



MEGA FLORESTAIS 2024

THE EVOLUTION OF FOREST MANAGEMENT ON THE PATH TO 2030

NORTHERN PARÁ, BRAZIL | AUGUST 19-22, 2024

MEETING SYNOPSIS

MEGA *florestais*



The fifteenth gathering of MegaFlorestais was held in the state of Northern Pará, Brazil from August 19-22, 2024. This year's theme was "The Evolution of Forest Management on the Path to 2030." MegaFlorestais has three main goals: i) address the most pressing issues facing the forestry sector and encourage learning and innovation; ii) promote new practices and policies for strengthening forest governance and forest agencies; and iii) foster strong relationships and empower forest leaders to become agents of change within their agencies and across ministries. These goals were well delivered in the Brazilian Amazon as we considered the progress and challenges of elevating the role of community-led conservation, preventing forest loss, and promoting restoration and reforestation around the world.

Brazil is a leader in the forestry and conservation sectors and will take center stage in the climate arena as the host of the UN Climate Change Conference COP30 in 2025. With this in mind, MegaFlorestais 2024 was held along the Tapajós River, a major tributary to the Amazon River. We engaged in fruitful discussions on important issues in forest governance with an emphasis on Indigenous Peoples', Afro-descendant Peoples', and local communities' role in leading forest conservation. Throughout the week participants reflected on the crucial role forests play in implementing sustainable climate solutions.

The week's activities were hosted by the Brazilian Forest Service, led by Director Garo Batmanian. The meeting began in Alter do Chão and at the offices of the Tapajós National Forest in the state of Pará in northcentral Brazil. The week included two nights traveling by riverboat on the Tapajós River with stops in Coroca and Casa do Saulo. Forest agency leaders and resource advisors participated from Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Nepal, Peru, Sweden, and the United States.



PHOTO BY G. OLIVER FOTOGRAFIA

DAY 1

WELCOME AND LEADERS ROUNDTABLE

The meeting started with the official welcome by the Chief of Brazilian Forest Service, Garo Batmanian, who shared the background of the importance of the region to sustainable forestry in Brazil. Mega-Florestais co-chairs Leslie Weldon and Herman Sundqvist proceeded to present the purpose of Mega-Florestais and how the network was created to facilitate conversations between forest agency leaders. Solange Bandiaky-Badji, President and Coordinator of the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), talked about the role of RRI, as MegaFlorestais secretariat, in advocating for the land and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendent Peoples, and local communities. The year 2025 will be an opportunity to reflect on MegaFlorestais' 20 years of accomplishments and continue to shape the initiative to address new and future forestry challenges. Sally Collins summarized some of these accomplishments: supporting the leadership of forest agencies in the Next Generation of Forest Leaders Workshop, hosting the Rethinking Forest Regulation workshops, and organizing the networks' annual meetings.

Leaders roundtable

We began the meeting by inviting participants to introduce themselves and to share three high priority issues or strategies that are the focus of their leadership. While the leaders' responses were diverse

in their international context, the commonality of intent for sustaining forests and biological diversity, improving policy implementation, and supporting forest-dependent communities was evident.

Sweden: Magnus Viklund, Head of Policy and Analysis Division at the Swedish Forest Agency

Magnus observed that the role of forestry is becoming prominent in the words of his country's political leaders as they express the importance of conserving forests while preserving the reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting culture of the Sami People. Sweden is adapting to the EU Forestry Policy legislation and is working through issues affecting the implementation of forestry work. There is an increased focus on the long-term role of forestry in addressing the country's needs. The Swedish Forest Service will lead the implementation of the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). The EUDR requires that all forest-related products created in or imported to EU countries be certified as coming from lands not deforested to produce them. Implementation will begin in earnest in the next few years and will require clear tracking strategies to ensure implementation.

Sweden is also implementing a conservation initiative to re-wet forested peatlands—rewetting peatlands can reduce soil-based carbon emissions and conserve extensive below-ground carbon. One of the Swedish Forest Service's organizational priorities is to meet the challenges of the future by increasing the competencies and capacities of their employees, including integrating more women into the forest sector.

Indonesia: Pak Bambang Supriyanto, Director General of Social Forestry and Environmental Partnership

Pak Bambang presented three priorities for forest management in Indonesia: i) strengthen forest management; ii) improve energy and transportation; and iii) review the land reform process as it relates to Indigenous Peoples.

He noted that while Indonesia is the 14th largest country in the world, it is home to the third largest global forest ecosystem with 120 million hectares, including 68 million hectares of protected areas and 27 million hectares of conserved forests. The use of technology in forest management has increased through collaborative partnerships, resulting in more high-resolution satellite imagery. This information is available to the public and is assisting in the country's efforts to keep forests standing. Technology advances have improved the efforts of SiPongi, Indonesia's system for forest and land fire management.

Community-led forest concessions are expanding, with Indonesia granting concessions covering over 400,000 hectares. There is stronger acknowledgement of the need for Native communities to engage in forest management. Indonesia's Social Forestry Program focuses on identifying funding mechanisms to expand this work through the Bezos Earth Fund and USAID.

Republic of Congo: Rosalie Matondo, Minister of Forest Economy

The Republic of Congo is making steady progress on increasing the sustainable management of its forests with 25 million hectares designated as production forests. After 20 years of managing forest concessions, the country has achieved the goal of 50 percent of its forests being certified.

