Discussion paper

Forest Ethics: the role of ethical dialogue in the fate of the forests

Comparing and contrasting the International Forest Policy Dialogue with the Earth Charter Initiative

Duncan Macqueen[1]

International Institute for Environment and Development

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International Institute for Environment and Development

[1] Duncan Macqueen is a Senior Research Associate in Responsible Forest Business working within the Forest and Land Use Programme (FLU) of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), 4 Hanover Street, Edinburgh EH2 2EN. Email: duncan.macqueen@iied.org
Tel: 0131 226 6860

Abstract

The current development paradigm - maximising individual material wealth - is sweeping aside natural forests, particular tropical rainforests. Such forests simply cannot compete, in terms of revenue generated per unit area, with land use alternatives (such as cattle, soybean or palm oil). Yet continued conversion of natural forests to other land uses may have catastrophic consequences for global human well being. This paper argues that changes are required to the values that underpin global development if we are to avert these consequences. The current value framework of development is 'impoverished' and this has led to the neutering of the current international forest policy dialogue process. The paper contends that ethical dialogue towards a collective global forest ethic is therefore required. More than a decade of failed attempts to reach or implement binding consensus on forests justify this new approach. A brief synopsis is made of the contrasting processes, outcomes and prospects of a Global Forest Convention through international forest dialogue of the IPF/IFF and latterly UNFF compared with the process of ethical dialogue leading to the Earth Charter Initiative. Four hypotheses are advanced as to why most existing process of forest dialogue have been flawed: (i) there is a mismatch between the ethical driving forces affecting forests (e.g. maximising individual wealth) and proposed solutions which appeal to broader notions of human well being; (ii) adequate and balanced representation from those suffering the consequences of forest loss rarely matches the power of those perpetrating it; (iii) individual or sovereign self-interests impede any attempt to develop a higher collective vision to the benefit of all; and (iv) short term restrictions of behaviour are preferred to long term changes in behaviour brought about by reorientation of education. The paper concludes with preliminary considerations regarding the process of ethical dialogue that might unveil a cosmopolitan ethic concerning the appreciation, use, monitoring and arbitration surrounding natural forests.

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Table of contents

1. A structural overview

This paper attempts to map out the significance of forest ethics as a field of study. It introduces the reader to forest's ethical dimension, assesses the current ethical framework within which forests are managed, and points out the most notable of its weaknesses. An alternative framework is explored with greater promise for human well being. The case is made that ethical dialogue is essential if we are to put an improved framework in place. Possible models for such dialogue are examined by contrasting the current international forest policy dialogue around a global forest convention and the Earth Charter Initiative. The paper concludes with some initial thoughts on the foundation and process by which ethical dialogue on forests might be founded.

2. Introduction to forest's ethical dimension

Ethics are born out of *interactions* between different agents. An isolated individual has no purpose in defining or defending ethical norms (rights) or values (good or bad). For example, an isolated individual who moves a marker defining his or her area of forest harvesting has no need to assert any right to do this or that this is good, for there is no other individual or 'agent' with whom to discuss such a claim. Some environmental ethicists insist that non-human life forms are also agents (Hallaway, 2002). Many faiths also posit a significant other in the form of God, gods or spirits. Both of these positions introduce ethics even in apparent human isolation – but it is beyond the scope of this article to investigate in what ways that might be important.

Ethics are also founded on the *aspirations* of different agents. An individual without aspiration has no need to define or defend his or her right because they have no scale by which to measure whether their claim or its denial through interaction or relationship with a significant other, constitutes profit or loss. Ethics arise out of interaction between different realms of aspirations – and they are therefore a function of human society.

Individual ethics may extend to any facet of existence about which there is some element of aspiration and interaction – and the fate of different types of forest is no exception. Forests relate to many different human aspirations – and since they occupy large land areas over significant periods of time multiplying the possibilities for interactions - it is no surprise that ethics have developed to govern human interactions relating to forests. This paper refers to the forest-related subset of rights (e.g. rights to products and services) and values (e.g. the prevailing notion that sustainable forest management is in some sense 'good') as 'forest ethics'. Forest ethics are not monochrome - there is a broad spectrum of forest ethics, from "maximise overall economic wealth" to "conserve at all costs for the inherent value of life therein".

