

TOWARDS A “BETTER” GOVERNANCE OF THE FOREST SECTOR IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF A GLOBAL BIO-ECONOMY: 5 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THEORY AND PRACTICE

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After a brief presentation of the policy and scientific debate on the concept of governance as applied to the forestry sector, the paper focuses on 5 statements: (1) the transition from conventional forms of government to new modes of governance is a very progressive process, and never a complete change; (2) the integration of the stakeholders and the public in decision-making processes still provides the main characteristic of governance systems as they presently work; (3) curiously, searching for “good” governance usually leads to a clear re-consideration of the importance of the traditional role of the State, which was never considered as an initial objective; (4) monitoring governance requires specific assessment framework for follow-up; (5) governance does not necessarily lead to sustainability (and vice-versa). Considering that both forest and forestry form a social-ecological system, the presentation calls for re-defining forest action as a process for adapting the objective of sustainability to the context of global change.

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Parole chiave: governance forestale, bioeconomia globale.

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1. Governance: the debate

Before discussing governance issues in link to policy promoting bio-economy, a clear statement on the concept employed is needed.

Although it is very often used by the forestry technicians to globally design forest policy and sometimes management means and strategies, the concept of governance is more specific. Whilst the term of policy mainly focuses on the objectives and strategic lines that guide the public action, whilst the word management supposes a day-to-day activity in taking responsibilities in local field actions, the one of governance directly relates to the concrete ways and means used to implement a policy and organize this management. Certainly some dose of overlapping exists between the 3 notions (a policy exists to be implemented, the way to implement a policy depends on its content, organizing management includes some concrete actions that are part of management itself), the vision in the three cases is rather differentiated. When management determines “what is done”, and policy gives the “what for”, governance explains the “how”.

The introduction of the concept of governance in the field of forestry has been recent and mainly used for promoting changes from a present general situation where “government” is characterized by conventional top-down State-centered regulatory ways to implement policy objectives. On the contrary, analyzing governance supposes to weight in the decision system the interactions between actors (public, private), between sectors (environment, agriculture, land use), between levels (global, international, national, regional, local), and to test the capacity of the

whole system to be transparent and capable to carry out a proposed organization. Defining “good” governance as resulting from a voluntary increase of interactions between actors, between instruments and also between couples of relations stakeholders/actions, leads to an incremental and systemic approach that is characteristic of a process of learning democracy.

2. Governance: a crucial issue in the perspective of global bio-economy

As such, governance is a crucial issue in the context of promoting bio-economy.

First because bio-economy is supposed to aim at an optimal use of biological resources in a more sustainable and efficient manner: this means a re-organization of the strategies, and maybe also sometimes a change in the principles guiding public action and its implementation at various levels of decision. Deciding of a global strategy promoting bio-economy supposes some changes in policy, management, and also governance.

Second because bio-economy also promotes integration between various topics to be addressed (forest, environment, energy), thus needs to be conducted in an integrated manner. In this context, forest is far from being the only topic to be considered, and this gives a clear impulse towards a development of the interactions mentioned above as for the definition of the concept of governance.

This change in governance needs to be analyzed through the experience learnt so far considering the forestry sector.

3. Lesson 1: A very progressive process

A first lesson is that it appears impossible to completely change from a system to another one.

At the beginning of the story of the promotion of the concept of governance, there was a liberal vision aiming at replacing the main actor of forest policy, the State, by a supposed opposite paradigm which was found as the market. Whilst it re-defines the economic aspects in the discussion on sustainable development, bio-economy clearly appears in direct connection with this idea, as a new form of economy applied to natural resources. Replacing legal prescriptions by market mechanisms has been a recurrent discourse of the liberal conveners of the international dialogue on forests since the last 20 years at least. And the modalities to apply the model in the forestry field include the promotion of the rather new concept of bio-economy, as well as the one of "green economy" which is slightly different in definition.

