



The role of formal institutions in forest decline: exploring institutional failure

Jim Yates¹, Laura Secco², and Francesco Carbone³

¹University of Padova, Italy (jim.yates@studenti.unipd.it)

²DEPARTMENT OF LAND, ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY (TESAF), University of Padova, Padova (laura.secco@unipd.it)

³DIPARTIMENTO PER LA INNOVAZIONE NEI SISTEMI BIOLOGICI, AGROALIMENTARI E FORESTALI (DIBAF), University of Tuscia, Viterbo (fcarbone@unitus.it)

Recent global efforts to reduce and abate forest declines i.e. deforestation, degradation and disturbance, forest ecosystems are extensive and well incentivised. Forests, however, remain as areas subject to competing resource objectives with complex socio-economic development paradigms and historical policy narratives. Indirect and direct causes forest decline are well cited across the literature. The concept that institutions are failing to secure positive outcomes for forest resources, however, is a somewhat new concept in resource management discourses. It is argued that formal institutions in forest management acting as developers, intermediaries, and the regulators of forest policy, having legitimized competency, are subject to meso-scale failure and in some circumstances contribute to forest decline. Adopting a mixed-method approach, application of a modified DPSIR framework, DPAESMR (Drivers-Policy-Actions-Effects-State Changes-Monitoring and Reporting) was combined with elements from the traditional policy cycle logic to develop a novel policy evaluation analysis tool or PEA. Using the PEA, analysis of classical literature and empirical experiences across four separate international and geographical case studies focused on formal institutions in forest management, their forest policy, actions and effects and are assessed against more recently reported state changes to respective forest resources, along with gaps in subsequent monitoring and reporting efforts. The analysis highlights land-use change and forest exploitation, intentional or not, demonstrates sustained losses in forest area, degradation processes and forest disturbance despite established/legitimized forest policy and robust formal institutional direction and support. Forest policy interpreted and derived from acts, laws and norms vary across all cases naturally, although, similar themes such as gaps in institutional regulation, enforcement and information, subsequently result in weak forest administration. Evidence of robust, reasonably well covered and incentivized formal forest institutions exist irrespaective of forest administrative area and have failed to address forest decline and is highlighted as meso-scale failure or institutional failure. Understanding traditional issues such as property rights, path-dependence or re-orientation may succeed in strengthening institutional adaptation to triggers, crises and abrupt policy changes which will aid the effort in slowing forest decline.

Keywords

Forest decline, Institutional failure, DPSIR, forest management, policy analysis