



Oslo Conference 20-21 October 2015 - Summary

The IFFA Oslo conference was opened by Olav Veum, chair of the Norwegian Forest Owners Federation, and Peter deMarsh, chair of IFFA and of the Canadian Woodlot Owners' Federation. The workshop was initiated from Canadian organisations and hosted by the Norwegian Federation.

The aim of the IFFA conference was to share experience between central, national and local level of the organisation. One of the goals was to explore best options for sharing experience between and within the difference levels in the organisation. Another goal was to look at different policies and programs that increase production of timber from family forests and small holders. A third goal was to prepare for sharing experience with forest producer organisations in other parts of the world and in developing economies, and prepare for an IFFA Asia conference to be held in 2016.

Among the policies and programs on the agenda, were income and property tax policies and other financial incentives, producer associations support for market access and value added production and extension services, including tools for including young owners, urban owners and female owners.

Participants in the conference came from the international IFFA level and national and local level in Canada, Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, Finland, Germany and Bavaria, Norway and Glommen, Sweden, Mellanskog and Norrskog.

All the presentations are gathered as attachments to the summary.

Norway

Norway presented the forest structure and the more than 100 years' experience in building regional and national forest owners associations, and turning them into cooperatives. The Norwegian public Forest Fund, established in 1932, was presented as a special tax and economic policy incentive for building long-term sustainable forest management and wood production (more information at www.skogfond.no). The cooperatives work in the wood market was presented as well as the development of group certification and the challenges of building and maintaining wood consuming industry. Glommen shared their experience in securing active urban forest owners.

The Norwegian Extension Institute, Skogkurs, and their educational programs was presented. There is as well a special forest insurance scheme and forest insurance company in Norway, more information at www.skogbrand.no.

Canada

The national federation, founded in 1989, of 7 regional associations was presented and the differences in attitude to form federations

Representatives from Manitoba, Quebec and Nova Scotia presented their history and development of associations, and the different attitudes from authorities and the challenge of having huge areas of public forest. The differences in tax and other systems in the provinces were presented.

Finland

The Finnish forest structure and the building of organisations was presented, as well as the new forest policies implemented in Finland. This include tax-free wood delivery up to a certain level and tax-free sales of property when having had the property for ten years or more.

Germany

The forest structure in Germany, including the division of states and the Federal Germany was presented, as well as the work in the Forest Owners' Federation AGDW and the regional state organisations, with special examples from the Bavarian association. Tax and policy systems as well as organisational and extension support for the forest owners were presented. The marketing system was outlined. The local associations have special arrangements for youth and women forest owners.

Sweden

The Swedish forest structure and organisational development into five strong regional cooperatives was presented, as well as the heavy forest owners' engagement in forest industry and industrial activities. There were special presentations of the Swedish Federation and the work in Mellandskog (pre-conference presentation) and Norrskog. The Swedish system of tax and other policies were explained and the regional associations support for family forest owners.

Evaluation and lessons learned

The workshop presented an incredible amount of information and ideas for follow up, including the dialogue with central and regional governments. The sharing of experience was very valuable, and even when the structure and history is different, there are a lot to learn from presentations and the following dialogue.

It is interesting to look over the borderlines and get input and ideas to follow up at home. There is a lot to learn from different approaches. In addition comes the social part of meeting new people from other countries who share the interest for and the experience in family forestry.

There could perhaps be allocated more time to general introductions and then go deeper into specific issues.

It is interesting to see the diversity, and at the same time realise that we have a lot in common. This is parallel to the experiences from working on the book "Strength in numbers". It is surprising to learn the differences in how authorities in countries and regions or provinces look at family forestry, and how forest producers are treated differently in the market.

There is a lot of value in making connections and building networks. Due to costs however, such conferences cannot be organised too often. There is interesting to have many participants, but on the other hand, there is a limit of participation if such conference should have value. There is a value of having many present, but there is not possible to have such good discussions with too many present, not more than 6-10 people at the time. The may be possible to add by Skype other participation to a conference.

It is very valuable to discuss, in some detail, tax systems, individual treatment and personal forest accounts and the way of lobbying governments. The larger the audience the simpler the issues have to be. It was however interesting to see in the conference that rather complex issues was handled smoothly, despite the complex nature of tax systems.

The conference may be followed up by exchange of e-mails and exchange of written material. Perhaps the conference could be followed up as well on Skype or similar, in 6 months' time or a year.

Interesting as well is the different attitude in countries and regions towards forestry and cutting of trees, and the connection between people, forest and land. Perhaps IFFA could be used as an educational tool. The web site could present more pictures of members' woodlots and personal stories, present visits to woodlots, bringing hope, optimism and future. The web site could show the use of forests in a positive way.

The conference covered many topics in a short time. It may ease the discussions if all participants had time to study all the questions before the conference, and have time to prepare. That is perhaps only possible in an ideal world.

It may be more difficult to exchange experience when the participants come from very different systems.

It is very interesting to see how family forestry is organised in different countries, and how the organisations work and act differently with similar challenges. A common challenge is to keep members active and use their forestland actively, which is the only way to secure the ownership.

Such conferences give a lot of energy to the participants when they return home.

E-mail and internet groups open new possibilities, powerful tools, but do not replace but complement traditional activities in the associations' relationship to their members.

Quebec showed a very interesting example of active use of surveys done in a quick and economic way.

There has been a follow up where government has taken contact with forest owners associations in other countries in order to learn more of specific issues. This goes for forestry as well as for issues related to forest industries.

[Lessons learned for conferences globally](#)

There is a need to build trust and exchange of experience, and conferences may be a good way of building trust and understanding, even when the conditions are very different. Tax issues may be very different in developing countries, but one element to keep in mind is that taxation gives the power to the forest owner, while subsidies do not.

The Norwegian and Swedish case, where they do not request special conditions, but demand fair treatment could be a viable solution in many countries. Building forest is the result of successful forest policies.

Family forestry must advocate that they are not a burden, but a resource.

Policymakers have to understand the value of family forestry. Bigger is not always better. Locally controlled forestry is essential in building long-term sustainable forest management.

Regional cooperatives could be a solution in many countries. They must do things differently, pooling wood together to central mills. The aim must be turning power back to the producer by getting together as a group.

Sharing experience and communicating the value of family forestry may compensate for differences in history and background. Where family forestry is strong today, private forestry has existed for several hundred years. Main messages that should be disseminated are the combination of small scale, long term, local attachment and being organised. In many areas, clearing the forest has come instead of land management. We need to create the understanding of economic politics and support. There is a connection between combatting illegal logging and supporting legal logging.

Issues of larger common interest could be: Digital copies of management plans, put on the web, expose best practises on the web site.

Family forestry is a solution to many challenges, including peoples' rights, tenure rights, and attachment to land.

In Asia, there is a fantastic story in Nepal where the local population was denied to cut the wood around the village and started to take care for the forest.

In Vietnam, there is the group who has grown to 300.000 members in two years.

Should IFFA publish success stories ("Story of the month"?)

The solution is to empowering people, and share experience in how to achieve that.

An important lesson: organisations are important, but you cannot organise people. You have to give them the incentives and support when organising themselves. Aid may not be the right solution, but support and facilitate, ease the creation of an environment for initiatives to grow and succeed.

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