However, as far as the decision-making modalities and styles are concerned, the reality came radically opposite to this idea of a complete transformation of the system. Instead of a replacement of a conventional rigid style of government by some new modes of governance that would be more flexible, the resilience of the institutional framework has led to absorb the changing tools for implementing forest policy into the same conventional structures. Certainly the type of policy, management and thus governance, have changed, but from inside, reacting to this external demand through a progressive adaptation. As a result of such a process, there was concretely a replacement of a form of government (analyzed as un-adapted) by a new form of government (and not of governance), deriving from the introduction of elements of governance in an initial system of government that was not basically transformed, leading to a mixed model that introduces modifications without changing the identity of the whole system of taking public decisions: something intermediate between government and governance.

Even in the framework of big changes introduced in the goals and strategic lines of forest policy resulting from a clear priority to bio-economy (which is not still the case, and even not in discussion presently), there would not be relevant modifications in the structure and organization destined to implement the related measures and mechanisms. A global strategy promoting bio-economy will not change the basis of the economic, institutional and regulatory framework, it will have to cope with it.

4. Lesson 2: Never without the stakeholders

The concept of governance clearly refers to a comprehensive group of criteria including efficiency, capacity, transparency and inclusion. Although all of those criteria are supposed to be taken into consideration together, a common ad conventional vision of what governance consists in usually restricts the analysis to the last one (inclusion), even most often limited to the participation of stakeholders to

decision making and implementing. For most analysts, the inclusion of actors in the process of managing public action is definitely enough for changing from the traditional (and still very present) top-down command-and-control system of government to a more modern and democratic one called "governance".

In the forestry field, the progressive transition from government to governance has worked as a slow introduction of participatory principles and approaches to decision making at various levels. In most of the cases, a passive consultation of the stakeholders has been promoted and convened by the State bodies in charge of the management of State-owned forests. The approach of consultation - where the decision makers asks for stakeholders' advice, without changing the modalities for taking decisions - has been privileged, slowly becoming a standard for sector policy and management. Certainly some attempts to go further, by discussing objectives and means in full negotiation with the actors and eventually leading to concrete partnerships in implementation, exist although still limited. However, a strategy for developing bio-economy, promoting for instance biotechnology products and services resulting from scientific researches and experiments, needs to be strongly discussed with the stakeholders and the public in order to get a sufficient accountability.

5. Lesson 3: State, the return

Whilst launching the discussion on good governance of the forest sector, the international donors and agencies were eventually searching for reducing the weight of State structures and institutions.

The idea was that those structures were working like a sort of screen between deciders and the people. State was considered as un-useful and even parasite, so that the good forest governance would be the one focusing on the market and directly responding to the demands coming from the real actors of the civil society, with the smallest possible State intervention.

Although opposite to what was initially expected, the promotion of good governance has concretely led to a spectacular return of State as the major actor in implementing forest policies. The reason for explaining such a paradox derives from the general conclusion, based on experience, that bad governance directly resulted from an absence of law-compliance: due to corruption, illegal practices for both production and trade of forest products had become structural characteristics of the public management of the forest sector, so that the first and main objective for promoting good governance was to assume first law-compliance. After voluntary and market-oriented certification schemes supposed once to provide the best instrument for promoting good management of the forests, the conventional regulation of production and trade have come back to be considered as a relevant solution. The EU FLEGT process and the related European control of timber imports give a good example of this

return of State as a central actor to improve the quality of the governance of the forest sector.

Although bio-economy, as any other form of economy, may be - in order to be sustainable - directly linked to market, there might be anyhow a need for a strong State intervention, especially as far as some ethical considerations are concerned (land to be devoted to energy production that may be concurrent to food production; cloning of plants and development of genetically modified organisms). In such a context, State may become a very central institutional driver of bio-economy, as both a producer of new models derived from scientific research, and a regulator of the best practices to be encouraged based on experience and in association with stakeholders. Partnership between public and private may become in such a context one of the best relevant strategies for promoting bio-economy in the forest sector.

