REPORT

Engaging the Forests and Livelihoods Community: The 3rd Annual FLARE Network Meeting

Arun Agrawal [*], Rebecca Rutt [**] and Cristy Watkins [***]

The Forests & Livelihoods: Assessment, Research, *and* Engagement (FLARE) network held its third annual meeting (FLARE 3) at Stockholm University in 2017 from 29 September to 2 October. The meeting was co-organized by the University of Michigan; Stockholm University; the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI); the Swedish International Agricultural Network Initiative (SIANI); the Forest, Climate, and Livelihood research network (Focali); and the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI).

About 180 scholars, practitioners, policy-makers, and donors from 29 countries showcased their research and implementation activities in the forests and livelihoods domain. There were 133 presentations**,** eight posters, two special discussion sessions, and three thematic workshops, and also daily social networking events. Four areas of insight and future research emerged.

Forests and forest products (still) matter to the livelihoods of the poor

Presenters identified direct benefits from forests (e.g., nutrition from hunting, fishing, and foraging activities) and indirect benefits (e.g., income

[*] Professor, University of Michigan, School for Environment and Sustainability, 440 Church Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109 USA; arunagra@umich.edu

[**] Assistant Professor, University of Copenhagen, Department of Food and Resource Economics, Rolighedsvej 25, 1958 Frederiksberg C, Denmark. While writing this paper she was a Research Associate with School of International Development, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, NR47TJ, UK; rebeccalrutt@gmail.com

[***] Research Manager, University of Michigan, School for Environment and Sustainability, 440 Church Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109 USA; watkinsc@umich.edu ✉

from sale of products, ecosystem services such as flood control). Many presenters also called for better measurement tools and analytical approaches to assess the extent of forests' contributions to livelihoods.

Two panel sessions discussed methods (empirical analyses, modelling efforts, and policy instruments) to gather representative household data on wood energy needs. Another session illustrated how small and medium-sized forest enterprises can positively affect community development through strong institutions, local user rights, technical support, and organizational capacity.

Several presenters explored payment-based interventions and argued that such programmes should incorporate existing stewardship practices that motivate good behaviour rather than punishing bad behaviour. Presenters debated whether and how comparative research can offer insights into improving policies for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) and enhancing well-being.

Challenges remain in understanding large-scale land tenure arrangements

Evaluating the effects of large-scale land tenure arrangements or changes in such arrangements (e.g. land transactions and protected areas) remain a challenge. Patchy data and context dependence are two key concerns. Presenters examined new methods for assessing preconditions, correlating factors, and interacting processes. One session described new tools and data sets to facilitate transparency in forest commodity supply chains. Another session examined conflicts and other spillover effects of changes in tenure and land transactions.

Effective forest management requires cross-scale coordination and attention to power dynamics

Power dynamics was a ubiquitous theme, especially in sessions exploring community engagement in forest management. It is critical to have equitable representation of diverse voices (e.g. in relation to gender, culture, and wealth differences) and robust tools to measure impacts. Land titling to secure conservation and livelihoods was shown to be inadequate to meaningfully secure land rights and ensure sustainable forest management. Local and social interpretations of ecological values (e.g. primary forests versus planted trees) need to be considered in tenure design. A panel focused on the Amazon illustrated the importance of coordination among farmers, e.g. for fire management as well as for higher-level policy intervention decisions.

Collaboration is central to conservation and development

Presenters argued that forest ecosystems can support agricultural resilience but competition for land is fierce. Diverse expertise is required to understand, respond to, and reframe the goals and impacts of conservation and development initiatives. Presenters called for both public and private sector representation, the meaningful inclusion of local and cultural knowledge, and an understanding of how expectations influence outcomes.

Special discussion sessions

The Future of Forest Work working group of the FLARE network explored the prospects for meaningful work for young people in forest communities. The group shared efforts to engage youth in 'visioning workshops' and discussed preliminary findings and opportunities for future engagement. The discussion on RRI's tenure tracking methodologies[1] presented their methods and data sets pertaining to tenure and explored how these can be used in policy, advocacy, and research settings.

Tool-based workshops

FLARE 3 also offered opportunities to engage with workshop-based problem-solving tools related to forest–livelihoods relationships.

Forests, farms, and livelihoods: Scale, scope, and rights matter: This workshop introduced the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on estimating aggregate value of contributions from forest and farm small producers at national and global levels. Participants learned about the data collection tool, Collect Mobile,[2] and discussed strategies for using existing evidence to influence decision-makers on policies and investments to improve conditions for small-scale producers.

Design and methods of research with community participation: Integrating local ecological knowledge, practices, and worldviews in resource use and management planning: This one introduced participatory research as a method to assess and incorporate local knowledge, practices, and worldviews ('k-p-w assemblage') into project/policy implementation. Participants produced hypothetical research designs and simulated participatory methods.

FLARE's LivWell and CommFor tools: It introduced FLARE's web-based tools for collecting data on livelihoods and well-being (LivWell),[3] and

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[1] https://rightsandresources.org/en/work-impact/tenure-data-tool/#.Wp2MLmrwb0M

[2] http://www.openforis.org/tools/collect-mobile.html

[3] http://www.forestlivelihoods.org/resources/livwell

community forestry (CommFor).[4]. Participants browsed the web-based tools, explored the questions that constitute each tool, drafted a work plan for implementing the tools in their own data collection settings, and provided feedback on how to improve the tools for wider use.

Fostering continued engagement

The annual FLARE meetings have emerged as a unique and much needed space for productive dialogue among an increasingly close-knit community of researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers. Participants praised the quality of presentations and moderator facilitation, and appreciated organizers' efforts to support new forms of engagement, collaboration, and exchange. Calls were also made for more collective sharing and learning from failures; diverse ways of communicating (e.g. artistic expressions and new media); non-English-language presenters and content; bridges with other sectors; and regionally or locally focused work toward concrete, context-specific policy suggestions. This feedback will inform FLARE 4 in Copenhagen in October 2018.

Conclusion

Researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers are advancing our collective understanding of interactions between forests and livelihoods and how people and forests influence each other. As befits a gathering of researchers and practitioners, key emphasis areas concerned the need for better low-cost tools to collect information on forests and livelihoods, especially to assess forest dependence in different contexts. Another question that garnered attention was how to best use emerging datasets and techniques to estimate the effects of different forest and livelihood interventions. More rigorous assessments require more than sophisticated quantitative analyses; they also demand a deeper knowledge of the interventions themselves, including why they are implemented in selected regions and for particular peoples and households. As new tools are designed and new data collected, the FLARE community continues to invest in cross-sector collaboration and the development of rigorous, cost-efficient, and easy-to-use tools with which to collect data and assess impacts of social and ecological interventions and phenomena.

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[4] http://www.forestlivelihoods.org/resources/commfor-tool