REGIONAL MODEL FOREST NETWORK ASIA

REGIONAL MODEL FOREST NETWORK, ASIA

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020–2024

International Model Forest Network

VISION

To enhance Asia's forests and other ecosystem services at the landscape level to sustainably meet stakeholder needs and values.

OVERVIEW

Forests and forest-dependent communities do not function in isolation. Inside or adjacent to forests the world over we find farms, rivers, towns, businesses, protected areas and other sectors competing for limited resources. For this reason, participatory and integrated approaches to managing forest landscapes is today fully accepted as necessary in any attempt to balance the social, economic and environmental trade-offs needed for sustainable development. This is the rationale behind the Model Forest approach.

Central to a Model Forest is a multi-stakeholder group representing the different social, political and economic actors in a given area. This includes government agencies, academic and research institutions, industry, civil society, non-government organizations and others who voluntarily work together to define what sustainability means in their own context and then create an inclusive governance structure and plan to collectively realize their sustainability goals.

The Regional Model Forest Network for Asia (RMFN-Asia) was originally established as an informal network in 2000 through funds provided by the Government of Japan and coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). We are a regional initiative of the International Model Forest Network (IMFN).

Today, with two decades of experience in partnership building, we know what it takes to "get people to the table" and how to change the way we view and use our natural resources.

This document outlines the key issues we aim to address over the next five years and how we intend to address them in partnership with others.

A Model Forest is a process — not a project

We provide technical support to our members; capacity building for good governance so that even the most marginalized stakeholders can have a voice in the decisions that affect them; foster relationships (local to global) to encourage knowledge sharing and understanding; develop tools for enhanced collaboration, and; conduct regional level advocacy and outreach.

Six Model Forest Principles

IMFN Principles and Attributes

1 Partnership

Each model forest is a neutral forum that welcomes voluntary participation of representatives of stakeholder interests and values on the landscape

Model forest stakeholders represent diverse values and interests from various sectors of society who work towards a common vision for the sustainable management of the area

The model forest aims at having representatives from the public, private and volunteer sectors, community organizations, academia and research institutions involved in its activities

Involvement in all aspects of governance in the model forest is voluntary and inclusive

No discrimination against groups or individuals exists within the model forest partnership

2 Landscape

A large-scale biophysical area representing a broad range of forest values, including social, cultural, economic and environmental concerns

The natural resources in the model forest are recognized by the stakeholders in social, cultural, economic and ecological terms

The model forest has a geographically defined area encompassing diverse ecosystems, resource management administrations and tenure arrangements

Forest and other natural resources provide communities with a range of goods, services and values

The model forest is a working landscape reflective of the diverse interests and values of the stakeholders and the uses of the area's natural resources

3 Commitment to Sustainability

Stakeholders are committed to the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources and the forested landscape

Sustainable management practices promote the generation and equitable distribution of economic and social benefits derived from natural resources

Model forests foster economic growth and diversification aimed at sustainable community development

Model forests promote innovative mechanisms for pursuing the sustainable management of natural resources within a framework of just and equitable distribution of costs and benefits

Model forests support actions for maintaining ecological integrity on a landscape

Model forests explore and promote practices that contribute to maintaining and/or restoring the ecological integrity of the landscape

4 Governance

The model forest management process is representative, participative, transparent and accountable, and promotes collaborative work among stakeholders

Stakeholders work together using consensus-based processes to attain the model forest's vision and objectives

A vision for the sustainable management of the landscape and its natural resources is developed jointly by the stakeholders

The model forest is a forum for exploring options to effectively address natural resource management conflicts

The actions of the model forest are governed by principles of trust, transparency and collaborative decision-making, while respecting various interests and values

Clear policies, procedures and practices are in place for stakeholders to express their views and influence decision-making

The model forest has a structure that is transparent and accountable, sets priorities and manages activities effectively

Committees, staffing or other executive mechanisms for developing and implementing activities are in place

5 Program of Activities

The activities undertaken by a model forest are reflective of the model forest's vision and stakeholder needs, values and management challenges

Model forest management processes include effective planning and monitoring systems

A strategic plan, with a program of activities reflective of stakeholder needs, values and issues, considers national forest programme objectives and other plans developed by broader jurisdictions

Practical mechanisms for implementing and monitoring the strategic plan are in place

Model forests facilitate innovation in the sustainable management of natural resources

Model forests facilitate and promote research and the implementation of new and innovative ideas, processes, approaches and techniques in the sustainable management of natural resources

Model forest planning processes make use of the best available traditional and scientific knowledge

