

A photograph of Jeff Campbell, a man with a mustache and glasses, wearing a grey suit and a light blue tie. He is standing behind a wooden podium, holding a black microphone in his right hand. Behind him are several flags, including the flag of the Instituto Nacional de Bosques (INAB) and the flag of the United Nations. The background also features a banner with the INAB logo and the text "Instituto Nacional de Bosques Más Bosques, Más Vida".

# Listening and trust – the basis for working with forest and farm producers

“Working together is a motivating and powerful approach to getting things done” says Jeff Campbell, manager of the Forest and Farm Facility. “This holds true for my own approach to life; for the work of the millions of forest and farm families stitching together complex livelihoods and ecosystems at a landscape level. Local indigenous peoples, smallholders, female farmers and forest dependent peoples have the knowledge and history, the culture and the potential to maintain and revitalise vibrant rural landscapes – we must trust and support them.”

Interview: Herman Savenije and Nick Pasiecznik

**T**he Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) helps in the creation and development of strong and equitable organisations and networks amongst smallholder farmers, women groups, farm and forest communities and indigenous peoples. It aims to enable them to make their voices heard in policy making processes at all levels, and to build their capacity and opportunity to access finance and investments for forest and farm development. It also supports governments to set up multi-sector platforms to coordinate the many ministries, private sector and civil society stakeholders involved.

**What are the greatest threats to our landscapes?** In my view, the greatest threats are fragmentation, insecure tenure, vested interests, and the cult of simplification for short term benefit. A fear of complexity and the loss of what I think of as 'land memory' are also major problems. This is compounded by climate change which adds to uncertainty. What to most communities is a living, breathing life-support system, with forests, mountains, rivers, fields, pastures, villages and homesteads has been broken up into different 'natural resources'. For a variety of political and technical reasons, these have been given different land use designations and so, in turn, tend to come under the jurisdiction of different parts of government. Common property rights have often been nationalised, leaving only actively farmed land that is recognised as belonging to those who use it. The push towards larger scale monocultures of forests, farms, water, land and more mineral exploitation in the name of efficiency is destroying the complex relationships between the many different parts of 'living landscapes'. And worst of all, those people who have been *listening to the landscape* as a whole, tend to be devalued and marginalised.

**What do you think are the opportunities?** I feel that there is a resurgence of interest in understanding the critical importance of landscapes as lifeboats for sustainability that will carry us into the future. Intrinsic to this is an appreciation of the complex interactions between the ecological and the cultural components, between forest and farm, and a growing awareness that these must be defined in terms of all their interlinked communities, people, animals, plants and the geography in which they live. We might also be thankful to the triple crises of climate, economy and food, in forging a better understanding that the solutions to these are also connected. The complexity of ecological and cultural land use patterns increase our adaptation to climate change, diversify local livelihood possibilities and contribute to a more

resilient approach to food security and nutrition. There is also a growing perception that well being is about a combination of things that landscapes provide, and not just GDP. Rural communities, smallholders and indigenous peoples are mobilising around this new awareness. They are becoming more visible and are being heard more, even in the face of the accelerating rush to extract the last remaining untapped resources on our planet.

**Why are forest and farming families so important?** It is clear to me that forest and farming families, including fisherfolk and pastoralists, are the social keystones that sustain the very functioning of landscape. Maintaining traditional practices, they hold on to a mosaic of land use systems and keep alive the knowledge and genetic diversity that will be needed in the future. By living in the very landscape, they use its many products, goods and services. They sample the fruits in different seasons and notice the changes in weather, moisture and soil condition that need to be attended to. By

Forest and farming families and the forests they live in are interconnected in many different ways.



striving to build and and more sustainable and resilient livelihoods, they remain connected to these landscapes as part of larger, interlinking ecological and cultural cycles. By being present as families, they also nurture future leaders, new plants and animals, and keep hope alive.

### **You say forest and farmer organisations are vital. Why?**

Forest dependent people and smallholder farmers are amongst the poorest and most marginalised people in the world, that is sure. Conversely, they often live in places that provide a lot of economic benefits at the national level, such as timber, minerals and water resources, but they rarely receive fair benefit from the exploitation of these resources. Furthermore, as long as these people are kept from organising themselves, it is more difficult for them to match the systems of resource control and extraction with which they find themselves competing with. The ownership and control of markets and the future of landscapes are all so connected. By becoming organised at whatever level, farming and forest communities increase their ability to be heard, to be seen, to access resources, to make connections and contacts, to find buyers for products, to diversify their livelihood strategies, to make their own decisions and to deal with change and opportunity on their own terms. But there are also many stakeholders who have much to gain by communities not being able to organise themselves and express their rights.

### **What is the Forest and Farm Facility doing?**

The Forest and Farm facility believes that farm and forest organisations are one of the levers towards a transformative change. This will reactivate rural economies and exert a more sustainable and rooted management over the different elements within a living landscape. By providing resources directly to help forest and farm families organise themselves at different levels, we believe they will then be able to raise and push through the changes needed, through policy advocacy and livelihood development. By connecting forest and family farmers, we believe that they will better see how similar their challenges are in terms of gaining recognition, tenure rights, access to organisational and business development support, access to credit, and opportunities for value addition. We also believe that the concept of food systems and landscapes are inseparable. Most family farmers are very dependent on their landscape, on forest products and ecological services for example, while at the same time they are often portrayed as enemies of forests. Forest producers also have much to learn from the power of farmer organisations.

### **What role can governments, corporates and NGOs play?**

In the Forest and Farm Facility, we strongly believe in the role of government to provide an enabling and supportive policy and administrative landscape. Through direct support to multi-sectorial and multi-stakeholder platforms, we aim to help innovators cross traditional boundaries and begin thinking at a broader and more holistic level. The more different groups know about and share information on each others' plans and programmes, the more likely it is that they will see the overlaps and contradictions. The more the government begins to appreciate the major role of well organised small producers as landscape managers and primary private sector actors, the more they will see the benefits of offering incentives allowing them to grasp opportunities, protect their legal rights, and provide space to operate constructively. Civil society and NGOs can play an extremely valuable role in helping this process, communicating, monitoring and facilitating positive change when needed, but then stepping aside when communities and producers can speak for themselves. As for the corporate private sector, they too can help to build a more distributive economy, helping small producers thrive rather than by taking their places. Big companies and corporations will have to give way to small and medium scale businesses, however, as it is these that collectively energize the economy for the benefit of all. Industrial and vertically integrated monoculture, the agricultural 'assembly line' model for working with natural products and natural systems will soon be shown to be archaic, highly wasteful and inefficient, and poorly adapted to climate change.

#### **Listening to producers is essential**

Photo: Sophie Grouwels

