

Foreword

Two major approaches to forests were observed in the past. A utilitarian one, focused on the wood resources that could be obtained from the forests, and another one oriented to the environmental values related to the existence of forests. Both had their related constituencies and have shown limited capacity to learn from each other.

Recently, a growing interest is being observed toward a third approach based on the social and cultural dimension of forests. Many loose ends that could be hardly integrated and assimilated from the previous approaches might, from a social lens, be easier to be addressed. In the political debate, the final argument to preserve forests is much more social than environmental or economical. Political controversy is solved by social categories that are ranked by values.

The social and cultural approach to forests is a vast universe that includes issues like decent and health labor, cultural and spiritual values, traditional forest knowledge, anthropology, geographical history, indigenous people, community management of natural resources, and rural development. The growth of this approach is progressively incorporating new professions, sciences, and interested people to the forest dialogue and community, which enrich it while helping to overcome conflicts of the past. Overseeing the impressive coevolution of many ecosystems is a clear indication of the limitations of the previous approaches.

One of the most consolidated ones is rural development. In developing countries, it could be rephrased as rural poverty alleviation by forests. Rural development is related to the contribution of forests to the livelihoods of the forest-related rural communities.

Forests cover 31 % of the terrestrial part of the planet. But actually analyzing the global forest map, one can easily observe that what prevail globally are either poor forest areas or dense forest areas with some transitional mixed areas. If we analyze it in even more detail, forest-dominant areas are those disadvantaged by nature – except deserts – due to harsh climate, morphology (mountains, regularly flooded areas), or poor acidic soils. They are characterized by very low population densities. This makes those populations extraordinarily reliable on the forest resources, regardless of the degree of development of the country. The rural development

perspective in those areas is by far much more crucial than the agricultural one prevailing normally in less disadvantaged and much better communicated areas accessible to public services.

In recent times, the need to move the focus from sectors (agriculture, forestry) to landscape approaches is gaining momentum. Watershed management, biodiversity preservation, enhancing landscape values, preventing disasters, or optimizing production in added value and employment terms can be done only from a landscape perspective. In that sense, a growing attention can be observed regarding land use planning, but from a different perspective than the previous technocratic approaches. If we want to answer the growing food, energy, and stable climate demands of an estimated nine billion human beings around 2050 and ensure decent living conditions for them, in no way can it be done by segregating functions or by a suboptimal use of land.

The obverse in social terms is rural development that focuses on and tries to optimize the use of existing endogenous resources in order to provide decent livelihoods to the rural population living in those areas. Rural development endeavors to ensure those populations similar living conditions as their urban peers, and this needs to be complemented with public policies related to infrastructure, education, and health.

Rural development in forest-dominant areas needs to focus strongly on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship. Wood, bioenergy, nonwood forest products, and tertiary services can only be fully valorized if a vital network of SMEs exists. Public policies need to overcome the main bottlenecks and to support their development. Firewood and nonwood forest products involve even in developed countries a considerable amount of informal labor that needs to be incorporated into the formal economy. SMEs are also crucial for the social architecture and democracy as, by increasing competition, they prevent corruption and ensure a broad middle class.

Major attention has been given to the vital environmental services which forests have been providing to the rest of the citizenry. Fragmentary answers have been given with limited results as shown by the deforestation figures. The downstream focus has failed since it forgot to keep the equity balance between what was requested to the forests including their dependent communities and the correspondent upstream flows that ensure the needed return in order to keep the process sustainable and equitable. Actually, the raising gender issue has not been much different, as far as the approach was directed to the services women provided to families and societies, so the issue was not solved. It was only when the equity issue was brought into the debate that progressively the balance was found. Payment for environmental services is, while being still in its infancy, a revolutionary tool that allows for the first time to address the distributional failures of previous approaches that, despite focusing on low-cost wood or environmental services supply, had this failed equity issue in common.

May I congratulate the excellent team of authors of this book for the quality of their respective chapters and the opportunity of this book and thanks particularly to its coordinator, Professor Jürgen Pretzsch from the University of Dresden.

This book provides very valuable information for students taking advanced courses and for practitioners in the area of forests and rural development. Surely, this book will cover an existing gap and contribute to bring the issue of forests and rural development forward.

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