The model forest process generates information and synthesizes knowledge that informs local and national policy-making and global sustainability initiatives

6 Knowledge-sharing, Capacity Building and Networking

Model forests build stakeholder capacity to engage in the sustainable management of natural resources, and collaborate and share results and lessons learned through networking

Model forests contribute to local and national capacity building in the sustainable management of natural resources

Model forests undertake and promote training and mentorship activities

Model forest communication and outreach activities have demonstrable influence on stakeholders and the general public

Model forests exchange experiences and lessons learned with other model forests and organizations

Model forests share their achievements and lessons learned nationally, regionally and internationally using various activities and approaches

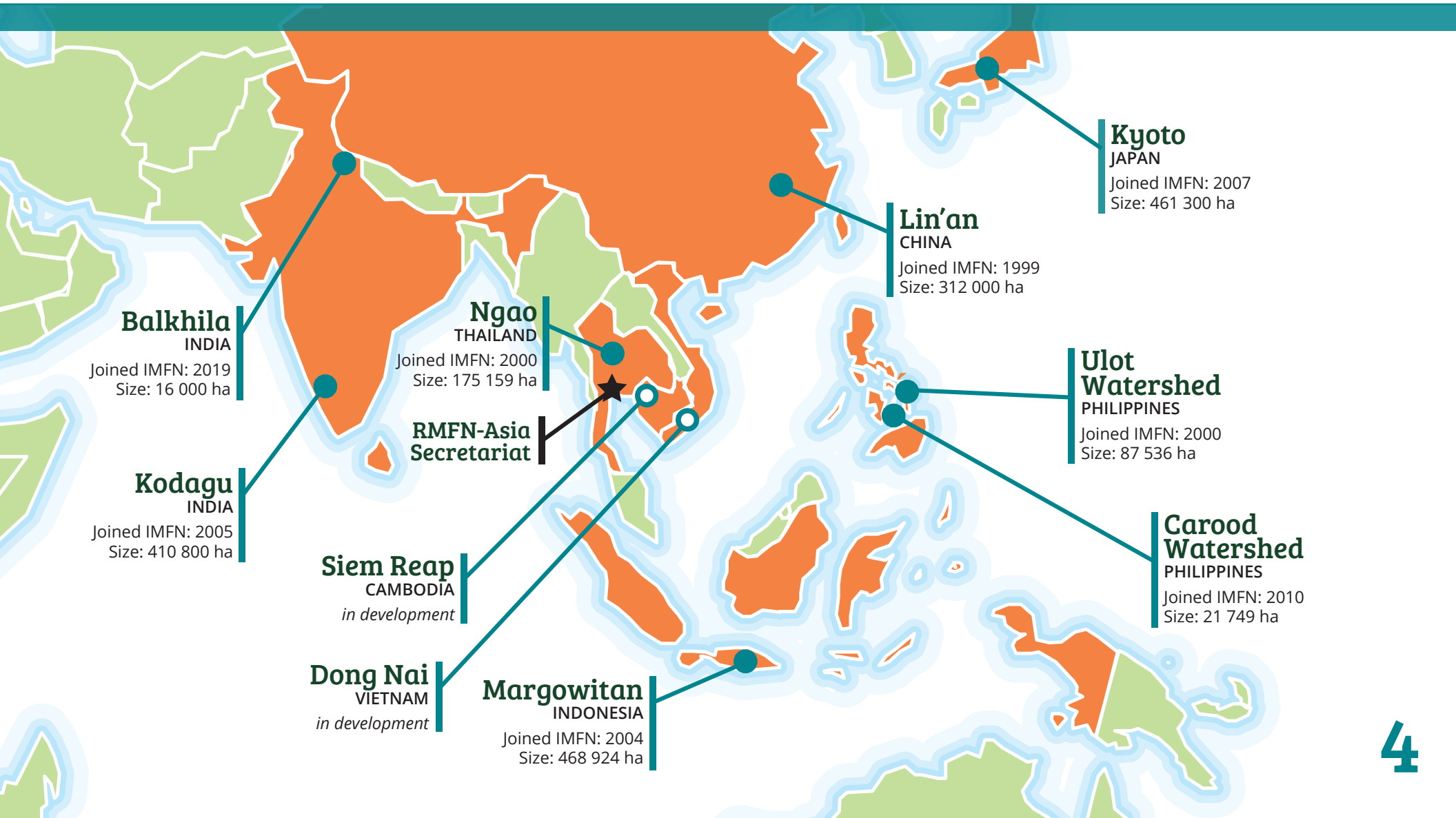
Model forests develop and participate in networking activities

Model forests engage in collaborative activities with other model forests

Model forests participate in activities and governance structures aimed at strengthening national, regional and international model forest networks

WHO WE ARE

The RMFN-Asia is an initiative that brings people together to help them sustainably manage their landscapes. These landscapes include forests, but also farms, rivers, towns, mountains, protected areas and other features important to peoples' lives and livelihoods.