Forest ethics also operate at many levels (e.g. local, national or international). For example, the local shifting farmer and the international climatologist have legitimate grounds for wanting or opposing forest clearance – but their conflict arises because forests generate aspirations at different levels. The local farmers control over his future depends firmly on clearing a particular local patch of forest. The international

climatologist is concerned about long term changes at the global level. Both might share the same forest ethic were they in each other's shoes, but the level at which their aspiration is based differs.

The strength with which any element of an individual's forest ethic is held will vary depending on the type of interaction, and the degree of aspiration involved. The reason for this is that some interactions are largely inconsequential to the parties involved, whereas others have substantial impact. For example, we might expect robust individual ethics regarding potentially fatal interactions (e.g. armed loggers in the Amazon felling timber and impoverishing Amerindian hunting land) compared with interactions leading to potentially less severe discomfort (e.g. the removal of aesthetic beauty in remote areas).

Since there are many different types of human aspiration, individual forest ethics are composite in nature. In other words, individuals weigh up many different elements of a decision against many different types of aspiration before taking action. Composite individual aspirations lead to complex interactions and forest ethics. For example, conversion of a natural rain forest to oil palm plantation (rather than its sustainable management) may be vehemently opposed by a forest dweller and strongly supported by a palm oil executive, each with their own set of individual aspirations and accompanying forest ethics.

3. Current framework of reductionist ethics

Recent development thinking, particularly among development economists of the Washington consensus, has tended to reduce all decisions to human aspirations for more individual material wealth – the first of two insidious positions that we will treat in this paper. The ethics associated with this impoverished view have led to a greatly diminished view of the contribution of forests to human aspiration (Table 1). The sum total of forests contribution or 'value' has been compressed into a single category - how much it can increase individual material wealth. Forest contribution is therefore almost exclusively measured on a financial scale. For example, there have been numerous attempts to add up the financial value of reduced impact logging, or add in the financial value non-timber forest products or environmental services. The rationale behind such attempts is the (usually vain) hope that forests will be able to offer as much individual material wealth to their prospective owners as alternatives that involve forest clearance.

Unfortunately, it is rare for natural forests to be as efficient in producing individual material wealth as comparable agricultural or industrial land uses (See Macqueen et al. 2003). Natural forests simply cannot compete with the profitability of monoculture plantations or alternative land uses (e.g. cattle, soybean, palm oil etc.). They are therefore obsolete, or "uneconomic" and are being converted on a vast and rapid scale. The deforestation drama being played out across the Amazon (see Macqueen et al. 2004) is not one of ignorant migrant farmers – it is an expression simply of the fact that forests are comparatively "uneconomic". If we continue to measure forests contribution within the ethical framework of maximising individual material wealth we will consign the majority of biodiverse natural forests to history. However influential such thinking may have become, we must discount it here as both untrue

and folly, referring adherents to the clear thinking behind Aristotle's 'good life' described several thousand years ago (Aristotle, ~322BC). Human aspiration is a nobler or at least more complex beast than Washington consensus would admit.

Table 1 Realms of human aspiration recognised within Washington consensus economics in relation to forests

Realms of human aspiration	Contribution of forestry
Individual material wealth	• Wood products (timber, pulp and paper) • Non Wood Forest Products (food, medicines, craft materials) • Environmental services (water regulation, climate change mitigation, energy provision, recreational use) • Other employment

4. Broader (if somewhat rhetorical) visions of forest ethics

Despite its operational leaning towards the reductionist ethics described above, the World Bank has developed a much more profound summary of the realms of human aspiration, assembled from notable philosophers and economists alike under the title of "dimensions of human development" (Alkire, 2002). This builds on the theories of need first described by Maslow (1943) that described a hierarchy of need in which the latter categories were dependent on the realisation of the former (physiological, safety, love, esteem and self actualisation).

In the early 1960s it was noted that Maslow's hierarchical trajectory was not inevitably followed with increasing wealth. Having satisfied essential subsistence needs, development trajectories frequently became fixated on further subsistence or comfort needs rather than progressing to the realisation of broader notions of human fulfilment or transcendence (Lebret, 1961).

The very terminology of words such as 'need' cast our eyes down toward the 'bare necessities' of life. By way of contrast, more recent literature on 'capabilities' diverts our gaze towards higher possibilities, once subsistence needs are met, invoked with a language of freedom (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000). But achieving these capabilities and freedoms does not lead automatically to 'the good life' - nor does the pursuit of freedom necessarily lead to development. It is quite possible to be capable and free and carry out the most retrogressive practical actions. Both Sen, and Aristotle before him, affirm the need for reasoned freedom or contemplation.

