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The Forests Dialogue Fire and Forests Initiative Roundtable Synthesis Report

Increasing fire events worldwide are stimulating an urgent call to action to understand **changing fire dynamics** and work together on **collaborative strategies to prevent, manage, and mitigate fire risks**. Wildfires, are becoming more frequent, intense and unpredictable and occurring in new locations previously not prone to wildfires. **Climate change** is driving this change through warmer temperatures, less rainfall and longer periods of drought. Land use change and land management are contributing to increased fire risks, including through the accumulation of fuels in some places and an expanding “urban-wildland interface” in others. These changes require a more collaborative approach to **fire use, risk mitigation, and prevention** but many impacted stakeholders or those with experience and knowledge to share, such as Indigenous Peoples and local communities, are rarely engaged in fire management decisions.

The Forests Dialogue launched the “**Fire and Forests**” initiative to bring together stakeholders in forest fire management to discuss these challenges. To catalyze the initiative, TFD collaborated with partners around the world to host a series of national and sub-national roundtable dialogues on the key challenges, strategies, and needs related to forests and fire from February to April 2022. Roundtables took place in **Australia, Brazil, Chile, Thailand, Lao PDR, and Vietnam**. These roundtables brought together people of diverse experiences, knowledge, and interests to understand changing fire dynamics and potential approaches to addressing the increasing risks of fire in each area and around the world. The roundtable dialogues were designed around a shared set of core questions including:

- **Key Challenges** - What are our greatest challenges related to fire? Which has the highest priority amongst various stakeholders?
- **Stakeholder Engagement** - Which stakeholders are typically excluded from fire-related decision making and learning spaces? Moving forward, how might they be included?
- **Climate Change** - How is climate change impacting fire dynamics in the region and how do we anticipate this changing in the future? What are we expecting from this climate change-wildfire nexus in the years to come?
- **Best Practice** - What are successful strategies to address wildfires that the world might learn from?
- **Driving action** - How can we best share the responsibilities of fire management? Are there blended approaches for government, private sector, academia, and local communities to pitch in and work together?



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These roundtables are a first step to explore fracture lines and opportunities for collaborative solutions across regions. The next step in this Initiative will be field dialogues to further delve into challenges and opportunities raised in the roundtables.

General Takeaways:

- **Lack of experience with collaboration:** In many parts of the world, we lack long-term, inclusive, multi-stakeholder processes for developing collaborative solutions to fire management challenges. Levels of experience in such approaches to fire management varied between regions. For example, the Thailand roundtable was the first time for stakeholders to gather for a dialogue on fire; Australia, on the other hand, has some history of cross-sectoral work on fire but still has challenges including diverse perspectives, knowledge and types of experiences.
- **Need to engage and empower Indigenous Peoples and local communities:** Across regions, roundtable participants recognized the important role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in understanding and addressing fire risks. This is a key priority for Australian roundtable participants reflecting a widespread recognition of the roles that First Nations people could and should have in managing their country, as they have done traditionally. Participants discussed the critical need for as well as the barriers to strengthening the agency of Traditional Owners, rebuilding Traditional Knowledge, and developing partnerships that empower and enable First Nations communities. This does not simply mean inviting them to dialogues, but requires a long-term process to build trust and empower these communities and integrate them in planning, preparedness, and response. In many places, smallholder farmers rely on fire for land management and are threatened by fire; balancing these conflicts with the needs of other interest groups is also a challenge.
- **Long-term integrated planning:** fire management needs to shift focus from short-term, reactive suppression to long-term integrated planning and mitigation to achieve benefits from the wise use of fire and avoid future impacts of uncontrolled fire. The need to involve diverse stakeholders at multiple levels, and provide for more decentralized governance and inclusive policies was discussed at many of the roundtables and highlighted in Thailand and the Brazilian Amazon in particular.
- **Capacity development:** Capacity development was a common topic. Almost all roundtables highlighted the need for training and equipment for firefighting. Monitoring was identified as a key challenge by several roundtables.
- **Human health impacts:** Fire brings far-reaching and enduring impacts on human health, both physical and mental. Concern over human health impacts emerged in multiple roundtables. Such health impacts cross national boundaries, making it more challenging to manage, such as in the case of cross-boundary haze in northern Thailand.



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- **Forest plantations:** A unique set of challenges exists for managing fire in the plantation context as compared to natural forests. For example, roundtables in Chile and Brazil Forest Plantations identified challenges with using controlled fire to mitigate impacts on plantations, due to restrictions imposed by certification and trade rules.

Annex: Country Roundtable Summaries

Roundtable Summaries

The following roundtables were co-hosted with The Forests Dialogue in February- April 2022 as part of the Fire and Forests initiative. Learnings from the roundtable series were shared at the World Forestry Congress in May 2022 and will inform a TFD initiative to further catalyze action and learnings on this issue. Please refer to the Roundtable Synthesis Report for details about the roundtable process and key themes across the regional and country-level discussions.