6. Lesson 4: Monitoring is required

A fourth lesson learnt from the analysis of the development of governance in the forest field is that an assessment of its progresses is needed, because of the continuing changing context in which new modes of governance are moving. As governance is mainly concerned by the “how” and not the “what”, the use of indicators of means and systems is particularly relevant. In this regard, the principles, criteria and indicators commonly used to evaluate the ability to promote forest sustainable development, which are oriented towards technical and ecological aspects, are not enough. Progress towards a better governance of the forest sector has to be assessed with a rather specific approach including a set of derived corresponding referents: level of inclusion of stakeholders and the public in the process for decision-making and implementing, modalities and effectiveness of inter-sectoral co-ordination, development of multi-level interactions and related conclusions in terms of re-organization of the whole framework for decision making, level of accountability of expertise and inclusion in the participatory process, organization of the procedures and rules of the game for permanent follow-up and evaluation procedures. In addition, criteria and indicators of governance of forests should include ethical components which relate to various aspects, such as genetic manipulations or the weighting of economy in decisions.

7. Lesson 5: Does governance necessarily promote sustainability?

Opposite to what is asserted in most of the official and scientific declarations promoting governance, there might be a contradiction between this concept and sustainability. First, the 2 notions refer to different levels and positions in the decision making process: sustainability relates to policy objectives and strategic lines, and is both a goal and a principle for policy formulation, whilst governance, as an approach and procedure for a

set of means, is basically concerned with implementation.

It is quite possible that in some conditions, the objective of sustainability cannot be achieved through means of good governance, on the example of the inclusion of the users in a process of land use planning in a difficult ecological context: in the South of Morocco, the association of all farmers has not resulted in a better management of the argan agro-forestry park so far; as another example, the FLEGT mechanism and the associated EU Timber Regulation, which are supposed to verify the good governance of tropical timber imported in Europe, have led to a redirection of those exports towards uncontrolled markets (especially informal and Asiatic), countering the efforts recently done for promoting sustainable forest management in Central Africa. On the opposite, the free development of informal activities of harvesting and trade of forest products (some of them being completely illegal, and assimilated as a bad governance) has made possible a local reaction to a hard crisis which has resulted in a re-organization of land use and tenure gaining more sustainability in the long run. More generally speaking, in a context of global change (climatic, social), a good governance may lead the State and the stakeholders to privilege a style of management that reacts through adapting to various perturbations, instead of aiming at a theoretical equilibrium in a framework including ecological, social and economic components, as preconized by the search for sustainable forest development. Actions promoting SFM do not necessarily lead to better governance, and *vice-versa*.

8. Change of governance, governance of change

The introduction of bio-economy as a central goal in forest policy and management constitutes a change that will necessarily have incidences in terms of governance also. To be successful and sustainable, this change, in the same time it is a change of governance, needs to be in reaction mastered by the governance system in order to control change. Some conditions for a good governance of such a change are needed:

- Guide the change whilst minimizing the risks (*e.g.* avoid from manipulated biological material?);
- Make all changes in objectives, means and governance accepted, validated, adopted by the stakeholders included in the process of change (*e.g.* conduct systematic participatory studies of feasibility for new techniques and models?);
- Develop all possible linkages between public and private sectors (*e.g.* valorize public research in supporting relevant private activities in difficult economic context?);
- Support integrated research on both socio-economic and ecological mechanisms in order to be able to adapt to changes;
- Make business models and policy, institutional and regulatory frameworks more convergent;
- Connect permanently to final users and consumers.

If those conditions are met, the orientation towards bio-economy will not only benefit from good governance means and mechanisms, but it will provide the field and give an excellent occasion to develop good governance in the forest sector.

RIASSUNTO

Per una “migliore” governance del settore forestale

Dopo una breve presentazione del concetto di governance applicato al settore forestale, il documento si concentra su 5 aspetti: (1) il passaggio da forme convenzionali di governance a nuove modalità è un processo molto graduale; (2) l'integrazione dei soggetti interessati e del pubblico ai processi decisionali fornisce ancora la caratteristica principale dei sistemi di governance; (3) la riconsiderazione dell'importanza del ruolo tradizionale dello Stato; (4) il monitoraggio della governance richiede un quadro di valutazione specifica per il follow-up; (5) la governance non porta necessariamente alla sostenibilità (e viceversa).

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