In short, it matters not only what categories of 'need' or 'capability' there are, but also what human potential is unleashed through their use. In this paper we prefer to combine the idea of 'capabilities' with the idea of 'unleashed potential' by using the term 'realms of aspiration'. These realms of aspiration are not restricted to normative categories of basic needs or capabilities, implying what ought to be pursued – rather they reflect areas of human aspiration and interaction where unleashed capability is 'to-be-decided', up for grabs and the starting point for ethical debate (Table 2).

The first realm of aspiration (shaded in grey) relates to Maslow's physiological needs, Lebret's category of essential subsistence needs or Nussbaum's life / bodily health and bodily integrity capabilities – the prerequisite upon which human flourishing is based. Nobody disputes that the elimination of abject poverty is a moral imperative and a precondition for development. But what sort of society do humans aspire to once those needs are met? The other realms of aspiration to look towards higher values – values that distinguish humanity from simpler living things. Their content depends on the wealth or dearth of our aspiration and its imaginative application. Our development trajectory is a function of our aspiration, not merely our capabilities or freedom.

Table 2 Draft realms of human aspiration and the potential contribution of forestry (following Alkire 2002)

Realms of human aspiration	Potential contribution of forestry
Subsistence, health and vitality	• Water regulation on a global scale (quantity and quality) • Energy for 2.4 billion people • Medicines for the primary health of several billion people • Timber for construction and livelihood needs (e.g. furniture, pulp and paper etc) • Food – bushmeats provide 20% of the protein in 62 least developed countries – plus fruits etc. • Soil fertility through bush fallow • Livestock fodder in agroforestry systems • Reducing vulnerability in times of rapid change (Kaimowitz 2003, FAO 2001)
Present and future security	• Climate change mitigation - sustainable forestry could make a substantial contribution to controlling atmospheric CO_2 levels but deforestation currently contributes 1.5-2 Gt carbon per year (compared to 6.5 Gt per year from fossil fuel and cement production) • Forests provide an untapped opportunity for renewable energy production (Bass *et al*. 2000)
Inclusive social contributions and fulfillment	• Strengthened rights, capabilities and governance in rural areas through people centred forestry • Providing opportunities for productive partnerships between the private sector and local communities (FAO 2001)
Creative work and use of its returns	• Formal forest employment for 17.4 million people • Informal forest employment for 29.6 million people • Other sources indirect forest employment may surpass measured employment by up to 10:1 (ILO 2001; Arnold and Dewees 1997)
Intellectual and aesthetic appreciation	• Diversity and pattern - 85% of the total 7 million world species are terrestrial and almost two thirds of all species occur in the tropics, largely in the tropical humid forests. • Landscape beauty - tourism is the worlds fastest growing business with 663 million tourists per year spending US$ 453 billion – an estimated 7% of which is on nature tourism (Pimm & Raven, 2000; Lindberg *et al*. 1997)
Identity, faith and culture	• Craft materials such as sacred objects, dyes, cultural foods and beverages, various narcotics, musical instruments etc. • Cultural identity, often linked to sacred groves for worship and ritual • Traditional ecological knowledge and harmony with environment providing the basis for local management practices and institutions (Berkes 1999)

5. Individual or collective forest ethics?

A reasoned approach to different realms of human aspiration is significantly fuller than the dominant reductionist view of forest ethics. But even this broader view is impoverished if it is understood exclusively in relation to the individual (Douglas et al., 1998) – the second common and insidious position of Washington consensus

economics. A slavish devotion to individual freedom has taken root despite the profoundly pessimistic view of human nature expounded by Hobbs (1686) and the decoupling of freedom from responsibility in commercial activity occasioned, though perhaps not intended by Smith (1789) – despite also the observation by Rousseau that there would be little desire to be free in a society of absolute freedom.

While each and every category of human aspiration listed above can stand in relation to the individual or the 'sovereign state', it need not necessarily do so. Human aspiration can also be thought of in relation to the collective – either to global humanity or a subset thereof – or even more broadly to the entire living and spiritual realm. So when we ask "What is human aspiration in relation to subsistence, health and vitality?" it is just as legitimate to respond "The universal provision of basic needs and health care" as it would be to respond, "I want fish and chips and some indigestion tablets". Individual-orientated ethics focus on possession whereas collective-orientated ethics tend towards issues of distribution or equity (see Table 3). Of course there is limitless scope to manipulate the collective in favour of individual interests – issues of power in the definition of collective ethics are ignored at our peril. Yet the intention here is to draw attention to the intrinsic difference between aspirations geared towards the individual and those geared towards the collective – a description of how to ensure equitable definition of collective ethics and cope with power is beyond the scope of this particular paper.