OUR FOCAL AREAS

We aim to influence forest policy and practice by encouraging or leading on activities associated with the six inter-related focal areas below. These focal areas represent broad categories of work that have been identified as priorities for most members. They are not applicable to all members at all times as Model Forest stakeholders decide on programs of work based on local context.

Our work also directly contributes to implementation of a number of globally and regionally significant commitments, such as the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2030, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Paris Agreement and the APEC Sydney Declaration.

1. Poverty Alleviation, Livelihoods and Food Security

Model Forests have proven to be effective at addressing the social side of sustainability. Over the next five years, we will provide opportunities for our local stakeholders to assess alternatives and find appropriate trade-offs between the economic and non-economic values of their natural resources to ensure a balance between conservation and development. We will promote a variety of sustainable revenue sources to decrease forest dependent people's vulnerability and increase incomes. We will also demonstrate participatory and integrated approaches to managing landscapes to ensure the benefits of forests are considered in food security planning.

Model Forests include the active involvement of people with legal authority over the land base, thereby offering an opportunity for traditionally marginalized groups — such as women and indigenous peoples — to influence decisions and policies. We will therefore also offer to serve as a forum for discussing land-use and access issues that impact people's livelihoods and food security. With our partners, we will seek to provide innovative research and extension services, and new technologies; enable policies, and; mobilize the resources needed to attain this goal.

2. Forest Restoration and Biodiversity Conservation

We will support processes to halt deforestation, restore forest lands, improve forest quality, reverse the loss of biodiversity, and reduce conversion to other land uses by building awareness and capacity for integrated community-based natural resource management.

We will continue to advocate for and undertake landscape restoration, the sustainable harvesting and use of non-timber forest products and discourage timber poaching by encouraging alternative economic development models.

3. Water Security

As "models" of sustainability, our members are best seen as leading on cost-effective initiatives where experimentation with innovative land management policies and practices can take place over the long term to address issues related to inefficient land and water use, water scarcity and pollution across Asia.

Within the next five years, we will work with stakeholders and governments to build capacity for developing and implementing water management plans for access to clean water and a reliable water supply. We will test methods for implementing ecosystem goods and services (EGS) programs in order to protect water quality and supply, and create economic opportunities for rural communities. This work links to our goals on forest cover, poverty alleviation and food security.

4. Landscape Governance

Our past experience has found that natural resource management objectives are most effective and attainable when stakeholders are fully involved in the decision-making process. We will use the strengths of the Model Forest approach to demonstrate principles of good governance and create practical solutions to improve decision-making, address the underlying issues related to illegal or unsustainable activities, and build capacity for forest conservation. We will operate throughout the landscape to demonstrate that food security, livelihoods, cultural values and conservation priorities are not mutually exclusive when a good governance system is in place.

5. Climate Change

As ready-made living laboratories, we aim to serve as platforms for monitoring and testing responses to changing conditions on the landscape. We will facilitate the free flow of information between policy makers, communities, practitioners and researchers to promote national and transnational dialogue and collaboration on the vulnerability of local communities to climate change. Through community level planning and capacity building we will work to help mitigate and adapt to a changing climate.

6. Gender Equity and Equality

Gender inequality affects land, forests, livelihoods, education, technology and other key aspects of life. While inclusiveness is a key principle of a Model Forest, we recognize that we can improve representation of women and girls in our decision-making processes and programming. Better results mean increased well-being for both women and men, and the creation of a more sustainable society.

Our network will complete the development of a gender strategy and action plan, which aims to contribute to the process of institutionalization and mainstreaming of a gender approach in all of Asia's Model Forests.