The conservation of biological diversity is also a major priority for the Republic of Congo. As of 2024, the country has protected 27 percent of its lands and is aiming for 30 percent of protected areas by 2030. The Republic of Congo is currently struggling to establish protected areas on the seacoast and is collaborating with neighboring countries. In addition, 11 million hectares are being targeted for reforestation. This will be the emphasis of future work for the country's forests along with protecting against deforestation. Illegal logging continues to be a problem, but most of the illegal harvesting is to provide energy for families.

The Republic of Congo collaborated with the Africa Union and UN Forum on Forests to host the First International Conference on Afforestation and Reforestation ([ICAR1](#)) in Brazzaville from July 2 to 5, 2024. The event brought together global experts, policymakers, and industry representatives to discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with afforestation and reforestation. This crucial event highlighted the urgent need for new plantations to meet the growing demand for wood and the need to protect existing natural forests. The objectives of the conference were to stimulate discussions about increasing the world's forest area on the basis of international cooperation and systemization of afforestation and reforestation activities. These goals will help optimize carbon sequestration, preserve habitats and biodiversity, and support the production of goods and services provided by forests.

United States: Angela Coleman, Associate Chief of the US Forest Service

The US Forest Service's focus is on addressing wildfires, a major climate-driven event affecting forests today. It is implementing a Wildland Fire Crisis Strategy which focuses on securing long-term funding for 21 of the United States' highest risk fire sheds by implementing forest management treatments in collaboration with communities to reduce the impacts of wildfires and protect watersheds, habitat, and property. Now in its third year of implementation, risks have been reduced to 550 communities. Funding support has been strong from US Congress and the Biden Administration.

The US Forest Service has also expanded its national strategies to partner with States, non-profit organizations, and communities to expand its capacity to address priorities for managing both public and private forestlands in the United States. It has newly established long-term partnership agreements with State and Tribal Forest agencies and multiple non-governmental organizations to assist in conservation work nationwide.

The US Forest Service has also been strengthening the skills of its depleted and aging workforce by hiring additional people into occupational series most needed for future strategies. Angela commented on the value of relationship building in MegaFlorestais, including her engagements with Rosalie Matondo, Herman Sundqvist, and Pak Bambang at global forest leadership events over the past year.

DRC: Ève Bazaiba Masudi, Minister of Environment

Minister Ève Bazaiba Masudi shared the country's priorities for forest and biological diversity conservation. The DRC shares the Congo Basin, spanning 260 million hectares, with six countries. Sixty percent, or 150 million hectares, lies in the DRC and is a great responsibility. Tropical and mangrove forests across the Basin provide water resources, biological diversity, and carbon storage. The Miombo ecosystem of grasses, tropical forest, and shrublands are also shared across many nations. They are sources of rich flora and fauna and minerals, including rare earth minerals needed for today's technology markets. However, the DRC is experiencing illegal logging and forest exploitation and is addressing ongoing challenges of defense and security of forest resources.



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Nepal: Rabindra Maharjan, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Forests and Environment

Rabindra shared that community-led forestry is a priority in Nepal. The country has practiced community forestry for over 40 years. As of 2019, data from the National Forest Inventory showed that over 45 percent of the country's lands, or 2.4 million hectares, were covered by community management, engaging 3.2 million households. Forest User Groups prepare three-to-five-year operating plans.

Nepal has been developing standards for sustainable forest management and has had very good success at increasing forest cover through reforestation programs. Nepal is also identifying ways to increase production on forestlands by enhancing traditional forestry practices. Sustainable forest management strategies are defined by elevational/ecological/social bands, including high elevation, mid-slope, and plains/lowland areas. Population size and land use differ among the elevations and require different regulations and approaches. Rabindra described the importance of Non-Timber Forest Products to Indigenous and local communities with high demand for medicinal plants from India.

Peru: Nelly Paredes del Castillo, Acting Executive Director of the National Forest and Wildlife Service (SERFOR)

SERFOR manages six decentralized forest zones across nine states, many including the Amazon Rainforest. Nelly described challenges in securing stable support for forest management in Peru. It has taken many years for there to be a strong understanding and support for managing Amazonian forest ecosystems and resources. SERFOR has made use of technology to monitor deforestation. Over the past 20+ years, it has increased granting formal titles, rights, and licenses for ownership and community-based forest management. In particular, SERFOR has prioritized community involvement in forest planning and has begun to emphasize the importance of Non-Timber Forest Products.

China: Liu Yuying, Deputy Director General of the International Cooperation Center, National Forestry, and Grassland Administration

China's forests include both public and private ownership. The country and its forest agency have been working with its provinces to establish public forests to initiate the regulation of forests. A lot of China's wood production comes from forest plantations—there is a need to address insect issues in plantations. China is also prioritizing improving the use of natural forests and increasing biological diversity by planting more diverse tree species in these areas. The country is also partnering with Germany to improve its efforts to protect forest health. Over the past few years, the country has increased its reforestation efforts to plant windrows that help to prevent desertification. China also focuses on urban forests through a Green Cities Program that encourages cities to protect and promote green spaces and natural infrastructure within urban areas.

Collective and community-led forestry has been successful in China for a long time and has very high participation rates in rural communities. The majority of forestlands are legally owned and managed by local collectives. There is a new project at the federal level that is focusing on policy reform for Indigenous communities and its objective is to create a five-year plan and a forum to convene several entities to develop a suite of new policies.

