

HEADS OF FORESTRY DIALOGUE ON INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHANGE AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

Introduction by Patrick Durst

BACKGROUND

Good afternoon. My name is Patrick Durst. I'm FAO Senior Forestry Officer, working in our Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. It's my pleasure to welcome you to the "Heads of Forestry Dialogue on Institutional Responses to Change and the their Effectiveness."

I'd like you to recall the presentation on institutional changes introduced during the COFO plenary session yesterday afternoon. Today, we'd like to build on that session by providing an opportunity for heads of forestry to exchange experiences and ideas in a more informal manner.

Institutional reinvention has become a favourite topic of everyone these days... to the point where almost all problems relating to forest management – rightly or wrongly – have been attributed to institutional deficiencies, including problems of governance.

We know change is a constant. Society's changing and increasing demands on forests and foresters require us to change the ways we work and the institutional structures that we work within.

Almost all countries have made efforts to bring about institutional changes in forestry, but these efforts have varied considerably in scope and effectiveness.

In developing countries, institutional changes have often been driven by donors; despite all good intentions, these efforts have, at best, produced only mixed results.

To be effective, we need to ensure that institutional change is firmly rooted in the local context.

To gain a better understanding of the issues, FAO has been conducting studies on institutional changes. Last year, for example, we completed a study on re-inventing forestry agencies in Asia and the Pacific. Currently, a similar study is underway in five countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In addition, FAO has been involved in country-specific efforts to support institutional development within the larger framework of national forest programmes.

OBJECTIVES

Now, let's turn to today's dialogue. Our discussion here today among Heads of Forestry is aimed at facilitating a frank exchange of views and perceptions on institutional changes and to learn from the experiences of others.

I'm sure that all of you have stories (perhaps horror stories?) to tell of the challenges of keeping your organizations attuned to relevant in the face of rapid change and increasing demands. So, rather than listening to theoretical approaches from management experts, we think that it will be more rewarding for you to share and compare experiences among yourselves as the real "trial-by-fire" experts on this topic.

We urge you to talk frankly about the challenges, problems, successes and failures that you've experienced in reforming, remodelling, reinventing,

refining, revitalising, reinvigorating, renewing, restructuring, redesigning... however you describe and define the change related to your organization. Our work suggests that there are many commonalities and overlaps in the difficulties institutions face in reinventing themselves, but there is likely to be much more diversity in the ways that these challenges have been overcome. We hope some of you will be able to offer advice and potential solutions to the problems raised.

HOW THIS WILL BE ORGANIZED

Just a few comments on how our dialogue will be organized. First and foremost, we hope this will be a very informal discussion. None of what is said here will be included in the official records of COFO. What we are looking for is a very open and frank discussion.

To kick-start the discussion we have requested one head of forestry from each region to outline one major institutional change issue they have addressed during the last five years. This is just to start the discussion.

This will be followed by sharing of experiences and discussion among all the participants. My task is simply to facilitate the discussion.

To provide some indication of issues that we might discuss, we've prepared a preliminary set of questions to provide some initial stimulation (see screen).

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION DURING THE HOF DIALOGUE

Relevance of public sector agencies

- How are public sector forestry agencies remaining relevant in the context of the larger social and economic changes?

General changes in public sector institutions

- How has change been handled in your forestry department compared with approaches in other closely related government departments?

Functional changes

- In defining the tasks your agency will carry out, are there any systematic efforts to identify the clients or customers and what their needs are? Who are your clients? Your Minister and Government? The forestry industry? The wider public? Are there effective tools and approaches to clearly understand what the customers of forestry expect from the public sector forestry agencies?

Structural changes

- Are structural changes made in your organization primarily based on changes in the functions you are required to carry out, or are there situations where changes are necessary even when functions remain more-or-less intact?

Moving forward

- From your perspective what is the most ideal framework for your institution? Are your structures dependent on functional lines? Or geographical lines? Or both? Or something else? Which structures are optimal?
- What are the greatest constraints and opportunities you may face in accomplishing your vision?

These are just indicative and you're certainly welcome to address other questions and issues that you consider more important.

All together we have time only up to 1730. In view of the rigid time we'll have for interpretation services, we will not be able to extend the session beyond that

time (so, you see we're already facing some institutional challenges here!). So, let's be very brief and to the point when offering comments, and please focus clearly and on matters of institutional change.

With that brief introduction, I'd like to invite our distinguished panelists to kick off the discussions by each briefly describing a major issue or challenge involving institutional change in which they've been involved with in the past five years.