

# IF TREES COULD TALK: 20 YEARS OF THE FORESTS DIALOGUE



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**Thanks to all those who contributed  
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Steve Bass, Chris Buss, Saadia Bobtoya,  
Marisa Camargo, Marcus Colchester,  
Minnie Degawan, Peter Dewees,  
Gerhard Dieterle, Amity Doolittle,  
Gary Dunning, Akiva Fishman,  
James Griffiths, Jeannette Gurung,  
Xiaoting Hou, Tom Jorling, Peter Kanowski,  
Tage Klingberg, Joseph Lawson,  
Stewart Maginnis, James Mayers,  
Michelle Mendlewicz, Ruth Metzel,  
Ivone Namikawa, Cécile Ndjebet,  
Milagre Nuvunga, Ghan Shyam Pandey,  
Cassie Phillips, Sarah Price,  
Miriam Prochnow, Carlos Roxo,  
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# IF TREES COULD TALK: 20 YEARS OF THE FORESTS DIALOGUE 2020





# Preface



Serving as executive director of The Forests Dialogue (TFD) over the last 20 years has been an amazing journey. It's one in which over 3,000 knowledgeable, passionate and motivated people have come together to discuss, debate and agree/disagree on the fate of the world's forests. They are the protagonists, the beneficiaries and the benefactors in this long journey. It's been my privilege to meet, to listen and to learn from them all. TFD was and will always be about the stakeholders themselves.

This book is our best effort to share and reflect on bits of that journey through the words of the dedicated people that created TFD and drove it forward. The book's author, Barney Jeffries, has truly succeeded in the herculean challenge of weaving a compelling story out of the many, many reflections that we solicited. I am indebted to him for accomplishing that feat.

Although there are many, diverse voices in the book, you will note that the narrative primarily focuses on TFD's intrepid steering committee members. They are the ones that have had the vision and wherewithal to bring TFD to fruition, give it purpose, direction and ultimately success. It is my honor to serve this group. There are also 10 steering committee members whose exceptional contributions warrant a special thank-you: our co-leaders. They have been the ones that took the ultimate responsibility for TFD's mission and tirelessly worked with and guided me through tough times and good to make TFD the best forest stakeholder platform that it could be.

Another very special group that you will hear from in this book are TFD's bright and energetic associates. These are the (typically) young professionals that did the heavy lifting for TFD. Fully ensconced in their respective master's degree studies at Yale, they devoted many "extracurricular" hours to help develop and run TFD's dialogues. While the work with TFD was always meant to be a clinical learning opportunity for our associates, the learning was certainly mutual as we benefited from their perspectives, hard work and good humour.

And, a final note of thanks to TFD's home institution, the Yale School of the Environment (previously the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies), and the Deans and faculty who have played an instrumental role in TFD's support and success over these two decades. We could not have had a better institutional base to nurture and take care of us.

So whether you read it cover to cover, dip in and out of its many pages or just photo surf, please sit back and enjoy this journey through 20 years of The Forests Dialogue. And thanks for being on it with us, even if only virtually.

**Gary Dunning, Executive Director, The Forests Dialogue**



- 1. *Land Use Dialogue*  
Iringa, Tanzania 2017
- 2. *Land Use Dialogue,*  
Kilombero, Tanzania,  
2019
- 3. *Tree Plantations in*  
*the Landscape, New*  
*Zealand, 2018*
- 4. *Intensively Managed*  
*Planted Forests, Brazil,*  
*2008*
- 5. *Land Use Dialogue,*  
*Mole, Ghana, 2019*
- 6. *Investing in Locally*  
*Controlled Forestry,*  
*Sweden, 2012*



# Foreword



This book is important because it shows how, with the right historical circumstances and a few dedicated people at the outset, important progress can be made on seemingly intractable problems. The problem in this case is the severely disparate view of forests and their future held by large numbers of people, all pretty convinced they are right. The breakthrough notion formed by the founders of The Forests Dialogue (TFD) was that talking over these severe differences could lead to better understanding all around, and that, in any case, hearing from people who don’t agree with you is a good stress test –helping make the forest sector being what writer Nassim Nicholas Taleb terms “antifragile”, something that gains from disorder. In the best instances, new ways forward are discovered and followed.

This breakthrough notion emerged from activities and organizations involved in one way or another in the wars over old-growth forests, tropical deforestation, clearcutting and a host of other disagreements over forests. Prominent among these were the run-up to the Northwest Forest Plan for the US national forests, the Seventh American Forest Congress, the International Institute for Environment and Development, the Global Forest Forum at Yale, and the World Resources Institute. But, of course, plans and organizations don’t do things, people do. In this endeavor, many were involved, directly and indirectly, but four stand out: Scott Wallinger, NigelSizer, Gus Speth and Gary Dunning. Without each of them it is hard to see how this effort would have got off the ground.

Several ideas were key to TFD’s success. The idea of not attributing statements to named people, and only recognizing participants as individuals, not representatives of ideological conglomerates, are key ingredients of effective dialogue. The first forces focus on content, not source, and the second ensures “skin in the game” for all involved. The defence “I was only following orders,” never a strong one but often invoked, is totally removed.

The book you are about to read celebrates the most significant, but by no means all, of the accomplishments of TFD. In the early days of forest certification, many of us, including me, didn’t think it would catch on. Boy, was I spectacularly wrong! The Atlantic Forest in Brazil is not yet fully recovered, but it is sitting up and taking nourishment, and TFD had a big hand in this. And illegal logging, though still a plague, is on the ropes in several places.

The idea that you have a conference and go home and begin planning the next conference on a different subject (arguably the American way) is completely refuted by TFD. Sticking with it is hard to beat. In this book, you can read what happened when people stuck with it.

**John Gordon, *Pinchot Professor of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Emeritus, Yale***

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# 1. Introduction

*“ Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”*

Margaret Mead



*Dialogue is a way to overcome conflicts, discover common ground and find ways to collaborate. TFD Land Use Dialogue, Kilombero, Tanzania, 2019.*

In January 2000, a small group of people met in London. They were a disparate bunch, drawn from many countries and backgrounds, united by a shared objective: to set up a platform for dialogue on forest-related issues. The idea was that by talking and listening to each other, private companies, forest owners, environmentalists and others could overcome conflicts, discover common ground and find ways to collaborate constructively. In a follow-up meeting on a Swedish forest estate that June, the group decided on a name that does just what it says on the tin: The Forests Dialogue.

Since then, The Forests Dialogue – or TFD – has been at the heart of the international conversation around forests. TFD has convened more than 80 dialogues and field visits in 31 countries, involving over 3,600 participants from all over the world. It’s helped break down barriers, turn confrontation into cooperation, build consensus and drive progress on vital issues – from forest certification and illegal logging, to biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction, to climate change and landscape approaches.

The importance of multistakeholder dialogue – once a novel idea – is now accepted throughout the forest sector. Forestry companies place a strong emphasis on their environmental responsibilities and their social licence to operate. NGOs engage positively with the private sector and recognize the value of working in partnership. Marginalized voices – including women, Indigenous peoples, forest communities and small forest owners – have opportunities to be heard. TFD can claim to have had a hand in all these developments.

But despite the progress made over the last two decades, the challenges facing the world’s forests are as great as ever. Since TFD was formed, the world has seen a net loss of at least 100 million hectares of forest – and deforestation is on the rise again. A growing global population with an ever-growing appetite is putting a squeeze on Earth’s ecosystems and finite resources. Poverty and inequality persist, biodiversity is in drastic decline, and climate change looms over everything.

In short, the work of TFD remains as vital as ever. The need for dialogue, for understanding, for constructive collaboration and shared solutions has never been greater.

This book is a celebration of the first 20 years of The Forests Dialogue. It charts TFD’s journey, the impact it has had, and the wider changes in the forest sector that it has contributed to. It also seeks to capture what makes TFD special as an organization and the unique value of its dialogue model. And it looks at TFD’s continued relevance today and in the future.

# Milestones

1992

At the **Rio Earth Summit**, the United Nations agrees the Forest Principles, a non-legally binding statement of consensus on forest management, conservation and sustainable development.

1996

Several TFD founders are involved in organizing the **Seventh American Forest Congress**, the largest multistakeholder dialogue process on US forest policy ever convened. The IIED runs a series of multistakeholder workshops on the paper industry and releases its report ***Towards a Sustainable Paper Cycle***.

1998

**The World Bank** convenes a meeting of forestry industry and NGO leaders to discuss sustainable forestry, which leads to calls to set up an ongoing, independent dialogue process.

2000

**The Forests Dialogue** is formalized with a Secretariat established and hosted by Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

2002

TFD hosts its **first dialogue**, on forest certification, in Geneva, Switzerland.

2003

First **field dialogue** is held in Brazil.

2004

TFD formally becomes a full-time, autonomous programme at the **Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies**

2007

Dialogues increasingly focus on the concept of **fracture lines** – areas of conflict with the potential to cause a rift, or to be healed.

2008

Following dialogues bringing together more than 250 participants, TFD releases **Beyond REDD: The Role of Forests in Climate Change**, a set of principles to guide climate change negotiators.

2011

TFD’s strategic plan introduces the three-phase process of **Engage, Explore, Change**.

2017

A shift towards a more landscape-based approach is evident with the first **Land Use Dialogue**.

2020

TFD has **two women co-leaders** for the first time

2020

TFD celebrates its **20th anniversary**.



## 1 FOREST CERTIFICATION 2002-2004

TFD's inaugural dialogue was the first time that the leaders of the major forest certification schemes and their supporters had met together, marking a change from outright hostility towards more constructive engagement. An informal meeting for CEOs of the main certification systems was followed by two three-day dialogues. **Switzerland, Sweden, 3x in the UK**

## 2 FORESTS AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION 2003-2007

Brazil's Atlantic rainforest region is one of the world's most important and threatened biodiversity hotspots, as well as having a thriving forestry industry. Recognizing that there might be unrealized opportunities for collaboration between environmental groups and the forestry sector, TFD convened a dialogue that evolved into a national initiative. **5x in Brazil**

## 3 ILLEGAL LOGGING 2005

In a series of dialogues in 2005, TFD brought together business leaders, environmental and social NGOs, industry associations, forest owners, retailers, researchers, and intergovernmental organizations to share experiences and promote commitment to reducing illegal logging. **Hong Kong, Russia, USA**

## 4 INTENSIVELY MANAGED PLANTED FORESTS 2005-2008

Intensively managed plantations can provide important economic and ecological values, but can also entail substantial environmental and social costs. TFD convened a series of dialogues bringing together business leaders, environmental groups, researchers, certification organizations and government agencies to better understand these issues. **Switzerland, China, Indonesia, Brazil**

## 5 FORESTS AND POVERTY REDUCTION 2006-2008

By some estimates, over a billion people in developing countries depend on forests for their livelihoods, yet commercial forestry has had limited impact on reducing poverty. This series of dialogues explored so-called "pro-poor" commercial forestry, initiatives by governments, businesses and others aimed at raising rural incomes through sustainable commercial forestry. **South Africa, Indonesia, Bolivia, Russia**

## 7 FORESTS AND CLIMATE 2007-2008

With the growing recognition of the importance of forests in climate change mitigation, TFD organized a series of dialogues on the issue, beginning with a scoping dialogue to coincide with the 13th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bali in 2007. The various initiatives sought to give the forest sector a voice in shaping international climate policy, particularly around REDD+, and to maximize the opportunities it offers. **Indonesia, USA, Switzerland**

## 8 REDD FINANCE MECHANISMS 2009

As the REDD concept evolved, financing became an important part of the discussion. These three dialogues identified key fracture lines and progressed towards consensus-building and implementation. **USA, Switzerland**

## 9 REDD READINESS 2009-2011

Many countries are keen to participate in a REDD mechanism but lack the institutional and technical capacity to do so. This series of field dialogues looked at ways to bridge the gap and to ensure that different stakeholders' voices are heard throughout the process. **Brazil, Ghana, Guatemala, Ecuador, Cambodia, Switzerland**

## 10 INVESTING IN LOCALLY CONTROLLED FORESTRY 2009-2012

With field dialogues in seven countries, this was TFD's most ambitious dialogue initiative to date. It sought to understand the issues facing local forests owners – Indigenous peoples, local communities and small-scale private forest owners – and to find solutions to providing the investment they need. **Belgium, Panama, Nepal, Macedonia, UK, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Sweden**

## 6 SMALL FORESTS OWNERS AND SUSTAINABLE FOREST PRACTICES 2007

Small forest landowners manage millions of hectares of forestland around the world, so it's crucial they are included in efforts to promote sustainable forest management. This dialogue explored the barriers faced by smallholders, the available sustainable management tools, and how markets can recognize and reward land-owners for sound practices. **Belgium**

**11 FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT 2010-2012**

The right of Indigenous peoples to give or withhold their free, prior and informed consent to proposed measures that will affect them had emerged as a core theme in several of TFD’s prior dialogue streams. This initiative sought to provide better guidance as to what this looks like in practice, particularly in regions where governance is weak. **USA, Indonesia, DR Congo**

**12 GENETICALLY MODIFIED TREES 2011-2013**

The application of biotechnology to commercial plantation forestry is a controversial topic. TFD aimed to facilitate effective dialogue among global stakeholders representing broad interests and opinions and to provide a non-adversarial framework for focused discussion on the pros and cons of genetically modified trees. **USA, UK, Switzerland**

**13 FOOD, FUEL, FIBRE AND FORESTS 2011-2014**

Meeting a growing global population’s need for food, energy and timber will put immense pressure on the world’s forests and our limited land and water resources. The “4Fs” initiative looked at the future role and value of forests in relation to food, fuel and fibre. **USA, Brazil, Indonesia (2x), Finland.**

**14 EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN THE FOREST SECTOR 2012**

Women play vital roles in the use, management and protection of forests, yet face continued inequality and marginalization. This scoping dialogue aimed to create a better understanding of the challenges and benefits of addressing gender inequalities in the forest sector and women’s inclusion in natural resource management. Hosted and co-organized by Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), the dialogue brought together 33 participants from 13 countries. **Nepal**

**15 REDD+ BENEFIT SHARING 2012-2014**

For REDD+ to be effective, all stakeholders need incentives to participate – in particular the forest-dependent poor, who must receive a share of the benefits. This dialogue stream, co-organized with IUCN, looked at how to build effective, efficient and fair benefit-sharing mechanisms for redd+. **South Korea, USA, Vietnam, Ghana, Peru, Mexico**

**17 TREE PLANTATIONS IN THE LANDSCAPE 2015**

In 2015, TFD carried out a global survey into stakeholders’ perceptions of progress since the first initiative on intensively managed planted forests. It suggested that, while things have improved, there was need for a new dialogue looking at the evolving state of issues related to tree plantations and planted forests. To date, three field dialogues have been organized in partnership with the New Generation Plantations platform. **South Africa, Chile, Brazil, New Zealand**

**18 SUSTAINABLE WOOD ENERGY 2016**

Around half the world’s population depends on wood energy for cooking and heating, while industrialized countries are increasingly looking to woody biomass as a source of renewable heat and power. This scoping dialogue aimed to start the process of forming a common vision for sustainable wood energy. **France**

**19 LAND USE DIALOGUES 2017**

Dialogue can be a way to resolve the often-competing interests of different stakeholders in a landscape. This multi-country initiative, coordinated by TFD along with a variety of local and global partners, is using the TFD model to guide and strengthen ongoing dialogue platforms in landscapes at risk of deforestation. **Tanzania (2x), Brazil (2x), DR Congo (2x), Uganda, Ghana (2x)**

**20 LAND AND FOREST TENURE REFORM 2018**

Land and forest tenure security improves governance, livelihoods and conservation – but despite progress in some countries, uncertain tenure remains a significant risk to sustainable landscape initiatives. This new initiative seeks to accelerate progress in addressing tenure problems for local and Indigenous communities. **USA**

**16 UNDERSTANDING DEFORESTATION-FREE 2014**

This dialogue stream aims to unpack the ‘deforestation-free’ concept and to explore the key questions that need to be answered if deforestation-free policies are to succeed in reducing deforestation on the ground. **USA, Indonesia, Gabon**





**Mouila, Gabon:** Indigenous community members share their thoughts on forest clearing and palm oil during a field visit as part of the Understanding Deforestation Free dialogue initiative in 2017.



## 2. More in common than they realized: the roots of The Forests Dialogue

In the world of forests, people are used to taking the long view. Forest managers think in terms of 30, 40 or 100-year rotations. Ecologists see ecosystems that have evolved over millennia. Indigenous peoples follow the paths trodden by their ancestors over countless generations. Twenty years is no time at all.



*Illegal Logging dialogue,  
St Petersburg, Russia, 2005.  
Left to right: Stewart Maginnis,  
Gary Dunning, James Griffiths*

The forest sector at the end of the 20th century was a very different place. Businesses and NGOs viewed each other with suspicion, if not outright hostility. For many environmental and social activists, timber companies were a destructive force, blindly pursuing profit with little concern for the environment, wildlife or the rights of local people. Companies for their part resented being told what to do by outsiders and extremists – they were the professionals, operating legally, providing jobs and supplying products that society needed.

Clashes played out in different arenas. At the extreme end, this included direct action – from sit-ins in giant redwoods in California to prevent logging of old-growth forests, to occupations of pulp mills and plantations by Indigenous peoples and landless workers in Brazil. There were legal battles, like the successful attempts by environmentalists in the American northwest to get the northern spotted owl listed as an endangered species – resulting in logging restrictions in its habitat that the industry argued would be economically devastating. NGOs ran campaigns and organized boycotts against companies. Wars of words were fought in the media.

“There was a lot of conflict,” recalls Gary Dunning, who studied for a master’s degree in forest policy at Yale in the mid-90s. “In the US, people were feeling disconnected from how National Forests were being managed and how priorities were being established. There was a need to have a broader conversation – not just about government forest policy but how that manifests itself in private forest management or private companies accessing timber on public lands. There was a lot of arguing and not a lot of progress being made in those discussions.”

“The 1990s was a time of tremendous turmoil in the forest sector,” says Cassie Phillips, a former vice president of sustainable forestry at Weyerhaeuser. She joined the timberland giant in 1991 when the company realized it needed a full-time issue manager. “In the US at least, the industry was transitioning from a model that was effectively about mining a found resource, logging and milling existing forests towards more of a farming model. The industry knew it had to do that, but going through it was tremendously difficult.”

“In the 90s, the typical relationship between the forest industry and the global NGO community was just clashes, – it was pretty negative,” recalls James Griffiths, former managing director of the Forest Solutions Group at the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). “Active fighting in the marketplace, boycotts Even where there wasn’t direct conflict, there was rarely direct contact. “Talking to people was a liability!” says Griffiths. “‘I can’t talk to that community or that NGO, because they’ll just load cost onto me’ – that was often the business perspective. Or governments didn’t feel they needed to consult with stakeholders – they felt they already had a mandate.”

Joseph Lawson, who was global director of sustainable forestry for packaging giant MeadWestvaco, agrees: “It was very difficult to even talk to somebody with opposing views. Back in the early 90s, there was a certain generation that was very resentful of NGOs, and a great deal of mistrust – probably justified on the part of the NGOs. There was a mindset out there of ‘leave us alone, we know how to do our business, it’s science-based and perception doesn’t mean anything’. Today everyone knows that perception is everything – companies recognize that there’s something called a social licence to operate, but that wasn’t recognized back then.”

*“In the 90s the typical relationship between the forest industry and the global NGO community was just clashes.”*



But it wasn't just the companies that were reluctant to talk. "These days, across the spectrum, most major NGOs are open to working with industry in various collaborative ways that involve at least some form of dialogue," says Justin Ward, who formerly co-led the Center for Environmental Leadership in Business, a division of Conservation International. "Today it may seem like that's standard practice, but back then it was not. And it was something that not all NGOs were comfortable dealing with. For some NGOs, dialogue was viewed as unproductive or incompatible with grassroots campaigns, litigation and other strategies."

Yet during this period, a number of developments were taking place that would lay the foundations for a different sort of relationship. In the US, Professor John Gordon of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies had set up what he called the Yale Forest Forum to discuss issues of sustainable forest management. An esteemed professor, Gordon was one of the so-called 'gang of four', academics appointed by the Clinton administration to attempt to resolve policy around spotted owl habitat. "Many in the industry didn't trust them," recalls Dunning. "The NGOs didn't always love them either. John thought we needed to change the tone and direction of the national conversation around forests. He started reaching out to people in the NGO community and timber companies and having regular calls to begin the long process to break down those barriers".

This group decided to take the conversation to the national level by calling, in 1995, for the Seventh American Forest Congress. These congresses had happened periodically since 1882 but never on this scale: "The Seventh American Forest Congress ended up being the largest multistakeholder dialogue process on US forest policy ever convened," says Dunning. He did an internship with the congress's office during his master's, which proved to be a formative experience.

"Prior to coming to Yale, I was an activist in California," he says. "I wanted to stop logging the old-growth forest, but I also supported the idea that there needed to be a healthy timber industry. The few heated face-to-face exchanges that I had with some companies made me feel like their morals and ideals were just messed up, but I knew there had to be more. The first important lesson for me with the Seventh Congress was that I could sit down and have a good conversation with folks and see that they want to do the right thing. We just may see different ways of doing it."

Dunning helped to organize a series of multistakeholder dialogues ahead of the main meeting in Washington, DC: "We had more than 50 roundtables that took place all over the country. These were all 1-2 day intensive dialogues, where people came together to come up with a shared vision for the future of America's forests, the underlying guiding principles and the next steps needed to get there – very much the model that we would return to with TFD." Over a two-year period, the Seventh American Forest Congress engaged more than 5,000 US forest stakeholders, with around 1,500 coming together for the final meeting in Washington, DC. It was a watershed moment, demonstrating that there was far greater agreement among stakeholders than might have been expected.

Around the same time, the WBCSD commissioned the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) to carry out an independent review into the global paper industry and its contribution to sustainable development. IIED consulted with a wide range of stakeholders through regional workshops, and set up an international advisory group encompassing industry, NGOs, government and academia.

*“Companies recognize today that there’s something called a social licence to operate, but that wasn’t recognized back then.”*

Steve Bass, now an honorary senior associate with IIED, was one of the lead researchers. "By the end of the three-year exercise, it was clear that most of the progress made had been a result of the in-country discussions and the work of the diverse 'assurance group'," he recalls. "Witnessing very different people from diverse backgrounds come to broad agreements was empowering for all. It was also clear that there were many more specific issues to be handled, that the systemic changes in the forest sector were going to take a generation. The most powerful legacy of the Sustainable Paper Cycle project was not so much the final report as the assurance group, the sense of growing consensus across themes and regions, and an embryonic dialogue methodology." One of the key recommendations in the 1996 report, *Towards a Sustainable Paper Cycle*, was that "Industry leaders should organize a global leadership group to promote forest stewardship."

