



Importance of multi-scale forest governance: linking national and local policy processes

insights from the Asia-Pacific forest governance project in Malaysia

This policy brief draws on key insights and lessons from the implementation of the Asia-Pacific forest governance project* in Malaysia, focusing on the importance of linking national, sub-national and local scales of forest governance and improving participation of non-state actors.¹

Challenges

The total remaining forested area in Peninsular Malaysia is estimated to be about 5.77 million hectares (ha).² A total of 3.8 million ha or 52% of Sabah state lands are categorised as Forest Reserve and other Protected Lands, while in Sarawak state, forest land is classified into three main categories, namely Permanent Forest Estates, Totally Protected Areas and State Land Forests.³ As per the 2010 Malaysian federal constitution, the central government is responsible for providing guidance on forestry matters, followed by the three states' commitment to enact respective laws and policies. This highlights the need to bridge the gap between the different layers, levels and sectors of forest governance. As in other countries, there is often a lack of vertical and horizontal policy coordination and communication within federal and state governments, between government departments, between government departments and NGOs, and between NGOs.

Opportunities

The project focused on enhancing the role of non-state actors of various kinds in different scales of forest governance, including to address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation through Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+), combating illegal logging and regulation of tropical timber, and the development and implementation of forest conservation and restoration policies and practices. At the local level, priority MNS project sites are focused on Key Biodiversity Areas in the Belum-Temengor Forest Complex, connecting to the Titiwangsa Main Range located within Central Forest Spine in Peninsular Malaysia, and the Heart of Borneo area in Sabah and Sarawak. Key to these two ecosystems is reducing further fragmentation and re-establishing and restoring connectivity to conserve ecological corridor functions, including to allow wildlife movement across these fragmented areas.

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² FDP (2018) *Forestry Statistics*, Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia. <https://www.forestry.gov.my/en/2016-06-07-02-53-46/2016-06-07-03-12-29>

³FDS (2012) *Sustainable Forest Management and Biodiversity Conservation in Sarawak, Malaysia Following ITTO 1989/1990*, Forest Department Sarawak, ISBN 978-967-5880-04-9.

Activities and outcomes

Malaysian Nature Society (MNS, BirdLife's Partner in Malaysia) has engaged in national forest-related advocacy including on REDD+ readiness and development, safeguard information systems and stakeholder participation. At local level, MNS has been organising and actively participating in a range of events and policy and advocacy related to forest management and governance in the Central Forest Spine and Heart of Borneo. For example, the Forest Governance Zonal Workshops that MNS is coordinating have been providing forest policy training for community-based organisations, indigenous communities and its own state branches on various aspects of forest governance.

A key aspect of MNS work in supporting multi-scale forest governance efforts has been through the development of a national 'forest watch' platform (myforestwatch.com.my). This provides state and non-state actors with up-to-date information on forest cover change, fires, illegal logging, deforestation and other forest threats. An MNS-run national forest monitoring network provides up-to-date, verifiable information on the state of Malaysia's forests, biodiversity and carbon stocks.

Key insights and learnings

- It is crucial to enhance wider participation of non-state actors in forest related decision-making. This can be done by focusing efforts and resources on strengthening existing institutions, processes and actors (national, sub-national and local) to achieve improved forest governance.
- Efforts should focus on removing any potential barriers and gaps to mainstreaming and connecting forest governance efforts involving different state and non-state actors.
- National forest policies and laws must be in sync with global agreements and priorities. Equally, at the local level, it is important to ensure that forest governance practice is guided by integrated land use planning at landscape level, accounting for local institutions and socio-economic trends.
- There is a need for improvement of coordination and collaboration between government agencies at multiple scales (e.g. national and state governments), as well as civil society.
- MNS's experience in forest policy processes shows that non-state actors can play an important role in addressing sectoral and scalar gaps. Insights and learnings from Malaysia can provide useful lessons elsewhere.



Participants of Forest Governance Zonal Workshops in Terengganu and Kedah, Peninsular Malaysia

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