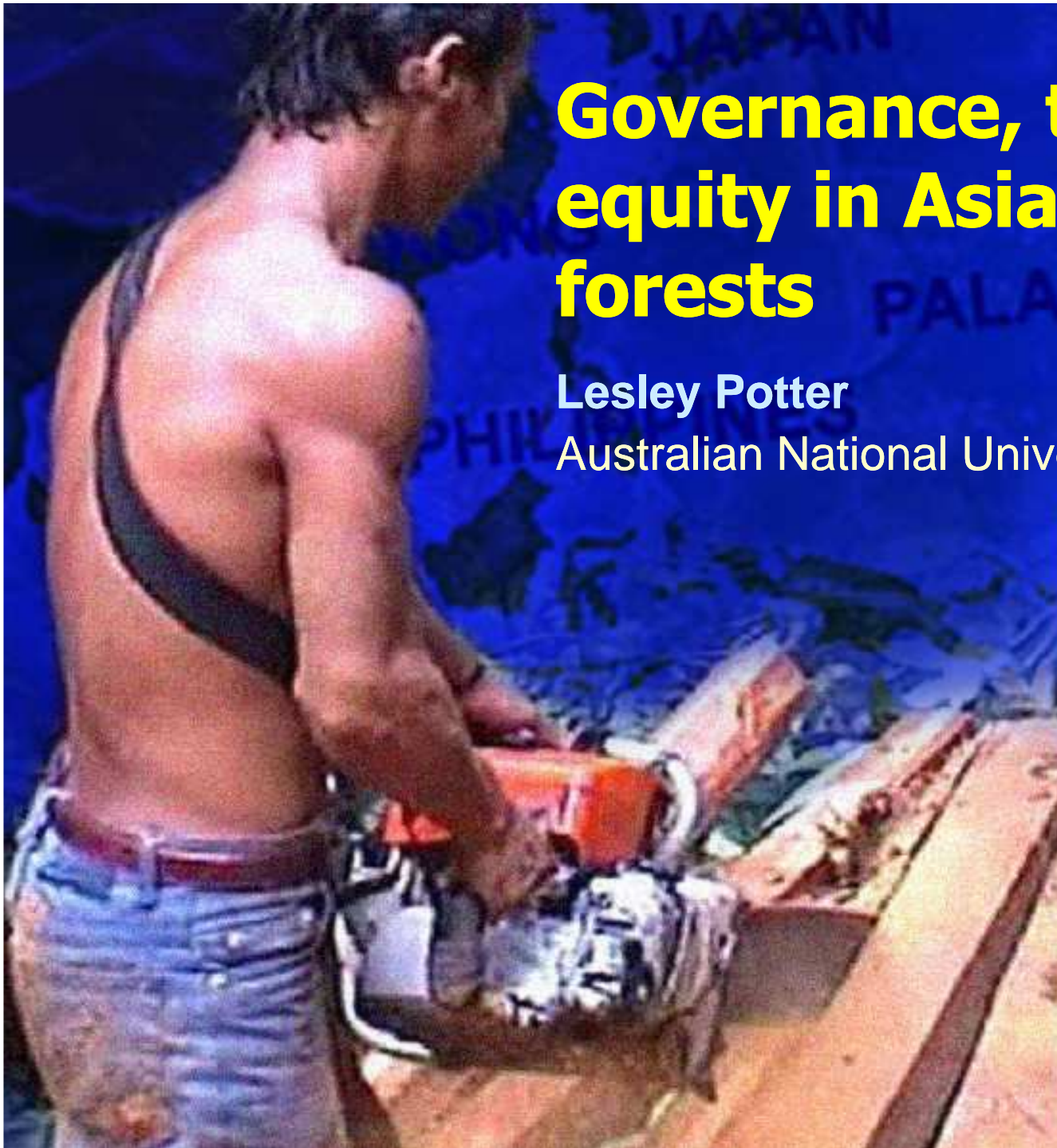# Governance, tenure and equity in Asia-Pacific forests

