

## SECTION 4: DISCUSSION

### WORKSHOP DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter we present the issues and recommendations which were discussed by the workshop participants. Our identity as a group was important here; the workshop was organised by the European Tropical Forestry Research Network, and in particular sought recommendations for the conduct of forestry *research* rather than *practice*. This stimulated a discussion about the nature and purpose of research, and the fact that many of the presentations were based on experience of forestry *practitioners*. The group recognised that a broad view of research as a learning process would help the discussion to move forward, and that in particular new research *methods* tend to emerge from field practice rather than from academic research. Furthermore, as the recommendations show, many participants felt that research activities are not easily separated from dissemination, institutional issues and policy.

Participants divided into groups to consider the following questions, which move from an assessment of the current situation through identified needs for change, to personal responsibilities for such change:

1. What is changing in forestry and forestry research?
2. What needs to change further?
3. What action should we take?
4. What should be the priority research topics?

Different groups considered the implications for forestry researchers ('internal' stakeholders), and for 'external' stakeholders such as donors, policy makers and forestry practitioners.

### CHANGE

Our discussions about change in forestry are summarised in table 1, and perceptions of further need for change in table 2. The group discussing internal issues highlighted a profound change in the nature of 'forestry' which has become a diverse discipline within which foresters might now be considered as professionals working with people using forest resources, irrespective of which discipline they come from. Consequently, the isolation of the traditional forestry sector is no longer seen as valid. These changes have occurred among both practitioners and researchers, but less so among decision-makers and large (forestry) companies, indicating a need for institutional change.

Participants noted however that some countries are starting to devolve control over forest resources to local communities, as part of a global trend which encourages governments to 'hand over the stick'. This is accompanied by a change in control of knowledge and research, through more participatory approaches. Participants in the workshop had very distinct experiences, and pointed out that not all governments are following this trend. The degree to which governments are prepared to give up control depends very much on the resource status.

In countries with degraded forest areas, governments are more prepared to devolve forest management, whilst in those which still have rich forest resources governments prefer to control the benefits of those resources. And finally we should remember that the devolution of power to communities is not sufficient; we need to be aware that local power structures may also be inequitable.

**Table 1:** What is changing in forestry and forestry research?

Note: The groups were summarising their perceptions of change, and hence the distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ issues is not rigid in this section.

Internal issues	External issues
The traditional forestry approach is challenged.	Multilateral donors are now supporting participatory forestry, and recognise the value of local knowledge.
We see change from a single-disciplinary (forestry) approach to a multidisciplinary (livelihoods) approach.	On the negative side, bilateral donors have reduced funding, and use short-term economic criteria to evaluate projects.
But forestry business and administration retain the traditional approach.	The objectives of tropical forestry have changed to include empowerment, in line with a more general trend towards decentralisation of decision-making powers.
The devolution of power represents a kind of revolution.	Donors expect research to be demand-led, and to involve beneficiaries.
The global conservation agenda has a strong influence, but is also questioned by some.	Relations between rural resource users and foresters have improved.
	Forest departments can no longer act unilaterally to enforce forest policy and must seek cooperation with forest users.
	More disciplines are involved in forestry research.

**Table 2:** What needs to change further?

<b>Internal issues</b>	<b>External issues</b>
Create opportunities for exchange of experience through networks and journals; and	Foresters and policy makers must recognise and accept local institutions, and enhance the scope for cooperation between local (formal and informal), national and international institutions.
build on local, existing structures/networks.	Networking channels need to be developed.
Ensure training / education of 'foresters' includes other disciplines dealing with natural resources.	Facilitate vertical and horizontal links between research, so that for example the World Bank can learn from local participatory research.
Include broad based, interdisciplinary education imparting 'conservation/forestry/environmentalist' values in non-forestry education from primary level onwards.	Funding for research should be less prescriptive and allow for a process approach which allows revision of goals during the research.
Researchers must develop a real interdisciplinary approach, by not only planning together but also conducting the research together.	Accept the equal status of local and scientific knowledge.
Foresters need to abandon arrogant attitudes.	Establish journal for relevant research.
Communication between researchers, resource users and practitioners needs to improve.	Institutions (government, donors, etc.) must move towards a more participatory and IK-inclusive* approach.
We need more research into the interface between IK* and professional knowledge.	Change attitudes to and roles for forestry research to enhance relevance for forest users.
	Involve resource users in defining research needs and include representatives on donors' decision-making boards.