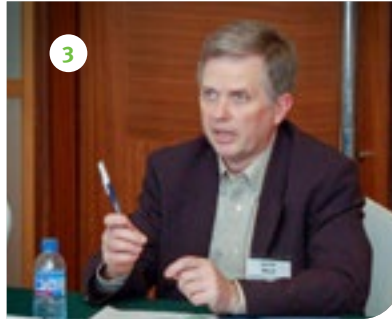
This was a call being echoed in other quarters. The conservation organization WWF had formed an alliance with the World Bank to promote sustainable forest management. This led to the Bank's then president, James Wolfensohn, convening a group of CEOs from the forest industry and NGOs in January 1998 to discuss some of the key issues. A follow-up working group called for a broader dialogue to develop a shared vision among forest industry, NGOs and private forest owners.

"There was growing awareness that parties on various sides of the debate about forests and forestry practices didn't know each other, only had stereotyped views of each other," remembers Scott Wallinger, a senior vice president at MeadWestvaco and Co-Leader of the WBCSD Sustainable Forest Products Industry Working Group. "We were asked to create a vehicle for leaders in the industry, woodland owners and NGO sectors to have meaningful, in-depth dialogue."

In June 1999, a first meeting was held in London involving individuals from WBCSD companies, the World Resources Institute (WRI), WWF and IIED, as well as invited representatives of private forest owners. Andrew Ackland of The Environmental Council facilitated the discussion. "It got pretty heated at times," says Wallinger. "Afterwards, the facilitator commented 'I've done a lot of dialogues, but I've never seen a situation with as much animosity. You really need to form some sort of dialogue group.'"

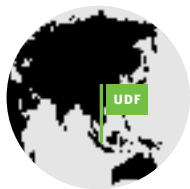
A second meeting followed in August, also in London, bringing together a larger group of leaders from across the forest sector. This dialogue recommended the "creation of a steering committee to plan, fund and implement dialogue processes among core leaders from forest business, social and environmental NGOs and private forest owners from around the world". The premise was simple: different stakeholders had more in common than they realized, but a lack of trust and understanding was a barrier to progress on important issues. By talking, spending time together and gaining a better understanding of each other's viewpoints, they could find ways to turn conflict into collaboration.

*“There was growing awareness that parties on various sides of the debate about forests and forestry practices didn’t know each other, only had stereotyped views of each other.”*



- 1. Steve Bass
- 2. Ruth Martinez
- 3. Justin Ward



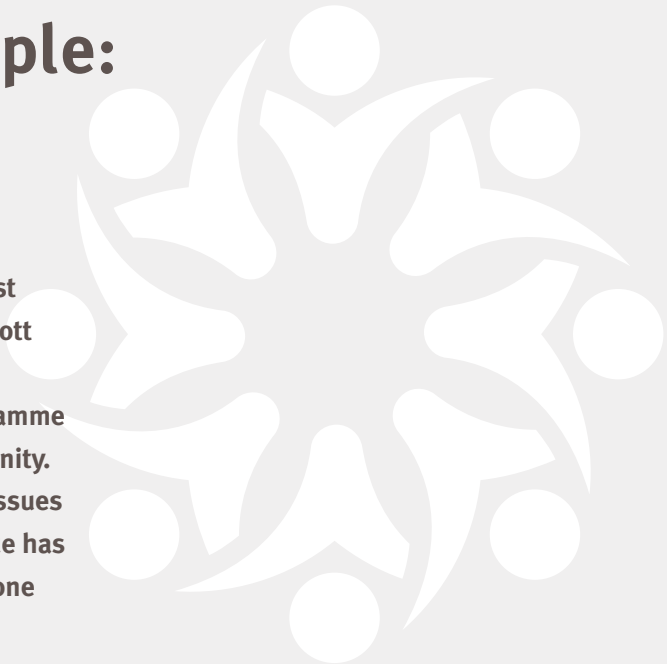


*Sumatra, Indonesia: a field visit during a dialogue on Understanding Deforestation Free, 2015.*



### 3. People, not spokespeople: early meetings

With the agreement that a formal dialogue platform for the forest sector was needed, two people were asked to lead the effort: Scott Wallinger of MeadWestvaco, an influential leader in the forest products industry, and Nigel Sizer, who headed the forest programme at WRI and was respected by both industry and the NGO community. The pair already knew each other through past interactions on issues such as forest certification, and got on well. The Forests Dialogue has maintained this model of two co-leads – one from industry and one from civil society – ever since.



TFD’s first co-leads,  
Scott Wallinger (left)  
and Nigel Sizer.

“I always enjoyed conversations with Scott,” says Sizer. “He was unbelievably knowledgeable after a career in the pulp and paper industry, but clearly very open to new ways of doing things. He and I agreed that something like TFD was needed, and that he and I would be founding co-chairs of the steering committee.”

“We met in Washington to discuss how to run a dialogue group,” explains Wallinger. “We identified people from the industry – mainly members of the WBCSD – and from the major NGOs to invite, and most of them accepted. We recognized that we must have representation from certain organizations, but we wouldn’t write to the head of the organization and ask them to delegate. We needed capable individuals with the ability to listen.

“We also recognized that these things need to take place over two or three days. If you have breakfast, lunch and dinner together, and a drink after dinner, you get to know each other as individuals and that’s when you see what you have in common.”

The first meeting of what would become The Forests Dialogue’s steering committee was held at the headquarters of Shell Natural Resources in London in January 2000. Six months later, the group met again, this time at Mackmyra Bruk near Gävle, Sweden, the home of private forest owner Tage Klingberg.

“My experience from the 1990s was that our contacts with other actors were hardly fruitful,” says Klingberg. “TFD helped me and many others to bury the war hatchet and open for talks and negotiations. I had a hunch from early meetings that we were on a possibly fruitful road, but that TFD and the meetings must not be dominated by the large bodies. I felt that the private forest owners must play a role. That was why I was open to arranging a meeting at my home.”

There are some 22 million small forest owners in Europe and North America alone, but the tendency in the past had been to talk about them rather than with them. Including private forest owners as key participants in the dialogue process was an important strategic decision on the part of TFD, and opened the door to the future participation of other marginalized groups – including Indigenous peoples, women, and communities and smallholders in the Global South. At that dialogue, participants agreed on the name The Forests Dialogue. But while the nascent TFD had an enthusiastic steering committee and energetic co-leads, it soon became apparent that to function effectively it would need more staffing capacity to actually organize the dialogues the forest sector was crying out for.

“At the time it was just Nigel and me with no staff,” says Wallinger. “We decided we needed a secretariat.” He suggested that Yale, his alma mater, would be a good place to host it: “At the time I was living 45 minutes from Yale and chairing their Global Institute of Sustainable Forestry. Half the students on the Yale forestry programme are international, so they have that international outlook.”

Crucially, the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies also had a new dean who was keen to broaden the school’s role in the international forests arena. Gus Speth, who joined the school in 1999, was a leading figure in the field of sustainable development and natural resource management. Founder of both the Natural Resources Defense Council and the World Resources Institute, he had just completed a six-year stint heading up the United Nations Development Programme. Despite his prominence, though, he was a controversial appointment in some quarters.

*“If you have breakfast,  
lunch and dinner  
together, and a drink  
after dinner, you get  
to know each other as  
individuals and that’s  
when you see what you  
have in common.”*

“Gus had a bit of a reputation of being personally at odds with various timber companies,” recalls Gary Dunning who, following his work with the Seventh American Forest Congress, was now running the Yale Forest Forum (YFF). “So a group of YFF supporters made a pilgrimage to New York to meet him. We asked him to also support YFF when he came to Yale. At that meeting Gus pulled me aside and said he really liked what we were doing with the YFF, but that it was very US focused and he wanted us to globalize it.

“Concurrently, Nigel Sizer contacted Gus about developing something they were calling The Forests Dialogue – they knew each other from WRI. And Scott Wallinger, who had been on the board of the Seventh American Forest Congress and was an external advisor to the Yale Forest Forum, contacted me asking if I might be interested in working with them on developing this new stakeholder engagement process.”

Speth agreed to host TFD at Yale, and Dunning was seconded to serve as part-time executive director. “There was widespread acceptance of the idea of using this tool for the global conflicts around forests,” says Dunning. “I think both NGOs and companies had reached the point where they weren’t gaining much ground with public campaigns or resistance through industry associations. It was time to try a new way to collaborate instead of fight.”

The Secretariat of TFD moved to Yale in September 2000, and Dunning led the planning for the third steering group meeting in December 2000, hosted by MeadWestvaco in Summerville, South Carolina. “I remember being excited, I remember thinking we were going to change the world – I was a younger person then,” he laughs.

“Those initial dialogues of the steering committee proved the concept,” says Wallinger. “People from a variety of interests and countries engaged in in-depth discussions, both formal and over meals and cocktails. They emerged seeing each other as people, not spokespeople – people with often similar backgrounds and reasons for working in natural resources, and with many similar concerns.”

“The atmosphere was very good,” agrees Sizer. “If you get a group of people together, even if some of them come in with quite severe animosity towards others in the group, by spending two or three days together in a nice place, having meals together and drinks together, you see the other side. What we observed was these were actually all people who were more or less committed to doing the right thing, even if we didn’t always agree on how to do that. And they were all pleasant to spend time with and get to know as people. So every time we got together the dialogue was constructive, open and respectful, and the differences of opinion led to very interesting debates. We didn’t necessarily solve the differences, but the dialogue was surely helpful.”

The idea of building trust and mutual respect by spending time together and getting to know each other as people has remained at the heart of the TFD experience. An important aspect of this was the strategic decision taken right at the beginning that both steering committee members and dialogue participants should engage as individuals, not institutional representatives. The use of the Chatham House rule – which allows information and opinions shared in the dialogue to be recorded, but not the speakers or their affiliations – also encouraged people to speak freely and candidly.

*“I think both NGOs and companies had reached the point where they weren’t gaining much ground by public campaigns or resistance through industry associations. It was time to try a new way to collaborate instead of fight.”*

“We wanted people to get to know each other and break through the tensions or differences or standoffs that were there, and then be able to talk to each other about whatever needed to be talked about,” explains Sizer. “Having people come into a meeting more in their personal capacities than representing their organization would make that easier and more productive. For some it’s easier to make that distinction than for others, but we wanted them to at least try to be more open to discussing different approaches. Parroting your institutional positions isn’t necessarily going to get you very far in a dialogue.”

“It’s important that you get the right people – individuals who are capable of listening, learning and contributing, not those who are only there to ‘play the tapes’ of their parent organizations,” agrees Wallinger. “There’s no point having ideologues in dialogues.”

*Gerhard Dieterle,  
James Mayers and Xiaoting  
Hou. REDD Readiness  
dialogue, Switzerland, 2011*



*“TFD has many traits which are helpful for organizations like us. It’s a place to discuss potentially controversial issues, where people from different backgrounds can come together without fear of being quoted for their positions. I think it’s a wonderful opportunity to learn from each other and to understand different viewpoints, and to find out at the end that solutions are basically possible.”*

*Gerhard Dieterle,  
Executive Director, ITTO*





*By engaging as individuals and following the Chatham House rule, dialogue participants are able to speak freely and candidly.*





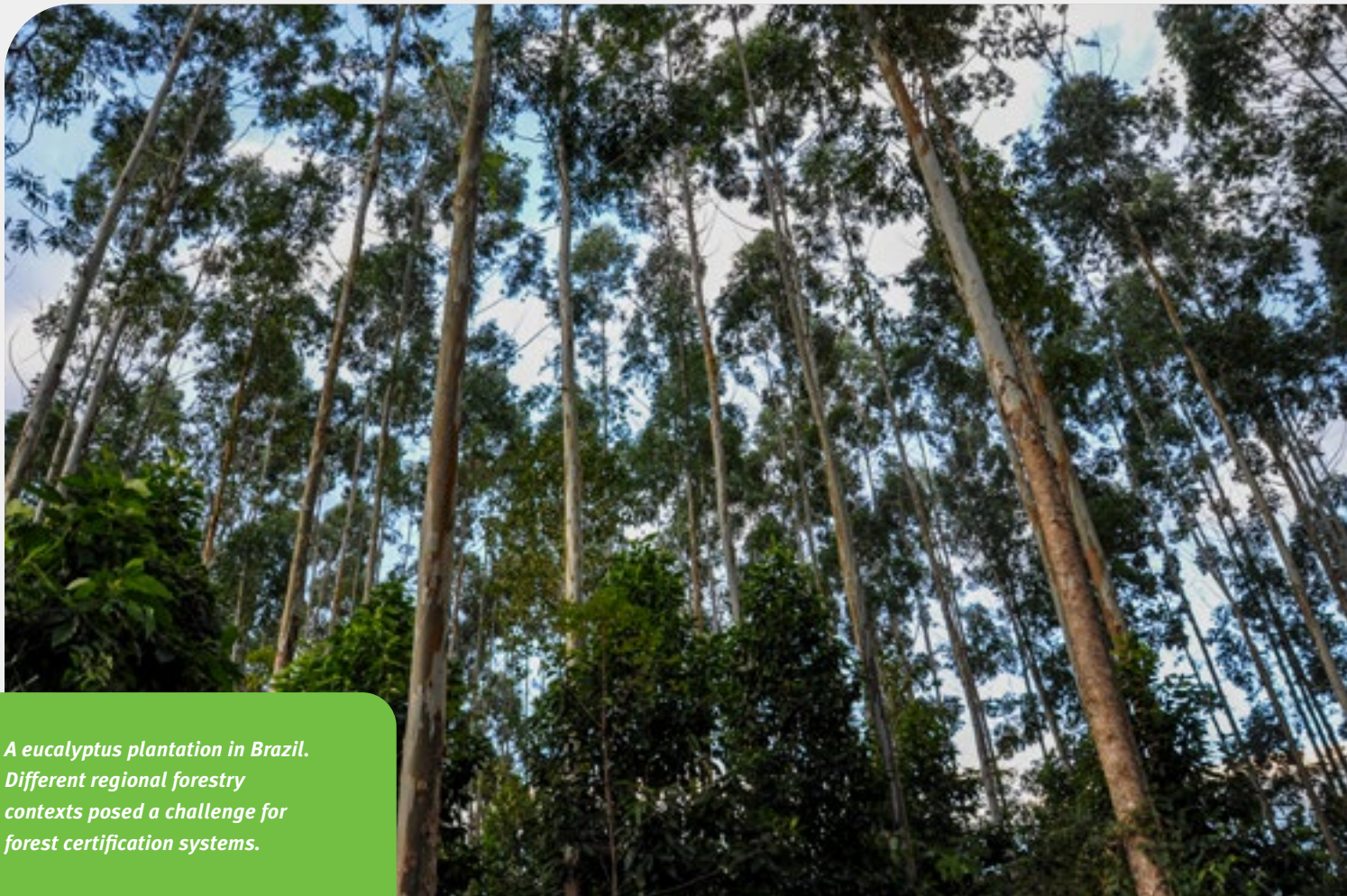


*Controlled wood in Indonesia:  
forest certification and illegal logging  
were the topics of TFD's first dialogues.*



# 4. Certification wars: the first dialogues

Having laid the foundations for a dialogue platform, the next step was to focus on the issues where dialogue had the greatest potential to drive positive change. One area that stood out was the vexed topic of forest certification. This would become the subject of TFD’s first dialogue initiative.



A eucalyptus plantation in Brazil. Different regional forestry contexts posed a challenge for forest certification systems.

Forest certification emerged in the 1990s as a response to civil society concerns around unsustainable forestry practices. The basic idea is to provide assurance that forests are being managed in a responsible way. Typically, a certification system will include a forest management standard with a set of agreed principles and criteria, an auditing function to check the standard is being followed, and a chain of custody system to track the wood from the forest to the market place.

But there were significant differences between the major certification systems. NGOs like WWF heavily promoted the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) as the only credible standard for sustainable forestry. Private forest owners in Europe, who felt FSC wasn’t relevant to their situation, had set up PEFC (Pan European Forest Certification, later changed to the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes after it began recognizing certification systems in other countries). In the US, the industry promoted the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), while the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) certified family forest owners. National systems were being developed in Canada and Brazil, Chile and Indonesia.

“It’s important to understand the huge differences that were behind the competing certification systems,” says Scott Wallinger. “The FSC was developed for the most part by European environmental and social NGOs and labour organizations with the intent it become a global standard. It largely sought to preclude single tree plantations, exotic species, fertilizers, pesticides and clearcutting. The SFI was created to respond to public concerns in the United States expressed through surveys and focus groups about large industry clear-cuts, protection of forest streams and quality homes for wildlife. At that time, the word ‘sustainability’ hadn’t entered the public lexicon.”

The challenges facing the forest industry varied from region to region, as Wallinger explains: “In Portugal, a quarter of the country’s forests were planted eucalyptus to provide short fibre for printing papers, and wildfires had long been an industry concern. Brazil was seeking to develop a domestic pulp and paper industry based on eucalyptus and pine, with tree plantations on former degraded agricultural land. South Africa, having been unable under apartheid to import or export to Europe and North America, had developed its own forest industry. On the Pacific Rim, Australia, New Zealand and Chile had begun to develop forest industries based on planted radiata pine. Illegal logging was prevalent in the Congo and Amazon basins, Indonesia and Malaysia, and in Cambodia it funded the Khmer Rouge rebellion. The various domestic forest certification systems developed within these differing contexts.”

This plethora of different systems wasn’t just confusing for customers. Proponents of different schemes were publicly critical of their rivals, in a way that went way beyond healthy competition – so much so that veterans still refer to the ‘certification wars’.

“A lot of time and money was being wasted on this competition between the certification systems,” says Nigel Sizer. “There were very passionate proponents of the different systems and a complex history which justified a lot of the tension that existed, particularly between some of the NGO advocates of FSC and industry players. Certainly in my view, there were very serious shortcomings in SFI at that time. Many of us thought it had basically been set up to confuse consumers and draw attention away from the FSC’s efforts to build consumer support in North America. So there were very real tensions around that. Scott and I both agreed it would be worth trying to have dialogue between the different stakeholders, get to know each other more, and see if we could find a more sensible way forward.”

“Certification was such a hot issue at the time, so we recognized that should be the first focus.”



“Certification was such a hot issue at the time, so we recognized that should be the first focus, and that led to the first official TFD dialogue,” says Wallinger. “We invited the heads of FSC, SFI, PEFC, ATFS and the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), and some of their leading supporters. That was the first time that all of them had ever sat down and talked face to face about what they wanted to accomplish.”

That first dialogue was held in Geneva on 16-18 October 2002. Gary Dunning remembers feeling apprehensive beforehand: “I knew the people we were bringing into the room were in conflict. When you see the kind of vitriol that goes back and forth in the media, or now of course on social media, it’s a wonder those folks would agree to be in the same room. But it was refreshing to get them in there and see that they really did want to work through some of that stuff – even though they couldn’t be more opposed to each other’s systems. They only wanted their own system to prevail, they thought theirs was the only one with moral authority of any kind. It was powerful to sit and talk through commonalities and this idea of certification as a tool, rather than fighting over the minutiae of systems.”

With hindsight, it’s clear how counterproductive the certification wars were. By focusing on each other’s shortcomings, certification systems and their supporters were missing the bigger picture: that legal, managed forestry with even the most basic environmental and social safeguards was a step up from the unregulated, often illegal logging that plagued much of the world’s forests, particularly in the Global South. Rather than publicly attacking each other, there was more to be gained from promoting certification in general and from sharing learning and experience.

“At the end of the day, consumers had become confused and this led to a smaller than predicted growth for all certification systems,” explains Carlos Roxo, a former TFD steering committee member and co-leader who worked for the Brazilian pulp company Fibria. “The total certified area was a tiny part of the global forests. Through the dialogue process, the several stakeholder groups started to realize that forest management certified by any of the systems was much better than the unchecked management of the rest of the world’s forests, and that the real challenge was to increase the areas certified by all the systems.”

“It was a classic issue for dialogue to sort out, because people were very entrenched, untrusting and aggressive towards one another,” observes Rod Taylor, global director of the WRI Forests Program and a former TFD co-leader. “Some of the leaders sensed there was probably as much common ground as there were differences. They took a risk in convening an alliance to find that common ground, so we could talk up the value of certification separately from the question of whether FSC was ahead of PEFC, or if SFI was just industry greenwash, and all the other rhetoric that was going around. I think it did succeed in building a level of trust amongst that group of senior leaders. From that, I think, they were able to find some common ground, and tone down the rhetoric that was undermining all certification, not just the individual brands.”

The Geneva dialogue was followed by two more informal meetings in London for CEOs of the various certification schemes, and a further dialogue in Maidenhead, England, in October 2004. Participants discussed ideas of legitimacy, or how to assess the credibility of certification systems. Discussions centred around the possibility of mutual recognition between systems (PEFC would go on to endorse the SFI, ATFS and other national standards involved in the dialogue) and enabling fairer competition

in the marketplace. The co-chairs summary noted the “concern that the publicly viewed claims and counterclaims among system proponents may ultimately dissuade the public and consumers about the merits of certification rather than promote it as something potentially valuable to them.” It also looked at the possibilities of collaborating to make certification more relevant in the developing world and for private forest owners.

“I’m proud that it got groups that were deadly enemies talking to each other and seeing each other as collaborators – competitors, yes, but still trying to achieve common goals,” says Wallinger. “Participants gained a much better understanding of the commonality of their personal and organizational objectives, the real issues on the ground, and means to address them.”

“FSC and PEFC still compete, but it is a much fairer competition that tries to outline the strengths and market advantages of the systems instead of disqualifying the other, as used to happen,” says Roxo. “There is no doubt that TFD had a very important role in developing a more mature vision between the stakeholders of different certification systems and consumers at large.”

*Steering committee members at a steering committee meeting in London 2004 (left to right): Bill Street, Roberto Smeraldi, Matti Karjula, Cassie Phillips, Nigel Sizer, James Griffiths, Klas Hall, Stephan Schenker, Bob Simpson, Stewart Maginnis, Thor Lobben, Justin Ward, Steve Bass, Mimi Wright, Scott Wallinger, Per Rosenberg and Manoel Sobral*

*“Some of the leaders sensed there was probably as much common ground as there were differences. They took a risk in convening an alliance to find that common ground.”*







*Democratic Republic of the Congo:  
community members and dialogue  
participants during a Free, Prior and  
Informed Consent (FPIC) dialogue, 2012.*



# 5. Into the field: conservation in Brazil’s Atlantic forest

“That first dialogue was powerful and gave me confidence that we were onto something,” says Dunning. “We started to think, OK, what’s next? The idea was we wanted to move beyond these one-off meetings; we wanted things to progress.”

That was reflected in TFD’s next dialogue initiative, which took the concept away from European conference rooms and closer to the reality on the ground. The focus was the Atlantic rainforest in Brazil – one of the most biodiverse and threatened regions on the planet, and also an area with a rapidly growing forest products industry. At the time, environmental groups and the forestry industry tended to see each other as adversaries – but steering committee members believed there could be opportunities to collaborate.



Participants at a Forests and Biodiversity Conservation field dialogue in Brazil’s Atlantic forest, 2007.

In October 2003, TFD convened a dialogue in Santa Cruz de Cabralia in the state of Bahia, which brought together 30 stakeholders from environmental groups, the forests products industry, landowner groups and academia to exchange information and ideas on how to balance conservation and business outcomes. For the first time, the dialogue included a field element, with tours of conservation and plantation operations and a discussion of how these could be replicated – a set-up that was to be repeated in subsequent TFD initiatives.