Canada: Vincent Roy, Collaborative Research Director of the Canadian Wood Fibre Centre at the Canadian Forest Service

Vincent shared that August 15, 2024, marked the 125th anniversary of the Canadian Forest Service which was established in 1899. The Canadian Forest Service's priorities include the scientific management of forests, the production of sustainable jobs, the fight against climate change, the conservation of biological diversity, and reconciliation with Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

Wildland fires continue to be the biggest drivers of change. In 2024, 30 percent of the mountain tourist town of Jasper, Alberta was destroyed by wildfire. Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable and are 20 percent more likely to be evacuated due to wildfires than non-Indigenous communities.

Canada is coordinating with various Indigenous communities to provide firefighting training and equipment, establish a National Indigenous Wildfire Working Group, and support the historical role of Indigenous fire stewardship. The country has a goal of planting 2 billion trees over the next 10 years through incremental and exponential planting, mostly in boreal forests. It is working with Indigenous communities to increase nursery production of tree seedlings. Within the organization, the Canadian Forest Service is being challenged with increasing its workforce and key skillsets by 25 percent.

Garo Batmanian and Márcio Halla ended the day by providing an overview of the importance of the Santarem region in Brazil to forest management and introduced Tuesday's field trip.

Brazil: Garo Batmanian, Director General of the Brazilian Forest Service at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change

Garo presented an overview of the [context for forest management](#) in Brazil. The Brazilian Forest Service (SFB) has just 100 employees but is responsible for supporting policy and oversight for sustainable forest management of concessions and restoration efforts on State and public lands throughout the country. It also supports community and Indigenous-led forest management. He noted that Brazil

has the largest tropical forest area (about one-third of the nation) and holds the highest concentration of biodiversity on the planet. Brazilian forests account for 497 million hectares, of which 98 percent is natural and 2 percent is planted. Plantation forests occupy approximately 10 million hectares. Forest area per capita in Brazil is 2.4 hectares. Forests occupy over 60 percent of the country with 80 percent of its forestlands residing in the Amazon ecosystem and 20 percent in the rest of the country.

Since the early 1990s, Brazil's log production has shifted from being predominately natural Amazon forest to being majority plantation forest with just a small fraction of the available harvestable species in plantations. Garo identified that one of SFB's priorities is to increase efficiencies in wood utilization across all harvest operations—52 percent of wood is considered waste. The SFB also sees opportunity in working closely with industry to modernize milling technology, and to adapt wood species to better match their uses, including for super-specialized wood products demanded in the market which can be more sustainably managed by influencing buyers and producers to use different tree species and wood qualities in their products. Colleagues from Indonesia, Republic of Congo, the DRC, and Peru face similar issues with tropical wood utilization and values for products.

Brazil is also prioritizing reforestation and forest restoration in upper watershed areas and has begun concessions or contracts to do this work. The sale of forest carbon credits is funding the restoration and reforestation work and demand for seedling stock is high.

For additional information on the SFB's priorities, see [this video](#) with Deputy Director General of the International Cooperation Center, Marcus Vinicius Alves, which was recorded in September 2024 for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO).



PHOTO BY G. OLIVER FOTOGRAFIA

DAY 2

THE TAPAJÓS NATIONAL FOREST FIELD TRIP

COOMFLONA presentation

On the second day of the MegaFlorestais meeting, the group left Alter do Chão for a two-hour drive to the Tapajós National Forest where we convened at the offices of COOMFLONA, a co-op composed of Indigenous Peoples and local communities who have the exclusive right to commercialize the timber and natural resources produced by the forest.

Garo Batmanian introduced the context of the forest as a conservation unit managed by Brazil's National Parks Agency, ICMBio, responsible for managing national forests and conducting research. It conserves the area of the lower Tapajós and supports socioeconomic development through community-led tourism and forest management. COOMFLONA was founded in 2003 when communities obtained authorization from Brazil's Ministry of Environment to manage the forest's natural resources. The management of the co-op is done entirely by communities after years of conflict with the government to keep companies out of the forest and to allow them their legal rights to manage the forest resources. Today, besides timber extraction, the forests produce various products like bio jewelry created by women (seeds and rubber), furniture, andiroba seeds, copaiba oil, cupuacu butter, and honey.

We learned about how government and communities work together to develop the technical expertise required for large forest operations. The government provides regulation, funding, and training while communities provide resources, labor, and products. Except for a few technical roles, most of the labor comes from community members, who are simultaneously developing expertise in forestry, administration, carpentry, and other related roles.

COOMFLONA is now a well-known reference for an effective community-managed forest that ensures both the conservation of the forest and the development of the livelihoods of the communities that live in it. The project's success is thanks to a wide network of partners who provide technical training and funding. These range from government agencies and private companies to established funds such as the Amazon Fund, the World Bank, and various non-profit organizations.

Resource management and manufacturing

In Brazil, the management plans of protected areas are created with communities and approved by ICMBio, and it is the communities who decide how much area will be harvested. These management plans are usually 35-year plans to enable the long-term management of the forest. Every tree extracted is georeferenced, and ICMBio has its own software to trace each tree via a QR code that follows the lifecycle of the timber throughout the chain of custody, from production all the way to the consumer. This ensures the traceability and certification of the sustainable origins of the timber. COOMFLONA staff led the group to a timber yard where we learned about timber mapping and extraction procedures, and how ICMBio has been improving the productivity of timber management while still ensuring the healthy growth and maintenance of valuable tree species.

After the timber yard, the group visited a furniture factory that opened in 2017 which employs 10 people from the co-op. They explained how members of the communities learned carpentry skills and professionalized their workforce to produce high quality furniture for national and international markets through partnerships with furniture designers.