\* IK = indigenous knowledge

**ACTION**

**Table 3:** What action should we take?

Internal issues	External issues
Advocate amongst our own professions to change perceptions of forestry (i.e. to recognise that it is interdisciplinary, IK-inclusive*, and uses participatory approaches)	Improve coordination between researchers, e.g. by establishing a clearing house which tracks who is doing what, why, when and where; and what <i>methods</i> they are using to learn <i>with</i> resource users.
Establish dialogue between researchers, practitioners and resource users.	Influence institutions, networks and organisations to recognise the issues we have discussed here.
Communicate better with the general public to change perceptions of the forestry profession.	Introduce participatory learning in forestry education.
Ask ETFRN to survey existing networks (professional, academic, local) and identify the need for a specific network, journal, newsletter, etc. for topics related to 'learning with resource users'.	Change current forestry curricula to address the need for participatory forestry management.
Change our own way of working and accept that others have different ways of doing things.	Promote integrated interdisciplinary research.
Improve learning processes with resource users through participatory research.	Ensure that project and research reports are produced in English, the language of the donor and the language of the research area (local language), and make sure that 5 copies of research reports are disseminated to libraries in the country where research was conducted.
Formulate general hypotheses from site-specific studies (extrapolation of findings)	Communicate research findings to the users with short and practically oriented reports.
Build theories and concepts on how to learn with local resource users.	Re-evaluate failures to help improve learning processes in forestry.
Build local research / learning capacity	
Document dynamics of local knowledge instead of treating it as static.	
Advocate for change in criteria for accepting publications in journals (many participants experience difficulties in publishing 'process-orientated' research).	
Work with a range of policy-makers, not only forest departments.	

\* IK = indigenous knowledge

**Table 4:** Preliminary list of research topics

Research topics	Research approaches
In what ways is local knowledge dynamic and what factors affect such change?	How can we improve cooperation between disciplines?
What areas does indigenous knowledge <i>not</i> include and how can these be addressed?	How can we develop a <i>general</i> understanding of methods for researching local systems / knowledge?
How can we generalise from context-specific local knowledge?	How can we integrate indigenous and scientific knowledge in forest management?
Are existing forest curricula addressing the need for participatory forest management?	
What is the relevance for forest management, of local / indigenous knowledge in Europe?	In summary, both
How can research improve livelihood security?	conceptual research to generalise findings and to develop a new set of integrated theories and methods, which will stimulate paradigm change; and  location-specific research and development to improve local livelihoods, which will lead to further integration with information networks.

Recommendations for action which we can take as researchers or practitioners, are summarised in table 3, and preliminary suggestions for research topics are in table 4. The discussion groups considered how their recommendations related to research topics, and produced a short list of ideas. We refer the reader to the ETFRN website ([www.etfrn.org/etfrn](http://www.etfrn.org/etfrn)) for subsequent discussion of the research implications. More discussion took place around the research *processes* than around the topics themselves and its contribution to development; the key points are presented below.

### **Participation**

Participation in research refers not only to the research activities themselves. The group also identified a need to improve the involvement of resource users in decisions about research, and in the use of research results in training and development projects. Research funders might limit the possibilities for this, but we felt an effort should be made to find donors who understand the need for integration of research and development.