The success of the first meeting inspired three NGOs – Instituto BioAtlântica (IBio) and the Brazilian branches of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Conservation International (CI) –, and three forestry companies – Rigesa/MeadWestvaco, Suzano and Veracel – to take the dialogue further. Between 2005 and 2007, they worked with TFD to organize a series of four regional dialogues focused on developing a shared concept for the forestry sector and environmentalists to work together to conserve the Atlantic forest and its biodiversity. This led to the establishment of a national version of TFD, the Brazilian Forests Dialogue, which remains active today (see chapter 22).

Marisa Camargo, who worked as a TFD programme assistant while studying for her master’s at Yale, helped organize the dialogues. “It was something that had never really been done in Brazil before – there was no dialogue between the sectors,” she says. “I remember the first dialogue was really difficult. Some NGOs were really against the companies. There was almost a physical attack by a guy from one of the more radical NGOs on a company guy. Today they’re good friends, and they warmly remember that event as something they were able to overcome through dialogue. They understood that they were on the same page, they were just coming from different directions. And by working together they would be able to achieve more.”

“That process helped to reveal, in a very neutral and objective way, what was working on the ground, and helped to document and elevate awareness of the role of the private sector in the designation, ownership and management of some of the most extraordinary biologically rich forest areas left on the planet,” says Justin Ward. “It demonstrated that intensive fibre production and biodiversity conservation do not have to be diametrically opposed objectives, but in fact can be compatible. It also helped to identify opportunities for forest restoration and protection of biodiversity corridors at a landscape level.”

The NGOs and companies that took part in the dialogues were instrumental in setting up the Mata Atlântica Restoration Pact. Launched in 2009, the Pact now has more than 260 members, including NGOs, businesses, government agencies and research institutions. Their mission is to restore 15 million hectares of the Atlantic forest by 2050. TFD participants have been some of the most active members, with pulp and paper companies working with NGO partners to restore and reconnect tens of thousands of hectares over the last decade. “Of course no one would argue that TFD came along and solved all the conservation problems in the Atlantic forest region, which is still under severe threat from various factors,” says Ward. “But I believe the Atlantic forest provides a concrete example of where on-the-ground results link back in tangible ways to shared perspectives and agreements that emerged from the TFD process.”

But the dialogues and field visits weren’t just relevant to the Brazilian context. “One of our hopes was that some of the lessons from the Atlantic forest experience could be applied to other tough cases around the world, such as Indonesia,” says Ward. “I think the TFD process in the biodiversity and conservation realm has helped to raise awareness of key problems and identify potential solutions in other regions.”

*“I remember the first dialogue was really difficult. Some NGOs were really against the companies. There was almost a physical attack by a guy from one of the more radical NGOs on a company guy. Today they’re good friends.”*





*The Forests and Biodiversity Conservation dialogue initiative included TFD's first field dialogues and led to the set up of the Brazilian Forests Dialogue.*



INTO THE FIELD: CONSERVATION IN BRAZIL'S ATLANTIC FOREST



# 6. International action: illegal logging

While the biodiversity dialogues in the Atlantic forest demonstrated the value of taking the process down to the local level, TFD continued to address big international issues. High on the agenda was illegal logging – a concern for the private sector, governments, and social and environmental NGOs alike. Illegal logging causes conflict and violence and damages forest ecosystems. It also costs governments billions of dollars in lost revenues while depressing wood prices and presenting unfair competition to responsible companies.



Cassie Phillips,  
TFD co-leader, 2005-2006

*“Forestry is so visible – you can’t hide logging. It’s very high profile, and it’s often the major source of employment in a rural area. So you have to negotiate with people and involve them in the outcomes.”*

At the time, governments, businesses and civil society were all taking steps to prevent illegal timber trade – but there was limited coordination between them. TFD wanted to see how businesses could work more closely with scientists, environmentalists, communities and governments to address the illegal logging challenge. In March 2005, it convened a four-day dialogue in Hong Kong attended by more than 120 leaders from business, civil society, government and academia.

Sarah Price, who was working as a TFD programme assistant while studying for her master’s at Yale, helped to organize the dialogue. “It’s a topic that everyone can rally around – nobody wants illegal logging, right?” she says. “So it was a good topic to bring diverse stakeholders together to look for common ground and look for common solutions.”

“There was a really interesting group of participants, and strong alignment between industry and NGOs that this was an issue we needed to do something about,” agrees Nigel Sizer. “That was very different from the certification dialogues. It was more a discussion of what are we going to do about it, how can we work together to address this problem?”

That’s not to say that the dialogue passed off without incident. “We had some folks there from Global Witness, who had some dramatic undercover footage showing how illegal logs are making their way into the Chinese mainland from Indonesia, and wanted to show it during the meeting,” recalls Sizer. This was a risk: some very senior officials from the Chinese government were in attendance, and securing their participation had been a major effort. But TFD didn’t want to shy away from difficult issues, even if it meant upsetting their hosts.

“It was pretty dramatic,” says Sizer. “We showed the video, the Chinese officials were very uncomfortable, but the next day they made a very strong statement recognizing that this was an issue and they needed to do something about it.” Following the meeting, the Chinese government shut down a number of sawmills in Guandong province that were importing and processing around 300,000 cubic metres of illegal timber from Indonesia annually.

While this was one direct outcome of the dialogue, strengthening alignment between stakeholders had other far-reaching consequences. Cassie Phillips, who co-chaired the dialogue, believes the TFD process had a direct influence on illegal timber regulation. “Illegal logging was the big issue at the time,” she says. “Some people had decided that the solution was certification for everything. Some of us in the US found that pretty offensive – the premise that you needed to prove that you weren’t acting illegally. But I came away from the meeting with a different opinion on what to do about it.”

Some key NGOs at the meeting promoted a due diligence approach, where companies would screen their timber imports against the risk of illegality. “That seemed very sensible,” says Cassie. “We came away convinced that the problem was real and important. And we had a level of trust and confidence in the NGO community that together we could come up with solutions that were workable.”

As a result, major US timber companies came out in support of a ban on trade in illegally sourced wood products provided the legislation was based on a due diligence approach. In 2008, the amended Lacey Act made it illegal for companies in the US to trade in timber from illegal sources. Similar legislation was subsequently introduced in Europe (the 2010 European Union Timber Regulation) and Australia (the Illegal Logging Prohibition Act, 2012).

*“The Chinese officials were very uncomfortable, but the next day they made a very strong statement recognizing that this was an issue and they needed to do something about it.”*



Following the Hong Kong dialogue, TFD also supported events in Saint Petersburg focused on the Europe and North Asia (ENA) Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) Ministerial Conference in November 2005. TFD convened a two-day preparatory dialogue where representatives from civil society and the private sector worked together to prioritize recommendations for consideration at the conference and was invited to facilitate a multistakeholder dialogue in parallel with the event itself.

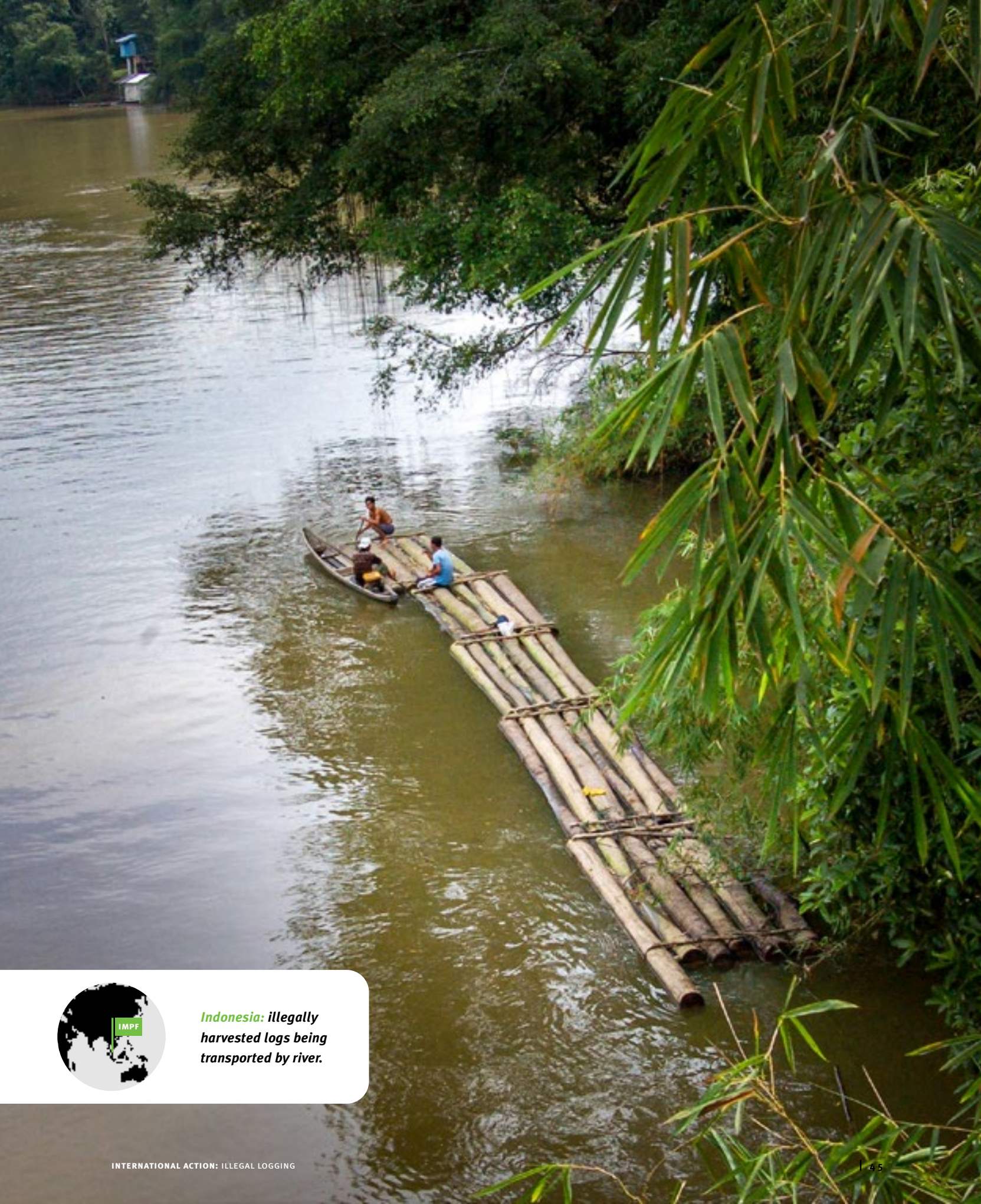
“It meant TFD was able to bring stakeholders who wouldn’t otherwise have had a voice to this process,” says Price. “Bringing together these people that had quite different views of the world and didn’t necessarily have experience of working in collaboration was such a fascinating experience, and one of the best illustrations of the power of dialogue in action that I’ve ever observed.”

The conference resulted in a declaration, signed by 43 governments, listing priority actions for governments, civil society and the private sector to tackle illegal logging.

“TFD helped to draw attention to the negative impacts of illegal logging not only on forests but also on the economic interests of the forest industry and consumers,” says Justin Ward. “Putting the spotlight on big problems, in particular where industry and conservation interests are aligned, has gone a long way toward motivating change at the policy level.”

*“We had a level of trust and confidence in the NGO community that together we could come up with solutions that were workable.”*

*Illegal logging dialogue, Hong Kong, 2005*



*Indonesia: illegally harvested logs being transported by river.*



# 7. This wonderful space for discussion: the power of dialogue

TFD’s first few dialogues had helped to galvanize greater collaboration across sectors to strengthen legal, responsible forest management. While participants didn’t necessarily agree on everything, there was widespread recognition that dialogue was a powerful tool.



An energizing exercise  
at a REDD readiness  
dialogue in Ecuador, 2010.

“There is a key role for dialogue at the local, national and international levels,” says Scott Wallinger. “By dialogue, I mean the ability for people from diverse backgrounds who have different goals and views on a particular issue to spend time together to get to know each other as individuals, understand their individual (not just organizational) motives, and listen to each other to fully understand the various concerns. That doesn’t come when people present formal position papers or meet for a half day. Meaningful results come when individuals learn to know and respect one another, fully understand the array of concerns, and work together to find workable solutions, not just to ‘win’.

“What dialogue does is take the heat out of a burning issue. You get away from the polemics and onto practical solutions. It also enables you to get to know what’s really driving issues like illegal logging on the ground – without that knowledge you’re just mouthing platitudes. It’s a hugely educational process – you learn things you’d never know just by going to meetings or reading about the issues. People become individuals. If you didn’t have those conversations, understandings would never occur.”

“For many of us, TFD was a deliciously anarchic thing to do,” says Steve Bass. “For company bosses to engage with Greenpeace, for researchers to engage with advocacy organizations, and for those whose career (and lives) had grown up as part of a ‘western elite’ to engage with representatives from poor countries. There was a true levelling of power and broadening of perspective. There was also a tremendous energy and commitment that was infectious.”

Carlos Roxo believes dialogue is particularly vital in the forest sector: “Forests occupy four billion hectares, or 31% of the land surface of the world. So forests have millions of stakeholders who interface with them throughout multiple means. They may be managed in certain regions by companies, but their ownership is in fact shared with those millions of stakeholders. Forests are a common good, and it is vital to have a multistakeholder dialogue process on how to manage them.

“I always saw TFD as a formidable and unique dialogue process between different groups of stakeholders on forestry issues. Before TFD, there was no such process at a comparable scale, and most of the contacts between forestry companies and NGOs used to happen on an individual basis, between company A and NGO B, focusing on single issues that were important for both at that moment. The network society that exists today, in which everybody is linked to everybody, requires a different kind of dialogue, and that is what TFD provides.

“The complexity of current problems requires a collaborative approach,” he adds. “There are clearly many problems that cannot be solved by a single company or a single stakeholder group, but that require a collaborative approach between all.”

“There’s been a big change in the way companies approach these interactions,” agrees Joseph Lawson. “There’s now a lot of recognition of the value of NGO input and of having broad stakeholder input into decisions that used to just be looked at from an internal business perspective. Even forest certification; back in the 90s it was mainly focused on wood supply, biodiversity and so on but didn’t branch out into the true meaning of sustainable forestry, which involves community programmes, social welfare, land use – much broader than just traditional forestry. Having dialogue creates this opportunity that never used to exist to bring in people to talk about these things.”

*“What dialogue does is take the heat out of a burning issue. You get away from the polemics and onto practical solutions.”*



“I believe the industry wouldn’t be at the table if they didn’t consider it to be worth their time,” says Justin Ward. “My observation consistently was that industry participants were very serious about tackling the hard issues. In the early days of dialogue-based engagement, there was some concern that industry was involved just to create distraction or perpetrate greenwashing. There was a perception that NGOs needed to be careful not to let the industry get away with endless dialogue to evade their corporate social responsibilities. But my experience was always a matter of everyone rolling up their sleeves and working in good faith to try to point the way toward constructive strategies and solutions.”

“Every sector needs more dialogue than it has, particularly effective forms of genuine multistakeholder dialogue,” says James Mayers, who heads IIED’s Natural Resources Group. “It used to be that the forest sector needed it more than others, because foresters are timid beasts and hide in the trees, and those associated with them haven’t been outward-looking enough to engage with each other. But somewhat perversely the forest sector has fostered a much more substantial set of dialogue processes than many other sectors over the last 20 years.”

Today, TFD is one of many multistakeholder platforms within the forest sector. But at least a portion of the greater openness and willingness to collaborate that exists today can be traced back to TFD and the trust it has cultivated between individuals.

“Spending three days with somebody in a small group out in a rural setting, you can get to know them quite well,” says Nigel Sizer. “And doing that repeatedly over the years, with interesting conversations, respectful debate, you become friends. These are people who you might have very significant differences of opinion with. But as friends, you can call each other up whenever you want to and discuss things. I had some very candid conversations with some top industry people as a result of the relationships built up through TFD.”

“I go to a tonne of conferences, and people don’t listen to other people if they don’t trust them,” says Cassie Phillips. “Trust doesn’t necessarily mean you like someone or agree with them, but you trust that you can understand each other – that agendas are out in the open, not hidden, and people aren’t blind to the issues or to each other’s interests.”

“I do remember going to a couple of TFD meetings where there were your classic heckling lobbyists in the room, and they would stand up and shout out their demands in a very animated way, because that’s the way they would behave in conferences or more formal proceedings,” says Rod Taylor. “And then you’d watch them realize that that’s not what the dialogue’s about. That if you get up and shout at people, people will actually respond to you – which was a shock to them – and then expect you to respond to that. Some of them adjusted very quickly – though some just didn’t get it.”

“TFD creates this wonderful space for discussion – I just really appreciated that about it,” says Peter Dewees, a former forests advisor at the World Bank. “At the Bank, we had lots of engagements with NGOs, but none were as satisfying as those with TFD. People who were clear opponents of the Bank were there around the table with us at TFD, as lovely folks that I could chat with. That’s what it came down to – this agreement to disagree and find a way to move forward. That to me remains the most powerful thing about TFD. It has been tremendous in that respect.”

*“Trust doesn’t necessarily mean you like someone or agree with them, but you trust that you can understand each other – that agendas are out in the open, not hidden, and people aren’t blind to the issues or to each other’s interests.”*

“It’s skill is to say there’s these views and those views and present both sides of the story, seeing where there’s overlap and where there’s not in an accessible way,” says Taylor. “It’s a chance for people to sort out what they do agree on and what they don’t agree on, rather than just denouncing the other person. The whole process can sound woolly and fuzzy, but I think it has huge value.”

Sarah Price recalls an incident in the illegal logging meeting in Saint Petersburg that, for her, dramatically illustrated the power of dialogue: “At one moment in the negotiations, we were kind of at an impasse. So it was proposed to two of the most vocal opponents, why don’t you guys go and sit together and see what you can come up with? I remember witnessing this discussion at a small table with just two or three people discussing what don’t we agree on here, what’s the issue, just trying to peel back a few layers. And it was really interesting just how quickly they actually realized that there was some common ground there. But it wasn’t until they had that intimacy to forget what their negotiating position was and get down to the real issues. I remember thinking, ‘oh wow, this is what dialogue is really about!’

“I see it in all the different dialogues I’ve participated in when people aren’t just presenting their organizational positioning again but get to meet real people in real situations and have to think more creatively about what the solutions are,” she says. “And I think that’s where you really see the power of dialogue: when you bring this eclectic mix of stakeholders, of geographies, of world views, and put them in that same forest setting or community. It’s really interesting what you can learn from each other, and you can challenge some of your own ways of thinking as well.”

“Just talking with others can move things forward in a very positive way,” says steering committee member Cécile Ndjebet, President of African Women’s Network for Community Management of Forests. “A week of dialogue can change things for life. It is a great tool for changing people’s attitudes through information sharing, communication, exploring and analysing the issues, and taking action based on others’ views, influence and priorities.

“It helps at all levels. You put everyone together – private companies, administration, civil society, local communities, women, Indigenous peoples – you put them together and give them room to talk, to say what they think, to share their perceptions, their ideas, their interests and their expectations. And from that you move to solutions that are coming from the stakeholders themselves, agreed solutions – then the implementation is easy, and the impact is huge. That’s The Forests Dialogue.”

*“The whole process can sound woolly and fuzzy, but I think it has huge value.”*








## Harvesting opportunities in southern Sweden

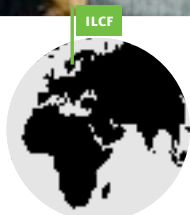
- Storms Gudrun and Per
  - have decreased long-term harvesting opportunities by 30 % in the central storm area (for example the county of Kronoberg)
  - have not affected long-term harvesting opportunities in Götaland
- Annual forest growth in Götaland is again larger than felling

Growth and present harvesting on average for the period 2005-2009, together with long-term harvesting opportunities according to the National Board of Forestry (SKA 08). Götaland.



 SÖDRA

2012-04-13  
3



**Sweden:** meeting private forest owners during a field dialogue on investing in locally controlled forestry.



# 8. Growth: Engage! Explore! Change!

The success of the early dialogues made it clear that there was an ongoing need for TFD. That meant putting in place some stable structures and seeking funding to secure TFD’s future.



Stewart Maginnis leads a break-out session during a REDD Finance Dialogue in Montreaux, Switzerland, 2009.

To avoid the risk of becoming – or at least being perceived as – an exclusive club, the steering committee decided that a number of members would be replaced each year, and that the two co-leaders should also be regularly rotated. In October 2004, seven members were rotated off the steering committee, and seven new members took their place. Justin Ward of Conservation International was chosen to succeed Nigel Sizer, with Cassie Philips of Weyerhaeuser replacing Scott Wallinger in March 2005. TFD has continued to appoint new co-leaders every two years, each representing a different stakeholder group. The make-up of the steering committee has also continued to evolve (see chapter 12).

At the same time, with TFD gearing up to organize at least four dialogues a year, the steering committee decided it needed a full-time secretariat. Six forest products companies (through the WBCSD) and four NGOs agreed to provide core funding, with additional support from the World Bank. In June 2004, Gary Dunning became full-time executive director – a position he has held ever since. By contrast, the rest of the secretariat is constantly changing, being made up largely of master’s students from Yale (see chapter 21). In 2005, TFD signed a memorandum with Yale University formalizing its position as a full-time, autonomous programme.

As TFD evolved, it also began to re-assess its purpose and its processes. “We started to really look at how we operationalize and position the dialogue process,” says Stewart Maginnis of IUCN, who became TFD’s co-leader in 2008. “This was when the idea of fracture lines got enshrined in the method.”

A fracture line is an area of conflict that, if not addressed, threatens to cause a rift – but which can also potentially be mended. Honing in on these fracture lines makes a dialogue more focused and productive. “Through the dialogue process, we’d ask: where do we see the areas of commonality? There must be things we agree on,” says Maginnis. “Where are the areas where there’s just a fundamental difference of opinion? There are some things we’re never going to agree on. But then there’s that bit in the middle, where because of all the noise, there’s a risk that we talk past each other but where it can really help to clarify and understand positions. You can make progress by working through that process and maybe finding a way of bridging those fracture lines, rather than just jumping right into the quagmire of conflict.”

Having been running dialogues for several years, TFD was becoming more assertive in pushing for tangible outcomes. “Dialogue on the scale we were attempting at the beginning was so novel that we were supported in doing it, and our donors allowed us the freedom to engage without feeling too much pressure to achieve specific results,” says Dunning. “Because relationships were so thin, if they existed at all, we didn’t want to put pressure on people that they had to find a resolution before they were ready and that they had to implement things as a result of the dialogue. But dialogue for dialogue’s sake doesn’t fly. As the group became more comfortable with the process of dialogue and started to build trust among each other, we realized that we needed to move to more solutions-oriented or implementable actions.”

To address this, TFD developed a three-phase approach that has continued to inform its work ever since. This is summarized in TFD’s 2011 Strategic Plan as follows: “We seek to engage stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, to explore vital but contentious issues – ‘fracture lines’ in forest uses, demands and decision-making, and to change thinking and outcomes for the better.”

*“Dialogue for dialogue’s sake doesn’t fly. As the group became more comfortable with the process of dialogue and started to build trust among each other, we realized that we needed to move to more solutions-oriented or implementabl actions.”*



TFD’s initiatives aim to progress through three phases



**Phase 1 – Engage:**

Scope the issues, build trust among leaders, and share perspectives and information.

