



Plantations for People


10 Things We Learnt

at the NGP annual meeting in Santiago, Chile, March 2015

1. The word of the week was TRUST

To make plantations work for people, forestry companies need to work together with local communities and civil society. And for that to happen, trust is critical – on both sides. Unfortunately, this has historically been lost in Chile (and other places). Although progress has been made, it's clear that restoring trust – like restoring forests – is a long-term process. And trust has to be earned: for Manuel Maribur, a Mapuche representative, “You need to fulfil your commitments before we can have trust again.” As one group discussion concluded, “trust is a journey”. It may be a long one – but as this meeting showed, it has at least begun.





2. The next level is the landscape level

However well plantations might be managed at the site level, they are part of a wider physical and social landscape. As Rod Taylor, Director of WWF's Forest Programme, pointed out: "If forestry does the right thing but other sectors don't, we'll still have problems with water, with biodiversity, with carbon." To have a positive environmental and social benefit, at a scale that matters, we need to think and work together with others at a landscape level. Two key words shaped the discussion of how we can do this. Landscapes need to be *resilient* – meaning that ecological and social systems continue to function and provide a full range of services, even in the face of changes and shocks such as the impacts of climate change. And the approach needs to be *inclusive* – developed with the participation of all stakeholders, and delivering benefits to all.




3. REDD+ offers opportunities for NGP (and vice versa)

While governments frantically attempt to reach a new deal on climate change by the end of 2015, one international instrument is already in place. More than US\$10 billion has been pledged towards REDD+, the UN-backed scheme that provides incentives to developing countries to conserve forests. REDD+ has outgrown its acronym: as well as for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, it now covers areas including conservation, sustainable forest management, forest restoration and afforestation. Forest businesses can have a significant role to play. As Louisa Denier from the Global Canopy Project pointed out, “companies need to find out what their countries are doing on REDD+, and see how their efforts can be aligned.” NGP participants have serious case studies, models and learning to offer: according to Paul Chatterton, from WWF’s Forests and Climate Programme, “there’s a lot for NGP to share with the climate world.”

4. Landscape-scale projects are already happening


Two presentations showed landscape-scale REDD+ supported projects that are already under way. Alberto Tavares, from the state government of Acre, in the Brazilian Amazon, outlined their efforts to integrate development with forest protection. Through a wide range of initiatives – from agroforestry systems, to sustainably harvesting natural resources like rubber and Brazil nuts, to plantations of native trees – Acre has managed to almost halt deforestation while increasing its GDP. Meanwhile in the Democratic Republic of Congo, WWF and partners are running a US\$74-million REDD+ project which has involved more than 100 organizations across a 12 million-hectare area. Fuelwood plantations, to provide an alternative source of charcoal to nearby Kinshasa, are a key part of the project.

Well-managed plantations in the right places can benefit people and nature. This is old news to anyone involved in NGP – so it's easy to forget that the concept isn't widely understood. We have real-world examples of how plantations can be part of the solution to pressing global problems – from providing development opportunities for marginalised rural communities, to increasing production sustainably, to restoring degraded landscapes and sequestering carbon. Significant opportunities for change are arising globally – from the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, to big corporations committing to deforestation-free supply chains, to the fast-growing market for “green bonds”, worth US\$36 billion last year. We need to take our story into these spheres.

A photograph of two men standing in a field of green plants. The man on the left is wearing a black cap and a yellow shirt, looking towards the right. The man on the right is wearing a red and white striped polo shirt, looking towards the left. They appear to be in a conversation. The background is filled with lush green foliage.

6. Shared value is not the same as shared values **(but both are important)**

Creating shared value was another phrase we heard a lot of. It's a concept that originates from Harvard Business School, and forms an integral part of WWF-South Africa's "Resilient Landscapes Approach", outlined in a presentation by David Lindley from the WWF Mondi Wetlands Programme. It involves companies working together with other stakeholders in the landscape to address social and environmental objectives while building long-term business competitiveness: rather than redistributing wealth (whether through taxation or voluntary projects), it's about finding opportunities for mutual benefit. For that to happen, it's important for partners to identify shared objectives and shared values. These can help to build trust (that word again).

A close-up photograph of a branch with several clusters of dark, round Maqui berries. The berries are a deep purple-black color and are attached to the branch by short green stems. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a forest setting.

7. Energy drinks and condoms can be good for forests

Maqui berries, which grow wild in Chile's native forests, are so high in antioxidants they make other superfoods look ordinary. They form the basis of an energy drink marketed by NGP participant Arauco, drunk in great quantities over the course of the meeting. It's an example of shared value in action: harvesting the berries provides an extra income for local people living alongside Arauco's plantations, while also increasing the economic return from the company's conservation areas. In Acre, meanwhile, the construction of a condom factory has helped increase the value of the latex collected by local people tapping rubber from wild trees and local plantations.

8. Communities come first

Companies need to learn to “work from, not with or for, communities”. Those were the words of a Mapuche woman quoted by Mario Rivas, who works for a Church-based NGO in Southern Chile. This is a challenge to conventional business models and ways of engaging. But a strong feeling emerged in group discussions that indigenous communities and other local people, as the first inhabitants of the landscape, should take the lead if we’re to see genuinely inclusive development. “Solutions” imposed from outside are unlikely to remain viable in the long term, and can lead to dependency: it’s as important to focus on getting the process right as much as the results. The challenge, one group concluded, is “to move from *us and them* to *we*.”





9. Government needs to be involved (up to a point)

The role of governments in creating inclusive, resilient landscapes prompted a range of opinions. Governments can certainly play a part in creating supportive policies and legal frameworks – but how big a part? For some, governments are best-placed to lead long-term land-use planning processes – but others worry that their horizons don't extend beyond the next election. Some complained that governments need to play a more proactive role, but nobody wants to see them dominate the process. Governments, it was felt, should just “do their job” – though of course that can vary greatly from country to country. The example of Acre shows what can be achieved with strong government leadership – but some participants felt that it's up to companies and communities to propose solutions.

10. Acknowledge the past, but look to the future

To rebuild trust between the forestry sector and civil society in Chile (and anywhere), it's important to recognise what's gone wrong in the past – to listen, to try to understand. Perhaps to accept responsibility and to make amends – as the three Chilean companies that take part in NGP are doing through restoring areas of native forest that have been converted since 1994. However, as Ricardo Schaffner of Arauco acknowledged, companies and civil society have some differences of opinion over who is responsible: “What is way more important is to find solutions,” he argued. “We need to look to the future, not the past.”