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This presentation has five sections:

1. Introduction: the state of the Asia-Pacific forests

2. Governance, decentralisation, devolution and accountability: the Asia-Pacific experience

3. Tenure, the critical factor:
   - who owns the forests?
   - tenure and forest fire
   - tenure and 'illegal' logging

4. Gender, caste and equity

5. Conclusion: 'traditional', 'old' and 'new' governance

The state of the Asia-Pacific forests

FAO has compiled a summary of the region's forests and their changes in the past five years (2000-2005)

- 'Forest' includes primary forest, woodland and tree plantations

- 'Forest' increased in China and Vietnam, mainly through plantation development

- Primary forest decreased very strongly in Indonesia and Papua-New Guinea and quite strongly in Cambodia and Vietnam; it increased in Japan

- Demand from China has been a major driver of forest change in Indonesia, Myanmar and PNG

Governance: devolution, decentralisation and accountability – the Asia-Pacific experience

Some definitions:

- Decentralisation: 'a relocation of administrative functions away from a central location'
- Devolution: 'the relocation of power away from a central location'
- Governance: 'powers and levels of decision-making and enforcement'
- While both decentralisation and devolution of some aspects of forest management have occurred widely in the past 15 years, powers of decision-making and enforcement have generally not really devolved to communities in the Asia-Pacific region

Inadequacies of devolution policies

- Community forestry has often been applied only to degraded areas
- Policies have focussed on limited objectives, such as restoring forest cover, controlling fires or protecting watersheds
- Communities have sometimes been allowed to plant trees, but not to extract and sell timber
- Only certain commercial species have been permitted or encouraged
- Locals prefer fuelwood, fodder, medicinal or food producing species

A woman carries tree seedlings

India's Joint Forest Management (JFM) programs have been accused of using local people as cheap labour

Nepal's Forest User Groups (FUGs) were one example of the devolution of significant control to local communities, though the scheme's extension from the Middle Hills (left) to the valuable tropical forests of the Terai (right) has not been as successful.

In Sichuan Province, China, the government supports joint ventures between local companies and cooperatives for plantation establishment and forest regeneration

Marginal farmland is converted back to forest. Households are permitted to sell the trees they grow

First timber harvested from a replanted forest of pines and Chinese fir.

Tenure: the critical factor

Who owns the forests?

- In 7 selected countries of Asia and the Pacific, government forest ownership varies markedly.

- It reaches 100% in Myanmar and 99.4 % in Indonesia, but is only 45% in China and 3% in Papua-New Guinea

- In India government reserves 16% of the forests for community or indigenous groups

- 55% of China's forests are privately owned by local communities or households

The legal recognition in the Philippines (1997) of <u>ancestral domain rights</u> over more than 1/3 of the former public forest represents a triumph for the indigenous communities, despite difficulties in implementation.