**Phase 2 – Explore:**

Seek agreement about the main challenges and opportunities to collaboratively solving a forest issue.

**Phase 3 – Change:**

Actively promote and coordinate stakeholder actions that lead to collaborative solutions on the ground in high conflict areas.

The first phase focuses on engaging – building trust, scoping out the issue, identifying who needs to be involved, exchanging perspectives. During the second phase, participants explore the issue in more depth, identifying the fracture lines and the underlying issues, seeking areas of agreement and possible solutions. “Spending time on trust-building and perspective-sharing is a really important early part of the process, but an initiative that’s been around for a while must lead towards actionable change, resolution or results of some sort,” says Dunning. The third phase of the process is where change starts to happen. In areas where some consensus has been reached, dialogue participants prioritize challenges, identify actions and next steps for different stakeholders, and push for wider change through policy advocacy and networking.

There is no set time period for a dialogue initiative. Some need to spend longer in the early stages than others, and not every dialogue initiative reaches phase three. However, over the years TFD has refined a way of working that facilitates progress. James Griffiths, co-leader 2008-2010, remembers working on developing a more strategic methodology: “TFD was starting to expand, we had more resources and were doing a few events a year to multiple events a year. We started to professionalize and operationalize the approach, which had started pretty informally, and create an infrastructure. You might start with a scoping dialogue, then you’d have a series of field dialogues, then you might have a policy dialogue, or one where you’re trying to capture all of the recommendations.” Comprehensive summaries covering key themes and discussions are published after each dialogue, which for some initiatives are synthesized into in-depth reviews of the topic.

This model had started to crystallize during the dialogue initiative on intensively managed planted forests, which ran from 2005 to 2008. “This was the first time TFD consciously adopted a model of taking the same group of people on a journey over a couple of years through different field dialogues culminating in a concluding dialogue,” says Peter Kanowski, a forestry professor at the Australian National University and one of the co-chairs of the initiative. “That built a cohort of people who were on that journey together. That was one of the great strengths of the process – it built understanding and relationships that wouldn’t have happened if they’d only met once or twice. That required a different level of commitment and was a different model of dialogue.” The initiative, widely regarded to be one of TFD’s most successful, illustrates how dialogue can engage actors with sometimes strongly opposed views, explore the fracture lines, and lead to real change. This is discussed further in the following chapter.

*“This was the first time TFD consciously adopted a model of taking the same group of people on a journey over a couple of years through different field dialogues, culminating in a concluding dialogue.”*

1. George Asher
2. Kalyon Hou
3. Peter Kanowski







*Rotorua, New Zealand: Tree  
Plantations in the Landscape  
field dialogue, 2018.*



# 9. Bridging a divide: intensively managed planted forests

While TFD had helped to build trust and forge progress on key issues, some conflicts continued to rage in the forest sector. One of the most bitter was around intensively managed planted forests (IMPFs). From the 1980s, there was enormous expansion in the industrial plantation forest area, particularly in the Global South – in Latin America, in South Africa and Southeast Asia.



Sumatra, Indonesia:  
Intensively Managed Planted  
Forests field dialogue, 2007.

IMPFs are highly productive planted forests that are grown primarily for wood production, particularly for pulp. They make up only a small fraction of the global forest area but contribute around 40% of the world’s industrial wood supply, and that proportion is continuing to increase. Proponents argue that they take pressure off natural forests, are essential for meeting growing global demand for wood products, and can provide employment and socioeconomic opportunities in remote areas. But IMPFs have also been fiercely criticized. In some places, notably in Indonesia, biodiverse primary forests have been cleared to make way for commercial plantations of alien species. Many environmentalists shudder at the sight of uniform, single-aged monocultures of eucalyptus or pine, growing in straight lines and leaving little space for other vegetation or wildlife, and dismiss them as ‘green deserts’. In other cases, there have been conflicts with local communities and Indigenous peoples, particularly over land tenure – for example in Brazil and Chile, where plantations expanded rapidly under the countries’ military governments.

“In 1996, the World Rainforest Movement published a book, *Pulping the South*, which shaped the narrative for the decade that followed,” says Peter Kanowski. “It argued that the international pulp and paper industry was expanding plantations in the Global South at the cost of the environment and local communities, and was impoverishing local communities rather than helping them be better off. The more progressive companies could see that their reputations were at risk from the behaviour of other actors in the sector. From the point of view of the NGOs, the social and environmental damage being done by poorly planned and implemented plantation expansion was very evident. So it was a natural issue to emerge for TFD.

“In the 1990s, plantations were seen as a sort of hell, and the NGOs and companies used to have a very harsh view of each other,” says Carlos Roxo. “TFD was instrumental in developing a dialogue process that led to a better understanding of the complementary role of native and planted forests. Plantations are not a substitute for native forests but a complement – the problem was not the model but the quality of the management.”

“There had been a long-running campaign by different organizations against intensively managed planted forests, partly driven by very valid concerns and very bad experiences in Latin America where traditional land rights had been trampled upon,” says Nigel Sizer. There were also issues around chemicals and water use. For the industry, of course, expanding intensive plantations, particularly in tropical regions where conditions are more favourable for rapid fibre production, was fundamental to their business model. There were very firmly held views on each side. So that was a really good example of where we thought getting these different people together just to understand each other’s points of view and concerns might lead to a more constructive discussion. Because these plantations were going to continue to expand.”

Strongly held views were certainly apparent on the second field dialogue, in Sumatra in 2007, which included visits to plantations owned by Indonesian pulp and paper giant APRIL – the target of high-profile NGO campaigns at the time because of forest conversion. “That was a really interesting one, bringing people in who were very critical – and quite rightly – of some of the historical expansion of APRIL and APP in Indonesia,” says Sizer. “That was an interesting moment, as those companies were in the process of figuring out how they could become more responsible and sustainable in their activities. There were visits to the mill, to the plantations, to the communities. And that contributed to those companies strengthening their commitment to improving their practices.”

“There were very firmly held views on each side. So that was a really good example of where we thought getting these different people together just to understand each other’s points of view and concerns might lead to a more constructive discussion.”



“I was appalled when I saw this large-scale felling of peat forests,” says Gerhard Dieterle, a forest adviser at the World Bank at the time and one of the co-chairs of the dialogue. “But to see also that the companies changed their course of action and didn’t shy away from engaging with other stakeholders – I think that is at least to a certain degree a result of The Forests Dialogue. They could engage there without being at risk of being quoted somewhere in a newspaper. There was a shift in thinking bit by bit through dialogue. To me that was one of the most striking experiences with TFD.”

Community rights and land tenure were also hot-button issues, and the dialogue was nearly closed down because of protests by Indigenous and student groups. “There were a lot of protests going on about plantation forestry,” recalls James Griffiths. “At TFD we were happy to meet with the protestors and in fact bring them into the dialogue process – we thought that was fantastic. The local chief of police came along, he couldn’t understand who we were – he was used to breaking up protests around meetings. But at the end of the day he got it.” After the close of the dialogue, the TFD steering committee held an additional session with Indonesian NGOs and community leaders to bring on board their views.

A similar situation had existed in Brazil, where a field dialogue was held in 2008. This included a visit to plantations belonging to Aracruz (later part of Fibria, now merged with Suzano). The company had been embroiled in long-running land conflicts with Indigenous communities and Quilombolas, descendants of escaped slaves whose land rights had only recently received legal recognition.

“At a steering committee meeting, one of the members, representing the social sector, released a letter signed by a group of Brazilian social NGOs that presented themselves as proxies for these communities, saying that the communities would refuse to participate in any kind of dialogue,” recalls Roxo. “After many discussions, the steering committee decided to go ahead with the dialogue. Differently from what that group of NGOs had claimed, the communities which had conflicts with Aracruz had a very active participation, with a lot of room to present their view of the conflicts. I remember that in the visits to these communities, Aracruz took a decision of not participating, in order to allow the communities to feel free to say what they wanted. Many members of the communities then participated in the following dialogue meetings. At end of the day, the whole dialogue was considered to be very successful, being one of the dialogues where local communities had the strongest participation.”

“The communities were just at the point of beginning reconciliation with the companies there,” says Kanowski. “I felt I was observing real, meaningful dialogue between local actors, and that the international group we were part of had helped create the circumstances for that.”

For Marcus Colchester from the Forest Peoples Programme, a human rights organization that works with Indigenous peoples and forest communities across the globe, the progress made by Aracruz and its successors is one of TFD’s most striking achievements. “When we went back 10 years later as part of another dialogue, we visited some of the same sites, and we could see the changes that have happened. Not only have the Indigenous people got their land back – mainly due to domestic legal changes but undoubtedly also because Aracruz was feeling the pressure which TFD had given space for, but we also saw they were trying to find more jobs and some tenure security for the Quilombola, and even for the landless rural poor, with a pilot project in providing some land for them. So they’ve moved a long way over 10 years. We can’t say they’ve solved all the problems, but it’s a definite example of where TFD’s been part of a process of driving change.”

*“I felt I was observing real, meaningful dialogue between local actors, and that the international group we were part of had helped create the circumstances for that.”*

“I think TFD made a big contribution in ‘getting the fish on the table’ on plantations,” says Rod Taylor. “Though there are still people on both sides with entrenched opinions, it’s pretty hard to come away from one of those dialogues with a hard line on plantations and a fixed opinion. It’s a way of moving people from a hard, simplistic view to a more nuanced view.”

“You can see the ways of thinking and points of agreement that emerged manifest themselves elsewhere,” says Kanowski. “It was reflected in other influential organizations’ position. So FAO (the UN Food and Agriculture Organization), who’d been involved as a partner in the IMPF initiative, published a statement of principles for management of planted forests a year or two later. You can clearly see the congruence between what emerged from the IMPF dialogue and what FAO codified and promoted.”

TFD would return to the issue of plantations again in 2015. The new initiative, Tree Plantations in the Landscape, has so far included a scoping dialogue and field dialogues in Chile, Brazil and New Zealand. It is co-organized with the New Generation Plantations (NGP) platform, which was set up by WWF in 2007 following TFD’s earlier dialogues on plantations (see chapter 22).

“Some things had changed and some had not,” reflects Kanowski. “The benchmark for good practice had improved between 2009 and 2015. The majority of large international companies were doing business in a different and better way than had been the case a decade before. Nevertheless, there’s still strong opposition to plantations in some quarters, and in parts of the world that conflict over planted forests hadn’t gone away. In the meantime, the broader context has moved on to focus on trees and forests in the larger landscape, climate change has emerged as a top-of-the-agenda issue, and people were arguing that we’d reached peak natural forest wood.”

Rather than discussing the pros and cons of plantations, the latest dialogue series focuses more on how to manage them effectively. “Planted forests continue to raise challenges, both at a political land-use decision-making level, and at an operational level, where our understanding is much more sophisticated,” says Kanowski. “We see the need for planted forests to deliver a range of environmental services and social benefits in a way that perhaps people didn’t 20 years ago, but our capacity to deliver that ambition is still significantly challenged.”

- 1. Jennifer Baarn
- 2. Estebancio Castro Díaz
- 3. Nigel Sizer







*Tanzania:  
Land Use Dialogue  
participants, 2017.*



# 10. One-and-a-half billion stakeholders: forests and people

Having begun life through conversations between industry and environmental NGOs, TFD’s early focus was primarily on balancing economic and ecological interests. It quickly became apparent, however, that discussions of forest issues have to centre around people. According to the FAO, around 1.6 billion people – more than a fifth of the world’s population – depend on forests for their livelihoods. It’s critical that they have a voice in the dialogue.



South Africa: Forests and Poverty Reduction dialogue, 2006

Bill Street from the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers, a global federation of trade unions in the forestry, timber and construction sectors, was among those advocating for a dialogue focused on social issues. “We’d recently managed to convince the forest certification schemes that you can’t have sustainable forestry if you meet all of the economic and biological criteria but don’t meet any of the human criteria,” he recalls. “Until you address the people and the politics, there are limitations to what TFD can do”.

Marcus Colchester was sceptical when he was first invited to participate: “I remember saying to my colleagues, ‘That looks like a waste of space, just a group talking to itself.’ And I was completely wrong. It was open, and it was clear that people did want to hear about the social challenges in the forestry sector. I’ve been an enthusiast for TFD ever since. Social issues have gradually gained in prominence – indeed, you could now say they’re the most prominent part of the process.”

TFD first explicitly addressed the issue of forests and people in a dialogue initiative on forests and poverty reduction, which ran from 2006 to 2008. The aim was to explore so-called ‘pro-poor’ forestry, and to explore whether the commercial forestry industry can make significant contributions to poverty reduction and sustainable rural livelihoods. A background paper written by James Mayers framed the starting point for the dialogue: this found that, while forestry has great potential to reduce poverty, beyond a limited number of individual projects there was little evidence of real wealth trickling down to the poor as a result of commercial forestry.

A scoping dialogue was held in South Africa, and was followed by field dialogues in Bolivia and the Komi Republic in Russia, as well as a mini dialogue attached to the IMPF dialogue in Sumatra, Indonesia. These dialogues fostered a greater understanding around how to address some of the key challenges – notably around ownership of forest land and resources, organizational relationships in the forest products value chain, and equitable benefit sharing.

TFD revisited these themes in a subsequent dialogue initiative which introduced the concept of investing in locally controlled forestry (ILCF). This was created with the Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP) – a collaboration between IUCN, IIED and FAO, supported by the World Bank, which aimed to drive more and better investment into locally driven forestry initiatives. “I think we can genuinely say that this notion of investing in locally controlled forestry came from TFD discussions,” says James Mayers. “A broad definition of investment as in backing capability and potential as well as the hardnosed money side of things, and local control as in decision-making as near as possible to the action.”

It was an idea that gained considerable traction over the course of the initiative, which engaged more than 400 forest owners, investors, NGOs, governments and intergovernmental agencies from over 60 countries. Following a scoping dialogue in Brussels, an unprecedented seven field dialogues were held between 2009 and 2012 – in Panama, Nepal, Macedonia, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Indonesia and Sweden. There was also a dialogue in London which brought together a wide range of investors to converse directly with family forest owners, communities and Indigenous peoples from both the Global North and the Global South.

One important outcome of the dialogue process was an enhanced collaboration between three different groups of rights-holders – smallholders, communities and Indigenous peoples. “Those dialogues were really interesting,” says Rod Taylor. “Three relatively disparate groups were able to

*“You can’t have sustainable forestry if you meet all of the economic and biological criteria but don’t meet any of the human criteria. You can’t address the people and the politics, there are limitations to what TFD can do.”*



discover things they had in common.” As a result, international alliances representing each of the three rights-holders groups – the Global Alliance of Community Forestry (GACF), International Family Forests Alliance (IFFA) and International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Tropical Forests (IAITPTF) – formed a partnership that became known as the G3.

Ghan Shyam Pandey, a community leader who co-chaired the dialogue in Nepal and later served on the TFD steering committee, was one of those involved. “There was division between Indigenous peoples and local communities,” he says. “Through this dialogue we came to the conclusion that we are all forest rights-holders – Indigenous peoples, local people, small forest owners. This helped to reduce conflict. We came to agree that we are all together, that we are fighting for the same cause.” “It was one of the best dialogues I participated in during my tenure,” he adds. “It really translated to the grassroots level. Many countries are incorporating these ideas.”

The final output of the initiative was a practical guide to investing in locally controlled forestry. “It was almost ahead of its time – now there’s much more interest in impact investment and blended finance, I think it’s more relevant than ever,” says IUCN’s Chris Buss. “The ILCF guide has been critical in helping people to understand how to mobilize various resources. Learnings were picked up in World Bank investment forums, and it certainly influenced IUCN’s forest programme. It helped reshape our model of how we look at communities and smallholders as central.” The dialogue also fed into the Forest and Farm Facility – a collaboration between FAO, IIED, IUCN and AgriCord, which provides financial and technical support to strengthen local forest and farm producer organizations.

One key theme that emerged during the ILCF initiative, as well as other TFD dialogue streams, was the principle of free, prior and informed consent, or FPIC. This refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to give or withhold their free, prior and informed consent to proposed measures that will affect them. The right to FPIC is affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples and under various international human rights treaties – but what was less clear was what it looked like in practice, particularly for private forestry companies. This was the subject of a TFD initiative that ran from 2010 to 2012, with a scoping dialogue at Yale followed by field dialogues in Sumatra and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The initiative helped to make FPIC part of mainstream practice in the forest sector, helping to influence approaches in organizations such as the World Bank. “The Bank was in the process of revisiting its policy on Indigenous peoples, so those dialogues were very helpful to us,” says Peter Dewees. “We ended up doing a dialogue at the Bank on Indigenous peoples and safeguarding, which internally was very useful.”

“When I joined the World Bank, everyone said: ‘oh, Indigenous peoples, that’s our biggest problem,’” adds Gerhard Dieterle. “There was an antagonistic view of Indigenous peoples – everybody thought the World Bank would be blamed if things went wrong. The Forests Dialogue helped to change perceptions on both sides. Now Indigenous peoples think of the World Bank as a friend, and the World Bank is proud to work with them.”

Marcus Colchester believes the field dialogues also helped to influence both governments and private companies. “In the meeting in the DRC, the government agreed that it would take up this issue of customary rights and FPIC. And indeed, in 2018, the DRC did pass a regulation on FPIC. Of course there were lots of other actors involved, but I think our conference really helped to focus thinking and bring some actors together who didn’t usually talk about such matters.”

*“Through this dialogue we came to the conclusion that we are all forest rights-holders – Indigenous peoples, local people, small forest owners. This helped to reduce conflict. We came to agree that we are all together, that we are fighting for the same cause.”*

In Sumatra, meanwhile, the FPIC dialogue helped catalyse real change on the ground. The issues of customary rights and FPIC had first been raised several years earlier when APRIL had hosted a dialogue as part of the IMPF initiative. “Concessions had been granted to APRIL which had not respected the rights of the local communities,” says Colchester. “The company said it wanted to engage with these communities, and we followed up with them to try to find a resolution to the disputes that were there. It didn’t go well, unfortunately. But APRIL came back to TFD several years later, and we had a second dialogue on FPIC, when they again said they would like to change their approach.

“I’m glad to say that now there have been some significant changes in the way APRIL deals with communities – they’re piloting land restitution in some of their concessions, providing land back to the communities for their livelihoods. Again, it’s not totally down to TFD – there’s been a lot of advocacy by local NGOs and by the communities themselves, and there have been changes in the national legal framework that have facilitated things. But I have no doubt that the TFD meetings provided a window for everybody to observe what was going on and help to move things along.”

Despite the increasing recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, the question of who should own and control forests persists. Land tenure remains a particular challenge: across the world, insecure tenure poses a threat to forests and the people who depend on them. In fact, the need for strong tenure rights has cropped up in almost every dialogue TFD has conducted. In 2018, TFD launched a new initiative on Land and Forest Tenure Reform. During a two-day scoping dialogue at Yale, 32 participants representing communities, civil society, companies, academia and development agencies discussed how to frame the challenge of land and forest tenure reform. This will be followed up in future field dialogues.

“There are so many cases where companies get forestry concessions through collusive practice or just through a law which gives them preferential access to forests, to the exclusion of the communities, and then this causes problems for the company as well because of disputes,” says Colchester. “Some of the more progressive companies want to find a solution. Could they go beyond just doing better practice themselves on the ground, could they press for tenure reform, could they engage with government to say ‘we would like a fairer relationship with local and Indigenous communities, because we don’t want these conflicts, it doesn’t help us to do our business?’ Having been accused of being part of the problem, can business be part of the solution?”

*“I’m glad to say that now there have been some significant changes in the way APRIL deals with communities – they’re piloting land restitution in some of their concessions, providing land back to the communities for their livelihoods.”*

1. James Griffith
2. Rod Taylor
3. GhanShyam Pandey





ILCF field dialogues took place in seven countries, including:

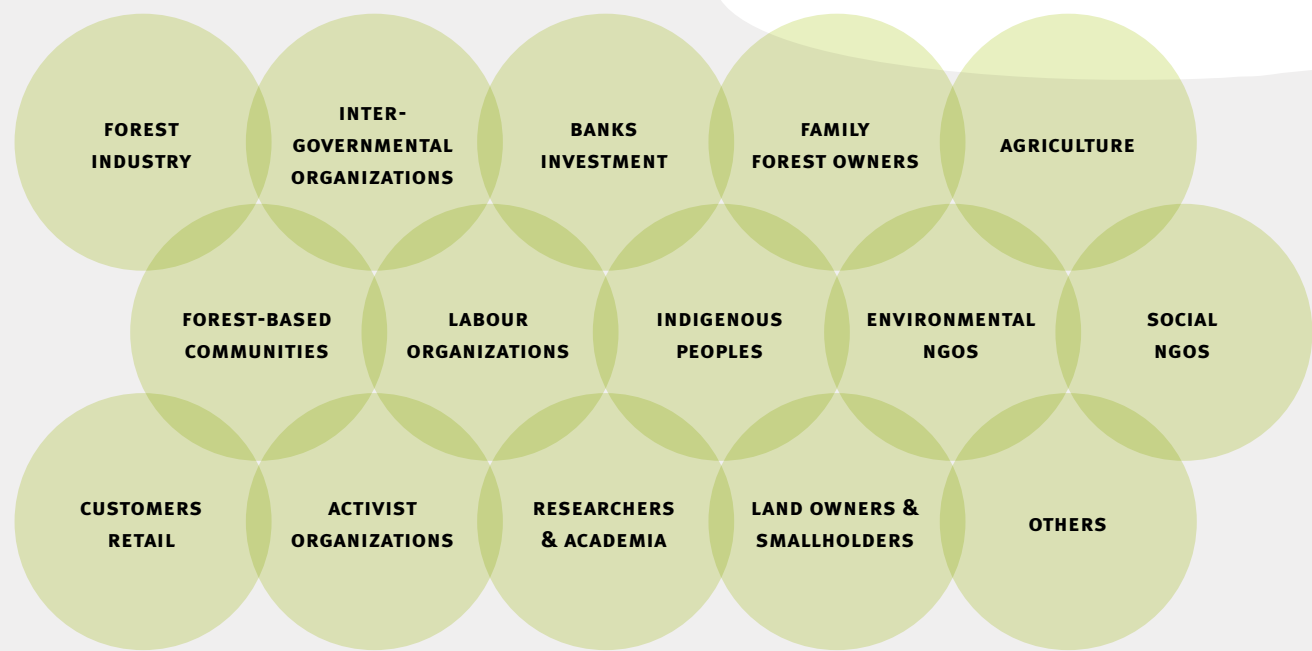
1. Indonesia,
2. Panama,
3. Burkina Faso,
4. Sweden,
5. Nepal,
6. Kenya,
7. Macedonia





# 11. A seat at the table: bringing in different voices

The dialogues in investing in locally controlled forestry and FPIC brought home the importance of talking with – not just about – different groups of stakeholders. As a result, TFD made a conscious effort to ensure all stakeholders have a voice – not just within individual dialogues, but within TFD itself.