Table 3. The distinction between human aspiration related to individuals and human aspiration related to the collective.

Realms of human aspiration	Contribution of forestry relating to the individual	Contribution of forestry relating to the collective
Subsistence, health and vitality	My health and survival enhanced by presence (or absence of forests)	Distribution of forest matches global subsistence demands upon it equitably
Security and control over one's environment	My outlook and control over my future enhanced by the presence (or absence) of forests	Distribution of forests ensures a stable environment and secure future for all
Inclusive social contributions and fulfilment	My social opportunities enhanced by the presence (or absence) of forests	Distribution of forests affords social space for shared decision making and productive partnerships
Productive work and creative use of its returns	My creativity enhanced by presence (or absence) of forest	Distribution of forest provides equitable global opportunities for creative endeavour (and returns from it)
Intellectual and aesthetic appreciation	My appreciation of the world enhanced by the presence (or absence) of forests	Distribution of forest provides fair global opportunities for intellectual stimulation or aesthetic appreciation
Identity, faith and culture	My identity faith and culture enhanced by presence (or absence) of forests	Distribution of forests meets global cultural and faith needs as and where appropriate

The distinction between individual and collective aspiration is important. While it might be acceptable for individual aspiration to drive towards, say, wanton

environmental destruction, due to an absence of or indifference to marginal personal loss from such activity, it is hardly acceptable to advocate such aspirations for the collective. A collective attitude of that sort would have catastrophic consequences (as often witnessed in the tragedy of the commons, Hardin, 1968). In other words, while individual aspirations may be subjective or relative or downright perverse, collective aspirations need to be based on higher cosmopolitan values and norms if we are not all to suffer as a result. Human aspiration in relation to the collective is a much more weighty concept than human aspiration in relation to the individual – provided that precautions are taken to avoid its subversion by the powerful.

Almost all societies acknowledge that there are some attitudes that are really true, and others really false towards the type of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are: collective wisdom, the Rta, the Tao, first principles, natural law, morality, call it what you may. Moreover, it is very difficult if not impossible to do away with such collective wisdom or replace it by some form of subjective rationality or value system (Lewis, 1943). Collective wisdom or a cosmopolitan ethics continue to exist because they continue to save the collective good from the whim of the individual.

Globalisation has brought the issue of collective ethics neatly into focus. Falling trade restrictions, improved transport and communication and the accelerating pace of change have brought formerly isolated subsets of human aspiration and culture into contact with one another. Northern environmentalists can now see the destruction of the rainforest. Southern workers can now see the lavish material consumption of the North. Ethical dialogue is inevitable as a result. On the one hand, individual freedoms have never been so far-reaching. On the other hand, the divide between rich and poor and the pace of environmental destruction mean that there has never been a more pressing need to save the collective good from the whim of individual freedom.

Assertions of the existence of (or need for) a collective cosmopolitan ethic cannot by themselves disguise real differences in individual aspiration. Our contention here is that, in the absence of an adequate process for reconciling competing ethical claims on the forest, the ethical framework of the powerful will win – a ‘collective ethic’ will be imposed come what may. The current ethical framework of the powerful is leading to the decimation of natural forests. If we are to build a rational alternative in the interests of all our futures we therefore need to implement a structured process of ethical dialogue. The aim of such ethical dialogue is to ensure that the aspirations of the powerful few do not ride roughshod over the aspirations of the collective in defining the fate of the forests.

6. The need for ethical dialogue to shape forest development

It has been said that “the forest sector is not only a key component of development; it is in important respects a microcosm of sustainable development” (Chaytor, 2002). Such is the diversity of cross-sectoral benefits or constraints provided by forests that forest development is often used as a testing ground for broader development solutions (Mayers et al. 2002). So strong are the ties between people in the North and forests in the South that forestry is also one of the areas in which development is beginning to be described, not in terms of us and them but rather as Francoix Perroux once said “development is for all human beings and for the whole human being”

(Goulet, 1974). It is increasingly appropriate to think of forest development in terms of “our collective aspirations” rather than “their need for material wealth” – although this vision is far from mainstream. Yet, where individual forest ethics and relativism prevail (i.e. where collective ethics are absent, poorly defined or unenforced) the weak or poor lose out to the strong and powerful.

