

International Conference on Collective Forest Tenure and Regulatory Reform in China

(Draft Background Note)

Organized by:

State Forestry Administration of China
The World Bank
Rights and Resources Initiative
Peking University

Sponsored by:

The World Bank
UK Department for International
Development
Swedish International Development
Agency



China is presently undergoing a new wave of reforms to the collective forestry sector that will have widespread impacts and historical significance. In 2005, the announcement of the “New Countryside Development Initiative” introduced a set of reforms aimed at making economic development and forest resources use more sustainable in mountainous areas. Commenced first in Fujian Province, the reforms quickly spread to 12 additional provinces by the year 2007. Moreover, according to the government’s current timetable, nearly all provinces in China will have undergone collective forest tenure reform by the year 2010.

Since the advent of collective forest tenure reform, a number of studies have been commissioned by some of the world’s leading institutions on forestry research and policy. In September, 2006, a conference sponsored by the Department of Policy and Legislation of the Chinese State Forestry Administration, Peking University, Forest Trends and the Rights and Resources Initiative discussed the preliminary evidence of reforms, including the relationship between regulatory reform and improved property rights, livelihoods and economic development. Subsequent research has revealed a number of equally important impacts and issues surrounding the implementation of the new reform program.

Generally, reforms in many Chinese provinces have strengthened household rights and reforestation efforts have been bolstered by a rise in family incomes. For example, it is apparent that village collectives choose to allocate a majority of land to individual households while maintaining a substantial portion through collective management. Overall, the reforms have more clearly demonstrated the link between property rights, the regulatory framework and the ability of small communities to organize and develop local enterprises. Indeed, it is increasingly evident that additional regulatory and legal reforms are necessary for local people to best benefit from their forests while protecting the myriad public services performed by forestland such as biodiversity conservation and watershed protection.

These issues will be the focus of an international conference held in Beijing, China on February 28-29, 2008, co-sponsored by the State Forestry Administration of China, the World Bank, Peking University and the Rights and Resources Initiative. The forum will provide opportunities to review the progress of China’s collective forest tenure reform

program, identify recommended “next steps” in the reform process and enhance international collaboration on tenure and policy issues. By making conjectures about the future of land tenure reform in China, the dialogue will explore routes toward improved management of global forest resources and effective climate change strategies for the international community.

Concrete objectives of the conference include:

- Examine the status of collective forest tenure reform policy and implementation in China and lessons to-date;
- Review of China’s current forest regulatory framework issues and opportunities for reform;
- Analyze relevant international experiences and lessons in forest tenure and regulatory reform;
- Review the current legal dimensions of collective forestry, issues and opportunities for reform;
- Identify constraints and opportunities for strengthening the contribution of small- and medium-scale enterprises in rural development;
- Explore paths toward increased international collaboration on forest tenure and regulatory reforms.

Participating organizations:

Domestic: Relevant departments of the State Forestry Administration; scholars from Peking University, Renmin University, Beijing Forestry University, Chinese Academy of Forestry, Wuhan University; officials from various provincial departments of forestry.

International: the World Bank, the Rights and Resources Initiative, Stanford University, Yale University, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Gothenburg University, Michigan State University, the State of Montana, University of British Columbia, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rural Development Institute (RDI), Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal (FECOFUN)

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