of the hall. One of them then stated that the situation was intolerable, and asked all participants from sub-Saharan Africa to join them and to leave the hall. At that point, perhaps one hundred participants got up and walked out. Most were Africans, but a few were from other tropical countries. One delegate explained his outrage to me. Throughout the Congress, security guards had been stopping everyone, to insist on seeing their registration badges. Why could not they have prevented this protest?

The Congress policy declaration read that morning had affirmed national sovereignty in managing forests, and come out against any restrictions of timber trade. Most Congress participants believe that any boycott of tropical wood would not help to save the tropical forests, but would make it more difficult for tropical countries to develop and to have the means to engage in forest conservation.

The Congress organizers stopped the concert, and removed the protestors. They expressed their profound apologies to the participants whom had left, and asked them to return. After they did so, the concert resumed and finished.

During the final vote of thanks, a few more protestors ran on stage -- one grabbing the speaker's microphone. The authorities quickly hustled them off the stage. We heard one woman protester cry "Sauver..." (Save...) After the protestors were finally gone, some speakers noted that foresters still have to work on better communications with the public.

The last event involved invitations to host the 11th World Forestry Congress in 1997. Three countries offered to host the next Congress: Peru, Turkey, and Senegal. As there has never been a World Forestry Congress in Africa, I think that Senegal's invitation might be accepted by FAO.

When we left the Congress Hall, several protestors were standing outside, wearing white masks, and handing out literature for their various causes. One person handed me a flyer protesting the ecological devastation and deforestation that has occurred in Tibet, allegedly due to Chinese harvests of the Tibetan forests.

Overall, I felt that the Congress was not a particularly participatory event. To accompany the speeches, much effort had gone into producing videos and fancy computer-driven audio-visual presentations (several of which ran into technical glitches). Although many people came, only a select few spoke. Many speakers in the roundtable discussions were also authors of invited papers, so they addressed the Congress two or three times. As over one thousand authors had contributed to the invited and voluntary papers, it should have been easy to enlarge the pool of speakers. The question and discussion sessions following the presentations were difficult, as time was too limited to permit everyone to contribute their opinions.

The 8th World Forestry Congress had focused on "Forests for People," and had stressed international forestry development issues. The 9th World Forestry Congress, on "Forests in the Integral Development of Society," had seemed more traditional and conservative than its predecessor. The 10th Congress, considering "Forests: A Heritage for the Future" seemed the most conservative of the three. Does this reflect that the meeting was held in France, rather than in a developing country? Or is it a signal of changing interests?

One colleague suggested that perhaps in the future there should be two separate meetings -- one on forestry development issues in developing countries, another on forestry in industrialized societies. I am not sure that I agree, as both could learn from each other. It does seem vital, however, that future Congresses be better planned to enable this to happen.

Given my frustrations, was it worth my while to have attended the 10th World Forestry Congress? I think it was. It was certainly useful to get an overview of some of the recent thinking in the field, and the diversity of opinion on some of the issues. I was left wondering, however, to what extent this sample of the world's foresters constituted a representative cross-section, or sample, of world forestry opinion.

It is good to be reminded that those of us working on social forestry and development issues still have much work ahead. But we will have to build our alliances with like-minded colleagues working on related development issues, to overcome the inertia, traditionalism, and conservatism of many of our forestry colleagues.

Sincerely,

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