

CIVIL SOCIETY MECHANISM'S VISION on Sustainable Forestry August 2018

The policy convergence process of the Committee on World Food Security in "Sustainable Forestry for food security and nutrition", developed by the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE), allows social movements and organisations at the Civil Society Mechanism(CSM) to offer our vision on this subject.

There are many forest-dependent communities worldwide, accounting for over 1.6 billion people. These communities have been engaging in community forest management, thus enabling them to reach food sovereignty and forest conservation on a global scale, given that they maintain their own socio-political, cultural, spiritual, economic and environmental relationship with forests (hereinafter referred to as community forest management). When we talk of communities, we are referring to Indigenous Peoples, peasants and small-scale food producers, fisherfolk, forest workers, landless peoples, and pastoralists. Forest communities have a complex and intricate relationship with their ecosystems / territories. A forest community can fish, sow seed, and rear animals at different times of the year and in response to different needs. It has been widely acknowledged that these communities of small-scale food producers not only feed themselves, but also most other people living especially in rural areas, thanks to their ancestral production systems, many of which are now referred to as agroecology.

We believe that these communities, as well as their practices, must be central to this discussion process that will conclude in policy recommendations. They should equally be central to the implementation of policies. We will refer to these communities as 'forest communities' in this document and throughout the discussions to come.

The concept of community forest management implies political control of communities over their territories and resources through horizontal decision-making that includes transparency and accountability to the rest of the community. Forest community management is not limited to forests and timber goods. It is a comprehensive concept because it includes the adequately planned use of water, food and non-timber forest goods, as well as of sacred spaces and biodiversity. It is also not limited to political management as it involves aspects of appropriate technology, ancestral knowledge and community practices of planning and orderly use of resources. This management process implies the generation of comprehensive policies that guarantee sustainability, fair distribution and respect for territories and their resources. All of this goes beyond simple technical management, as occurs in the so-called sustainable management of forests. Rather, it refers to an ancestral bond that communities and peoples have with a specific territory and the community's effective management or governance over that territory. The ancestral relationship is in itself a source of many elements that facilitate this type of self-governance. This linkage is very deep and involves ways of life, energy, health, identity and culture, and freedom itself. Similarly, this linkage is closely related to the communities' ancestors and intergenerational connections in such a way that it provides a basis for learning, identifying values and developing their own rules. In this manner, it is also linked to a spiritual reality.

In this sense, community forest management refers to regulations and practices that many communities apply to the conservation and sustainable use of the territories where

they live. It is a type of collective, community-led management and traditionally identifies with protection, thus confronting the market-led and industrial usage of forests and other natural resources. Community management also identifies with traditional knowledge as a complement and/or counterweight to so-called 'western science', which is based on simplified models that are often underpinned by assumptions that have facilitated, in several cases, the devastation of resources as well as grave social injustice.

Clearly, local communities and Indigenous Peoples view forests as much more than a set of trees, timber and non-timber goods. Forests have a cultural, spiritual and religious meaning, and are a home and provider for these communities. Additionally, dwellers produce food and obtain construction and clothing material for their homes from these spaces. Forests are intimately related to all natural commons that are necessary for life: water, seeds, biodiversity, climate, soil, honey, fruit, medicine... all of which are forest-dependent. Across the world, forests also represent a deep connection to the spiritual world, which is also a fundamental aspect of community management.

Forest community management plays a key role in efforts for reducing forest destruction and this discussion is crucial when it comes to stimulating, fomenting and supporting these community processes in the best way possible.

In order to strengthen community management, collective rights need to be strengthened as we understand these to be part of fundamental human rights and are encompassed in the so-called solidarity human rights, given their very collective nature. They defend the role that local communities and Indigenous Peoples play in different areas, such as ecosystem balance through the sustainable usage and conservation of its elements; the improvement and discovery of uses of biodiversity; management of tenure of their territories and the recognition of the diversity in organisations, cultures, legal regimes, and cosmovisions. Within this framework, we believe that the protection of traditional knowledge, as proposed by the Convention on Biological Diversity (article 8j) is fundamental, as not only does it allow for the conservation and even improvement of forests, it also highlights the vital links between local communities / Indigenous Peoples and forests / biodiversity. Similarly, the right to self-determination and participation – including free prior and informed consent – is another essential right, which must be respected. Consultation processes must follow traditional methods and must be respected, irrespective of the outcome. This right ensures and respects traditional ways of decision-making.

These universal, indivisible and interdependent rights are based on culture, tradition and practices of forest communities and are therefore historical in nature. We must also highlight women's rights, which are fundamental given the key role they play in community management. Community forest management is not only a custom that should be protected, it is also a collective right that needs to be implemented.

Community forest management faces several risks of being weakened and threatened. Amongst others, it is worth mentioning the following:

- the current definition of forests: not only because of the technical simplification of forests, but also because this definition encompasses monocultures and tree plantations, which threaten community management whilst also generating negative impacts on water, soil, biodiversity and communities themselves;
- industrial agriculture often based on monocultures devastates forests and

- territories whilst also destroying diversity, which is the basis of agroecology, a way of producing that goes hand in hand with community management. This advance of industrial agriculture often leads to the desalination of forest families and communities;
- the grabbing of water, land, trees, seeds and knowledge from forest communities cause social and environmental destruction and engender the loss of collective knowledge and future management;
 - market mechanisms that are supposedly designed to protect the forest have been proven to negatively impact forest conservation, as is the case with REDD. These market mechanisms have demonstrated that they are inefficient and ineffective in the fight against climate change – as well as against other environmental issues. Moreover, they are underpinned by a worldview and a belief of how territories covered with forests should be protected, and thus impose a vision of conservation and management where the individual is privileged over the collective. Additionally, they enforce conflict resolution methods on communities, and increase inequalities between those who receive funds and those who don't, thus dividing the community. In this manner, they inflict non-traditional ways of using the forest on communities.

At the Civil Society Mechanism we will work to ensure that our vision of community forest management, which benefits so many people in the world, not only remains central to this discussion, but is also strengthened for the benefit of these communities, the forests, a better diet and conservation of biodiversity.