*TFD engages with a number of different stakeholder groupings. Ideally all of these should be represented in dialogues and on the steering committee. In reality, this isn’t always possible, but TFD strives to maintain balance between representatives from NGOs, the private sector and communities.*

“That thinking started very early on when we went beyond just working with NGOs and companies to bring in family forest owners,” says Gary Dunning. “They felt they needed a seat at the table when talking about sustainable forestry, and no one was asking them to the table. So we then started to ask, ‘well, who else?’ That was really important – though figuring out how to get those marginalized groups on board is really challenging.”

“Whenever you are doing a multistakeholder dialogue you always have to ask yourself, have you got the right people in the room? Have you got all of the relevant perspectives?” says James Griffiths. “Now you can’t have everyone in the room – you can’t run a UN meeting every time. But if certain groups can’t be directly represented, who in the room is championing their needs?”

“Steering committee members often did that,” he adds. “To be on the steering committee, you need to come from a fairly well-resourced entity. But I saw over and over again how important it was for those steering committee members to represent not just their own organizations but also the needs and voices of those groups that couldn’t be in the room.”

“In the early days when TFD started up, it was dominated by big industry and ‘bingos’ – big international NGOs,” says Stewart Maginnis. “When James Griffiths and myself were co-chairs, we said we really needed to start to diversify the steering committee – reaching out to human rights NGOs, Indigenous peoples, making sure there was more balance with the Global South.”

“The ILCF dialogue really helped transform some of the thinking within TFD,” says Chris Buss. “It got TFD away from Northern white men, and allowed us to bring in Indigenous peoples and communities into its management structure.”

Minnie Degawan, a Kankanaey Igorot from the Cordillera mountains in the Philippines, was the first Indigenous representative to be invited to join the steering committee. “I felt that Indigenous peoples’ concerns and thoughts should be mainstreamed in as many fora as possible,” she says. “At first, I hesitated because I would be the only one on the steering committee and I was afraid it would be a token representation. This was a time when Indigenous people were subjects rather than participants. I felt it would be good to have a voice on the steering committee so that Indigenous peoples’ issues could be better understood. My primary goal then was to save a spot for Indigenous leaders to take should there be interest.”

She admits that early experiences with TFD were sometimes uncomfortable for Indigenous participants. “Once we were formally at the table discussing free, prior and informed consent, of course we were able to speak out, but during the breaks there was a lot of discomfort and that feeling of not being part of the group,” she says. That ran from not being clear whether the cost of meals was going to be covered, to feeling excluded from conversations about the soccer World Cup. On a broader scale, she points out that, although Indigenous representatives are now invited to participate in all number of high-level meetings, many remain marginalized because of language and logistics.

“Because of more participation by Indigenous peoples in these smaller groups like the steering committee and the relations that were built, there’s now more sensitivity,” she says. “There’s the realization that we do need to provide for people coming from faraway places to cover their costs – although the issue of language has still not really been covered. It’s hard and it takes some

*“I felt it would be good to have a voice on the steering committee so that Indigenous peoples’ issues could be better understood.”*



preparation for Indigenous peoples to really participate. It's one thing to have an Indigenous person sit on the steering committee, but how do we then make sure that participation is also effective and useful?" This also includes approaching dialogue themes in a way that reflects local concerns. Degawan remembers thinking this during dialogues on REDD+: "For an Indigenous person deep in the forests of the Cordillera, all this discussion about carbon emissions is like, 'what are they talking about? My issue is simple, I want to keep the mining company out of my territory, and you start talking about how many gigatonnes of carbon will be saved if we stop the mining.' So that's an issue, how we frame the discussions."

She is pleased that Indigenous leaders from other parts of the world have since followed in her footsteps. "That for me is an indication that the decision to ensure that Indigenous peoples have a slot on the steering committee was correct. It's not often that we have that opportunity to sit down and talk with big business. And at the end of the day you discover they're human. I do have this burden of bringing Indigenous issues to the table, but at the same time I don't lose sight of the fact that we are all human, and we can achieve something by being friends and being nice to each other."

TFD also made efforts to include another group who have often been excluded from discussions around forestry, despite comprising roughly half of humanity: women. The original group that founded TFD included just one woman (Sonja Canger of IUCN), and this gender imbalance persisted for some years, reflecting the general state of affairs in the sector. As a female forester, Jeannette Gurung says she always felt professionally marginalized: "I had a sense that this was a man's world, and that if you wanted to get anywhere you had to become a card-carrying member of that old boys' club. I have always been motivated by this marginalization – it is the reason I founded WOCAN (Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management) along with other women foresters and agriculturalists around the world, who felt the need to be recognized and heard, to voice the issues of women engaged at all levels within this very male-dominated sector."

It was in this capacity that she was invited to join the TFD steering committee in 2009. "When I received the call from Stewart Maginnis, I was so touched and honoured that tears came to my eyes," she recalls. "To be recognized as a leader in this sector that has been such a difficult space for women was emotional. Why was that such a moving experience for me? It does really point to the degree of exclusion and marginalization we feel as women."

*"To be recognized as a leader in this sector that has been such a difficult space for women was emotional. It does really point to the degree of exclusion and marginalization we feel as women."*

When women are excluded from discussions, important perspectives are missed. "We know that women play a very large role in sustainable forest management around the world," says Gurung.

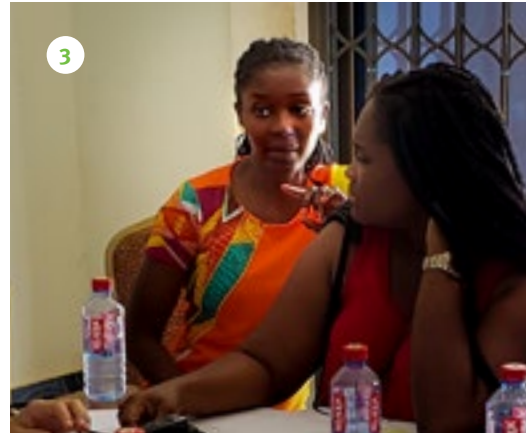
"The classic way to think about it is, when there's significant revenue to be gained, then men step in and are in the foreground. But when it's things like seedlings and nurturing and taking care of the health of the forest, that's where you see women taking the lead. On TFD field visits, we would seek out women in the communities and talk to them specifically, and bring that back to the dialogue."

For James Griffiths, this was an eye-opening exercise: "I remember doing a series of dialogues where local communities were being asked about what assets or infrastructure they needed from companies. In every village we went into, we'd hold two meetings: one with the men of the village – who wanted the roads, who wanted the cash flow and the economic rewards – and one with the women, and there the approach was quite different. The women were much more concerned about the wider impacts. It wasn't that they didn't care about economic development – they seemed to be the entrepreneurs of the village – but they wanted to know, say, how would this compromise water security over time? What are the opportunities in the primary processing stage for adding value? They were much more interested in creating value over the long term."

In 2012, TFD and WOCAN organized a scoping dialogue in Nepal on Exclusion and Inclusion of Women in the Forest Sector. Unfortunately, while participants strongly supported the aims of the dialogue, funding couldn't be raised to continue the initiative at that time. However, it did inspire TFD itself to commit to a target of having at least 40% women on its steering committee and at least 40% women participants in its dialogues.

"The sector is still highly male dominated, but in TFD there is growing interest towards mainstreaming gender," says current steering committee member Cécile Ndjebet. "Steering committee members have improved their understanding on gender, but we need a field dialogue. It would be great to do this in the Congo Basin, because of the male domination in the forest sector there. The awareness has grown, but now what we have to push for is translating the awareness into concrete action, in the field, in policy, in the community and throughout the sector. We have to think of gender-related activities in every programme and budget for that."

- 1. Minnie Degawan
- 2. Jeannette Gurung
- 3. Saadia Bobtoya
- 4. Barathi Pathak
- 5. Amity Doolittle
- 6. Milagre Nuvunga







*Atalanta, Brazil:  
a Land Use Dialogue  
field visit in 2016*



## 12. Charismatic megafauna: the steering committee

One of the quirks of The Forests Dialogue’s history is that its steering committee existed before the organization itself. An ad hoc group of dedicated and passionate leaders from forestry companies, NGOs and private forest owners set themselves the task of setting up the dialogue platform in the first place, and deciding on the issues to focus on. The members may have changed, but this group continues to be responsible for setting TFD’s agenda and making decisions.



TFD steering committee at Yale University in 2018.

“A stakeholder driven effort needs to be driven by stakeholders,” says Gary Dunning. “We didn’t want a formal board of directors. I felt the less this group needs to worry about governance the better. Let the secretariat worry about process, and we’ll get this group to think about content, think about issues, the things that get them to the table. A big steering committee that is ready, willing and able to work on these issues is more important than a bloated secretariat and a board with a few rubber-stampers.”

“We didn’t want to be another global NGO,” agrees founding member Scott Wallinger. “But we needed a steering committee that’s large enough to have a breadth of perspective, that can sit down and say what are the really critical issues? What should we have dialogues on, and who should we invite?”

The steering committee has a maximum of 25 members, including the two co-leaders. Staying true to TFD’s original principles, steering committee members are selected as individuals and for their ability to listen and work collaboratively, not confrontationally. While they are expected to have an influential role within, and support from, their organizations, they participate in a personal capacity rather than as representatives of a particular institution or constituency. That’s a strength, but also a challenge, Dunning believes: “We look to bring in individuals, not organizations. But that does mean that when those individuals leave, their institutions don’t necessarily stay engaged. It’s an interesting dynamic. It’s really and truly an independent body run by individuals, entirely stakeholder driven.”

Steering committee members are expected to be active leaders within their spheres of influence. “They are our charismatic megafauna, who have key roles in the ecosystem,” says Dunning. “During my tenure there’s been a huge amount of change, a shift in energy and dynamics as individuals come and go. It’s an ever-changing cast of characters, and I’m honoured to work with every one of these people.”

Since 2000, well over 100 individuals have served on the steering committee. “All the founders are long gone,” says Dunning. “These were the individuals that really drove TFD in the first place, and it’s an institutional challenge when your champions are constantly leaving. But they didn’t want TFD to become a private talk shop. They wanted – demanded –, diversification.”

“The membership of the steering committee was never rigid,” says Wallinger. “Part of every meeting would be about asking, is there someone else who ought to be part of this? Do we have the people who are relevant? That will always be important as issues come and go and new ones arrive. It’s important to have someone who is fully up to speed on that issue and who knows who should be involved in any dialogue around it.”

Steering committee members are asked to serve a term of three years, though this can be renewed with agreement. The executive team – which is made up of the executive director, the two co-leaders, and two past or future co-leaders – reviews the make-up of the steering committee annually, as people’s ability to engage ebbs and flows. Because TFD is legally a programme of Yale University, the steering committee doesn’t have formal legal and fiscal responsibility for TFD. Members are, though, expected to participate in efforts to support TFD financially by securing core funds, funds for dialogues, grants or in-kind support. They are also expected to serve as an advisor on at least one initiative and co-chair at least one dialogue during their term, as well as participating in as many dialogues as possible.

*“A big steering committee that is ready, willing and able to work on these issues is more important than a bloated secretariat and a board with a few rubber-stampers.”*



Along with regular teleconference calls and email exchanges, the steering committee meets annually at Yale. “During an ideal meeting we might have a two-day mini dialogue with external folks, plus an internal meeting on TFD business,” explains Dunning. “There’s admin issues like budgets and gaps on the steering committee, but the rest of the time we’ll have a concentrated focus on each initiative, getting updates on progress and discussing where we want to go, what comes next. We try and spend as much time as possible, at least 75%, on content not admin. We’ll also put time aside to scope out new themes. We have a pitch session where members will pitch an idea, and steering committee members will decide which to take forward.”

Dunning admits that trying to get all the different stakeholder groups represented can be a logistical nightmare. Most important is trying to balance the three main civil society groupings – environmental and social NGOs, the private sector and communities – as well as geographies and gender. Only in 2019 were women equally represented on the steering committee. In 2020, for the first time, two women were appointed as co-leaders – Ivone Namikawa from Klabin and Milagre Nuvunga.

Milagre Nuvunga, serving a second term on the steering committee, believes its diversity is a strength. “What I think is the way of addressing an issue will be completely different from someone representing the World Bank, or a forest owner in Sweden,” she says. “There are nuances and intricacies that you might not be aware of that can render your dialogue less effective. Having these issues raised and discussed at steering committee level means that TFD will have a much greater level of awareness and understanding when it comes to designing an approach, selecting organizations that are going to be key participants, even selecting the location of where a dialogue may be held. We are all people, and we use our own spheres of influence and our personal connections to make it work.”

“I think there’s a great balance at the moment,” says former co-leader Chris Buss. “The steering committee shapes where TFD is going and what it’s doing. That platform of a diverse range of actors from local to global is critical in helping identify the relevance of where the project is going. The right people around the table setting the right agenda.”

*“At any point in time, there’s a bunch of 20 or 30 people who are deeply engaged with TFD, and that’s a significant proportion of the most influential decision-makers in forests.”*

Most former steering committee members look back on their time with great affection, and found the experience a valuable one. “Looking back on my career, it was really one of the highlights,” says Joseph Lawson. “It was a lot of fun and very enriching to talk with people from different cross-sections of the globe, and I’ve made some long-standing both professional acquaintances and friendships through it.”

“One of the benefits of joining the steering committee is that you get to form a relationship with a fairly diverse group of senior people in the forest sector,” says Rod Taylor. “Instead of having to go to big conferences with pointy elbows, you get to spend a lot of time with people who have some authority or power in a more relaxed, informal setting. It was also an opportunity to put some of the curlier issues we were trying to deal with on the table before putting them through the dialogue process.

“At any point in time, there’s a bunch of 20 or 30 people who are deeply engaged with TFD, and that’s a significant proportion of the most influential decision-makers in forests – it’s useful core of people who have a basic trust in each other. They might not always agree, but they have a basic trust, and they will listen to and be influenced by one another.”

“It was rewarding to spend a lot of time with peers from the sector,” agrees Justin Ward. “There was rotation in the membership, so there was continuity and people you’d get to know over a multi-year period, but you’d also get to meet new people coming in. It was so relevant and consistent with my job description at Conservation International that there wasn’t any issue with devoting time to it.”

“The steering committee is TFD’s Achilles heel at times, but also its great resource,” says James Mayers. “It’s supposed to run TFD, to keep it on its toes, to bring in the money and to make things happen. And yet it’s a huge group – brilliantly huge – of diverse people who’ve all got day jobs. So it’s not actually the most effective decision-making body. It’s an odd shape – it’s an inefficient shape – but it’s lovely. I don’t think there are many other organizations like it.”

- 1. Joe Lawson
- 2. Isilda Nhamumbo
- 3. Päivi Salpakivi-Salomaa

*“TFD is a very important organization that has achieved so many great things, and has a very important mission. It’s a great thing that we now have two women leaders. We are always looking to have the right balance of gender, regions and sectors represented in the steering committee, though we still have some gaps.”*

*Ivone Namikawa, TFD co-leader*







Steering committee meetings from the first meeting in 2000 to 2020





# 13. REDD and beyond: forests and climate change

As the 21st century progressed, climate change began to permeate every part of the discourse around the environment, sustainable development and corporate social responsibility. It was inevitable that TFD would take up the topic, given the critical importance of forests in climate mitigation and adaptation. Starting in 2007, TFD convened a series of dialogue initiatives looking at forests and climate change. These focused particularly on the issue of REDD – the UN-backed mechanism for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, which effectively involves paying tropical forest countries to conserve their forests.



Wet weather during a REDD+ Benefit Sharing field dialogue in Vietnam, 2013.

The first scoping dialogue took place in Bali, Indonesia, coinciding with the 13th Conference of the Parties (CoP 13) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). During these negotiations, REDD transitioned into REDD+, with the plus sign denoting the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. However, TFD participants were concerned that intergovernmental strategies on forests and climate change had side-lined the broader forest sector and the knowledge and experience it had to offer. As a result, they were overlooking the potential climate benefits of productive forestry and agroforestry, and ignoring hard-learned lessons around the rights and participation of local people.

A clear message that came out of the initial dialogue was that the forest community needed to speak with a more unified voice on these complex issues. Over a further two dialogues, in Washington D.C. and Gland, Switzerland, participants drafted a statement entitled Beyond REDD: The Role of Forests in Climate Change setting out five guiding principles for climate change negotiators. The initiative brought together more than 250 representatives of governments, forestry companies, trade unions, environmental and social groups, international organizations, forest owners, Indigenous peoples and forest-community groups.

“REDD became a donor darling and very much the discourse for the climate negotiators,” says Gary Dunning. “We decided to enter into that arena, but we took a different path. We wanted to create a statement by the forest community for negotiators, since they seemingly didn’t understand the value of forest use and conservation without excluding humans. Because we were a mature group, we were able to progress some of these ideas pretty quickly.”

“It really helped create broad stakeholder buy-in into some of the key issues around climate change and forests, and the role of people in that,” says Chris Buss. “It was critical at the time for all of us to be able to say, ‘look, these are the issues that are coming up in dialogue, these are the issues that need to be addressed’. It positioned TFD very well in the climate debate.”

As the political process on REDD+ progressed, TFD organized three further related dialogues – on REDD readiness, finance mechanisms and benefit sharing.

The REDD Readiness initiative attempted to bridge the gap between a country’s willingness to participate in REDD+ and its technical and institutional capacity to do so. “There was international funding available, but unless the countries were in a position to use this in the way it was intended, it would be putting the cart before the horse,” says Joseph Lawson. “I’d like to think that TFD had a role to play in addressing that.”

The initiative included field dialogues in Brazil (October 2009), Ghana (November 2009), Guatemala (January 2010), Ecuador (June 2010) and Cambodia (November 2010). “The innovative thing there was that we did a series of country reports, writing up a detailed description of the issues after each dialogue,” says Stewart Maginnis. Some of these proved influential in shaping national REDD+ and climate plans. “The dialogue publication was critical in helping Ghana shape their climate change funding, to give one example,” says Chris Buss. “Originally they were very much focused on protection of forest reserves. But they really picked up on the dialogue outcomes to look at the role of landscapes, the role of people and trees outside forest reserves, for example how agroforestry could be critical in addressing some of the issues.”

*'It was critical at the time for all of us to be able to say, look, these are the issues that are coming up in dialogue, these are the issues that need to be addressed.'*



Frameworks for REDD+ finance and implementation were discussed during three dialogues in 2009, in New York, and Montreaux and Gland, Switzerland. These helped explore areas of agreement on some key issues, notably around the inclusion of safeguards to prevent possible negative social and environmental consequences.

“That had become a sticking point in the UNFCCC negotiations in the run-up to CoP 15 in Copenhagen,” says Maginnis. “There were those who said safeguards were necessary, and those who said it would slow everything down. We actually got agreement between the different stakeholders of how this might be approached, and put this into a position paper.

“There was a special preparatory climate meeting in Bangkok in October 2009. We had a TFD session there, where we sat with Tony La Viña, who was chair of the REDD+ working group, and said, 'look, this is what we've worked through with different stakeholders, and this is what we think might be an option for trying to address the safeguard stalemate'. He took that on and got it into a draft of the paper, and that helped unblock that issue.”

James Griffiths remembers these meetings well: “Because the advice from TFD was multistakeholder based, negotiators like Tony saw it as sound, informed and credible, and therefore ‘safe’ advice to take forward within these political negotiations.”

The final REDD+ initiative looked at how to build effective, efficient and fair benefit-sharing mechanisms. Following a mini dialogue at the IUCN conference in Korea and a scoping dialogue in Washington D.C., there were field dialogues in Peru, Ghana, Mexico and Vietnam, attended by 250 forest stakeholders from 25 countries.

While the REDD process continues, global efforts to eliminate deforestation have received new impetus more recently with many multinational companies committing to eliminate deforestation from their supply chains. While these deforestation-free commitments from companies, governments and others are welcome, many were launched with little consideration for how they would be delivered or monitored in practice, and with limited understanding of the on-the-ground impact on forests and communities. TFD stepped into this space in 2014 with a scoping dialogue on Understanding Deforestation-Free, which has been followed by field dialogues in Sumatra, Indonesia in 2015 and Gabon in 2017.

Akiva Fishman helped to set up the initiative while interning with TFD during his master’s and now works in this area with WWF. “A lot of the thought leaders on deforestation-free were there at the initial scoping dialogue,” he says. “I think TFD helped to coalesce a global conversation out of what had been different companies making disparate commitments with different guidance from various NGOs.”

In 2019, a coalition of NGOs released the Accountability Framework which draws together a set of common norms and guidance for supply chain commitments in agriculture and forestry. “I would say TFD played a key role in that evolution by, for the first time, convening all these players who were acting independently to begin the process of getting everyone on the same page,” says Fishman.

*“TFD helped to coalesce a global conversation out of what had been different companies making disparate commitments with different guidance from various NGOs.”*

“Deforestation-free is a global goal that really needs to be adapted and landed in a way that takes account of aspirations of the people in the places affected by it,” says Rod Taylor, one of the dialogue co-chairs. “I think TFD was an important early rail in that process.”

Today, with the world finally waking up to the urgency of the climate crisis, the role of forests in climate mitigation and adaptation is high on the international agenda. “The challenge that climate change presents is one of unprecedented magnitude, and there’s so much growing evidence on the role that forests and trees provide as solutions,” says Sarah Price. “We need to think about how the forest sector can scale up nature-based solutions in a way that brings value to climate but also to people and development goals. There’s a role for TFD to explore possible fracture lines, but also to build momentum and solidarity around the issues.”

- 1. REDD Readiness, Cambodia, 2010
- 2. REDD Finance, Montreux, 2009
- 3. Past co-leader Edward ‘Skip’ Krasny
- 4. REDD+ Benefit Sharing, Ghana, 2013





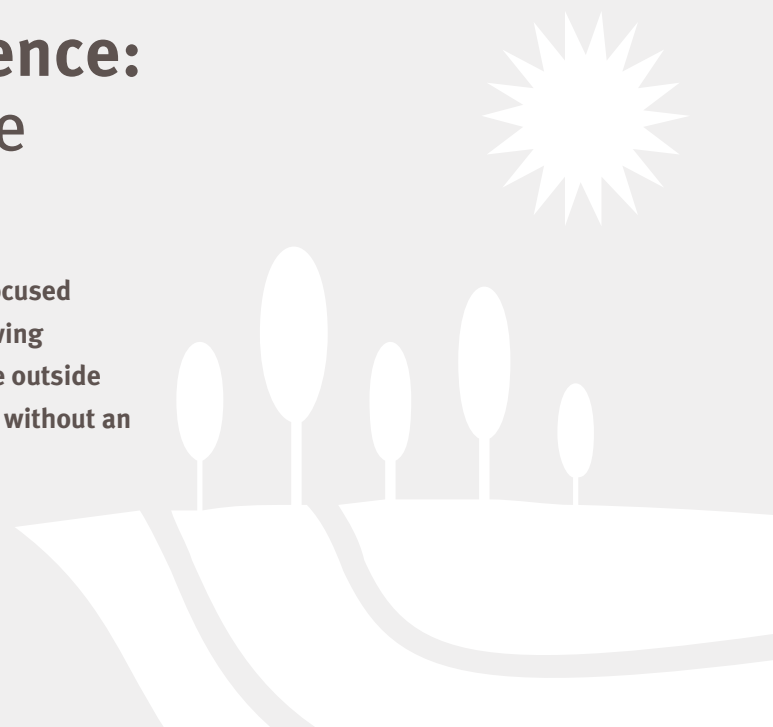


*Tanzania: pressures on forests can't be addressed without an understanding of the wider landscape. Land Use Dialogue, 2017.*



## 14. Beyond the forest fence: looking to the landscape

The Forests Dialogue (the clue's in the name) has always focused primarily on forests. But over the years, there's been a growing recognition that many of the most pressing issues originate outside the forest fence. You can't address the pressures on forests without an understanding of the wider landscape.