Australia

Hosted by the Australian National University and the University of Melbourne

16 participants + 3 co-facilitators

Australia recently experienced the catastrophic Black Summer Fires (2019-2020) that burned across millions of hectares in southern and eastern Australia. Climate change is driving more such severe fires, including in ecosystems and locations in which fire has historically not occurred. Participants' perspectives included those of First Nations, emergency services, fire and health researchers, and forest and land managers.

Participants highlighted the following challenges: (i) addressing profound and persistent human health impacts caused by smoke from wildfires and longer-term harm of widespread fire to mental health; (ii) the need move beyond a framing of fire in the Australian community and political consciousness as a natural disaster (with a continuing emphasis on emergency response), to a deeper understanding of fire as a cultural tool and ecological process to be used to manage Country and prepare for and avoid future fire impacts on people and landscapes; and (iii) more broadly recognizing the knowledge and skills of Traditional Owners in using fire, and empowering, engaging with them in respectful partnerships to rebuild Traditional Knowledge and provide resources to scale up the use of these practices.

Brazil- Forest Plantations and Brazilian Amazon

Hosted by Diálogo Florestal (The Brazilian Forests Dialogue)

Forest Plantations

25 Participants

Throughout the roundtable there were disagreements on the use of fire for land management but participants agreed on the question of capacity building (i.e. raising awareness and better



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equipment). On the question of innovation and inclusion, there was support for more participatory policies, payments for ecosystem services, and the use of technology. There was also an interest in learning from other countries about fire management and suppression technology.

The participants highlighted the following key challenges: (i) Effective cooperation between different institutions; (ii) Lack of effective training and equipment; (iii) Ineffective public policies; (iv) Lack of investment in tools for detection, monitoring and response; (v) Lack of awareness/education on fire use.

Participants also discussed best practices which include monitoring, fire prevention campaigns, public/private sector collaboration, exchange of knowledge, fire risk zoning, and capacity building. Stakeholders that are traditionally excluded include Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) as well as agriculture, livestock and forestry sectors. Participants shared the following ideas to improve stakeholder participation: more inclusive public policies involving civil society, Payment for Ecosystem Services to re-establish traditional practices, and community inclusion in academic research. Finally, the participants outlined opportunities for action focusing on funding, integration, training, and innovation.

Brazilian Amazon

44 Participants

In the Brazilian Amazon roundtable there was strong interest among participants to continue to engage in dialogue on fire in the Amazon. The roundtables occurred in the context of the newly forming regional forest forum in the Amazon, and a context of great urgency in the region due to frequently occurring fires. There was a strong focus on collective actions, and the underlying causes of fire vulnerability. A great number of challenges were identified, and there were strong opinions on issues related to land tenure. Key identified actions included working together on helping advance legislation through petition signing.

The participants highlighted many key challenges, among the following: (i) Land Conflicts; (ii) Community inclusion; (iii) Monitoring and control; (iv) Low budgets for firefighters; (v) Approve and implement the National Integrated Fire Management Policy.

Participants also discussed best practices which included integrated fire management, cooperation/knowledge exchange, prevention, capacity building, technical solutions, and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) involvement. Stakeholders that were traditionally excluded include traditional and local communities, landowners, municipal government, as well as academia. Participants shared the following ideas to improve stakeholder participation: better access to land, involvement of indigenous firefighting brigades, and increased coordination between stakeholders

Finally, the participants outlined opportunities for action which included the proposed signature of a petition asking the government to approve and implement the National Integrated Fire Management Policy. This legal framework aimed to prevent the occurrence and



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reduce the negative impacts of forest fires. The proposal had been approved by Congress, and the motion aimed to petition the Senate for approval.

Chile

Hosted by Diálogo Forestal Nacional (The Chilean Forests Dialogue)

60 participants

The Chilean roundtable occurred in the context of a very bad fire season this year, and the ongoing devastating fires. Discussions were focused on specific actions and best practices to reduce fire and fire impacts: emphasis on training and preventive measures as well as education and emergency warnings. Participants also wanted to look at fire within the broader picture of ecosystem management.

Participants highlighted the following best practices: On the question of knowledge, they mentioned the importance of educational programs; as well as better training and equipment. For emergency warnings, they advocated for communication between local actors as well as use of signage and sound alarms. They also supported control of agricultural burns as well as better waste management to prevent uncontrolled fires. For better stakeholder inclusion, participants suggested more community education/training and the possibility to broaden the view of fire risk to include issues like water, native forests, and residential sectors. They also suggested including utility companies and the agricultural sector into the conversation.

In terms of action, participants highlighted the need to decrease the use of combustible materials in plantations. They also supported better local fire prevention regulations with mechanisms to sanction negative behavior. Although the work of Community Prevention Committees was well recognized, participants expressed a need for them to do more. Communication campaigns must show the effects of fires on climate change, biodiversity and population health, presenting these issues as interrelated with effects that were not limited to rural areas.

