



**SIANI**

Swedish International Agricultural Network Initiative



## **Governing frontier landscapes: Insights from the Global Landscapes Forum 2014**

Landscapes across the developing world are changing rapidly amid accelerating demand for food and other natural resources, exacerbated by climate change and other factors. In frontier landscapes, novel societies are emerging, with diverse actors who have different productive strategies, cultural and migration histories, and access to capital, technology and markets.

On 7 December 2014, as part of the Global Landscapes Forum, SIANI and EcoAdapt hosted a dialogue session on opportunities to foster sustainability in dynamic, multi-stakeholder landscapes, focusing on success stories. The goal was to draw lessons and identify key enabling conditions and effective mechanisms to connect tailored, bottom-up solutions to sustainability problems with top-down policies, accounting for the needs and interests of diverse actors.

Addressing the needs and often-conflicting interests of different actors in these multi-stakeholder landscapes requires new approaches to governance that recognize the diverse voices and actively seek common ground.

Participants identified several conditions and changes needed to ensure that sustainability strategies are both legitimate and effective.

- **The window of opportunity to harness the capacity of different stakeholders to foster sustainability in frontier landscapes is short-lived.** A failure to seize this opportunity can further exacerbate the imbalance of power and capacity among different actors as land use and tenure systems become rapidly consolidated. Given the rapid pace of change in frontier landscapes, a key challenge is how to build social capital faster than the pace at which ecosystems and natural assets are degraded.
- **Incentives to achieve emission reductions and support sustainable landscape governance will succeed if effort is first invested in building appropriate institutional capacity.** Incentives to change land use that are not supported by strong and legitimate institutions are unlikely to deliver benefits in the long term, and may even lead to increased inequality and vulnerability in the most marginalized groups such as subsistence farmers and low-income smallholders.
- **An initial focus on shared concerns, such as water security, health or education, can be a vital step in establishing the common ground necessary for tackling problems of environmental degradation among a broad set of actors.** Multi-stakeholder institutions are critical in providing a space for dialogue and knowledge exchange where diverse actors can identify differences and shared values, and build trust.

### **Why frontiers?**

We defined frontier landscapes as fairly remote areas where rates of forest clearance, land use change and social and economic fluidity are high. They include established populations as well as newcomers, resulting in a very diverse mix of actors, ranging from large-scale agri-business and mining operations geared to international commodities markets, to low-income and subsistence farmers. The bringing together of these starkly different groups is fundamentally changing the makeup and development trajectory of these landscapes.

• **Political support and a clear regulatory framework are essential for ensuring that local-level initiatives and institutions in frontier landscapes can both persist in the long term and be scaled-up to other contexts.** Government action is needed to make a strong commitment to sustainability as well as social inclusion and participation in development planning. The Peruvian government has taken a step in this direction with the creation of a Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion. More such examples are needed to help improve the congruency between national policies and on-the-ground realities.

• **It is crucial to take advantage of the diversity of actors and to account for their interdependencies, both negative and positive, in decision-making processes.** Tailoring policies to specific actors is a positive step, but it is not enough. More proactive approaches are needed.

• **Civil society organizations are often key change agents in achieving the effective participation of all stakeholders in frontier landscapes.** Yet these organizations will only succeed in their task in the long term if they i) have legitimacy in the region where they work; ii) are proactive in building capacity and leadership among local actors; iii) are flexible and adaptive to changing local conditions; iv) strengthen ways to integrate different types of knowledge, including both Western science and local and indigenous knowledge; and v) have a clear exit strategy.

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**Global Landscapes Forum website:** <http://www.landscapes.org>

**This Discussion Forum was a collaboration between SIANI and EcoAdapt.**

The Swedish International Agricultural Network Initiative (SIANI) is a member-based network that supports and promotes Swedish expertise and provides an open and interactive platform for engagement and dialogue in a global context. Its mission is to enable sustainable food security and nutrition for all.

To learn more, visit <http://www.siani.se>.

EcoAdapt, the “Ecosystems-based strategies and innovations in water governance networks for adaptation to climate change in Latin American landscapes” project, is funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme. To learn more, visit

<http://www.ecoadapt.eu>.

