

## Summary Report on the First Annual FLARE Conference

The First Annual FLARE conference (November 27-30, 2015) brought together a diverse group of ~180 scholars, practitioners, policy-makers, and donors to showcase and discuss a wide diversity of topics related to the domain of forests and livelihoods. Participants, representing 25 countries, presented 92 oral talks and nine posters, and participated in five topic-specific workshops over four days at the Musée de l'Homme, in Paris, France.



The goals of the conference were to:

- 1) Advance cutting edge knowledge on forests and livelihoods, laying the groundwork to further develop tools, methods, and indicators to assess how, where, and why interventions function best to protect forests, reduce terrestrial GHG emissions, and improve the lives of forest-dependent peoples within the larger landscape context
- 2) Create a strategy to catalyze analyses of existing large-scale forest, census, and household datasets; generate functional analytic frameworks, indicators, and methodological products to assess outcomes of forest sector interventions; identify areas of needed research; and promote the broader adoption of these products by researchers, practitioners, and policy makers alike.

Through discussions and feedback from steering committee members and conference participants, we identified eight core themes:

- 1) Inequality:** It is critical to understand inequalities—within communities and across scales—when assessing the impacts of forest-related interventions. There is a need for analyses that can assess social dynamics as they relate to inequalities, and to address them in interventions. The distribution of costs and benefits at local to global scales is needed when assessing and designing policy and practical interventions.
- 2) Power:** An analysis of power is essential to understand forest livelihoods and outcomes of interventions designed to support them. There is a need to

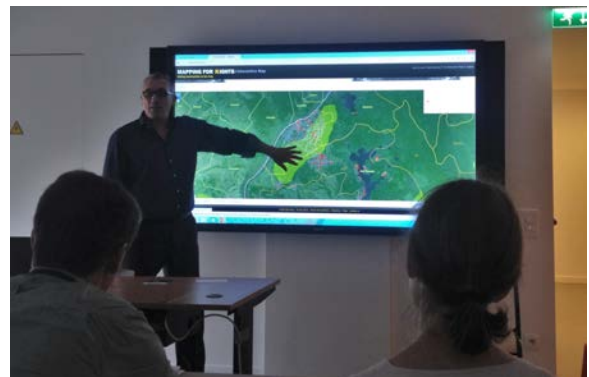
distinguish between participation and representation (wherein there are binding,



responsive agreements, not just channels of communication). Communities of practice, broadly understood, including local or within country networks as well as international ones like FLARE, can help be a kind of “counter power” to entrenched interests, and bridge local issues and interests with broader policies and processes.

**3) Forests versus non-forest livelihoods:** Forests may provide income and livelihoods benefits, but how do these compare to other potential livelihood activities? What is the effectiveness of forest-based livelihoods activities as pathways to prosperity compared to other potential pathways that may involve forest clearing or non-use of forest resources, such as migration from forest areas? Further, under what conditions (market, social, etc.) and at what scales does forest use shift from conservation to consumption? There is a need for criteria and methods to assess different approaches that consider not only economic dimensions, but also social and environmental ones relating to forest use and conservation. Few studies place forest activities in comparative context, which is especially important from a policy perspective.

**4) Data and evidence:** We need more and better data on forest-livelihood linkages at multiple scales (from household through to country). Synergies and gaps in existing data, both at the same scale (e.g. households in different contexts, but also across scales, such as checking national scale data with local data) also need investigating. Assessing the quality and usability of existing data, especially large datasets, is key. The trend is toward an obsession with quantifiable objectivity that perceptions are dismissed, but actually perceptions may in many cases be as or more important as they are associated with actual behavior. (Re)consideration of perception data and its relationship to more objective measures is needed.



**5) Impact assessment:** Credible, practical, and forward-looking impact evaluation tools area needed. Rigorous impact evaluation and randomized control trials are

not feasible for assessing forest-related outcomes in all cases, especially for those interventions which may not occur until the medium to long run (conservation & reforestation). However, more work is needed to understand the conditions under which RCTs *would* be feasible, useful, and generalizable. Modeling - at different scales, based on empirical evidence, and including sensitivity analyses under different scenarios - is needed to help better inform policy. We also need to identify and use key/predictive indicators.

- 6) Context matters—but how?** Even after 20+ years of knowing better, we are still implementing many forest-related efforts with a top-down, one-size fits all approach, with disastrous consequences. We must seriously consider implementation contexts and what empirical similarities there may or may not be across different contexts in order to better tailor practical and policy efforts.
- 7) Develop a community of practice on forests and livelihoods.** FLARE has real value added as a link among different actors relating to forests (private, community, public, and academic) and connecting research to policy and practice and vice versa. There is a need to engage more with private sector actors. Key roles of this community would be to:
- Facilitate the critique of persistent assumptions in the field of forests and livelihoods (and perhaps development, more broadly)
  - Encourage adequate inter- and trans-disciplinary research and researchers, including qualitative studies.
  - Encourage cross-sector learning and communication

