

## **Project Report of Peer Review of the IGES Forest Conservation Project 3rd Phase Research**

### **Introduction**

The Peer Review of the Forest Conservation Project (FC) 3rd Phase Research was held on 07 June 2007 at IGES Headquarters, Hayama, Japan. The two peer reviewers were:

- Dr. Hwan Ok Ma, Project Manager, International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO)
- Dr. James Mayers, Head - Natural Resources Group, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

Dr. Yam Malla, Executive Director, Regional Community Forestry Training Centre for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC), was also enlisted as a peer reviewer, but could not attend the Peer Review because of sudden illness. Dr. Hwan Ok Ma acted as the Chair of the Peer Review Panel. Other participants in the Peer Review included:

- Professor Akio Morishima, Special Research Advisor to IGES
- Professor Hironori Hamanaka, Chair of the Board of Directors
- Mr Hideyuki Mori, Vice-President of IGES and Programme Managing Director

The Agenda of the Peer Review consisted of:

- Opening remarks from IGES and the Panel Chair and introduction of participants
- Presentations on the following topics by FC researchers in separate sessions that included time for questions and feedback from peer reviewers:
  - \* Outline of FC activities, progress and outputs of Third Phase Strategic Research
  - \* Public timber procurement policies
  - \* FC research on forestation programmes
  - \* Forest certification for small forest enterprises
  - \* Other research activities and outputs
  - \* FC fourth phase research programme
- Closing remarks from IGES and the Panel Chair

The peer reviewers submitted independent reports, which show general agreement in their conclusions.

### **Conclusions of the Peer Review**

#### **1. Main messages**

*A strengthening programme.* After a turbulent recent history in which the Forest Conservation Project almost terminated following serious questions about the relevance of its work, the Project is back on track and this is helped by greater strategic and

management development at IGES as a whole. FC is now doing good work and has the makings of a strong programme.

***Moving in the right direction.*** FC's trajectory is very promising. Its policy achievements have been very modest to date but the project looks set to achieve some significant impact in the near future. Plans for the next phase of work confer some coherence on the current research and show the FCP is becoming increasingly strategic and focused on issues with real policy traction.

***Needing to rectify some weaknesses.*** The process of strategic choice of research topics could be more concerted, objectives could be sharper and targets could be clearer. Efficiency could also improve – some research outputs are slow to emerge, others are poorly written and unfocused.

***Facing some key challenges.*** Looking ahead FC can build on strengths and remove weaknesses. Good team members need to be retained and their capabilities developed – particularly in targeting research and writing skills. FC and IGES as a whole might benefit from greater emphasis on work through alliances and partnerships with others.

## **2. Mission, Strategy and Priorities**

The peer reviewers felt that the main objective of the Third Phase of the FC Project was highly consistent with the goal of IGES in promoting the designing of policies for protecting the environment to ensure sustainable development in the region. In their view, the two specific topics and one scoping study of the Third Phase were both timely and positive. The timing was appropriate and important in demonstrating policy options related to certification, plantations and public timber procurement to the wider community in the region. Nevertheless, the peer reviewers found some shortcomings in the Third Phase proposal: “Possibly symptomatic of the haste involved also, there is no actual objective or set of objectives recorded for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase in the plan document, only a title and some thematic components”; “the Third Phase Proposal did not provide any sufficient analysis regarding the comparative advantage (niche) of IGES in conducting the research relative to other existing research as well as relevant partners and their respective roles in the formulation and implementation of the project’s strategy and priorities.”

## **3. Design, Quality and Policy Relevance**

### *Design*

The peer reviewers observed that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase Proposal had a serious designing problem in that FC spent almost one year in revising the Proposal until it was approved by the BOD of IGES and that project implementation was effectively stalled during this period. They noted that this was subsequently followed by the departure of two senior members of the project team and concluded that efforts of the FC team are currently paving the way for the fulfilment of its Third Phase’s objectives.

The reviewers identified comparability between the conceptual and analytical frameworks of the components of the Project as an area requiring attention. They suggested that more coherence at this level would foster stronger assessment of the relative importance of components and that it might also strengthen team-work.

### *Quality*

One reviewer noted that capabilities in the team vary for identifying the key issues and recognising the key points amongst the detail. He felt that there may be a tendency to assume that more description equates with useful analysis, which is rarely the case, but he discerned a general tendency towards stronger conclusions.