PHOTO BY G. OLIVER FOTOGRAFIA

DAY 3

COROCA COMMUNITY

Coroca livelihoods and sustainable tourism projects

On the third day, MegaFlorestais participants traveled on the Arapiuns River, a tributary of the Tapajós River, to visit the Coroca community. Participants spent the day immersed in the experiences of a community leading a socio-bio economy, defined as an economy based on the sustainable use and restoration of Amazonian ecosystems as well as Indigenous and rural livelihood systems in the region. A socio-bio economy can also include sustainable ecotourism and the production and innovative processing of fruits, nuts, oils, medicines, fish, and other products deriving from socio-biodiversity.

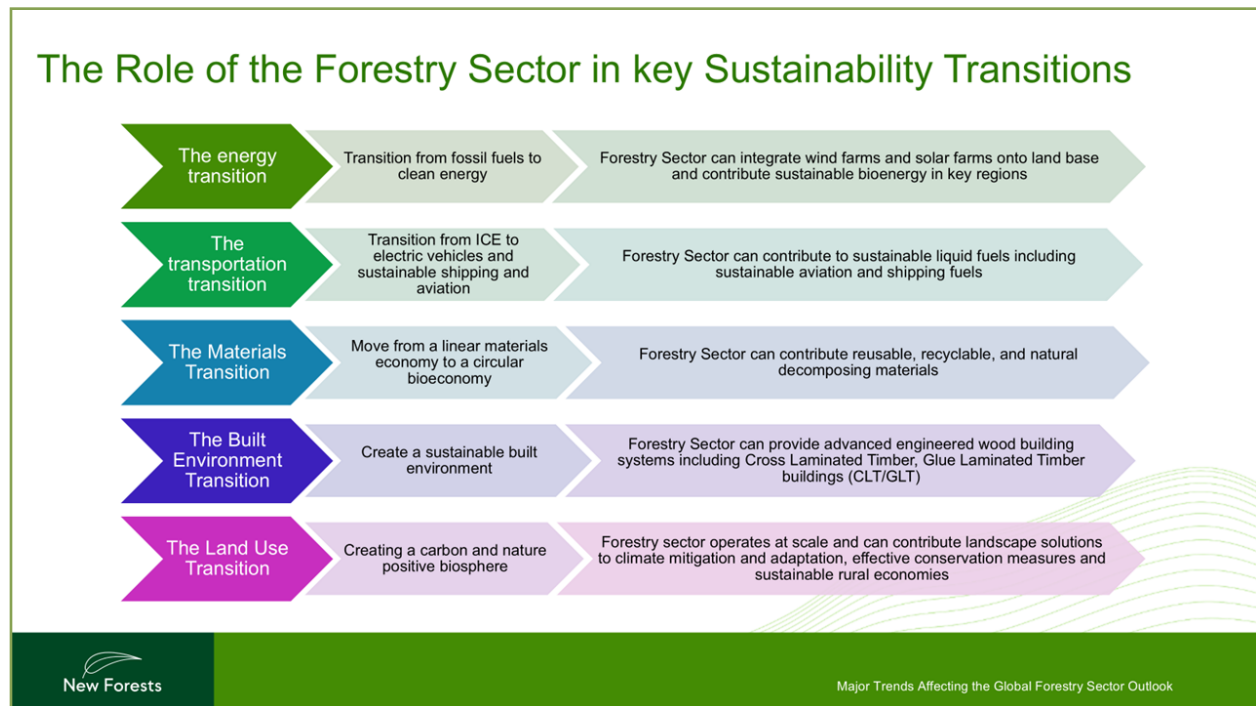
The Coroca community is known for its sustainable tourism projects attracting thousands of tourists traveling to the Santarém region in Pará, Brazil each year. The community has an apiary, arts and crafts made of palm fiber, a restaurant that serves hundreds of tourists during its peak season, a turtle breeding project, and a house to accommodate the short-term stays of tourists.

We started the day visiting these Coroca community-led projects. The apiary is managed by the community, and many individual homes also have their own beehives; some people have 50–60

beehives. The honey produced is medicinal and the bees—made up of several species such as the Jataí and the black and yellow pipe—are stingless, therefore harmless to humans. We learned about the bee and beehive lifecycle and the knowledge the community gained through technical training and their own experiments in beekeeping. In the turtle pond, we learned that the species in the lake live up to 100 years and can grow up to one meter in diameter. The turtle project is a source of livelihood for the community that charges \$25 BRL (approximately US\$4.20) per person to visit and see the turtle feeding. Sustainable tourism in the region began around the year 2010. Other crucial projects led by the Coroca community include the arts and crafts co-op where women and men create baskets and other household items with palm fiber. Through these projects, the Coroca have been able to shift their subsistence from small crop farming that cleared the forest to more sustainable means of livelihood substance that improve the daily lives of community members and keep the forests standing.

Global forest trends scan: Thoughts on nature-based markets, community forestry, and the socio-bio economy


In his presentation “Major Trends Affecting the Global Forestry Sector Outlook” David Brand, Founder and Executive Chair of New Forests, shared compelling information about shifts in the role of global forests. In addition to anticipated shifts in wood demand toward the Indo-Pacific and Africa, he shared how the forestry sector and forests are poised to play significant roles in improving sustainability in the energy, transportation, construction, land use, and materials sectors.



David also emphasized the challenges we're facing in both the regulatory and voluntary carbon markets and shared examples from California, New Zealand, and Australia concerning agreements for afforestation and reforestation (ARR) and REDD+ markets. He highlighted the growing focus on suspending and reversing biodiversity loss through forest-based "nature positive" solutions which is now receiving attention equal to global climate policy goals.