Gabon: agriculture and forests, 2017.

“The forest industry – and I think there’s an element of truth in this – thinks of itself as light-years ahead of agriculture in terms of sustainability, land-use mosaics and so on,” says Rod Taylor. “There was a feeling of frustration that they were so much further along in terms of conservation or protecting areas of high conservation value, yet there wasn’t much point in forestry doing the right thing in landscapes if agriculture was then going to move into their no-go zones or plant right up to rivers. It revealed the need for a landscape approach.”

“A multistakeholder dialogue process naturally pushes you towards a landscape approach,” says James Griffiths. “It makes you think beyond the geography that you’re immediately operating in. And it pushes you to look at the global context as well, at the supply chain and international trade drivers behind poor management decisions.”

This was the thinking behind the Food, Fuel, Fibre and Forests (4Fs) initiative, which ran from 2011 to 2014. This looked at the future role of forests in a world where a growing and increasingly wealthy global population will consume more bioenergy, wood products and food, putting greater pressure on forests and land.

“We’d been doing a lot of scenarios within WWF on whether it was possible to feed the world and save the forests at the same time,” says Taylor, who led the WWF forests programme at the time. “They were issues that went beyond forests into how decisions are made around land use. We’d also been recognizing that there were trade-offs and different perspectives from local and global stakeholders.”

Following a scoping dialogue in Washington, there were field dialogues in Brazil, Borneo (Kalimantan, Indonesia) and Finland. While these contributed to an important ongoing debate, Taylor wonders if the topic may have been too ambitious for TFD to take on: “I think the issue of land competition writ large is too large and unwieldy to have a really meaningful dialogue around it, so you have to tease apart some issues and dive into those. I don’t think we got too far with it, but it led into other things.”

Indeed, landscape thinking is central to current TFD initiatives, like Tree Plantations in the Landscape. “It influenced the dialogue around plantations in the sense that just looking at plantations stand by stand doesn’t make sense, you need to look into how they fit into the broad mosaic of land uses,” says Taylor. Landscape-based strategies also play a prominent role in the ongoing Understanding Deforestation-Free initiative – including ensuring that eliminating deforestation doesn’t undermine the needs of local people or displace production into other important ecosystems.

Most explicitly, TFD has launched the Land-Use Dialogues initiative in partnership with IUCN and various international and local partners. This initiative takes the TFD model into various landscapes at risk of deforestation to address the often-competing interests of different stakeholders. It aims to develop existing multistakeholder platforms to strengthen sustainable land use and inclusive governance.

“The dialogue provides a safe space to explore those landscape fracture lines and discuss trade-offs,” says Chris Buss. “You’re not going to fix all the problems, and a landscape, by its nature, is very dynamic. So it’s not a panacea – it’s much more about facilitating, looking at how we link to other processes, scaling up, seeing who can provide support.”

*“A multistakeholder dialogue process naturally pushes you towards a landscape approach.”*



Seven land-use dialogues have been organized to date – in Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and two landscapes in Ghana and Tanzania. The idea is that local governments and other organizations will build on this foundation and continue to run effective multistakeholder dialogues in these landscapes. “TFD is facilitating the process, but it’s about driving national ownership,” says Buss.

Saadia Bobtoya, IUCN’s forest coordinator in Ghana, has been involved in the land-use dialogues in Ghana. “There was an identified gap that discussions at a national level were not really trickling down, and in the same way the issues from the local level were not really being taken up effectively into policies,” she says. “We saw this idea of landscape dialogues as a way to build capacity and provide a platform for discussion and decision-making at the local level, where all the action is really happening, and then to feed this into national level discussions and policy-making.”

TFD’s international profile and proven model helped create buy-in, she believes: “A platform that has international appeal and reputation provides that air around it where stakeholders are keen to participate. We had a head of the district assembly come and be a co-chair and facilitate the discussions himself – that was something I’d never seen in my 10 years with IUCN. Local people feel motivated if they see their voices are being heard and their activities are being recognized at a national level, and internationally.”

The dialogue has influenced local land-use plans in Ghana and elsewhere. “One issue we discussed in the Wasa Amenfi landscape was how can the local community-level natural resource management structures, called community resource management areas, be integrated into district assembly activities,” says Bobtoya. “We followed up a couple of months later, and one of the three districts had already put that into its action plan – although the next step is to see them allocate some resources to this.”

“I think we were one of the early organizations to think about how you implement a landscape approach on the ground,” says Gary Dunning. “Now that stuff has progressed so far, and some of the questions being resolved are those that we asked at the very beginning.”

*“Local people feel motivated if they see their voices are being heard and their activities are being recognized at a national level, and internationally.”*



*“When you work in the environmental space it’s very easy to have a negative and pessimistic view of the world and all of its problems, especially in these times of political conflict and dichotomy. At TFD, I got to see first-hand how there are so many people working on real solutions on the ground. Looking back, it’s very reassuring to remember that there is hope out there and the power you can unleash by bringing people together. TFD has a special place in my heart!”*

*Michelle Mendlewicz, TFD programme assistant 2015-17*



**Mangai, DRC:** the Land Use Dialogues initiative has established a multi-stakeholder forum in the landscape.





TPL

*New Zealand: harvesting operations, Tree Plantations in the Landscape initiative, 2018.*



# 15. The right people in the room: ingredients of a successful dialogue

A successful dialogue doesn't happen by chance. Over the years, TFD has developed an effective model with some clear ground rules and processes. As the Strategic Plan puts it: "For TFD, 'dialogue' is not just another word for 'conference' or 'talk-shop', but a managed process for participants to learn from each other and catalyse change."



Breakout group discussion during an IMPF dialogue, China in 2006.

"Anybody can do a multistakeholder dialogue," says Stewart Maginnis. "What TFD has are clear, almost codified rules of engagement that help reinforce trust building, so people know when they enter into it that this is a safe place."

"Participants are expected to show a profound respect to each other, even if they don't agree on some issues," adds Carols Roxo. "All discussions must reflect the respect for diverse opinions."

Good dialogues require rigorous preparation. Every TFD dialogue initiative is driven by an advisory group made up of steering committee members and other stakeholders who know the subject. It's their responsibility to make sure that the right people are in the room – that all views will be heard, and that the various actors who can put solutions into practice are represented. Considerable research goes into every dialogue, and a background paper is shared with all participants beforehand so that everyone goes into the process with a good understanding of the issues at hand.

"Preparation is key," says James Mayers. "The TFD model of dialogue doesn't come cheap and it doesn't come often, because it takes time and energy to set up in that way. There's not many others that do it."

One long-standing principle, as we've seen, is that people are invited to participate on an individual basis, not an institutional one. TFD deliberately selects individuals with the ability to listen and empathize, not those who just 'play the tapes'. Sarah Price has been involved with TFD in various capacities – as a master's student, as a participant while working for PEFC, and most recently as a member of the steering committee while working for pulp and paper company Sappi. "I think whether you're working for an NGO or a company, at the end of the day you're yourself, and you have your own perspective and professional interests," she says. "Maybe at some conferences you're limited to having your current organizational hat on in your interventions or positions, but I think the dialogue really focuses on you as an individual, and you bring your views forward regardless of your position at that point."

This is supported by another important principle: the use of the Chatham House rule, which states that participants are free to use the information received, but not to reveal the identity or the affiliation of the speaker. "Dialogue processes that are not driven by Chatham House rules have no capacity to lead to results," says Roxo. "Without such rules, participants speak for their own audiences that will listen or read what they said later, and not to the people who are in the room. This limits the individual's capacity to negotiate and find common ground with other stakeholders."

Miriam Prochnow, from the Brazilian NGO Apremavi, also highlights the importance of the Chatham House rule. "It creates an environment that does not threaten people – I think this is the soul of The Forests Dialogue. We need to speak frankly, not be afraid to speak as long as it is true and you are ready to hear a counterargument. This can only be achieved when it is reciprocal. I learned a lot from this: to have a little more patience and tolerance and to build more convincing arguments."

TFD itself remains a neutral convenor. Dialogues are facilitated by several co-chairs who represent different stakeholder groups, ensuring that no single institution or interest can dominate. Usually, a dialogue will have four co-chairs chosen by the steering committee, advisory group and local hosts. They are well-versed in both the TFD process and the topics being discussed.

*"Anybody can do a multistakeholder dialogue, what TFD has are clear, almost codified rules of engagement that help reinforce trust building, so people know when they enter into it that this is a safe place."*



While dialogues are expected to lead to results, these are determined by the participants, not by any individual organization. “With a workshop you go in to develop a strategy or fix a plan or something like that,” says Rod Taylor. “TFD goes in with a very open-ended idea of what’s going to come out the other side.”

“You must go into dialogue not quite knowing what’s going to come out,” agrees Mayers. “If you really know what’s going to happen in a dialogue process, then you’re probably not doing the right thing and it probably won’t work. But you do need to have some clarity on expectations to satisfy participants, and particularly donors. Striking that balance is one of the tensions in TFD that won’t ever go away, but it’s a good, constructive tension.”

To enable this process to develop over time, most TFD initiatives feature a series of dialogues exploring a theme in different contexts. Initiatives will usually start with a scoping dialogue to better understand the issue and whether a dialogue process could help to overcome barriers. If the TFD steering committee decides to go ahead with an initiative – and can raise the funding to do so – then a series of field dialogues will be organized. Typically, these will include two days in the meeting room, and another day or two in the field. This helps to introduce new perspectives, bring issues to life and ground the dialogue in reality, as well as enabling dialogue participants to speak directly to community members, workers and other stakeholders. It also creates opportunities for engagement outside the more formal dialogue setting.

Over the course of an initiative, dialogues and their associated field visits will usually be held in different countries, exploring themes and sharing ideas in a variety of contexts. Each dialogue will include a mixture of international participants and national stakeholders. This creates a cross-fertilization of experiences, ideas and perspectives, and helps to develop solutions to both local and international challenges. These are recorded in the co-chairs summary, published after each dialogue, and often feed into a synthesis report and recommendations.

“The most successful dialogue initiatives are those that have had a core of individuals that have travelled the journey together,” says Mayers. “It works best when people aren’t in it just for a one-off moment, but there’s some consistency of participation across contexts.”

“Single dialogues usually have a limited capacity to find solutions,” agrees Roxo. “One of the key drivers of successful dialogues is the building up of common trust between individuals, and this can only happen with the continuity of the dialogue process.”

“There are moments in TFD dialogues when I get the buzz, when I think that something really good is happening here,” says Mayers. “Typically that happens when you realize that the preparation is good, that the right people are in the room or in the field together, and key parties are really going to benefit from it. Those moments of magic don’t always happen, but in the best dialogues they do.”

*“There are moments  
in TFD dialogues  
when I get the buzz,  
when I think that  
something really good  
is happening here.”*



1. Forests and Climate dialogue, Indonesia, 2007
2. Land and Forest Tenure Reform scoping dialogue, New Haven, 2018
3. Land Use Dialogue, Kilombero, Tanzania,, 2019







*Peru: transporting timber,  
REDD+ Benefit Sharing  
dialogue, 2014.*



# 16. Entrenched positions: when dialogue isn't enough

Successful dialogue depends on people on all sides  
being prepared to at least look for common ground.  
That doesn't always happen.



“A topic area that just wasn’t ready for dialogue”: GM trees dialogue, Gland, Switzerland.

“I think there are probably some NGOs and civil society organizations which wouldn’t want to have much to do with an organization like TFD,” says Peter Dewees. “At the World Bank, I had a number of interactions with a few organizations which really weren’t interested in having a genuine discussion about some key forest issues, and never expressed any desire to explore common ground.

“But TFD is not just this friendly group of convivial people who enjoy chatting about interesting issues over beers,” he adds. “Yes, that’s great fun and terribly useful, but you need also to engage in tough discussions with other people and institutions who are not your advocates, and who are not – and are never going to be – friendly to your institution. That was something we tried to do at the Bank and which we found really frustrating. There was simply no interest in looking for common ground. I’ve often wondered if with a group like TFD it could have played out differently.”

There is, though, a danger that attempting to engage those with inflexible opinions can prevent any progress. “Because of very strong positions taken by some actors, it can be hard for those who are less fixed in their positions to find space to move,” says Peter Kanowski. “It’s a challenge for all dialogue processes to incorporate views that are at the extremes in ways that don’t undermine or derail the process.”

This was apparent in an initiative on the controversial topic of genetically modified (GM) trees. Between 2011 and 2013, TFD convened two scoping dialogues in New Haven and Gland and an “information sharing meeting” in Gloucestershire, England.

“The two failures I can think of where even TFD couldn’t get beyond idealistic and entrenched positions are GM trees and, to some extent, bioenergy,” says Rod Taylor. “I was involved in both of those, and they were really tough issues. TFD did a lot to bring parties close to being able to have a dialogue, but in both cases some NGOs said ‘no, we don’t even want to talk about this.’”

“The GM trees process couldn’t go very far because there was such opposition to even talking about the issues beyond the level of principle,” says Kanowski. “It proved to be so contentious for some participants that it wasn’t possible to move beyond the first initial meetings. There wasn’t the space to move forward. I guess that could have happened in the IMPF process if some of the strongest critics had been involved at the earliest stage. Our concern was that it was a topic area that just wasn’t ready for dialogue, and that turned out to be true. Those meetings demonstrated there wasn’t enough common ground to continue.

“NGO views ranged from measured scepticism to complete ground-zero opposition. And because only a few companies were actively engaged in researching and developing GM trees, there was less market motivation to unblock the issue. So not only was there not enough common ground, but nor was there enough push from a broad base of actors to resolve it.”

“It wasn’t a bad thing to scope it out and see where we could get, but it was also a sensible decision not to push it forward,” Kanowski adds. “At some point, though, as the technology progresses and the climate changes, GM trees are going to come back onto the agenda. Then TFD or someone is going to have to explore those issues.”

“It’s a challenge for all dialogue processes to incorporate views that are at the extremes in ways that don’t undermine or derail the process.”



Despite the lack of clear progress, many participants found the dialogue useful. “We were able to bring people to the table who wouldn’t normally entertain the idea, to talk about why it was such a hot-button topic, and listen to the industry’s point of view and listen to the NGOs’ point of view,” says Joseph Lawson. “Just having that dialogue was extremely valuable.”

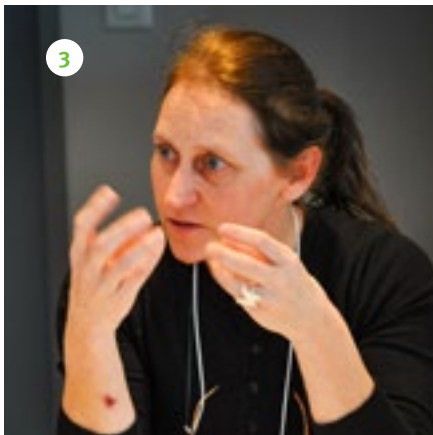
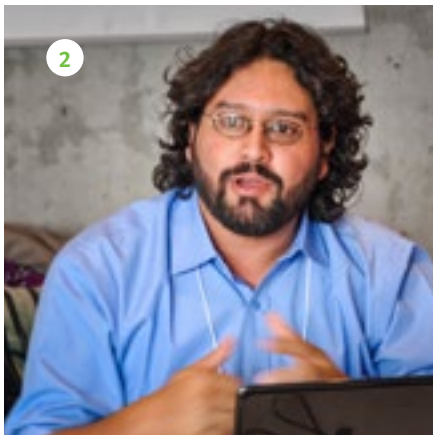
“One tangible output from this dialogue was a detailed questionnaire about the scope and scale of GM tree investments, developed by the NGO participants, which was completed by all the investing companies,” adds James Griffiths. “These results, which are on TFD’s website, could certainly help inform any future interactions.”

Another initiative that arguably failed to make much progress was on sustainable wood energy. A scoping dialogue was held in Montpellier, France in 2016, but no further dialogues were organized – “There’s just two different religions there,” laments Taylor. Nonetheless, many of the dialogue participants remain active in various public policy, research and supply chain assurance processes around sustainable wood energy, including the EU Renewable Energy Directive, the International Energy Agency’s Bioenergy Sustainability Inter-Task Project, and the Sustainable Biomass Program.

But while the issue of bioenergy in industrialized countries remains fraught, the dialogue did lead to results in the Global South, according to fellow co-chair Cécile Ndjebet: “It was crazy! You wouldn’t believe what we agreed in that dialogue! To this day, we are still implementing actions agreed in Montpellier three years ago.

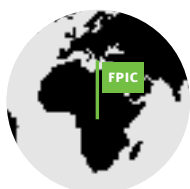
“In the Congo Basin you have cities like Kinshasa, Yaoundé, Abidjan relying on charcoal,” she explains. “In TFD we look at that and we realize that we cannot say ‘no charcoal’. If you say that you are wasting your time and pushing people into illegality. Let people have charcoal, but sustainable charcoal production. We have initiatives now in these cities on sustainable charcoal production which came from that dialogue.”

- 1. Chris Buss
- 2. Victor Lopez
- 3. Miriam Prochnow



*Charcoal on sale in DRC: the TFD dialogue on sustainable wood energy contributed to several sustainable charcoal initiatives.*





*Democratic Republic of  
the Congo: Field discussions  
during a dialogue on FPIC, 2012.*



# 17. Getting down to ground level: field visits

Field visits have become an essential ingredient in TFD’s recipe. There’s a two-way dynamic: seeing the reality on the ground informs and enriches the wider discussion and the knowledge of participants, while that discussion and international experience can be harnessed to tackle local challenges.



Getting into the forest during a 4Fs dialogue in Finland, 2014

“The format of getting people into the field and then discussing issues does make a big difference,” says Chris Buss. “The fieldwork brings people together. You take people through different experiences, and because you’re getting out into the field, you are getting into the real issues. It helps you reflect, you can see what’s going on. It’s one of the few opportunities we have sometimes to get down to ground level. And you’re also able to share experiences and discuss issues with people in a much more informal environment.”

Cassie Phillips recalls visiting Brazil’s Atlantic forest as a particularly valuable experience. “Being able to visit people opened up your mind,” she says. “It was bringing an international perspective to issues we only dealt with domestically. If you only see the local picture, you don’t understand the controversy. If you don’t have that understanding, you can’t find solutions.”

“The field visits are particularly important – interacting with people on the ground produces the most compelling lessons as one sees and experiences things,” says Minnie Degawan. “It’s a great way to ensure that real discussions happen on real issues, and are not limited to theoretical or abstract matters. You can talk with communities on the ground, ask specific questions and have focused discussions. It also provides the participants an opportunity to interact with each other in a much more informal way – often travelling to the field opens up more productive discussions than two days inside the conference rooms.”

“Indigenous people or local community organizations can feel intimidated to say what they want to say in a lush hotel or some international forum, because we’re dealing with contentious issues,” agrees Marcus Colchester. “But when people are visiting them in their village, in their forest, they will talk in a much clearer way about their situation, because their colleagues are around them and they feel in familiar territory. There’s a real opportunity for people to speak from the heart – and a sympathy from the visitors to listen, because they are the guests there. They are together, standing in the same hut, listening to the same story.”

“I never underestimate the value of going into the field and listening to people from that place giving you their perspective,” says Rod Taylor. “A lot of things can make really good sense when you write a nice pithy paragraph about an issue from your ivory tower. But it can become very theoretical unless you’ve got in your head memories of people saying certain things, or seeing things with your own eyes in really tough landscapes. So I’ve always appreciated the reality check you get by going on the field dialogues.”

“Field visits are an integral part of the whole process, because they reinforce and make real all of the discussion of the issues at hand – just getting exposed to and being able to see with your own eyes what we’ve been talking about,” agrees Justin Ward. Often, this reveals similarities between different contexts. Joseph Lawrence recalls experiencing this during the “4Fs” dialogue: “If you were in Africa, fuel was a huge issue. If you were in Indonesia, fibre was a huge issue, as well as forests. We had field dialogues in Finland, Indonesia and the Brazilian Amazon – drastically different contexts, but the real issues were very similar. In Finland, for example, there were very sophisticated cooperatives of small forest owners, but it’s the same thing as in Indonesia, it’s about trying to support communities and their livelihoods.”

*“The fieldwork brings people together you’re able to share experiences and discuss issues with people in a much more informal environment.”*



This international exchange of knowledge and experience is an important part of the TFD process. “Field visits are where the tyre hits the road,” says Sarah Price. “You see the international folks coming in and trying to make sweeping comments and conclusions on what they’re seeing, and then being carefully reformed by the local people who have their own deep knowledge and local intelligence. It’s those moments where you see this cross-fertilization of these different perspectives – it’s really eye-opening.”

“Bringing the TFD model to a particular place and engaging local actors seems to create space for discussion locally,” says Peter Kanowski. “There’s something about bringing together an international and local group that works in both directions.”

He cites the Tree Plantations in the Landscape dialogue in New Zealand in 2018 as an example: “I think all of us went away feeling we’d learnt more about the New Zealand model and how that works, both the strengths and the challenges. And I think the New Zealand participants went away feeling they’d been empowered in their capacity to situate what they were doing in the broader international context – seeing positive reinforcement, but also seeing where areas that were challenging might be informed by how people had approached those challenges elsewhere. That was particularly the case for Maori people talking with other Indigenous peoples, or other participants who’d been closely involved in working with Indigenous peoples in different contexts.”

A danger with field visits is that they can become sanitized show-and-tell exercises – but, says James Mayers, this is rarely the case with TFD. “Typically you’ll get the corporate spin, the company line, the communications people who’re there to tell you the good stuff. But because you’ve got this group of people who’re interested and pretty sharp, you get past that pretty quickly to reveal the reality of what’s going on,” he says. “That’s a typical breakthrough in a TFD dialogue. And everybody involved benefits from the tactical learning they get in making that breakthrough, including the company.”



*“Individuals and institutions engage with forests from different viewpoints. For some they are a home to be cherished, for others a source of financial gain and, for others, a landscape to conserve for the good of humankind in the face of climate change. Recognizing and harmonizing these requires a certain level of acceptance and understanding of competing goals. Dialogues are often the most effective way to ensure that a necessary first step is taken – the recognition of the rights of the different stakeholders in a landscape, and subsequent negotiation around the options and trade-offs to be explored. Bringing to the table stakeholders that are effectively on a warpath or resolutely set on ignoring each other is, for me, the greatest achievement of TFD.”*

*Milagre Nuvunga, Executive Director, MICAIA Foundation*



1. Field visit in DRC, 2012  
2. Field visit in Sumatra, Indonesia, 2007







*Ghana: REDD+ Benefit  
Sharing field dialogue, 2013.*



# 18. The power of the bus ride

Organizing field trips can be a logistical headache. One of the challenges is that the places where forest-related issues are experienced most acutely are often remote areas, and usually require a long bus ride. After some early experiences, TFD instituted a maximum travel time of four hours – but in practice it doesn’t always work out like that. However, these long journeys can in fact be hugely valuable in their own right.