However, traditional ownership in PNG (and in Indonesian West Papua) has had its problems, as unscrupulous firms have taken advantage of peoples' limited negotiating skills and experience, while promised benefits are seldom realised.
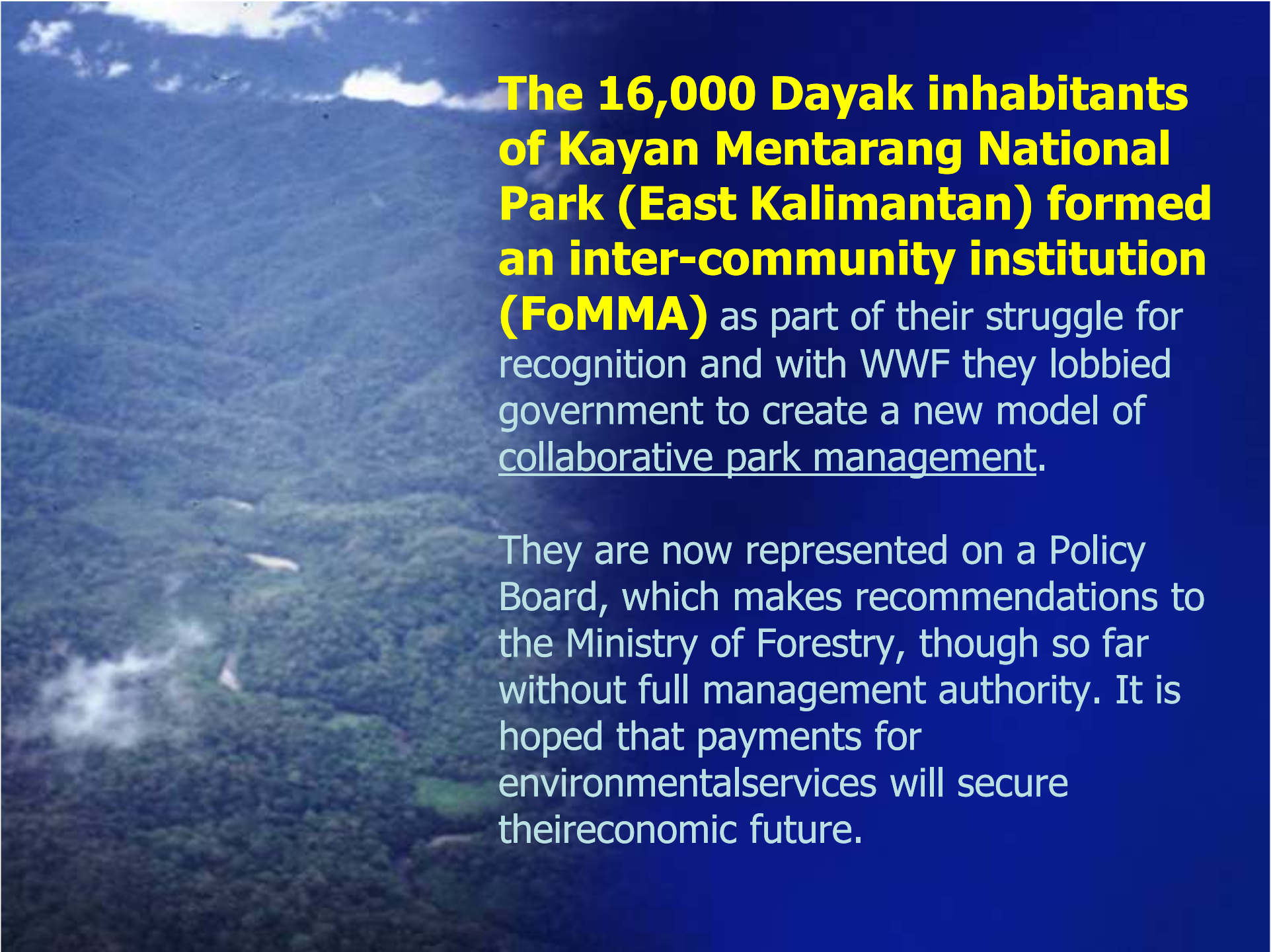
Key elements of tenure security

- Effective community institutions (sometimes including more than one village)

- Clear and enforced rules and resource boundaries

- Community mapping of resources

- Public education and lobbying (often by NGOs)

- Willingness to take advantage of 'critical turning points' when conditions improve

Community mapping, while it may cause boundary disputes with neighbours, is an important means of fighting outside claims to village lands and supplying evidence of village rights to resources.

Krui damar trees (*Shorea javanica*), a famous example of an indigenous agroforest, which was eventually protected by law from logging and oil palm interests.

The 16,000 Dayak inhabitants of Kayan Mentarang National Park (East Kalimantan) formed an inter-community institution (FoMMA) as part of their struggle for recognition and with WWF they lobbied government to create a new model of collaborative park management.

They are now represented on a Policy Board, which makes recommendations to the Ministry of Forestry, though so far without full management authority. It is hoped that payments for environmentalservices will secure theireconomic future.