International Policy Framework Priorities

What is the future role of the global forestry sector



- Circular Bio-economy Transition Agenda**
 - G20 has established Bioeconomy Transition Initiative under Brazilian presidency this year
 - Forest and Climate Leaders Partnership initiative to expand use of wood in the built environment launched at COP28 in Dubai
- Nature Capital Agenda**
 - Efforts to establish and scale carbon markets have had mixed success
 - Article 6 - efforts to resolve this at Azerbaijan COP29
 - Could Brazil COP30 launch a fresh approach - Global Natural Capital Agenda for Climate, Biodiversity and Community Benefits?

New Forests

Major Trends Affecting the Global Forestry Sector Outlook

David shared the emergence of new models for cooperation and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities. There is a rising recognition of traditional and community land rights by governments which is promoting local control; investors are learning how to engage with traditional landowners through free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and economic partnership models. However, more work is still needed to better share information between government and corporate interests and communities, and improve the negotiating capacities of communities. There is also a continuing need to take the time required to develop trusting and transparent relationships with Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities.

Challenges and opportunities in nature-based markets

David Brand and Garo Batmanian shared information about the status of nature-based markets as a path to supporting and accelerating conservation outcomes and sustainable communities. Currently, nature has no value as defined by economies unless there is a product or service that is wanted and thus creates a market. For example, under the current system, forestland converted to palm oil plantations generates income or value, whereas the original intact forest ecosystem would not have any inherent economic value.

David and Garo proposed that based on current open market practices, applying a monetary value to nature services that flow from intact ecosystems (carbon storage, water production, habitat, flood control) would help to conserve and protect these functions. David provided several examples of where monetizing ecosystem services through wetland banking and “no net loss” laws for wetlands has increased mitigation and protections from development. These examples showed some of the activity in today’s carbon markets, including incentives for preventing forest conversion, government regulation as a stabilizing factor, and what has been learned from voluntary participation. The dialogue that followed with all participants considered the following questions: How can forest and habitat loss be curtailed by establishing a different economic valuation for intact nature? How can such a paradigm shift protect the carbon and water sinks of the Congo Basin, the Amazon, and the rainforests of Indonesia which are so critical to mitigating climate change?

David shared lessons learned from nature-based and carbon markets from the last decades:

- Markets do work—good evidence exists that demonstrates how markets create benefits from conservation and reforestation and reduce deforestation. Evidence also shows that markets can find low-cost solutions to difficult problems.
- Creating markets is a complex regulatory approach needing sophisticated design, regulation, and stakeholder management.
- We must think carefully about the wider public policy context when setting rules.
- New markets can lead to windfall gains, unexpected price distortions, and other unintended consequences as entrepreneurs seek to find opportunities and capital flows.
- Stability is important to attract long-term capital, otherwise investors heavily discount future revenues or require that all risks be laid-off via forward sales. Future markets can help reduce risk.
- Heavy capital in land and land use change will likely come from institutional investors rather than corporations. These investors are seeking opportunities to decarbonize their investment portfolios while also integrating nature-positive investments—the new “Natural Capital” asset class.
- Government participation in markets will likely be via government-to-government mechanisms rather than playing out in private markets.

We next heard reflections from Hilton Lucas Gonçalves Durão, Advisor at CONAQ, and Crisanto Rudzö Tseremey’wá, Xavante leader, who participated in MegaFlorestais as representatives from the RRI coalition and from women leaders from the Coroca community. Crisanto shared heartfelt and compelling experiences as an Indigenous leader from southern Brazil. We also learned a lot from Hilton, who shared his perspectives and recommendations representing the Brazil’s Afro-descendent Peoples. They expressed the critical need for governments to respect and engage with Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant Peoples with fairness to ensure participation in decisions that affect their communities and overcome the devastating impacts of the past. Hilton also expressed his current concerns:

- If federal law protects Indigenous Peoples, state governments and private entities will try to work around this law in the name of profit.
 - Indigenous Peoples are asked about their contributions to the country’s GDP via agricultural exports but are rarely invited to high-level discussions.
 - Because of this, development is not synonymous with progress for Indigenous Peoples; without thinking about future generations, it can be destructive and irreversible.

- Even if Indigenous Peoples are appointed to the highest-level of government, these decisions rarely carry over to local actions.
- Social management is embedded in resource management: If a government refuses to vaccinate an Indigenous population, this carries over to every other aspect of their existence and their ability to manage their lands and communities.

In response to these remarks, and after witnessing the success of community-led co-ops in Brazil, some MegaFlorestais leaders noted that while their governments aid in the management of rural villages, they could transfer more land management responsibilities to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendent Peoples.

AARTA and Turiarte Cooperative presentation

Community leaders Luziete da Silva Correa, from the Association of Braided Artisans of Arapiuns (AARTA), and Rosângela Tapajós, from the Urucureá community, described their community's long-held traditions and the successes they have had deriving economic benefits from their traditions of caring for nature and supporting their community. They shared their successes in uniting with other communities to protect their rights and prevent development from outside entities, including preventing coal mine development.

AARTA is an association of artisans, mostly women, who work together to produce woven art from the straw of the palm tree called *tucumã piranga*. Luziete, Rosângela, and their colleagues demonstrated first-hand how the palm is harvested, dried, and dyed in preparation for weaving, and showed us the local artisan shop. AARTA has been successful in marketing their products across the region. This work is the result of agroforestry, a technique of forest management that has multiple benefits while sustaining ecosystem function. Luziete and Rosângela expressed their loving commitment to continue delivering benefits to the young people and families of their communities and to improve everyone's quality of life with the goal of providing economic opportunities close to home. They don't just sell handicrafts, but also values, culture, dreams, and the possibility of future achievements for everyone in their community. This sentiment seems to be at the heart of success for communities managing their lands.

