Growing sustainable and inclusive landscapes for over 25 years

Model Forests are an important addition to every forest practitioner’s sustainable development toolbox. This approach to building and managing the governance of large-scale landscapes is founded on convening a diverse range of stakeholders — such as local community associations, indigenous peoples, governments, and industry — and developing inclusive partnerships as complex as the values and uses of the landscape it encompasses. Model Forests bring joint solutions and innovative strategies to shared challenges such as climate change, wildfires and pests, market access and livelihoods, health and well-being, and land-use conflicts.

Since being appointed Head of the International Model Forest Network Secretariat in mid-2017, I have been proud to watch our members and partners continue to make a difference around the world. I see proof every day that Model Forests are not standing in isolation, but make up a greater network of individuals and organizations planning and implementing a range of activities, including forest landscape restoration, natural resource policy development, gender-responsive initiatives, and community training and capacity building.

Model Forests have been promoting the landscape approach to sustainable development for more than 25 years. As the international community looks for ways to achieve their commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals and other agreements, we point to the success that has come from within our Network and look ahead to scaling up these lessons for even greater achievements, together.
PARTNERSHIPS Each Model Forest is a neutral forum that welcomes voluntary participation of representatives of stakeholder interests and values on the landscape. Model Forests are voluntary and diverse partnerships designed to create, mobilize and share knowledge, expertise and technology locally, nationally and internationally. These inclusive fora bring the public, private and volunteer sectors, community organizations, academia and research institutions together to jointly develop a strategy for the sustainable development of a given area.

The innovative approach developed by the Kyoto Model Forest Association in Japan to engage private companies such as Coca-Cola, Kyocera and Suntory in a corporate social responsibility movement and the funding of forest management activities, is a notable example of a private-sector partnership that responds to local needs.

LANDSCAPES A large-scale biophysical area representing a broad range of forest values, including social, cultural, economic and environmental concerns. Model Forests are large-scale biophysical areas encompassing a broad range of forest values, natural resources and diverse ecosystems. They are watershed scale approaches to natural resource management where forests are an important feature in the landscape, but certainly not the only one. The forest-farm interface, for instance, represents a critical component of many Model Forests, as does the rural-urban interface. Forest and landscape restoration (FLR) is a key theme in many Model Forests. FLR’s dual objectives to restore degraded lands while also improving human well-being through multifunctional landscapes is ideally suited to the Model Forest context. In fact, 11 Model Forests in Latin America are members of the 20x20 Initiative and have collectively pledged restoring 1.6 Million Ha of degraded land by 2020 in support of the Bonn Challenge. Through FLR, Model Forests directly contribute to mitigating and adapting to climate change at the local level.

SUSTAINABILITY Stakeholders are committed to the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources and the forested landscape. Model Forest stakeholders explore and promote practices that contribute to maintaining and/or restoring the ecological integrity of the landscape. Whether in a developed or developing country context, Model Forests do this using a cross-sectoral approach to the three pillars of sustainable development. Model Forest priorities are reflective of local and national management challenges and occupy the space between policy and practice, where national commitments or programs such those related to climate change, forest and landscape restoration, or the protection of biodiversity as examples — can be tested before being scaled up, or where local programs can be shared with governments for application beyond the Model Forest boundary. The Eastern Ontario Model Forest in Canada collaborating with Bluesource Canada to generate carbon offsets for community forests across the province of Ontario is one example of that.
GOVERNANCE The Model Forest management process is representative, participative, transparent and accountable, and promotes collaborative work among stakeholders.

In a Model Forest, stakeholders work together using consensus-based processes to attain a common vision and objectives. While there are attributes to describe what a Model Forest is, there is no template for how one must be structured. The actions of the Model Forest are governed by principles of trust, transparency and collaborative decision-making, while respecting various interests and values.

Through their inclusive governance structures, Model Forests provide a space at the table for typically marginalized stakeholders, such as women and indigenous peoples. Along these lines, the Ibero-American Model Forest Network (IAMFN) launched its Gender Equity and Equality Strategy to support its members in ensuring representation that is more balanced. This regional tool provides guidelines for institutionalizing a gendered approach to sustainable landscape governance that is being implemented in Latin America and shared with other parts of the Network.

PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES The activities undertaken by a Model Forest are reflective of the Model Forest’s vision and stakeholder needs, values and management challenges.

The Model Forest approach can achieve multiple benefits for people and communities dependent on local priorities and context: economic development, food security, conflict resolution, wood or non-wood products, water supply, clean energy, and more. Model Forest stakeholders undertake activities that reflect their needs and support national forest and other program activities, facilitating and promoting knowledge generation and innovative solutions to the sustainable management of natural resources. In other words, each Model Forest is unique, and therefore the range of activities stakeholders undertake in pursuit of sustainable development varies widely. There are examples of Model Forest programming touching on each of the SDGs. For example, Montagne Fiorentine Model Forest in Italy pioneering ethical certification of wood and sustainable tourism is promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns.

KNOWLEDGE-SHARING, CAPACITY BUILDING AND NETWORKING Model Forests build stakeholder capacity to engage in the sustainable management of natural resources, and collaborate and share results and lessons learned through networking.