Thailand

Hosted by RECOFTC in collaboration with the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), the Breath Council, and the Forestry Department of Kasetsart University, as part of the IKI-BMU FLOURISH project.

72 participants

This roundtable provided the first opportunity in Thailand for such a broad range of stakeholders around the country to come together for a dialogue. There was a strong interest to continue dialogue and collaboration on these issues. Participants represented different stakeholders from eight provinces in the north of Thailand where the fire events are the most severe.

In terms of key challenges, the participants pointed out that climate change was changing fire dynamics and causing more frequent fire events in forest types that were not



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prone to fire, such as evergreen forests and peat swamp forests, where there was a lack of research and information to support fire management. Climate change also resulted in lower production in the agriculture sector; this effect coupled with the pandemic to drive more needs for the forest products. Fire was used for forest product harvesting. In addition, the policies on forest fire management lacked flexibility and were not linked with local contexts. Finally, Thailand also faced a fire management and haze challenge that came from across the borders – the smog from neighboring countries and similarly from Thailand to its neighbors. This boded well for regional approaches and solutions such as those tested under the FLOURISH project.

In terms of opportunities for action, the participants suggested improving policy and regulation. Decentralization of forest fire management can increase participation and collaboration with local people. In some ways, Thailand had already decentralized forest fire management through providing funding to communities, local initiatives, and civil society organizations for fire management. Policies were also needed to incentivize improved smallholder farming practices, such as shifting away from monocrop to agroforestry or mixed crops that require less use of fire for site preparation. Participants also suggested establishing forest fire management funds at the community level for easy access when a wildfire occurs.

Lao PDR

Hosted by RECOFTC

52 participants

Roundtable participants included the Department of Forestry, provincial and district agriculture and forestry offices, provincial administration offices, National University of Lao PDR, local community representatives, military representatives, private industry, and Civil Society Organizations (CAMKID, MHP, and WCS). Participants identified the following key challenges: slash-and-burn agriculture; hotter and drier weather caused by climate change; lack of knowledge and awareness of forest fire among people and lack of participation from local communities; lack of budget, equipment, and technical teams; and lack of collaboration among key stakeholders at all levels.

Moving forward, participants saw many clear actions and next steps, among them were: 1) securing funding, potentially from higher governmental organizations, and resources to monitor, prevent, and fight fire; 2) establishing a responsible volunteer group with sufficient training and tools for preventing and fighting forest fire; 3) establishing forest committees at all levels (provincial, district, village) as responsible bodies; 4) raising awareness on forest fire both through the education system and with the general public; 5) developing an action plan based on national forestry law and strategies to implement forest fire monitoring, prevention and firefighting; 6) setting up a fine system for those who breaches laws and regulations on forest fire.

Vietnam

Hosted by RECOFTC



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66 participants

Roundtable participants included different stakeholders from ministry level to the ground level, such as forest rangers and village leaders and community members. According to the participants, fire prevention should be the priority in Vietnam. In terms of key challenges, participants pointed out: 1) the accelerating demand for conversion of forestland into other land uses (e.g. agricultural production, high-market valued fruits, and commercial industrial plantations for coffee, pepper, rubber, and others); 2) lack of proactive and full participation of local communities at community level; 3) insufficient collaboration and coordination among stakeholders at ground level; 4) lack of knowledge, skills, budget, and equipment for on the ground fire prevention and control; and 5) lack of timely forest fire forecast and communication.

In terms of stakeholder engagement, the participants pointed out that forest fire prevention and control is the legal duty of forest owners, which includes National Parks, Nature Reserves, forest protection and management boards, forestry companies, communities, and individual forestry householders. Among these, the communities, individual forestry householders are the most poorly equipped force, lacking professional knowledge and skills on forest fire prevention and control. When fires happen in the landscape, the better equipped forces including army, police, and forest rangers cannot be immediately mobilized to the affected area. Local communities' early response become very important. For this reason, their roles should be better emphasized in practice.

Participants also identified many opportunities for collaboration for all levels, particularly at the operation level. For example, participants suggested effective action planning and implementation at operation level through community-based approach, with prioritization on funding and capacity building for local community participation. In addition, they suggested setting practical and adaptive mechanisms and regulations for effectively coordinating key relevant stakeholders at the commune and village levels.

The Forests Dialogue: The Forests Dialogue (TFD) was created in 2000 to provide international leaders in the forest sector with an ongoing, multi-stakeholder dialogue platform and process focused on developing mutual trust, a shared understanding, and collaborative solutions to challenges in achieving sustainable forest management and forest conservation around the world. Through a structured dialogue process of “Engage, Explore, and Change”, TFD has successfully facilitated stakeholder dialogues on various contentious issues related to forests over the past 20 years.

TFD's Fire and Forests Initiative: The Fire and Forests initiative aims to foster coordination across sectors and stakeholder groups, build shared understanding of key challenges and successful strategies to address fire risks, and drive actions to enable readiness and response for fires.