The impact of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples in accelerating forest conservation

During this session we explored progress in the relationships and roles played by communities in forest conservation and how land tenure rights, partnerships, and the involvement of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities contribute to and benefit from efforts to prevent deforestation and improve forest restoration and reforestation. Dr. Éliane Ubalijoro, Chief Executive Officer of CIFOR-ICRAF, who hosted the session, provided opening remarks that emphasized the urgency of actions needed to conserve not only forests and biological diversity, but also the communities that have always been a part of the natural world and that have lived in reciprocal, harmonious relationships with nature for millennia. She stressed the importance of governments developing co-leadership relationships with communities.

Following her remarks, five MegaFlorestais participants from Nepal, Republic of Congo, China, Canada, and Indonesia shared information about the evolution, progress, and continuing challenges of their agency programs in relation to community-led conservation. Although the context, policies, and challenges are different across the nations, all have seen progress in recognizing the importance of land tenure rights and community-led conservation. The discussion that followed focused on the need for countries to formally learn more about each other's programs, projects, and activities, improve relationships, and expand trust building exercises that would help to ensure that these programs continue to grow and benefit both people and the planet. There was a growing understanding of the interrelationship between sustainable natural ecosystems and the vitality and success of the communities that live within and depend on these ecosystems.



PHOTO BY G. OLIVER FOTOGRAFIA

DAY 4

CASA DO SAULO

Keynote speaker: Marina Silva, Minister of Environment and Climate Change in Brazil

On the final day of the convening, the group was welcomed at Casa do Saulo, a resort and meeting space nestled on the banks of the Tapajós River. The day began with Marina Silva, Brazil's Minister of Environment and Climate Change, speaking with MegaFlorestais leaders. We were inspired and empowered by the authenticity by which the Minister shared words from her heart. We learned how her childhood experiences in the Amazon shaped her values for people and science, and we witnessed how Minister Silva is actively influencing leaders and communities, both in Brazil and globally, to accelerate climate mitigation actions and to preserve communities. She expressed the need to move toward conserving “social biodiversity” as being critical to conserving nature and addressing climate change in the long-term. She shared the following remarks:

- We are in a new cycle of forest management with two driving questions: How do we conserve what is left when the first cycle of forest management destroyed biodiversity? How do we build agrosystems that reconcile forest and social prosperity?
- Forests play a central role in preserving communities by providing both resources and livelihoods, and communities must be involved in their management and compensated for their knowledge and work.
 - Indigenous Peoples and local communities act as the nurses, forest providers, and water engineers of their territories.
 - Sociobiodiversity requires the merging of scientific and traditional knowledge.
- Forests must be understood beyond carbon: They are repositories of biodiversity, homes to Indigenous populations, spaces of beauty, and sources of sustainable bioeconomies.
- In order to conserve forests, there must be concurrent poverty alleviation; if people are hungry, they will fish and hunt to care for themselves—we have to meet the needs of the poor while conserving for the future.
- Sustainability is an approach to life that must be taught from childhood, not simply as a management strategy.
 - Minister Silva considers herself as having a PhD in traditional knowledge, starting with her father’s insistence that they learn the names of trees growing up.
 - Her children asked her in 2003 why there were no climate meetings for children; a month later, the government started to mobilize children aged 11–15.
 - Words for her 16-year-old self: “We are not the product of what our lives do to us. We are what we make of our lives. We have to create what we believe in.”
- The world’s wealthiest countries must channel funds into the conservation of the world’s forests, particularly the three tropical forest basins of the Amazon, the Congo, and in Indonesia.
 - Beyond the tropics, cities are suffocating under floods and heat waves and glaciers/ permafrost are affecting water levels.

Following her remarks, MegaFlorestais participants held a lively “reflection and question” session with the Minister. There was a desire to continue sharing ideas on how forest agency leaders and partners could continue evolving strategies for forest conservation and to improve the work done with local communities most affected by conservation choices. Indigenous representatives expressed the concern that there is so much to overcome in trusting the government of Brazil with its history of supporting rubber production and the severe impacts this legacy has had on Indigenous communities. They feel strongly the need to persevere against the government to gain and protect their rights.

Political transitions: Angela Coleman, Associate Chief of the US Forest Service

This session was an opportunity for MegaFlorestais participants to share their experiences and practices related to successful political transitions that occur in their nations and the impacts these have on conservation programs. Angela Coleman, Associate Chief of the US Forest Service, led a conversation about the challenges and opportunities associated with transitions in political administrations and their effects on agency leadership as well as changing strategic priorities. Angela shared an



PHOTO BY G. OLIVER FOTOGRAFIA

overview of the US election system, its implications for the US Forest Service, and how her role assists in preparing for successful transitions. With several MegaFlorestais nations recently experiencing political transitions, this topic was timely. Some of the group's reflections included:

- Despite differences in governments, all leaders present faced the need to navigate political transitions.
- Each agency is ultimately charged with carrying out the work of the administration in power within the confines of their mission.
- Many agency leaders serve as part of the current administration, but their roles may shift with political transitions, including reassignments to different roles or seeking work outside of the agency.
- Some leaders expressed that their organization's role is to sustain political neutrality, serving whichever administration is in place. Its goal is to address the priorities of the new administration while sustaining the organization's core mission and responsibilities.
- Long-standing governments have a strong system of constitutional checks and balances that prevent transitions in executive leadership from making drastic changes to agencies. Some developing countries are often more vulnerable under new administrations, which can move agencies between ministries and therefore alter the scope of their work entirely. However, even developed nations may experience similar challenges depending on the political positions and goals of incoming administrations. This raised concerns about the instability of conservation organization programs and services to citizens, and challenges to employees' work experiences.
- Leaders noted it is important to lean on international friendships between MegaFlorestais leaders in times of transition; the relationships built now may become useful once transitions occur.