Tenure in the battle against forest fire

- Forest fire and tenure status are closely linked
- In CIFOR/ICRAF studies of fires across Sumatra and Kalimantan, land tenure and land use conflict were most significant causes of fire
- Fire was used as a weapon in battles between villagers and companies over land
- Traditional fire-fighting systems disappear when government takes over land previously in village control

Tenure and illegal logging

- Illegal logging has increased greatly in the past decade in several Asia/Pacific countries, e.g. Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia

- In Indonesia, processing capacity and demand for timber far outweigh the legal supply, so most is 'illegal'. It varies from small-scale and local to highly organised international timber smuggling

- At village level, peoples' rights in their traditional forests are not recognised: they often depend on illegal logging to survive

- In Vietnam most households have no forest lands, so they meet their forest product needs illegally

Below, Sumatran villagers log forest in a nearby park, which they claim as their traditional territory

Above, ramin, a softwood, is smuggled to Sarawak from Kalimantan

Bicycle logging, a simple way to move timber out of the forest for export from West Kalimantan to Java

Gender, caste and equity

Gender and equity issues: often overlooked.

- Decentralisation will not by itself ensure that men and women are represented equally
- The revival of traditional values may pose greater challenges for women
- Women (and those of lower castes or lower social status) are more often illiterate or in poverty
- Participation by women in forest management groups is often either nominal or entirely absent
- Women do most of the protection work in the forests and are highly dependent on collection of forest resources

- Arora-Jonsson (2005) concluded that Indian women, though unable to speak out about their forest activities, often preferred to work through their own institutions

- Women's savings and credit groups enabled them to carry out collective activities, such as tree planting

- Women also took on activist roles, participating in marches and blockades and at times challenging both illegal loggers and the Forestry Department

Women gather leaves and other food products from community forests in Orissa, India

Gender and key objectives of community forestry

- Three key objectives are: a pro-poor orientation, promotion of democratic institutions and maintenance of healthy ecosystems

- In Nepal, the District Forest Officer (DFO) is seen as the keeper of superior 'scientific' knowledge, given to the village through the high caste male elite

- Adoption of 'scientific' forest practices is used by the men to curry favour with the DFO, though these practices may be unsuitable for community forestry

- As in India, women do most forest work and have most forest knowledge

Women were able to challenge the elite men through their practical understanding of the forest. They prevented the men from introducing permits for collection of firewood and leaf litter, harvested almost daily. The management techniques promoted were for production of timber, not multi-species subsistence harvesting as needed by the village.

A multi-species village forest versus a forest specialising in timber production

Marginalised groups are still able to fight back against a social system which is slow to change. There are examples in Nepal of women who have taken over the management of FUGs from men. Aid agencies helped in providing literacy and management training for women, even in remote districts. Unfortunately the Maoist problem has recently disrupted such training.

Conclusion

'Traditional', 'old' and 'new' governance and the Asia Pacific forests

- 'Traditional' forms of governance used to exist widely, in which communities managed their forests according to their own rules. These forms still exist in districts remote from government influence.

- 'Old' governance refers to a top-down approach, popular from colonial times, in which central governments developed policy based on 'scientific forestry' and their forestry departments implemented it.

- 'New' governance is a more democratic approach emphasising collaboration and inter-dependence between the state and civil society and including measures of decentralisation and devolution.

'Traditional', 'old' and 'new' governance and the Asia Pacific forests (continued)

- Decentralisation can destabilise traditional systems without offering useful alternatives.

- Sometimes remnants of the 'old' governance systems remain, as in India and Nepal. Corruption and enrichment of local elites is another scenario, especially in Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia.

- Intermediaries such as NGOs are needed until local institutions can negotiate with stakeholders on an equal basis, together with legislation ensuring representative gender membership of forest management committees.

- There is zeal for real devolution of power to forest communities, who will be satisfied with nothing less

Thank you