Aspects of participation which need to be addressed include particularly the need to return research findings to the research sites and participants. It is not possible or appropriate for all research to be conducted and validated by local researchers, but

where outsiders conduct research based on local knowledge or practice, we have an obligation to make sure the results are communicated to those who contributed. Such communication can be enhanced if we seek funding for local language translations and use more non-verbal forms of communication.

### **Role of ‘forestry’ research**

The range of disciplines represented at the workshop, and diversity of experience reported, provoked questions about what kind of research can be labelled ‘forestry’ research. Some participants felt the research we were discussing would be better described as ‘livelihoods’ research, but others felt this might reduce the social dimensions of forestry by separating the livelihood issues from it.

There was a strong sense of responsibility as researchers, and recognition that this responsibility is particularly complex in research involving local resource users. It was suggested that the professional researcher should think of him or herself as an intermediary, in a position to communicate research needs and results to those who can use them, or to those who can respond to them by facilitating or enabling change.

The recommendations of the ‘internal’ working group in particular reflect the sense among participants that foresters, and forestry researchers, must work hard to change perceptions of their profession, and advocate for a better understanding of the social and power issues involved in our work, as well as linking more directly with government departments other than forestry.

### **Generalisation**

The discussion stimulated a debate about generalisation of research findings. We noted that some of the presentations had warned against assuming that research from one geographical region or culture, was relevant for others. This appears particularly to be the case with studies of indigenous knowledge, in contrast with scientific research which seeks to generalise from controlled experiments (an example relevant to forestry would be the generalisation of plant breeding results from site specific studies). This highlighted a difference in research approach which requires interdisciplinary approaches, and the need to develop generalisable concepts, theories and methods.

One way to approach this is through country-specific case studies, but we must recognise the possibility that results are not easily communicated between countries. Both approaches (regional exchange of experience, and attempts to generalise) are needed and can coexist.

Summarising the debate, it was suggested that research involving local or indigenous knowledge needs to take place at two inter-related levels:

- a) conceptual research to generalise findings and to develop a new set of integrated theories and methods, which will stimulate paradigm change;
- b) location-specific research and development to improve local livelihoods, which will lead to further integration with information networks.

### **Dissemination**

The focus of the workshop on resource users led many participants to see dissemination as a particularly high priority for researchers. We considered the range of options for dissemination, and the pressures on researchers to publish results, and noted that we should make use of the range of outlets for these findings (journals, newsletters, leaflets) depending on the type of research being reported on.

While some participants saw a strong need to create a new journal, others argued that existing journals should be encouraged to include new research approaches of the kind discussed at this workshop. One result of this meeting could be to propose new guidelines for accepting such research in professional journals. The argument for a new journal is that there is no focused body of knowledge on this topic, and that instead it is dispersed in many different publications, which makes it difficult to keep track of other work. Such a journal would not necessarily be confined to forestry. However establishing a new journal would take up a lot of time and resources so the preference of the group is to work with existing outlets.

More specifically, it was noted that a journal is an academic communication tool; how can we communicate with practitioners and resource users? This question led into a discussion of the value of networks.

### **Networks**

Linking researchers and practitioners through networks plays an important role in research of the kind discussed here, and an animated part of the discussion focused on the merits of establishing new networks. There was a strong general feeling that existing networks could be better used, and that there is scope for researchers to share information about these, perhaps through one of the networks itself – this could in fact be a key role for ETRN.

Against this was the view that existing networks are not sufficiently open to the specific issues discussed here. However it was recognised that networks are expensive to establish and run, and that a new one was not practicable; instead we should focus on convincing network coordinators of the importance of issues relating to resource users. One way in which ETRN could move forward would be through linking up with research institutes in the tropics:

### **Education**

Finally, it is worth noting that many participants mentioned the need for foresters to change – and that this would only happen if forestry education changes. Curricula for forestry education are still largely based on the traditional approach to forestry as natural resources to be managed by professionals; as forestry researchers we agreed on the importance of communicating the need for new foresters to be more aware of the range of participatory methodologies, and approaches used by relevant social disciplines.