Through its network structure, Model Forest stakeholders and participants in the IMFN are committed to local, regional and international knowledge sharing and networking. By design, Model Forests are intended to ‘speed up’ sustainability programming, processes and policy influence. They do this by exchanging experiences and lessons learned, strengthening local capacity to engage in the sustainable management of natural resources, and sharing their achievements and challenges nationally and internationally.

Following this principle, a learning laboratory has been created in Tiveden National Park in Bergslagen Model Forest, Sweden, for the stakeholders to collaboratively develop, apply and evaluate innovative forest management methods allowing for both wood harvesting and tourism opportunities.

Similarly, Puerto Rico’s National Model Forest, the Chocó Andino Model Forest in Ecuador, the Pichanaki Model Forest in Peru and the Newfoundland and Labrador Model Forest in Canada are leading inclusive learning programs such as “forest schools” where sensitivities are developed and awareness is generated around the natural environment. These initiatives seek to influence education and benefit the local population as well as promote sustainable management of natural resources nationally and internationally.
Model Forests’ Highlights from 2017–2018

1. Kyoto Model Forest: An approach to collaborative forest management through corporate social responsibility

2. Chorotega Model Forest: Restoring one hectare at a time to protect freshwater springs

3. Carood Watershed Model Forest: Partnering with FAO to restore its landscape and protect against fire

4. Prince Albert Model Forest: Renewing cultural and spiritual relationships with the bison and the landscape

5. Eastern Ontario Model Forest: Partnering with Bluesource Canada to generate carbon offsets for community forests

6. Chocó Andino Model Forest: Obtains Biosphere Reserve status

7. Ibero-American Model Forest Network (IAMFN): Ensuring inclusiveness in Model Forest landscapes through a gender equality and equity strategy

8. Montagne Fiorentine Model Forest: Pioneering ethical certification of wood and sustainable tourism

9. Bergslagen Model Forest: Place-based collaborative learning towards multiple forest use

10. African Model Forest Network (AMFN): Learning from each other for integrated landscape management in Africa

11. Margowitan Model Forest: Forest communities granted low-interest loans, legal access and policy support to engage in agroforestry as part of national food security program

12. Puerto Rico National, Chocó Andino, Pichanaki, and Newfoundland and Labrador Model Forests: Leading inclusive learning programs to raise awareness and build capacities around the natural environment
IMFN Snapshot

The International Model Forest Network (IMFN) is an ever-growing global network for sharing new ideas, best practices, and advancing sustainable landscape management through concrete action. The IMFN was first hosted by Natural Resources Canada’s Canadian Forest Service in Ottawa in 1992, and its Secretariat continues to be hosted there today.

For more than 25 years, IMFN members and supporters have been implementing a participatory, landscape-level approach to the sustainable management of natural resources. Model Forests offer an effective and flexible way to build partnerships and bring together stakeholders involved in the environmental, social and economic aspects of a landscape.

As of end of 2018, the IMFN membership includes some 61 Model Forests with additional sites under development, supported in 37 countries and covering nearly 70 million hectares.
The IMFN Secretariat provides the central day-to-day coordination of support and development services to the network, and develops and strengthens the IMFN and its profile internationally. The Secretariat facilitates and encourages networking and knowledge sharing among the member Model Forests, and acts as the focal point and authoritative source of all IMFN communications. Together with the regional networks, the Secretariat also jointly leads the membership assessment process with regional Model Forest network representatives.

ENSURING INTEGRITY AND PROMOTION OF THE MODEL FOREST CONCEPT

In 2017–2018, the IMFN Secretariat participated in four successful membership assessment missions alongside regional representatives. These include: Floresta Modelo Amazonas-Tapajós in the amazonian state of Pará and Floresta Modelo Hileia Baiana in the states of Bahia and Espírito Santo in Brazil, Czech Republic Model Forest, a site dispersed across five discontinuous locations at different ends of the country, and Balkhila Model Forest in the Indian Himalayan Region. The continued growth of the Network is a demonstration that the Model Forest concept is a highly relevant approach to address local sustainable development concerns through multistakeholder partnerships.

PARTNERSHIP IS THE STRENGTH OF THE NETWORK

The IMFN Secretariat is also a longstanding member, and former Chair, of the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR) and represented the Network at the Partnership’s meeting in December 2017 on the margins of the Global Landscapes Forum. As a demonstration of our support to the GPFLR, the Secretariat is also a member of its virtual secretariat, meaning the provision of support to the Executive Committee of that organization by way of coordinating and contributing to communications and other activities. In that capacity, IMFN contributed to creation of the first GPFLR report “Restoring forests and landscapes: the key to a sustainable future”, which features Chorotega Model Forest’s restoration success story. In a similar vein, the Secretariat also contributed to Canada’s 2018 report to the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) where the IMFN’s contribution to SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals, was highlighted.

NEW WAYS TO REACH MORE PEOPLE

Directly supporting the sixth Model Forest principle on knowledge sharing and networking, the IMFN Secretariat continued to lead on global communications and outreach on behalf of the Network. The new IMFN website will improve communication and outreach while providing a channel to share knowledge and best practices on sustainable forest management and keep the Network’s members and partners informed on the different activities going on in the 61 Model Forests around the world.
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