Reflections from MegaFlorestais participants

At the end of the final day, participants were asked, “When considering the experiences of the week, how did your perspectives change, or what deeper understanding will you bring to your leadership team back home? What words of wisdom or advice would you share with your MegaFlorestais colleagues?”

Liu Yuying, China

Liu would take back a renewed appreciation for the science-based management of forests, the value of independently led community-based forestry, and the significant environmental awareness of communities. The week’s presentations demonstrated for her the role of female leaders as important actors in their communities and in conservation. She sees opportunities to improve the relationships between communities and government.

Rabindra Maharjan, Nepal

Rabindra recognized the value of managing renewable resources wisely. He appreciated the role of ICM-Bio and how it promotes sustainable forest management for an array of beneficial outcomes for forests and people and sees how this approach could be used more often. He shared the value of replicating the Brazilian community-led ecotourism model that puts local people at the center with their active involvement.

Pak Bambang Supriyanto, Indonesia

Pak Bambang shared that he appreciates the methodology and model of MegaFlorestais and how important it is to go to the “grassroots” to witness, and then correct, policies based on what the local people are experiencing. He appreciated the importance of having an open mind, open heart, and open willpower to help us all do well in our responsibilities. He appreciated having such good examples of community forestry models, such as by COOMFLONA and other community-led work, to improve biodiversity, tourism, and manage timber. He also shared the importance of valuing the forests beyond their use as carbon currency. Pak Bambang shared the wisdom that “no one is perfect. [We must] keep an open mind and open heart and listen to local wisdom.” He asked that the MegaFlorestais network be kept alive.

Rosalie Matondo, Republic of Congo

Rosalie shared that she learned a lot throughout the week, especially that the management of forests should not be centered only within the government, but that communities can also become the center of forest protection and that current community projects in her country can be valued more. She also valued the experiences of technology transfer and the emphasis on community development efforts that the group witnessed at Coroca. She appreciated the value of traditional ways of taking care of the land, Non-Timber Forest Products, and other community-led initiatives like beekeeping and basket-making—these are opportunities to develop and elevate. Rosalie would welcome MegaFlorestais to the Republic of Congo. She also appreciated the opportunity to establish a very useful relationship with Indonesia and was able to inquire about a possible future cooperation with Canada. Her advice was for the MegaFlorestais leaders to be a source of support for one another in the future.

Herman Sundqvist, Sweden

Herman shared that this meeting reminded him of how much good forests produce. The forest management challenges Sweden is facing are totally different with the choices and trade-offs not always easy. He reflected that while everyone likes forests and the wood they produce, people sometimes do not want to know about how the wood is produced. Urbanization will not make conservation easier and will only increase the demands on natural resources. How do we prepare for these challenges?

Nelly Paredes del Castillo, Peru

The week demonstrated to Nelly how community-led forest management is a common issue shared across countries and how community-led forestry is an opportunity to bring back the role of women leaders. She saw the importance of ecotourism and community forestry as something she can bring back to SERFOR in Peru. The remarks from Minister Silva about the importance of science, how forests are at the heart of the world, and how the love of nature and love for the land can help people come together resonated with her. Nelly also expressed the need for stronger ethics related to forests with the continuation of illegal logging. How can the bad players be found and how can the chain of custody of logs be improved. She asked that the emails of MegaFlorestais participants be shared to help keep the network connected.

Angela Coleman, United States

Angela expressed her gratitude and shared several important learnings from the week. This included her new understanding that the idea of conservation and biological diversity is bigger than the biological and physical components of a forest—that we must fully consider the impacts, opportunities, and benefits to humans, not as a peripheral outcome, but as the center of forest conservation efforts. Socio- and bio-diversity are integrally connected. She shared that MegaFlorestais is a forum for shared stewardship of the world's forests and that we are all interconnected and interdependent and benefit from the broad perspectives of global forest management.

Vincent Roy, Canada

Vincent expressed his opinion that the Amazon is in good hands, despite the thoughts of many he has encountered. He shared that there is value in more storytelling about the Amazon and the people who care for it. He witnessed the care, dedication, love, and creativity that everyone attending the meeting has shown for the Amazon Rainforest. He appreciated learning about challenges. This trip tested his comfort zone with immersion into social forestry and the stakes for Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities. He shared the importance of this global network and understanding global issues. Vincent also expressed the opportunity to collectively learn more about different technical approaches to improve forest management such as geo-referencing trees and small log utilization. He looks forward to the future of the MegaFlorestais network.

Garo Batmanian, Brazil

"We are MegaFlorestais" was Garo's sentiment—that regardless of our diversity and the situation of forest management in our countries, we all value forests. We value forests for all they provide beyond

forest products. Standing forests have value for the people living in them, and these people must be respected and supported. He reflected the wisdom that we all have shared challenges and need to find a way to take on a few of them to find solutions that can help forest management move forward. One example of such a challenge is the need to develop lesser-known forest species and build market awareness of them as a way to more sustainably manage forests and deliver wood products to markets. A second example is to learn more and transfer technological practices knowledge to others to improve efficiency in the use of wood products and reduce wood waste. Garo encouraged more virtual meetings for information sharing and connections among MegaFlorestais participants. The problems forest managers face are complex and everything is interrelated. There are no silver bullets, but rather different answers to different problems. He encouraged starting small and adapting incrementally to focus on improving the image and multiple purposes of forestry.

