

Independent forest monitoring

Tool

Purpose:

Forestry in many countries is vulnerable to problems of poor governance. Approaches such as Forest certification and the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance processes are making progress but have the drawbacks of being voluntary, and taking a long time to negotiate and implement. This tool – *Independent forest monitoring* (IFM) – complements these approaches.

IFM is built on the premise that an increase in transparency and accountability will drive irreversible reform in the sector. IFM is the use of an international, independent third party, which provides observation of and support for an official forest law enforcement system. Monitors are contracted to a central government authority to provide credible information, based on thorough fieldwork, on forest operations and illegal activity. They work with local officials, civil society and the private sector of timber-exporting countries to influence policy – thus IFM is more than an audit.

Activities in establishing IFM:

- 1 **Host:** The monitor needs to have official status, yet remain independent of government, like an ombudsman or election observer. The host authority could be a ministry, or some form of multi-sectoral or parliamentary committee.
- 2 **Baseline criteria:** IFM is observation of the system of forest law enforcement. If there is no system, there can be no monitoring of it. Furthermore, IFM has an explicit interest in furthering sustainable forest management and respect for forest-dependent communities. Such goals need to be in place at the highest policy or constitutional level.

Keep in Mind

- ★ IFM needs to build trust and confidence with all stakeholders, including ministerial staff, private sector operators, donors and civil society and involves managing relationships in a politically sophisticated way.
- ★ Information itself has no power; power comes with the application of information. Thus a monitor produces neutral information – evidence without interpretation or judgement. But the monitor and others then use this information in politically influential ways.

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3 **Mandate:** IFM is prefaced on three protocols, as set out in a Terms of Reference with the host. Upholding these in a professional manner is the basis for commitment by the host and the credibility of the monitor:

- access to official information while respecting certain confidentialities
- right of free movement while monitoring the law enforcement agency
- right to publish while building responsibility and ownership

In all cases monitors remain observers; responsibility for law enforcement remains with forest officials and governments.

★ Ultimately IFM is an instrument to ensure that the benefits from a country's natural resources are more equally shared by all stakeholders, i.e. shifted from the (illegal) logger to the state and communities.

★ The full version of this Power Tool considers the following aspects of IFM:

- How can IFM remain independent yet be a driver for change?
- In what ways can IFM be used to raise accountability?
- What are the potential pitfalls of using IFM in this way?

Further information

Find full tool and other related tools and resources at: www.policy-powertools.org

Global Witness undertook IFM work in Cambodia from 1999 to 2003, and in Cameroon since 2000. Global Witness is also producing a more detailed *Guide to IFM*. www.globalwitness.org

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