International participants meet locals on an IMPF field visit in Sumatra, Indonesia, 2007.

Gary Dunning calls it “the power of the bus ride”: “You see people sitting together on the bus – just talking. Then you see them off the bus and they’re hanging out, having a beer. And when it’s people you know could have problems with each other or with each other’s organizations, that’s really incredible. And I see it all the time.

“The longer and more harrowing the bus ride, the closer they become,” he adds. “When you’re on a bus with someone for ten hours it gives you time to get to grips with different perspectives,” says James Griffiths. “The bus rides, the dialogues, the dinners, being shown around the forest – these are all engagement opportunities.”

“It’s all part of the dialogue,” agrees James Mayers. “Endless hellish bus rides, collapsing arrangements, places to stay that turned out not to be places to stay, getting charged by hippos – that’s all happened despite usually excellent preparation, and that’s all part of it.” “After a field visit, we all pile back into the bus, and everybody’s talking about what they’ve heard, and they’re all jumbled up, all these different stakeholders sitting next to each other chatting away,” says Marcus Colchester. “You can see it happening, people saying ‘I didn’t know it was like that!’ And it really helps people find a common understanding of each other.”

In a blog for Global Forest Watch, Rod Taylor writes about the discussions on the bus after a visit to oil palm plantations owned by agribusiness giant Olam during the Understanding Deforestation-Free dialogue in Gabon:  
*... as our bus bounced past vast rows of young oil palms, the passengers engaged in passionate debate. Were palm oil plantations good for Gabon? Could and should they be deforestation-free? A pragmatist praised Olam’s efforts to map how local villagers use the land and secure their consent. A more cynical voice remarked “But can the people really say ‘no’ if they know the president is behind the project?” One person commented, “We don’t want zero deforestation to put a big bell over our country and deny us the right to develop, but we do want to protect our forests.” Our debate on the bus was a microcosm of a global discussion about how to balance rural development and forest protection.*

“In the intimacy of the bus conversation, people are prepared to be a lot more direct and opinionated, and it gets quite heated sometimes. But it’s a really good insight into how wicked some of these problems are in a way that you can’t get from reading a paper or a briefing,” Taylor says. “Whether it’s one on one, or a group of three or four, a lot of ideas get cooked up in those informal conversations. And if the individuals have enough ambition, they can follow it up and make something happen.”

The bus rides also provide participants with a deeper understanding of both the physical and the socio-economic landscape in which the dialogue takes place. “It’s easier to helicopter in and look at a forestry issue,” says Sarah Price. “Those bus rides are always an insight into the broader context that a country operates within and the lack of infrastructure that affects so many of the places we’ve visited.”

This was brought home dramatically on a visit to a community in Nepal in 2009. “The agenda was based on the absolute unattainable ideal rather than the reality,” Dunning recalls. “A pass was blocked, and the four-hour drive out of Kathmandu ended up taking twelve hours. It was 10 or 11 at night by the time we arrived.”

*“Whether it’s one on one, or a group of three or four, a lot of ideas get cooked up in those informal conversations. And if the individuals have enough ambition they can follow it up and make something happen.”*



The TFD participants received a warm welcome from the community, who had been waiting the whole time, but soon had to hit the road again. “That was the one and only time that we’ve had a serious accident,” says Dunning. “These are roads you don’t want to drive on at night. One of the buses came off the road and rolled over into a deep ditch filled with water. I remember there was that moment where I didn’t have a clue what we were going to do; there was chaos. But then we became organized and did what needed to be done. Chris Buss, who had military training, started organizing everybody into human chains, reaching under the bus, pulling people out, opening the rear exits.”

Five people needed to go to hospital, but nobody was seriously injured. “We didn’t get to our accommodation until 3am, and had to leave at 7 or 8 the next day,” Dunning says. “But the rest of the dialogue was quite thoughtful and thankful.”

Minnie Degawan recalls the same incident. “It was memorable in that it underscored the very real situations that people face on a day-to-day basis that are often blurred when international meetings happen. Often, Indigenous representatives travel great distances, often in an unsafe manner, just to be able to attend international meetings and present their concerns. But this is never part of the discussion, as other issues are prioritized.

“On another level, the incident showed the solidarity among the dialogue participants. Everyone jumped out of the bus and extended help. It was a good feeling to know that everyone felt connected.”

- 1. A warm welcome at the end of a long bus ride, Nepal, 2012
- 2. Past programme manager Peter Umany (left) in a bus ride discussion, Gabon, 2017.







*Pekanbaru, Indonesia: Steering committee member Mubariq Ahmad (left) in front of a stack of confiscated illegally harvested timber. IMPF dialogue, 2007.*



# 19. Kind of a soft science: TFD’s impact

Over the last two decades, TFD has contributed to significant progress within the forest sector, at local, national and international levels. It’s helped to defuse conflict around issues like forest certification and plantations, bring concepts like FPIC and locally controlled forestry into mainstream practice, and catalyse partnerships and collaborative action. “People in the forest sector will find it a more civil place today,” says Gary Dunning. “That’s partly down to The Forests Dialogue.”



Brazil: seedlings,  
Tree Plantations in the  
Landscape dialogue, 2018.

Evaluating TDF's impact is a challenge – while many dialogues have led to tangible, concrete outcomes, its influence is often softer and subtler. “It’s hard to draw direct lines between what it does and the impact on trees growing and people’s happy lives,” says James Mayers. “It’s all about organizing ‘blah blah blah’ in different places, and the effect of such chattering together is indirect.

“But there are times when the dialogue sizzles. The meat and dairy industry coming together with foresters in Brazil for dialogue on what better land use should look like – that felt like a really punchy key moment. Wilmar, the big plantation company in Indonesia, coming together with NGOs to even consider what FPIC might imply – you felt both the tensions and the possibilities running through everybody’s veins.”

“It’s frustrating for donors who want to see logframes, impacts and outputs,” says Peter Dewees. “That’s not what TFD’s about. TFD is a discussion, and discussions are always good – particularly when there are contentious issues. Discussions like that help to create a broader understanding of what the issue’s about. I would be hesitant to say, for example, that ‘this dialogue stream resulted in this policy change’. No! That’s not what it’s about.” Building personal relationships is one of the most important parts of the process, he believes: “For the people who get involved in TFD, it becomes very personal. You’re reacting to people on a one-to-one basis. It’s not just about the big picture issues – it’s about this guy you’re having dinner with. And I like that. I think that’s just a really great tool to move forward on some of these issues. You’d know people on the steering committee or from the dialogue streams, and then you’d see the same people at a conference or some other event, and immediately it reduced all the barriers that might have otherwise been there.”

“When individuals know each other through TFD, they may be more likely to support each other in public,” agrees Scott Wallinger. “If in other meetings you see somebody from the industry say something, then somebody from WWF or Greenpeace backs them up, then people are going to take notice.”

“The intangible value is that it allows you to talk to a group of people, particularly on the steering committee, who are all leaders in their own area of focus – business leaders, NGO leaders, community leaders, they’re all decision-makers,” says Joseph Lawson. “Listening to their opinions helps you shape your own decision-making. That’s certainly been my experience. These intangible values of dialogue cannot be overstressed – and they do lead to things on the ground, though it’s kind of a soft science.”

“I have no doubt the world is better because of the dialogue, none whatsoever,” says Bill Street. “Before TFD started, the middle ground wasn’t very wide. I think the trust building in the dialogue widened that space for some important policy-makers. Over the years, we opened doors for folks to think about things that they would not have thought about beforehand, that they would have just dismissed out of hand as too radical, too crazy, or insignificant. What we did was prepare the soil – I’m not sure how often we got to the point of planting a seedling, but the soil was more ready for it because of the dialogue.”

“Direct cause-and-effect is always hard to prove in soft policy, but other sectors have been influenced by the TFD approach,” says James Griffiths. “There are so many sustainability standards being set up now, and all of them take a multistakeholder approach to governance and standard-setting. TFD was always seen as an open-source model. We were always talking to people about the value of multistakeholder approaches and the value TFD added in the forestry supply chain. My then role at WBCSD meant I was often asked by colleagues and member companies about challenges and opportunities associated

*“These intangible values of dialogue cannot be overstressed – and they do lead to things on the ground.”*



with structured stakeholder interactions across a range of industrial sectors, including vehicle tyres, cement, mining and minerals, bioenergy and agribusiness. I was always able to use TFD as an illustrative and practical model for discussion.

“I always saw TFD as this giant learning laboratory,” he adds. “It’s fascinating to see the transfer of learning across different contexts. For example, learning about the challenges that small forest owners have around the world, even though their context is very different, the challenges are very similar. It was really interesting to see this flow of best practice from private forest owners in North America or Europe being adapted and transferred to Nepal or India.

“Innovative companies could use it to learn about societal expectations, ahead of activism, ahead of the market. It helped build internal understanding, particularly ahead of making investments in developing countries. It was great to see so many companies wanting to get into a multistakeholder dialogue process, develop relationships and eventually work with NGOs.”

Many participants have brought lessons learned from TFD back into their own organizations. “You can still see the DNA of certain dialogue streams in the IUCN forest programme,” says Chris Buss. “We have business lines including locally controlled forestry and forest landscape restoration, which have been heavily influenced by TFD and the outcomes of those dialogues, and making sure we have stakeholder buy-in. We’ve greatly valued having TFD to shape our thinking and understanding of the issues on the ground.”

“I’m really proud of the fact that NGOs are using this platform to take on issues collaboratively, and also developing partnerships with companies or private sector entities in a way they weren’t doing before,” adds Dunning.

But it’s in changing the thinking of individuals that TFD has perhaps its most powerful impact. Gerhard Dieterle provides a striking example. “I was in charge of developing this climate investment fund as part of the World Bank’s Forest Investment Program, which eventually got about US\$800 million in funding,” he recalls. “At a certain time in the negotiations, I thought back to discussions I’d had with Indigenous peoples in Indonesia with TFD. I felt those groups were being invited as observers, but it was more to fill the formal requirement of consultation, rather than allowing them to express their views and to organize themselves.

“So overnight I put a paragraph into the negotiation document – paragraph 38 – that created a dedicated grant mechanism for Indigenous peoples and local communities. It changed the process overnight because it was exactly what Indigenous peoples and local community observers were looking for and fighting for. The dedicated grant mechanism was finally accepted. Indigenous peoples formed a global steering committee and they developed a programme on their own. It’s now got now close to US\$100 million and was rolled out in 80 countries where the Forest Investment Program was investing. The idea to develop that grant mechanism was a direct result of my work with The Forests Dialogue.”

*“I always saw TFD as this giant learning laboratory, it’s fascinating to see the transfer of learning across different contexts.”*



**Vietnam: REDD+ Benefit Sharing dialogue, 2013.**



# 20. A ripple effect: TFD’s alumni network

Over the last 20 years, more than 3000 people have attended TFD events, often on repeat occasions. A significant number have been more intensively involved – as steering committee members and co-leaders, working as programme assistants, or co-hosting dialogues. For many, it’s an experience that has a profound effect on their personal and professional lives.



Land Use Dialogue in  
Mole, Ghana, 2019.

“Forty plus students have worked with TFD and many of them have gone onto use dialogue and multistakeholder engagement in their work,” says Gary Dunning. “Being in TFD has trained them in how to use dialogue as a tool to solve challenging environmental problems.”

Sarah Price, whose own association with TFD goes back more than 15 years, agrees: “TFD has a very large alumni network, and that must have a lot of value – the opportunities that people have had through TFD and the things that they’ve learnt that they can now apply in their own spheres of influence. For instance, when I was working with PEFC, I institutionalized a stakeholder dialogue process, where for one or two days they would bring people in to discuss and debate. I feel sure there are many like me who’ve learnt from a TFD experience and put it into our own surroundings. So there’s a ripple effect through the TFD network, and I think that’s one of the biggest impacts it has.”

Former programme assistant Marisa Camargo now works as a sustainability consultant, and regularly draws on the lessons she learnt during her time with TFD. “I often work with my clients to see how we can breach diverse views and find a common way forward, because otherwise we’re going to be throwing tomatoes at each other,” she says.

“Whenever you impose your view on somebody they’re unlikely to accept it. It’s all about listening to the other side, understanding and trying to find the midway. TFD taught me those truths a long time ago, and that’s what I’m applying to my job right now. The type of advice I give my clients is very much influenced by those skills I acquired.”

But it’s not only students who learn from TFD. “Steering committee members all came into TFD as leaders in their own walks of life: almost all came out of TFD as new kinds of leader with much more to offer for society,” says Steve Bass. “And the dialogue participants – most of them leaders in some way – also left individual dialogues with wider notions of leadership and, sometimes, the confidence to act this out. The success of dialogues I think gave a ‘proof of concept’ to many, who brought a deliberate approach to multistakeholder engagement back into their own organizations.”

Bass says his time with TFD has inspired his subsequent work in several areas. “I was one of the two founders of the Green Economy Coalition, which has just passed its 10th anniversary,” he says. “It’s based around the observation that change requires not only top-down policy change but societal demand, and we have run many national dialogues on what kind of economic reform is required to help people and nature thrive together. The TFD experience informed the method, and at times we sought Gary (Dunning)’s advice. When we appointed a director, Gary’s approach inspired my choice of title – Convenor.

“In addition, when I set up IIED’s programme of national dialogues around sustainable artisanal and small-scale mining, I asked an IIED researcher to look for best practice. She interviewed Gary and looked at TFD publications. There are real similarities in approach. And we’ve also set up an internal IIED group on effective dialogue.”

Milagre Nuvunga says she has brought TFD approaches into her own work with MICAIA, which supports communities in Mozambique to improve their lives through sustainable agriculture and natural resource management. “Although no TFD dialogues have happened in Mozambique, I have incorporated lessons learned in steering committee meetings and field dialogues into MICAIA,”

*“Whenever you impose your view on somebody they’re unlikely to accept it. It’s all about listening to the other side, understanding and trying to find the midway. TFD taught me those truths a long time ago.”*



she says. “Our projects now incorporate dialogues at different levels around the issues being addressed – for example between land users at community level and their leaders, or between community leaders, government and private sector representatives – with MICAIA playing a facilitation role.”

A particularly important lesson, she says, is the importance of preparation in engaging the right people. “I knew I had to be willing to spend the time with people who, the moment I called to say something, would begin shouting at me,” she says. “But the second and the third call would lead to a conversation, and in the end to that person being present and being more positive in the dialogue.”

“For me, TFD was a long-term learning laboratory,” says James Griffiths. “Much of my consultancy work now links back to knowledge, contacts, context and understandings from that ten or so years at the cutting edge of stakeholder dialogue on sustainable forest management. The in-country learning is particularly invaluable, as well as the skills and experience in effective multistakeholder dialogue. These are learnings that I still draw on in my day-to-day work.”

Joseph Lawson had recently retired when he received a call from Indonesian pulp and paper company APRIL asking if he would run a stakeholder working group. “I told them I’d do it for one year. I’ve done it now for five,” he says. “I manage a stakeholder advisory committee, with NGOs, community leaders, academia, industry people. We gauge stakeholder input and feed that into the company’s programme to see how they can get better – and that includes a lot of criticisms. The experience I gained through TFD has been very important for what I’m doing right now, and I developed relationships with people I still call upon to help me with different things.”

He believes that APRIL itself has been changed by its engagement with TFD. “It used to be the ‘evil stepchild’ according to some NGOs. But they’re pretty progressive, they’re willing to change and they’re willing to listen and do better. Some of the dialogues involving them in the past still influence the decisions they make today.”

Nigel Sizer believes this willingness to listen is one of the most important lessons TFD teaches. “One of the things I say to my team now is I’ll talk to anybody,” he says. “I don’t care how bad they are, I will always be willing to have a conversation. So they have a chance to hear our point of view and vice versa. And in my experience, almost invariably, that is helpful. TFD certainly helped me to see that.”



*“Celebrating a steering committee member’s 50th birthday on a beach in Ghana... working closely with local partners in Guatemala to design a dialogue programme together and learning about their culture and work... discussing land-use practices and sustainability principles with farmers in Brazil... These are all part of the process of building trust that are less valued by donors’ ‘results chains’ and ‘theories of change’ and ‘indicators’ which put too little emphasis on the importance of those relationships.”*

*Xiaoting Hou Jones, former TFD programme manager*



1. IMPF field dialogue, Brazil, 2008.  
2. Scoping dialogue on Exclusion and Inclusion of Women in the Forest Sector, Nepal, 2012.





1. Forests and Biodiversity Conservation dialogue, Brazil, 2003
2. Celebrating 10 years of the Brazilian Forests Dialogue, Brazil, 2015
3. ILCF dialogue, Macedonia, 2009
4. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent dialogue, DRC, 2012
5. Tree Plantations in the Landscape dialogue, Chile, 2016
6. Intensively Managed Planted Forests dialogue, Switzerland, 2005



7. Forests and Poverty Reduction, South Africa, 2006
8. Forests and Climate Dialogue, Indonesia, 2007
9. Land Use Dialogue, Brazil, 2016
10. ILCF dialogue, Indonesia, 2012
11. Land-Use Dialogue, Kilombero, Tanzania, 2019





# 21. A symbiotic relationship: the Yale connection

Since the beginning, TFD has maintained a close connection with Yale University. Officially, TFD is a programme of the The Forest School at the Yale School of the Environment. The executive director is a full-time employee of Yale, and the faculty provides office space and accounts administration as an in-kind contribution to TFD’s mission. Within this structure, though, TFD enjoys a high degree of autonomy. A faculty liaison group serves as a link between TFD and the School, but has always taken a hands-off approach. A Yale faculty member is invited to attend steering committee meetings, but in a non-voting capacity.



Scoping dialogue on land tenure reform in New Haven: TFD’s home at Yale offers students the chance to interact with forest sector leaders.

It’s an unusual relationship, but a symbiotic one. “It’s not a natural home,” says Gary Dunning. “We’re not a research body, and we’re not really a centre for training. But we wouldn’t still be here if it wasn’t mutually beneficial.”

“Although it was tough at times to ensure TFD grabbed enough of Yale’s attention, having this respected home provided great continuity,” says Steve Bass. “The Yale brand is extremely important and helpful,” agrees Nigel Sizer. “It’s a nice impartial setting, and it gives TFD more resilience. Housing it within another organization would potentially be more partisan, while having it out there on its own might not have worked.”

In turn, the Yale Forest School benefits from the annual ‘TFD week’, which coincides with a meeting of the steering committee. Committee members take part in forums, talks and careers chats, giving students the opportunity to engage with prominent leaders in the sector. “This is written into our MoU, and underscores the primary reason we’re still at Yale, which is to support the development of environmental professionals,” says Dunning.

Most strikingly, TFD does this by employing significant numbers of student interns. They play an essential role in the work of the secretariat, and do much of the legwork in setting up and running dialogues – from logistics and communicating with local partners, to preparing funding proposals and background papers. “I was never interested in growing a large secretariat with a cadre of full-time professionals. I felt like there was more to gain by trying to figure out how to do things with a bunch of really bright and creative master’s students,” says Dunning. In part, this was out of necessity – TFD’s secretariat has always operated on a shoestring budget, although its interns are paid decent rates by student standards.

“Having this respected home provided great continuity; the Yale brand is extremely important and helpful.”

More importantly, though, it’s about professional development. “As an alum of Yale, I’m committed to this institution, and one of the things I was interested in was to provide some really cool opportunities for students to get professional on-the-ground training on things that they care about,” says Dunning. The majority of these students have gone on to pursue careers in the forest sector or in the world of multistakeholder dialogue, often via contacts they have made through TFD.

“Students now are very interested in stakeholder dialogue and how to move situations forward through dialogue, so the internships are highly sought after,” says Amity Doolittle, a senior lecturer at the Yale School of the Environment. “They do get tremendous connections and on-the-ground experience.”

A former steering committee member, Doolittle is one of the few faculty members to have taken part in several dialogues. “I found that visiting the field sites provided lots of interesting materials and ideas that I could bring to the classroom,” she says. “Travelling with The Forests Dialogue and engaging with the work they were doing on the ground kept me rooted in what our students would be doing as professionals after graduating.”

“The many interns and former staff keep popping up all over the world and seem to have loved their TFD experience,” says Steve Bass. “I’ve had very rewarding and productive working relationships with the interns who cycle through TFD,” says Peter Kanowski. “That’s a strength of the model being anchored at Yale. It provides that stream of bright young people who can really contribute energy and



youthful enthusiasm and sometimes nicely naïve questions and challenges into the process, as well as doing a lot of the hard yards on making it happen.”

Marisa Camargo had just begun a master’s degree in environmental management, with a particular interest in corporate social responsibility and alternative dispute resolution, when she heard TFD was on the lookout for a Portuguese speaker. “I had no idea what it was about, but I thought, ‘let’s see, that sounds like a match,’” she says. “It was wonderful, because the dialogue had everything I was interested in – really trying to bring together diverse views on how we can address sustainability. For a student, I think it’s wonderful that TFD is housed at Yale, because it really allows the students the possibility of working in practice in a topic they’re studying, and also allows them to meet leaders in the field, work closely with them, learn from these people and eventually become friends with them.”

Xiaoting Hou Jones was a programme manager from 2009 to 2014, and now works as a senior researcher for IIED. “TFD helped me understand how to engage with diverse perspectives and stakeholders with very different backgrounds, which set the foundation for me to work on a variety of issues including supporting the development of multi-stakeholder engagement processes for artisanal mining at IIED,” she says. The personal contacts formed through TFD are also important: “A few of the IIED colleagues I work with now, I got to know them during my TFD days. The network of steering committee members still help nurture me personally and professionally.” She is taking a sabbatical in New Zealand in 2020, where she will be hosted by a former steering committee member.

For Akiva Fishman, there was a direct line from working with TFD during the second year of his master’s degree to his current role managing private sector interventions to tackle deforestation and forest degradation with WWF. While with TFD, he was involved in organizing the first dialogues in the Understanding Deforestation Free initiative: “I represent WWF on the steering group of the Accountability Framework Initiative, which in some ways came out of the TFD process,” he says. “More specifically I lead our work with companies on setting and implementing deforestation-free commitments.”

Another area of his work is in jurisdictional and landscape approaches. “If done properly, they do the same thing that TFD does – to bring together governments and companies, NGOs and local communities to align on a common vision for a landscape or a jurisdiction, and on what to do to achieve environmental, social and economic objectives,” he says. “Many of these have convened multistakeholder dialogues, but some haven’t been able to make as much headway as they could if they were using a more effective approach. I think there’s a lot that some of them could learn from the way TFD conducts its dialogues, with the preparation that goes into them, the careful facilitation and the mutual respect. I’ve witnessed what I think is good multistakeholder convening through TFD, and that informs how I advise other multistakeholder around working better.”