Dialogue is the obvious starting point when the well being of the many is compromised by that of the few. The array of further protest options including such extremes as terrorism or war may exacerbate the situation (e.g. generating insecurities, social exclusion etc.), suggesting that dialogue should be a preferred first choice.

In forestry, dialogue is frequently the preferred initial methods of resolving forest conflicts. Terms such as “participatory process”, “negotiated solutions”, “action learning approach” are increasingly frequent in development terminology. But it is not just dialogue within a preconceived ethical framework that is needed, since this may only reinforce undesirable outcomes if the strong and powerful side against collective well-being. What is needed is dialogue about the legitimacy of the ethical framework itself. For example, dialogue about how individuals or sovereign nations can maximise individual wealth from the forest merely reinforces the status quo – we need instead to explore what sort of collective aspirations about the forest would optimise collective well being. The priority is not therefore to engage in dialogue, but rather to engage in ethical dialogue – where the establishment of a collective or global forest ethic is the end in view rather than the immediate resolution of conflict between individual (or sovereign state) aspirations.

Put another way, there is plenty of evidence that people value tropical forests such as the Amazon – but the rate of deforestation accelerated last year. The problem lies in the fact that real values, genuinely ascribed to forests such as the Amazon, have no ‘relevance’ or ‘force’ within the framework of the current forest ethic – people’s real aspirations cannot be articulated within the prevailing ethic. At least part of the reason is that in some realms of human aspiration forests are valued as an ‘end’ in themselves rather than as a ‘means’ towards some greater end – i.e. they are not merely a ‘means’ to maximum individual material wealth (see Schumacher, 1973). Trying to find ways of ascribing financial utility to forests misses the point – it is not for their wealth maximising properties that forests are valued. There are currently unquantifiable values placed on forests linked to broader human aspiration beyond material wealth (see Table 2). We need a forest ethic that reflects this reality rather than pretending it does not exist. Development for a forester therefore becomes the task of engaging in ethical dialogue - forging new values that accurately reflect collective aspirations, and optimising those values for all peoples in terms of resource limitations.

In order to assess whether this challenge might be achievable within or allied to existing processes, this paper compares and contrasts below two promising candidates – the International Forest Policy Dialogue surrounding the issue of a global forest convention – and the Earth Charter Initiative. Both touch on forest ethics, both have some promising consensus, but are yet to produce legally binding instruments. Both involve protracted dialogue processes. The difference lays in the type of dialogue which each involves: the international forest policy dialogue is essentially

‘individualistic’ – i.e. a negotiation between sovereign nation states in which individual interests are paramount. The Earth Charter Initiative by way of contrast is a ‘collectivist’ or ‘global ethics’ approach – i.e. a civil society process in which the aim is the collective good.

7. Contrasting the dialogue towards a Global Convention on Forests with the Earth Charter

7.1 The International Forest Policy Dialogue

The confusion regarding what ‘development’ might entail for forestry is reflected in the number of international government and non-government agencies that have entered the fray to try and sort it out: the ITTO, UNDP, UNEP, FAO, GEF, UNESCO, World Bank, IUCN, WWF etc. These are matched or exceeded by countless national and local entities. The complexity of forestry in part lies in its relevance at different levels. The ‘problem’ that each agency is trying to solve is not monolithic – to some, global warming is the greatest concern, and to others it is the local exclusion of the poor from access to traditional subsistence resource. Each agency competes to bring its individual agenda to the fore. The concern and confusion is a relatively recent state of affairs. Until global concerns took root in the 1990s, forest resources had, like their agricultural counterparts, been thought of as the province of domestic jurisdiction (Chaytor, 2001) – this despite sporadic attempts at broad forest strategies by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO),

With growing concern over global inequities, loss of biodiversity and changes to the global climate the 1990s saw the advent of global forest dialogue – starting with the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). UNCED achieved a great deal, not least the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Agenda 21 with Chapter 11, Combating deforestation. It did not, however, achieve a binding global forest convention.