The reviewers concluded that the first draft of the research report on public timber procurement policies was well prepared and included important conclusions and recommendations, but suggested that some revision is desirable prior to finalizing the report.

On the study of forest certification for small forest enterprises, one reviewer concluded that so far the only well written-up case is that on FPCD in PNG, which he described as excellent, and that the comparative analysis or conclusions are still to be undertaken. The other reviewer found that a weakness of this research was inadequate attention to analyzing cost implications related to the adoption of certification by small forest enterprises.

The reviewers agreed that the report *Decentralisation and State-Sponsored Community Forestry* was well written (one reviewer described it as “very impressive”) – with the involvement of many authors unquestionably well-placed for this work – and nicely presented. One reviewer felt that it is not clear from the summary if what is presented is anything new.

To further improve quality, it was recommended that:

- \* In analysing findings and presenting conclusions, more could be done to explore the context, the pre-conditions, the alternatives and the ‘next best’ options. Clarity in showing prioritisation of conclusions, and possible steps in pursuing recommendations, is also critical.
- \* Efforts to improve confidence and skills in writing up research and policy briefs would pay dividends. Mentoring approaches and specific training courses may be appropriate. Iterative report writing with partners is also an effective route to both improving writing skills and developing partnerships.
- \* FC already has a useful emphasis on political economy in some of its work and this could be deepened. In particular, in the analysis of constraints, FC is encouraged to be bold in going “three steps back” with each constraint identified - to reveal its real economic dynamics and political underpinnings.

One reviewer concluded that the spirit and concerted effort put into self-critique by the FCP team is impressive and should be continued.

### *Policy relevance*

The reviewers felt that work on public timber procurement policies responded to urgent policy developments of government and seems to have been a good match with FC's recently acquired team members. They stressed that the work aims at a moving target – there is much to do to develop many elements of the Japanese procurement policy – so the recommendations need to be made and pushed quickly, with clarity on the priorities and possible steps.

One reviewer suggested that FC research on planted forests can contribute meaningfully by conducting a critical review of the social and economic issues of forest plantations in the region. He felt that the research could address issues related to land tenure and property rights as well as financing mechanisms. The other reviewer concluded that the work presents a nice typology and categorisation of approaches, but that this is weakly targeted at stakeholder action.

Regarding the 12 national studies on systems for verifying timber legality conducted by the Project, one reviewer felt that this was a potentially useful literature review to identify issues that need further work.

Both reviewers recognised the importance of FC's contribution to the Asia Forest Partnership. One reviewer found that FC's involvement in drafting and facilitating the evaluation of the Partnership's first phase had usefully created and strengthened a number of key institutional links and potential partnerships with Japanese ministry actors, the Government of Indonesia and CIFOR.

#### **4. Effectiveness and Efficiency of Project Plan**

The Peer Review Panel concluded that once the main components of research had been agreed, the management of the Project has been effectively pragmatic and flexible whilst keeping an eye on the bigger picture, and that strategic thinking is evolving fast in FC with the work done in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase clearly setting the scene for a well-targeted and more policy-focused 4<sup>th</sup> Phase.

#### **5. Accomplishments and Impacts**

The reviewers noted that the major Third Phase outputs are currently being completed. One reviewer concluded that upon completion of the Third Phase, its accomplishments would include a comprehensive information and critical analyses of the relevant aspects of certification, timber procurement policies and plantations. Along with these accomplishments, the expected impacts would be enhanced knowledge, awareness, involvement, and networking of key stakeholders involving from governments to NGOs as well as local communities.

The other reviewer concluded that some of the work undertaken has delivered process impact in the form of new alliances and relationships, but there is little impact yet in terms of the Project's (implied) objectives. He felt that some of the work looks to be on course to achieve impact: the work on public procurement is likely to have the greatest impact; and some substantial impact could be gained from the work on small enterprise certification, if its targeting is tightened up. However, he was unsure on how the forestation work can achieve impact.

The peer reviewers also provided recommendations for strengthening FC 4<sup>th</sup> phase research, which can be found in their reports.

### **Final conclusion**

“FCP is a good team, doing some interesting research, with potential to create a coherent programme. With attention to improving some critical ways of working, this programme could have significant regional impact.” (James Mayers, FC 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase Peer Review)