*“Being a programme manager was a very empowering experience. As part of such a small team, I had the opportunity to be involved in so many different aspects and to take on a lot of responsibility. The field trips in particular were a great way to meet people who were passionate and interested in honest engagement and conversation, and I’ve retained valuable relationships with many of them.”*

*Teresa Sarroca, Former TFD programme manager*

Michelle Mendlewicz worked for TFD from 2015 to 2017, where she was involved in setting up the land-use dialogue in her home country of Brazil. “As soon as I stepped in the office, I really enjoyed the grassroots work and casual, fun style from the team,” she says. “Everyone seemed very passionate and motivated about the work and 100% dedicated to the cause. Plus, TFD offered a very hands-on experience with work that was independent from Yale’s agenda. I was happy I got the gig!”

“I learned so much! Towards the end I was working on three land-use dialogues in different countries, managing over 100 stakeholders globally. It was a lot of work, especially doing that while at Yale (it could easily be a full-time job), but what I gained was truly invaluable. Working within teams and with stakeholders from different countries, cultures and time zones, travelling to amazing places, and getting to see the results on the ground. What you experience when you see 50 different people from businesses, government, academia, non-profits and smallholder farmers getting together in a very remote place for the first time to talk about super-sensitive issues in a safe and supportive environment is magical. I’m very grateful I got to experience that.”

Mendlewicz now works in corporate sustainability for Nike, but still draws on what she learned with TFD. “I view my time at TFD as a super-intense crash course on stakeholder engagement and management, and I think these skills are essential to anyone working in the environment and social space,” she says. “These people and relationship skills are intangible and hard to quantify. It’s not something you can learn in a classroom – you have to get out there and experience it for yourself, and TFD was the perfect opportunity for that.”

*“I view my time at TFD as a super-intense crash course on stakeholder engagement and management, and I think these skills are essential to anyone working in the environment and social space.”*

1. John Gordon and Gary Dunning at Yale University
2. TFD staff and programme associates 2016







*Peru: getting down to ground level during a REDD Benefit Sharing dialogue in, 2014.*



## 22. Offshoots: what happens once we've left?

**“When you were running a local dialogue, there would be some underrepresented local group or a group that had a particular problem, and having an international stakeholder group come in and want to talk about these issues in a public and balanced way really gave them a mandate, gave them an opportunity to raise these issues,” says James Griffiths. “But there was always the question of what happens in the country once we’ve left. Often this was about trying to empower people, leave behind these coalitions of interest who could take these issues on”.**



“One of the sidebar objectives of TFD has always been to get that initiative to continue and be sustainable in the region we went to,” adds Joseph Lawson. “It’s one thing to bring all these global leaders into the country, but then you leave, and the question has always been, ‘well, what was that good for? What did we really do?’ It’s great to talk, but everyone goes back to their day jobs, and does anything really happen? So one of the objectives has always been to get that dialogue to continue, but on a local scale and driven by local actors.”

This happened most clearly in Brazil following the forests and biodiversity dialogues in the Atlantic forest. “The Brazilian NGOs and companies took ownership of the process, and found the model worked so well that they decided to make their own Brazilian version of it,” recalls Marisa Camargo. While it maintains a close relationship with TFD, the Brazilian Forest Dialogue has continued as an independent entity, and has also led to multistakeholder forest forums being set up at state level. “It keeps attracting attention and inspiring other initiatives,” says Camargo.

“I recently learned that I was invited to those first Brazilian meetings because I was a combative environmentalist. They really wanted to test if the system would work,” says Miriam Prochnow from the Brazilian NGO Apremavi – Association for the Preservation of the Environment and Life. “I entered the Dialogue with a reputation as an environmental activist and I am still an activist – but at no point in those years has anyone told me that I could not say anything.”

Prochnow went on to serve as executive director of the Brazilian Forest Dialogue for 10 years from 2008, and was a TFD steering committee member for most of this time, maintaining a link between the two organizations. “They work differently, but the two initiatives always complement each other in their methodology, themes and content,” she says.

A national forests dialogue (Dialogo Nacional Forestal) has also been set up in Chile. It co-hosted the international field dialogue on Tree Plantations in the Landscape in 2016, and runs a number of initiatives at national level.

Other countries and regions have maintained multistakeholder dialogue platforms following TFD initiatives – notably those involved in the ongoing series of land-use dialogues. “The localization of these dialogues and recognition of linkages to TFD is testimony to its value at the landscape and national levels, where key policy and practical decisions are taken,” says Milagre Nuvunga. Other platforms have been created to continue exploring particular dialogue themes. One example is the New Generation Plantations (NGP) platform, created by WWF in 2007 in the wake of TFD’s initiative on intensively managed planted forests. NGP brings together companies and governments that manage plantations with NGOs and civil society, and its model of study tours, discussions and information exchange is heavily influenced by TFD.

“TFD inspired us in terms of how we could design NGP,” says Luis Neves Silva, who leads the NGP platform for WWF. “We knew that there was a need to develop a space for different stakeholders to think about what sustainable plantations mean. There were common participants between the companies attending the dialogues and those who would become part of NGP, so information was going back and forth, and also the spirit behind the dialogue. The outcomes of the IMPF dialogue series were published around the early days of NGP, so that was a very useful source of information for us to think about and to structure what we wanted to become.”

*“It’s one thing to bring all these global leaders into the country, but then you leave, and the question has always been, ‘well, what was that good for? What did we really do?’”*



The two platforms have maintained a close relationship, and co-organized the Tree Plantations in the Landscape initiative. “When we started to organize the joint events, we saw the differences between the two initiatives,” says Silva. “TFD is a neutral dialogue platform. It doesn’t express an opinion – it convenes the stakeholders and creates the conditions for the dialogue to happen. While NGP does have a very clear and very strong message, and it exists to advocate that message and to work convening all the stakeholders towards that vision, towards a concept. So in that sense they act quite differently, but are very complementary.”

1. NGP annual encounter, Sao Paulo, 2016  
2. Brazilian Forests Dialogue national meeting, 2019



Guatemala:  
REDD Readiness  
dialogue, 2010.





# 23. As important as ever: TFD today, and tomorrow

When the nascent steering committee first met at the turn of the century, few imagined that The Forests Dialogue would still be going strong in 2020. “The founders never had aspirations that this would last five years, let alone twenty,” says Gary Dunning.



“It’s very gratifying that it’s still active and still doing meaningful things today,” says Scott Wallinger. “That’s a real tribute to the steering committee, and to Gary as the common denominator throughout it all.”

“It’s pretty unusual for something like this to still be going twenty years later,” says Nigel Sizer. “Why that is is a really interesting question. Most things like this would start to peter out – they’d either have a defined life, or they’d start to wither away after seven, ten years. Twenty years is a long time.”

“The fact that it can survive on little money certainly helps to keep it going,” he says. “It’s a very lean outfit. The Yale team is tiny – and not highly paid! Some of the dialogues were pieced together on a shoestring. Gary deserves a huge amount of credit for sticking with it. And he’s learnt every step of the way to do it better.”

“TFD has done an extraordinary job of producing significant impacts on a shoestring budget,” echoes Justin Ward. “It has shown that big issues don’t have to depend on huge institution-building approaches – a lot can be accomplished in a very economical way.”

The forest sector today is a very different place from 20 years ago. The value of dialogue is widely accepted, multistakeholder platforms have become common practice, and private companies and NGOs regularly work in partnership. So what is TFD’s role and relevance today?

“The issues TFD is working on have only grown in importance as the years have gone by,” says Sizer. “The need for it has certainly not diminished. It offers organizations that want to have a dialogue a way to do it, organized by people who are very experienced after all these years.”

“We’re not creating work for the sake of it, but when the stakeholders decide we need a platform for dialogue on a particular issue, TFD should be ready to go,” says Dunning. “It should be an easy answer to the question of how we can reduce conflict in the forest sector. There’s always going to be conflict, there’s always going to be issues that come up.

“People have seen, understood and supported the value-add of TFD. We’re providing something that people need and use. We’re a quiet space – we’re not flashy or trying to garner media attention. I think that’s a reflection of how we feel real things get done. I see how even people on the steering committee have to be chasing dollars all the time, or the new buzzword, or the latest flavour of the month for donors. That’s not something we worry about.”

“In 20 years of activities, TFD has helped to produce many partnerships, agreements and advances in the forest sector,” says Miriam Prochnow. “Given the important challenges facing humanity, especially the climate crisis, I have no doubt that the TFD model should be applied in all sectors. It should be a brand, a methodology to be followed. It would make a spectacular contribution to improving the quality of life on planet Earth.”

“What TFD has going for it is a very successful business model,” says Ward. “There’s a proven track record that dialogue works and is effective as a vehicle for preventing and resolving conflict as well as providing a source of innovation for practical solutions on key issues. That hasn’t changed – you still need that to deal with issues that have not been resolved, or have gotten worse over time, like the

*“TFD has done an extraordinary job of producing significant impacts on a shoestring budget. It has shown that big issues don’t have to depend on huge institution-building approaches – a lot can be accomplished in a very economical way.”*



fires related to climate change and forest practices in different parts of the world. Now more than ever TFD and dialogue-based forums like it are truly an essential part of the strategy.”

“TFD continues to occupy an important niche in the constellation of ways people interact with each other over forest issues,” says Peter Kanowski. “Governments are involved, but they’re not driving it, it’s not an industry group or an NGO group, but a true multistakeholder group. That need and niche remains as important now as it did then. It’s a safe space for conversations about difficult issues, that people come to with quite different starting points and perspectives, and that’s both rare and valuable.”

James Griffiths worries that the value of dialogue is now questioned in some quarters. “Some people put dialogue into a bucket called ‘talk shops’,” he says. “That dialoguing is just talking and talking, and it’s a very clumsy process to try and build at speed coalitions of interest that can deliver at scale. Because that’s what everybody’s talking about, we need action now, it must be done at speed and we must scale everything up. There’s a reluctance to get into a structured dialogue processes – it just takes too long, or it’s too resource-intensive, or we’re fiddling while Rome burns.”

That, he believes, is a mistake. “We’ve seen governments and companies and NGOs making promises that operating on their own they cannot deliver on. You have these grand promises, but they can’t be achieved without doing the analysis, understanding the context, exploring the challenges, creating the right type of critical delivery partnerships and really figuring out how you can resource the opportunities and design and operationalize solutions – and dialoguing is part of that.”

Cassie Phillips also believes we’re seeing less dialogue in a world that’s becoming increasingly polarized. “I see the response to climate change, and I scratch my head and think ‘people need to sit down together and work this out’,” she says. “Our practices came from sitting down with our critics and working out solutions. There seems to be a retreat away from that in the world today. That’s a tragedy.”

“The world seems to be so polarized today,” agrees Marisa Camargo. “We seem to have come to an era of us and them. There seems to be very little willingness to understand the other side, and I don’t think we’ll be able solve anything with this one-sided view.”

“As a global community, I think we’re at a low point of dialogue,” adds Dunning. “Even the most pernicious racism and nationalism we’re seeing now, I believe this tool can help address that. I believe strongly in this tool to create change. But it doesn’t work if the actors aren’t willing to participate openly and give it a chance. You have to have people who want it to work.”

And that, ultimately, has been TFD’s greatest strength: people. People who, despite their differences, have been prepared to listen to each other, to seek to understand each other, and to respect each other as fellow human beings.

*“As a global community, I think we’re at a low point of dialogue. Even the most pernicious racism and nationalism we’re seeing now, I believe this tool can help address that.”*





# List of dialogues

FOREST CERTIFICATION

- CEO meeting
- London, UK, 2003
- Dialogues
- Geneva, Switzerland, 2003
- Maidenhead, UK, 2004
- Malmö, Sweden, 2004
- London, UK, 2004

FORESTS AND BIODIVERSITY

- CONSERVATION
- Dialogues
- Santa Cruz de Cabralia, Brazil, 2003
- Dialogues convened by Brazilian Forests
- Dialogue with TFD partnership
- Teresopolis, 2005
- Canhoinhas and Tres Barras, 2006
- Porto Seguro, 2006
- Mogi, 2007

ILLEGAL LOGGING

- International dialogue
- Hong Kong, 2005
- Stakeholder dialogue
- St. Petersburg, Russia, 2005
- Dialogue
- Washington DC, USA, 2005

INTENSIVELY MANAGED

- PLANTED FORESTS
- Scoping dialogue
- Gland, Switzerland, 2005
- Field dialogue
- Guangxi, China, 2006
- Pekanbaru, Indonesia, 2007
- Vitoria, Brazil, 2008

FORESTS AND POVERTY

- REDUCTION
- Scoping dialogue
- Richards Bay, South Africa, 2006
- Mini dialogue on pro - poor commercial forestry
- Pekanbaru City, Indonesia, 2007
- Field dialogue on pro - poor commercial forestry
- Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 2007
- Field dialogue on forests and rural livelihoods
- Syktyvkar, Russia, 2008

SMALL FORESTS OWNERS AND

- SUSTAINABLE FOREST PRACTICES
- Scoping dialogue
- Brussels, Belgium, 2007

FORESTS AND CLIMATE

- Scoping dialogue
- Bali, Indonesia, 2007
- Dialogues
- Washington D.C, USA, 2008
- Gland, Switzerland, 2008
- Washington DC, USA, September 2008

REDD FINANCE MECHANISMS

- Dialogue
- New York City, USA, 2009
- Montreux, Switzerland, 2009
- Dialogue on frameworks for REDD+ finance and implementation
- Gland, Switzerland, 2009

REDD READINESS

- Field dialogues
- Belém, Brazil, 2009
- Busua, Ghana, 2009
- El Petén and Antigua, Guatemala, 2010
- Papallacta, Ecuador, 2010
- Siem Reap, Cambodia, 2010
- International dialogue
- Gland, Switzerland, 2011

INVESTING IN LOCALLY

- CONTROLLED FORESTRY
- Scoping dialogue
- Brussels, Belgium, 2009
- Field dialogues
- Panama City, Panama, 2009
- Kathmandu, Nepal, 2009
- Ohrid, Macedonia, 2009
- Mombasa, Kenya, 2010
- Ouagoudougou, Burkina Faso, 2011
- London, UK, 2011
- Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2012
- Växjö, Sweden, 2012
- Investors dialogue
- London, UK, 2010

FREE, PRIOR AND

- INFORMED CONSENT
- Scoping dialogue
- New Haven, USA, 2010
- Field dialogues
- Pekanbaru, Indonesia, 2010
- Kinshasa, DRC, 2012

GENETICALLY MODIFIED TREES

- Scoping dialogues
- New Haven, USA, 2011
- Gland, Switzerland, 2012
- Information sharing meeting
- Gloucestershire, UK, 2013

FOOD, FUEL, FIBRE AND

- FORESTS
- Scoping dialogue
- Washington DC, USA, 2011
- Field dialogues
- Capao Bonito, Brazil, 2012
- Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, 2014
- Punkaharju, Finland, 2014
- Mini dialogue at Forests Asia Summit
- Jakarta, Indonesia, 2014

EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION

- OF WOMEN IN THE FOREST SECTOR
- Scoping dialogue
- Kathmandu, Nepal, 2012

REDD+ BENEFIT SHARING

- Mini dialogue at IUCN Congress
- Jeju, South Korea, 2012
- Scoping dialogue
- Washington DC, USA, 2013
- Field dialogues
- Lam Dong, Vietnam, 2013
- Elmina, Ghana, 2013
- Lima and San Martin, Peru, 2014
- Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico, 2014

UNDERSTANDING

- DEFORESTATION-FREE
- Scoping dialogue
- New Haven, USA, 2014
- Field dialogues
- Sumatra, Indonesia, 2015
- Moulia, Gabon, 2017

TREE PLANTATIONS IN

- THE LANDSCAPE
- Scoping dialogue
- Durban, South Africa, 2015
- Field dialogue
- Temuco, Chile, 2016
- Porto Seguro, Brazil, 2018
- Rotorua, New Zealand, 2018

SUSTAINABLE WOOD ENERGY

- Scoping dialogue
- Montpellier, France, 2016

LAND USE DIALOGUES

- Brazil
- National dialogue, Atalanta, 2016-17
- Amazon landscape pilot, Belem, 2019
- Tanzania
- Ihemi cluster, Iringa, 2016-17
- Kilombero landscape, Ifakara, 2019
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- National scoping dialogue: Kinshasa, 2019
- Mangai landscape, l'diofa, 2019
- Uganda
- Dialogue process meeting, Agoro-Agu landscape, 2019
- Ghana
- Wasa Amenfi landscape, 2018
- Mole ecological landscape, 2019
- LAND AND FOREST TENURE REFORM
- Scoping dialogue
- New Haven, USA, 2018



# Steering Committee 2000 - 2020

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS	START	END
Ahmad, Mubariq	2000	2008
Akzell, Lennart	2014	2019
Asher, George	2007	2012
Baarn, Jennifer	2016	2017
Bakarr, Mohamed	2005	2008
Bass, Steven	2000	2006
Blaser, Juergen	2000	2000
Bowling, Jill	2000	2000
Brown, Chris	2016	2017
Bryant, Dirk	2001	2002
Canby, Kerstin	2000	2001
Cariño, Joji	2014	2016
Cassels, David	2003	2004
Castro Diaz, Estebancio	2008	2013
Chinyangarara, Inviolata	2007	2007
Christie, Stuart	2000	2002
Cox, Steve	2003	2003
Cranger, Sonja	2000	2001
Crochet, Joseph	2000	2003
Degawan, Minnie	2008	2011
Deweese, Peter	2012	2014
Doolittle, Amity	2016	2018
Gardiner, Peter	2008	2013
Ginn, Bill	2005	2008
Griffiths, James	2003	2014
Gurung, Jeannette	2012	2015
Haines, Sharon	2004	2007
Hall, Claes	2000	2004
Henriksen, Olav	2000	2003
Hou, Kalyan	2012	2014
Hurd, Jack	2008	2010
Jorling, Tom	2000	2003
Kanowski, Peter	2007	2012
Karjula, Matti	2004	2010
Karpachevskiy, Mikhail	2007	2008
Klingberg, Tage	2000	2004
Knight, Chris	2010	2016
Kornexl, Werner	2016	2018
Kransy, Edward “Skip”	2010	2018
Kushlin, Andrey	2016	2018
Laestadius, Lars	2005	2011

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS	START	END
Lawson, Joseph	2010	2014
Lobben, Thor	2003	2006
Lwin Thaug, Tint	2016	2017
Maginnis, Stewart	2002	2011
Makaroff, Edward	2000	2000
Mansur, Eduardo	2013	2015
Martinez, Ruth	2010	2012
Mayers, James	2008	2013
McAlpine, Jan	2011	2013
McKenzie, Colin	2008	2010
McMenamin, Viv	2006	2007
Meyer, Chris	2016	2019
Muller, Eva	2016	2017
Namirembe, Sara	2013	2014
Nhantumbo, Isilda	2016	2018
Peng, Ren	2014	2015
Phillips, Cassie	2003	2010
Pircher, Herbert	2011	2013
Powell, Ian	2000	2000
Prochnow, Miriam	2011	2018
Ramsay, Bob	2008	2011
Reddy, Matthew	2016	2019
Reitbergen, Simon	2000	2000
Robert, Augusto	2016	2017
Rosenberg, Per	2004	2007
Roxo, Carlos Alberto	2005	2013
Sahi, Antti	2008	2013
Salpakivi-Salomaa, Päivi	2011	2014
Sandler, Liz	2008	2010
Schenker, Stephan	2004	2007
Schlemmer, Gisbert	2000	2002
Shanahan, Teri	2013	2014
Shyam Pandey, Ghan	2011	2014
Simpson, Bob	2000	2004
Sizer, Nigel	2000	2006
Smeraldi, Roberto	2004	2010
Sobral, Manoel	2004	2007
Stead, Justin	2000	2004
Strassner, Ken	2008	2010
Street, Bill	2003	2008

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS	START	END
Sun, Changjin	2000	2003
Taylor, Rod	2008	2014
Thaug, Tint Lwin	2016	2017
Tsyplenkov, Sergei	2000	2000
Verissimo, Adalberto	2000	2003
Vollbrecht, Gudmund	2003	2004
Wallinger, Scott	2000	2006
Walubengo, Dominic	2013	2015
Ward, Justin	2002	2010
Wright, Amelia	2004	2007
Yaroshenko, Alexey	2001	2004
Ze Meka, Emmanuel	2008	2011
CO-LEADERS	START	END
Wallinger, Scott	2000	2004
Sizer, Nigel	2000	2004
Ward, Justin	2005	2006
Phillips, Cassie	2005	2006
Griffiths, James	2007	2010
Maginnis, Stewart	2007	2010
Mayers, James	2011	2012
Roxo, Carlos Alberto	2011	2012
Taylor, Rod	2013	2015
Lawson, Joseph	2013	2015
Kransy, Edward “Skip”	2016	2017
Buss, Chris	2016	2019
Namikawa, Ivone	2017	-
Nuvunga, Milagre	2020	-

CURRENT STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS	START	
Buss, Chris	2012	-
Cesareo, Kerry	2020	-
Cuthbertson, Yulia	2020	-
Colchester, Marcus	2006	-
Namikawa, Ivone	2014	-
Davis, Crystal	2017	-
Dieterle, Gerhard	2018	-
Dunning, Gary	2000	-
Fonseca, José Carlos	2020	-
Ganz, David	2018	-
Guimarães, Paula	2018	-
Hartman, Paul	2020	-
Jintiach, Juan Carlos	2019	-
López, Victor	2016	-
Marjokorpi, Antti	2014	-
Ivone, Namikawa	2014	-
Ndaro, Mary	2018	-
Ndjebet, Cécile	2014	-
Nuvunga, Milagre	2013	-
Price, Sarah	2019	-
Rattanakrajangsri, Kittisak	2018	-
Rodrigues, Fernanda	2019	-
Rodríguez, Francisco	2017	-
Stewart, Christopher	2018	-
Thomas, Ruth	2020	-
Wishnie, Mark	2019	-



# TFD Secretariat Staff

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Hatanga, Paul	Program Associate
Linton, Bethany	Program Manager
O'Brien, Lisa	Program Administrator
Pyone, Htet Htet	Program Associate
Uwizeyimana, Lysa	Program Associate

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Hou, Xiaoting
Metzel, Ruth
Rebelo, Camille
Sarroca, Teresa
Soesilo, Denise
Umunay, Peter

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Doughty, Caitlin	Tikina, Anna
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Thanks to the following companies for their support in covering the costs of this publication:





# IF TREES COULD TALK: 20 YEARS OF THE FORESTS DIALOGUE

In January 2000, a small group of individuals came together with the idea of setting up a platform for dialogue to address the conflicts and challenges that plagued the forest sector. They were united by the belief that, by talking and listening to each other, private companies, forest owners, environmentalists and others could discover common ground and find ways to move forward together.

Since then, The Forests Dialogue (TFD) has been at the heart of the international conversation around forests, convening more than 80 dialogues in over 30 countries and bringing together thousands of people from all over the world. It's helped break down barriers, turn confrontation into cooperation, build consensus and drive progress on vital issues – from forest certification and illegal logging, to biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction, to climate change and landscape approaches.

This book tells the story of the first 20 years of The Forests Dialogue. It charts TFD's journey, explores the impact it has had within the forest sector, and seeks to capture what makes TFD special as an organization. Based on first-hand accounts, it offers both a celebration of the power of dialogue and a unique insight into the issues surrounding the world's forests in the 21st century.

