

Communiqué on a Major Groups Workshop Developing Recommendations for UNFF-11

**Presented to the press by Lambert Okrah, President, MGPOF:
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From 2-6 March, 2015, Major Groups Partnership on Forests (MGPOF), the coordinating organization of Major Groups involved in the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) process, organized a five day international workshop, hosted by the government of Nepal, on one of the major issues of our time: Sustainable Forests Management.

Climate change, water shortages for drinking and irrigation, and loss of biodiversity are huge challenges for our planet Earth. Sustainable management of forests can make a big contribution to overcoming these crises.

As part of our five-day conference, we visited three Community Forests here in Nepal where we saw for ourselves how local communities are restoring forests, increasing water supplies and protecting wildlife.

Civil society in Nepal includes many representatives of Major Groups. Many are essential participants in the work of the Community Forests we visited. They are demonstrating the importance of the active involvement of women, youth, small farmers and local authorities with support from scientific research institutions, labour and environmental organizations.

Without the leadership of the communities and the support of government and other organizations, the benefits from sustainable forest management would not happen. We saw this for ourselves here in Nepal. We can tell you this is also true around the world. When civil society groups are actively involved, there are solutions to the local and global crises we all face.

The workshop brought together 76 participants from 36 countries representing the following 8 of the 9 official Major Groups identified by the United Nations: Women; Children and Youth; Scientific and Technological community; Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); Indigenous Peoples; Workers and Trade Unions; Farmers and Small Forests Landowners; and Local Authorities.

The theme of the workshop was “*Sustainable Forest Management: Designing the Vehicles for Securing the Means of Implementation*”. Discussions focused on three themes: the new United Nations body for Sustainable Forests Management (SFM); financial mechanisms for undertaking SFM; and enhancing the engagement of Major Groups participation in the UNFF process.

Under the first theme of a new global body for SFM, to replace the UNFF that will soon be concluding its mandate, participants concluded that:

- The UNFF’s placement within ECOSOC has led to a rich dialogue that resulted in more than 270 recommendations, but it does not provide scope or capacity for implementation. The present hierarchy and complexity within ECOSOC at the divisional level hinders decision-making as bureaucracy is very high. Major Groups want to see more focus on implementation of the forest instrument and goals on forests.
- There is a lack of ownership of UNFF recommendations, as seen in some of the language used that asks Parties to “consider” and “encourage” but does not call on Parties to “commit”. With clauses of “national limitations and territorial sovereignty” the Parties are more reluctant to take on recommendations that might be too ambitious.

and made the following recommendations:

- We propose a new multi-stakeholder UN Forest Organization, not under ECOSOC, that addresses both policy and implementation, and that will deal with forestry issues in a coordinated and holistic manner at the global, regional, national and local levels.
- The issue of forests is included in several of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, goals 6, 15 and 17). The new body on forests should be responsible for the high political level dialogue on SDGs on forest related issues, including the review of policies and the establishment of dedicated funds to implement its work on the ground. The new body should also be responsible for coordinating all institutions and mechanisms engaged on forest issues within the UN.
- Major Groups need to be part of the governing structure of the new body on forests.

For the second theme of financial mechanisms for undertaking SFM, participants concluded that:

- The lack and inconsistencies of funding mechanisms reflect the lack of political willingness among the governments to prioritize SFM. As a result, funding for SFM is not only extremely fragmented, but the existing funding mechanisms emphasize more on economic value and less on the conservation, cultural and social value of forests.
- A large proportion of existing funds have been spent in bureaucratic processes, leaving less funds available for the implementation of SFM. This makes it difficult for communities to get fair compensation for their efforts in forest protection as well as restoration.

and made the following recommendations:

- The UNFF should set up a strategic trust fund for SFM, which will play a catalytic role to leverage other sources of funding. The new body on forests should set up modalities for contributing monies to this strategic trust fund. Seed money from the strategic trust fund should be made available for developing countries to develop their implementation actions.
- Establish national funds for SFM that can be borne out of mechanisms, such as taxation from forestry related industries, and ensure that the funds are allocated for SFM implementation, capacity-building and technology transfer.
- Create a financial clearing house of all existing funds on forests to assist in implementing SFM in developing countries.

On the issue of enhancing the engagement of Major Groups participation in the UNFF process, participants concluded that:

- During UNFF processes, cooperation and coordination among MGs has drastically improved. For example, meetings to provide constructive inputs and guidance to the UNFF processes; and Major Group joint papers that become official UNFF documents. Many governments recognize the importance of Major Groups and are willing to explore how this could be enhanced
- Interventions of Major Groups have been watered down and sometimes are not reflected in the final reports and decisions. That limits the role of the Major Groups to “really” engage and have “real” dialogue and “real” discussions instead of just being a tokenism that does not reflect rightfully or recognize the contributions that the Major Groups have made in the UNFF processes;

and made the following recommendations:

- Recognize MGPoF as a legitimate coordinating body for Major Groups involvement in post-UNFF processes. Give MGPoF official Permanent Observer Status in the post-UNFF process; and make Major Groups true partners in the full process of the realization of actions.
- At the global, regional and national levels, any working groups, task forces or other mechanisms addressing SFM issues must have Major Groups representation to ensure their meaningful, full and effective engagement. Involve Major Groups representatives in review processes and other important decision-making processes.
- Financial support for Major Groups involvement in post-UNFF processes should be increased. This should include funds for the MGPoF to do its work and successfully implement its institutional goals.