In the run up to UNCED the various preparatory committees discussed the notion of a global forest convention. But southern sovereign states were suspicions of the potential distribution of benefits from such a convention (i.e. locking up the South’s forests to offset the North’s excessive consumption). Coupled with the lack of negotiation time, it was only possible to agree a set of non-legally binding principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests (UN, 1992). While mention was made of the holistic nature of human needs linked to forests and the need to match sovereign exploitation rights with global responsibilities, there was little definition of what these needs might be in practice and what strategy might be used to maximise them. In other words, the interpretation of these principles was left hostage to whichever model of development prevailed. Development has become increasingly associated with the need for material wealth (a trend exacerbated by poverty reduction programmes). The result has been an increasing sense of betrayal at an ethical framework that promises, but cannot deliver, the fulfilment of human aspiration through material wealth.

In 1995 the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on the recommendation of the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) approved the establishment of an ad hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) extended in 2000 into the Intergovernmental Forum and Forests (IFF). Together they developed proposals for action in line with specific thematic areas and the UNCED principles (UNFF, 2001). In addition, an Interagency Task Force on Forests (ITFF) sought to coordinate the proposal formulation between intergovernmental organisation so as to avoid overlap. The resulting tangled mass of literally hundreds of overlapping horatorial statements was not entirely worthless – the process of producing it generated a good deal of consensus on what sustainable management might entail (e.g. the ITTO guidelines on sustainable management). Nevertheless, the process did nothing to alter the development framework that had led to the concerns over forests in the first place.

The early assumption of working towards a global convention on forests suffered a further setback with widespread NGO unrest that a convention would now pander to commercial interests, enshrine weak sustainability standards, undermine the biodiversity convention and avoid or delay the real issues (Forest Trends, 1997). The real issue listed in this NGO declaration included the failure to tackle the underlying causes of forest loss and degradation – which they linked to consumption patterns, unfair land use and trade patterns and non-democratic decision making. Implicit within this statement is the notion that it is the prevailing model of development that has led to a forest ethic that many people do not share. There was also an increasingly obvious deficit in representation between those suffering the consequences of forest loss and those perpetrating it. Damage limitation by key international and national forest agencies has included increasingly extravagant (and often quite suspect) claims about the contribution of forestry to poverty eradication and the creation of material wealth.

The establishment of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) in 2000 was ostensibly to address the lack of momentum towards legally binding commitments on sustainable forest management and the lack of attention to the broader concerns of NGOs. The ITFF has evolved into the collaborative partnership on Forests (CPF) – new acronym but same vision, and little further progress has been made towards a forest convention despite continued calls (MTC, 2002; Roberts, 2003). While kindly observers note an increasing intensity of cooperation (Chaytor, 2001) there is little real doubt over the lack of appetite to negotiate legally binding instruments (Ruis, 2001). The latter author comments tellingly “the views of states are too divergent regarding the extent to which forests can be treated as a common concern of humankind – a global commons – as opposed to the realm of sovereign domain”. Cosmopolitan norms and values had come second to sovereign self interest.

As the perception of failure to deliver has grown, one response has also been to temporarily (?) abandon multilateralism and launch new regional initiatives on forest issues about which all could agree (e.g. illegality). The EU, Asian and African Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) processes are cases in point. It is too early to assess whether the results will be binding and successful. Cynics may suggest that FLEGT is a deliberate northern ploy to discredit Southern producer countries, but it has been embraced nonetheless with further lists of horatorial statements. But are short term restrictions on behaviour really a sustainable answer? –

or is their more scope with education towards long term behavioural change? We explore this alternative approach below.

7.2 The Earth Charter Initiative

The *Earth Charter* is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful society in the 21st century (Earth Charter Initiative, 2004). In 1987, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development called for a new charter that would set forth the fundamental principals for sustainable development. Unfinished at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, it was given fresh impetus by Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev through the launch of the Earth Charter Initiative (in 1994) and Earth Charter Commission (in 1997). With thousands of inputs from contemporary science, law, world religions, philosophical traditions, teachings of indigenous peoples, UN and people's declarations the Benchmark Draft evolved into a final version of the Earth Charter, launched in the Hague on June 29, 2000.

The Earth Charter's 16 principles and 61 supporting principles confront the challenge of environmental devastation and human suffering caused by current patterns of production and consumption. An alternative pattern of life is offered, based on the realisation that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about 'being more', not 'having more'. In other words it embraces the broad realms of human aspiration not just those linked to material wealth. Four sections capture a minimum consensus for human beings: (i) Respect and care for the community of life; (ii) Ecological integrity; (iii) Social and economic justice and (iv) Democracy, non-violence and peace. In contrast with the confusion over what development is in the international forest policy dialogue, this is the Earth Charter's main business. Its clarity of intent has encouraged more than 1940 national and international non-governmental organisations to endorse the Earth Charter since 2000 (Earth Charter Initiative, 2004).