Carine Saturnine Milandou, Republic of Congo

Carine expressed her appreciation for the deeper understanding she gained about the ways we can manage forests differently, especially the role of Non-Timber Forest Products. She shared the value of practicing what we witnessed, including community forest development, ecotourism, and Non-Timber Forest Products. The MegaFlorestais network can help build understanding and knowledge.

Éliane Ubalijoro, CIFOR-ICRAF

Éliane shared that she is in the second year of her leadership role at CIFOR-ICRAF; the relationships she's built and the people she's engaged with in the MegaFlorestais community have been valuable and exciting. She appreciated the emerging focus on socio-cultural biological diversity, especially human's relationship with forests and living in and benefitting nature as a way of life. She will take a piece of this learning back home and in her work.

Márcio Halla

Márcio expressed his happiness and appreciation for being able to participate in MegaFlorestais. He experienced the purpose of the network of supporting open dialogue and a deep level of information sharing. He heard a lot of echoes over the four days about who owns the forests and sees potential in a path forward. He emphasized the importance of raising the voices of communities to influence forest management decisions and policies. He valued the wisdom and knowledge of the communities that also participated in the meeting.

Andrew Miccolis, CIFOR-ICRAF

Andrew shared his gratefulness for participating in MegaFlorestais. He valued witnessing the human aspects of conservation and the connections at the community level. He was also energized by these connections and learnings among MegaFlorestais colleagues.

David Brand, Founder and Executive Chair of New Forests

David shared the importance of sustaining people's lives in such a way that best suits their values and cultures. Some countries carry unfair burdens to manage forests like the Amazon—they are

depended on to protect the world's biodiversity, serve as its lungs and sources of freshwater. This should be capitalized and investments should be made in natural capital.

Closing remarks

The fifteenth gathering of MegaFlorestais delivered on its mission to create a valuable and inspiring leadership experience. The MegaFlorestais leaders, speakers, and resource advisors engaged in robust and thoughtful dialogue throughout the week. We appreciate each participant for their active contributions as they shared new ideas and new ways of thinking that have the potential to enrich the natural resources and organizational management practices of their agencies. We are also grateful to have learned about realities, hard truths, and contributions from RRI coalition members representing Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities living in Brazil.

Megaflorestais participants identified several topics where additional technical learning and exploration would be important:

- Considering solutions for reducing gross waste that currently results from logging of tropical woods. This would improve return on investments and maximize wood utilization, and possibly reduce deforestation and illegal harvests.
- Exploring current research and developing strategies to expand marketing of additional tropical wood species beyond those species currently receiving high pressure from legal and illegal markets. Such ideas could expand forest product markets, improve sustainable forest management, and reduce deforestation.
- Devising and experimenting with new financing models that place economic value on “intact nature” as a way to secure conservation of forests for their ecosystem value and services that mitigate climate change, conserve biological diversity, and better support Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities.
- Learning more about successful locally led conservation practices, including best practices from different nations for community/cooperative forestry programs, case studies for locally led special forest products programs, and common protocols for monitoring and evaluation of community-led conservation efforts.

The international richness of wisdom and perspectives was impressive and made evident the importance of international collaboration and the sharing of experiences and lessons learned as vital to accelerating progress in conserving forests and supporting communities during this era of rapid change.

Based on feedback from participants, this year's gathering was a powerful learning experience hosted in the heart of a world-class and globally important Amazon region for its biophysical make-up, importance in climate regulation, and human connections. Participants felt that there was an abundance of learning they could take back and explore or apply to the leadership within their agencies. We offer deep gratitude to the Brazilian Forest Service for hosting this invaluable experience.





PHOTO BY G. OLIVER FOTOGRAFIA

About MegaFlorestais

MegaFlorestais—Portuguese for “those with the greatest forests”—is a network of public forest agency leaders created in 2005 by Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), the State Forestry Administration (SFA) of China, and the Chinese Center for Agriculture Policy (CCAP) to discuss public forest tenure reform. Since 2006, the group has expanded to include forest agency leaders from the world’s most forested countries. Its annual meetings provide the network’s members a platform for sharing ideas, discussing challenges, and learning from one another in an informal, honest, and safe environment, one not dictated by politics or political correctness (or driven solely by ministerial priorities and positions) and placed under the Chatham House Rule. RRI acts as the secretariat of MegaFlorestais and works closely with the MegaFlorestais co-chairs involved in the network’s leadership and key decision-making processes. For more information, please visit www.megaflorestais.org.



About Rights and Resources Initiative

The Rights and Resources Initiative is a global coalition of over 200 organizations dedicated to advancing the forest, land, and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities, and the women within these groups. RRI’s members capitalize on each other’s strengths, expertise, and geographic reach to amplify the voices of local peoples and help governments, multilateral institutions, and private sector actors to support the realization of rights. By advancing a strategic understanding of the global threats and opportunities resulting from insecure land and resource rights, RRI also develops and promotes rights-based approaches to business and development and catalyzes effective solutions to strengthen communities’ rights, livelihoods, and sustainable resource governance. For more information, please visit www.rightsandresources.org.