Despite its careful drafting the Earth Charter was never designed for immediate ratification by nation states. Instead, it was designed to be such an inclusive process that its legitimacy would rest not on its official status but on its content. Official recognition has nevertheless started to be forthcoming. In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) General Conference plenary approved a resolution to (i) recognise the Earth Charter as an important ethical framework for sustainable development that coincides with the current UNESCO vision (ii) affirm the intention of UNESCO Member States to utilize the Earth Charter as an educational instrument; and (iii) invite an analysis of how to reinforce, in a practical way, the vision and principles of the Earth Charter in UNESCO programmes. In many ways the Earth Charter therefore bares comparison with the international forest policy dialogue towards a Global Convention on Forests. But there are four notable differences that make the Earth Charter a more promising dialogue approach to resolve intractable forest problems:

- Scope
- Representation
- Legitimacy
- Timeframe

In terms of scope, the Earth Charter has a deliberately broad notion of human development linked to 'being' rather than 'having'. It therefore acknowledges that human well being might best be served by treating aspirations other than material wealth as desirable ends. As we have noted above, forest ethics have become shackled to the current paradigm of maximising individual material wealth. The Earth Charter allows a much broader interpretation of the possible contributions of forest to human well-being. It therefore challenges the forces underlying forest destruction rather than trying the impossible task of reconciling increasing material wealth with unprofitable sustainable forest management.

In terms of representation, the Earth Charter has been the product of a decade long, worldwide, cross-cultural dialogue about collective aspirations and shared values. It has not restricted its participation to particular sectoral expertise groups (e.g. foresters or development experts). Those suffering the consequences of forest loss and underdevelopment have had equal say with those perpetrating the current model for forest-based development. The result has not been to sweep away the need for sustainable forest management in the light of more pressing issues. Rather, the Earth Charter's approach to development requires forests to be conserved not for their utility but for their existence value. No need to make extravagant utilitarian claims for forests ability to eradicate poverty and generate material wealth.

The legitimacy of the Earth Charter is based not on its endorsement by sovereign states. Rather it is based on the equity of its process and the congruence between its resulting ethic and the collective aspirations of the global community. The current international forest policy dialogue has failed in its aim even to provide a lowest common denominator of standards for forest activity to which sovereign states would sign up. The Earth Charter is directed towards changing the values that empower sovereign states to the detriment of all global community. It is a quiet and long-term revolution – intended to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well being of the human family and the larger living world.

The long term nature of the Earth Charter and its emphasis on education rather than short term policy initiatives (Mackey, 2002) in the face of a crisis for forestry may appear esoteric and irrelevant. Yet the reality of the global development paradigm based on the acquisition of material wealth and the sovereign rights of nation states offers little space for forestry and its contribution to human well being. Pretending that this isn't so is futile. Forest and development experts need urgently to build a forest ethic and its defence using a process similar to that of the Earth Charter. The extent to which the dominant development paradigm is embedded in national and global institutions presents a formidable challenge. Finding practical governance mechanisms to convert rhetoric into reality is similarly daunting – but this paper contests that such a struggle is necessary and timely if a desirable collective outcome for forests is to be achieved.

8. Process – what might make an ethical dialogue on forests work?

The Earth Charter is not a Forest Charter. The collective aspirations and ethics which underpin it are not specific to the multiple aspirations and interactions inherent to tree

covered landscapes. The Earth Charter is not therefore sufficient to our need for a collective forest ethic but it does provide a useful starting point – in summary the Earth Charter:

- Establishes a precedent for ethical dialogue towards shared values and an example of a cross cultural process by which this might happen
- Creates a broad ethical framework within which forests 'fit' – avoiding the schism between human aspiration and the current development paradigm
- Gives precedence to human aspirations to 'be more' rather than 'have more' in line with collective wisdom of almost all longstanding traditions
- Provide specific ethical principles to stimulate further more specific debate and to monitor evolving norms and values in forest ethics
- Provides a credible cross-cultural structure within which to frame new ethical dialogue processes

From this firm foundation an ethical dialogue on forests might seek to discuss and agree the following:

- A workable consensus on the main realms of human aspiration (both need and reasoned capability) and the contribution of forestry to those realms
- Specific collective human aspirations for forestry within each realm (e.g. 'desirable states' for the distribution of and benefits from different types of forests)
- Practical criteria and indicators to monitor progress towards those desirable states.
- Necessary format for sovereign nation states to pursue national strategies towards those desirable states within national forest programmes
- An assessment of the main areas of conflict due to the unequal distribution of and costs and benefits from forests within nation states
- International mechanisms to compensate nation states for the unequal expectations on particular nation states in order to realise global collective human aspirations for the forest.

In mapping out the trajectory of an ethical dialogue on forests we would need to draw on the process guidelines adopted explicitly or implicitly in the Earth Charter Initiative (Earth Charter Initiative, 2004). These guidelines would need wide discussion, but might include at least the following:

(i) collective rather than individual approach: it is the development of a collective forest ethic that is to be pursued, not the imposition of one dominant individual or sovereign state's ethic (i.e. we do not want ITTO or WTO rules where pre-existant trading power defines the size of negotiating power – trade is only one dimension of our interest in forests). The difference between individual and collective dialogue processes is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Distinguishing individualistic and collectivist processes of ethical dialogue

Individualistic		Collectivist	
Principal emphases	**Practical ground rules**	**Principal emphases**	**Practical ground rules**
Possession	Invest in areas of maximum return	Community	Invest in social interactions
Isolation	Exclude non-aligned interests	Coexistence	Ensure diversity is represented fairly
Competition	Exert personal power where possible	Cooperation	Abide by democratic decisions
Self interest	Insist on personal veto	Collective interest	Include all positive inputs
Scepticism	Demand input to all stages	Confidence in others	Delegate to sub-groups
Immediacy	Maximise immediate personal gains	Incrementalism	Build on positives over long term

(ii) holistic: any forest ethic should reflects the full extent of human aspiration rather than the simple subset that has become synonymous with "sustainable development". These two safeguards would ensure that "development is for all human beings and for the whole human being".

(iii) cross-cultural and widely shared: an ethical dialogue process towards a collective forest ethic should engage the full spectrum of races, cultures, religions and ideological traditions – drawing on the most human elements of each rather than finding the most bestial common denominators.

(iv) of enduring significance: a forest ethic should aim to leave a legacy that invokes current solutions for future generation rather than relying on future solutions for the aftermath of the current generation.

In addition to some helpful guidelines, the Earth Charter also furnishes a number of useful pointers to success. These include the need for:

- Some significant champions of the process at an international level
- Sufficient funding to ensure adequate cross-cultural representation
- Interested partners who believe in the project and will invest in the process and in the implementation of its outcome
- An iterative process but with clear deadlines for the circulation of discussion materials and drafts.

9. Conclusions

This paper has described why forest ethics exist – because people have aspiration concerning forests and interact with one another over these. It has gone on to show why ethical conflicts in forestry are commonplace – because multiple different aspirations regarding different forest products and services exist over extensive geographical areas and timeframes. The conclusion is that some form of planned ethical dialogue is necessary if the dominant or powerful few are not to trample on the aspirations of the many.

In examining two possible models by which some of the main ethical conflicts in forestry might be resolved through ethical dialogue, we have seen how a conventional 'individualistic' dialogue process such as those between sovereign nation states within the now-UNFF has failed to make much progress. At the very least, an alternative approach is warranted. An examination of the 'collectivist' approach of the Earth Charter Initiative has highlighted why such an approach might offer a workable alternative – not least because it exalts and seeks to conserve the multiple values (beyond material wealth) which all but the most hardened capitalist ascribe to forest products and services.

The important outstanding question is: what is to be gained by what some might see as esoteric philosophising about forests? What concrete impact will add to the myriad existent forest development projects? The answer is simple – the outcome will shift the ends towards which such development strives. It will rechannel development projects towards end which reflect the full scope of human aspiration, not the short change offered under the current paradigm of eradicating poverty and maximising material wealth.

It is beyond the scope of this single author paper to discuss the specific details of what a collective forest ethic might entail, how it would flexibly accommodate diversity without compromising its global authority or specificity. Nor has it been possible to address the many practical issues that would ensure a fair and transparent process in developing such an ethic. How to cope with vast power differentials in a historically contextualised global community – and how to install and enforce the collective will with such fragile global institutions are subjects worth of serious consideration. This paper has restricted its ambition to showing the legitimacy of forest ethics as a field of enquiry and of ethical dialogue as one constructive way forward – building on the grass-root foundation of the Earth Charter Initiative.

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