IMPLEMENTATION — BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

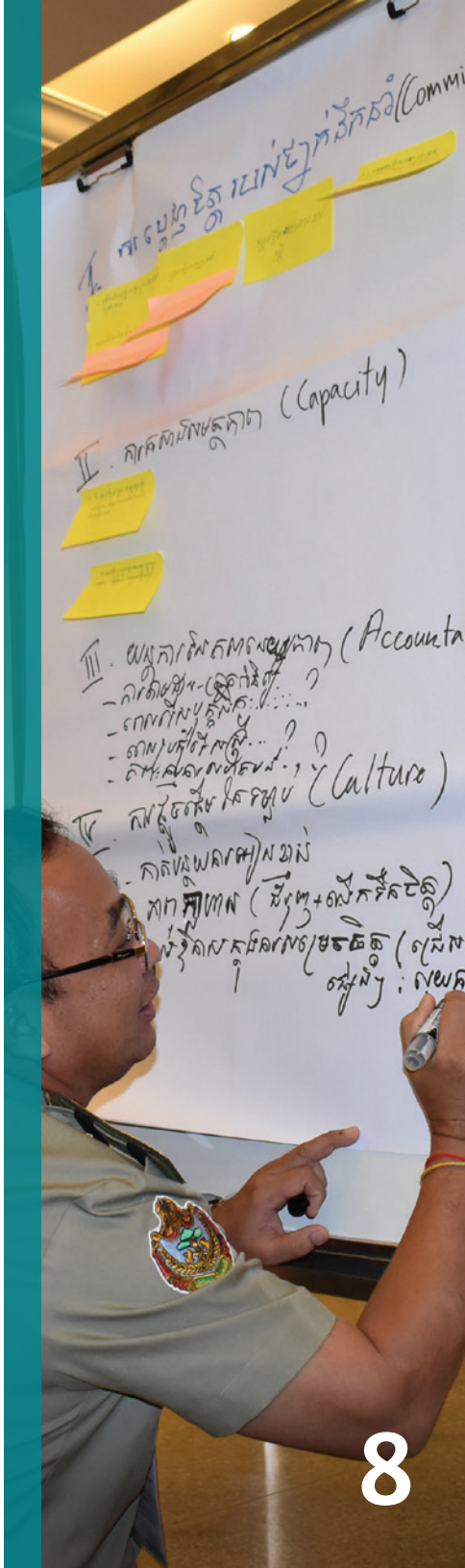
We have the expertise required for implementing landscape-level natural resource management, beginning with changing how people think and interact with each other. We will continue to build on our strengths and pursue new paths towards implementation as directed by our members in four areas: capacity building, networking and knowledge sharing, promotion of the landscape approach, and research.

Capacity Building & Advocacy

The success of Model Forests involves effective landscape planning to ensure that development interventions contribute to stakeholder needs and values. To ensure those needs are met, stakeholders must be involved in the process. Yet people do not always know how best they can contribute in a meaningful way. Participation is a process of bringing together diverse stakeholders as well as requires a range of skills, tools and techniques, and capacities to adequately perform their roles. We want to continue to build engagement capacity at the local, regional and national levels to enable greater benefits and engagement from Model Forest participation.

Networking & Knowledge Sharing

We aim to act as an information hub and play an active role in facilitating networking among participating countries, national and regional agencies, and internationally by promoting knowledge sharing through online tools, participating in meetings and events and seeking joint research, publishing and project opportunities with partner organizations.



Policy Influence & Promotion of the Landscape Approach

Increasing awareness is an effective way to encourage the application of an integrated approach to managing landscapes both within and beyond the Model Forest boundaries. Bridging the theory and practice of the participatory governance models required to manage at a landscape scale crucial.

We will therefore advocate, demonstrate and promote the Model Forest approach at the local, national and regional levels as a means for raising awareness of the importance of good governance, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, as well as how to actually implement it.

Through strategic and targeted outreach we will strive to develop an understanding of the Model Forest approach among policy makers, practitioners, and partners to broaden application of participatory governance and influence policy.

Research, Technology Transfer and Innovation

In a Model Forest, research partners may undertake studies on the biophysical aspects of forests and the surrounding environment, but equally important is an understanding of the social side of sustainability. Model Forests offer stakeholders a chance to learn by doing and then act based on their own capabilities (learning by doing or adaptive management). The more knowledge that is generated, the more capacity is built and practical processes emerge.

We will continue to play a coordination role to inspire research and compile information from ongoing studies in Model Forests in Asia. We will also commit to sharing results freely with members and supporters in order to “speed up” sustainability processes elsewhere.

HOW WE WORK

The RMFN–Asia is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors represented by each member country. The Board is responsible for providing strategic direction to the regional secretariat, promoting the Model Forest approach, networking between sites, membership and other major decisions.

Established in 2010, the RMFN-Asia Secretariat based at the Royal Forest Department of Thailand supports the day-to-day operations of the regional network, facilitates knowledge sharing, coordinates meetings, and maintains regional communications. The Secretariat works closely with the IMFN Secretariat in Ottawa, Canada.

As a network, we operate based on the following principles:

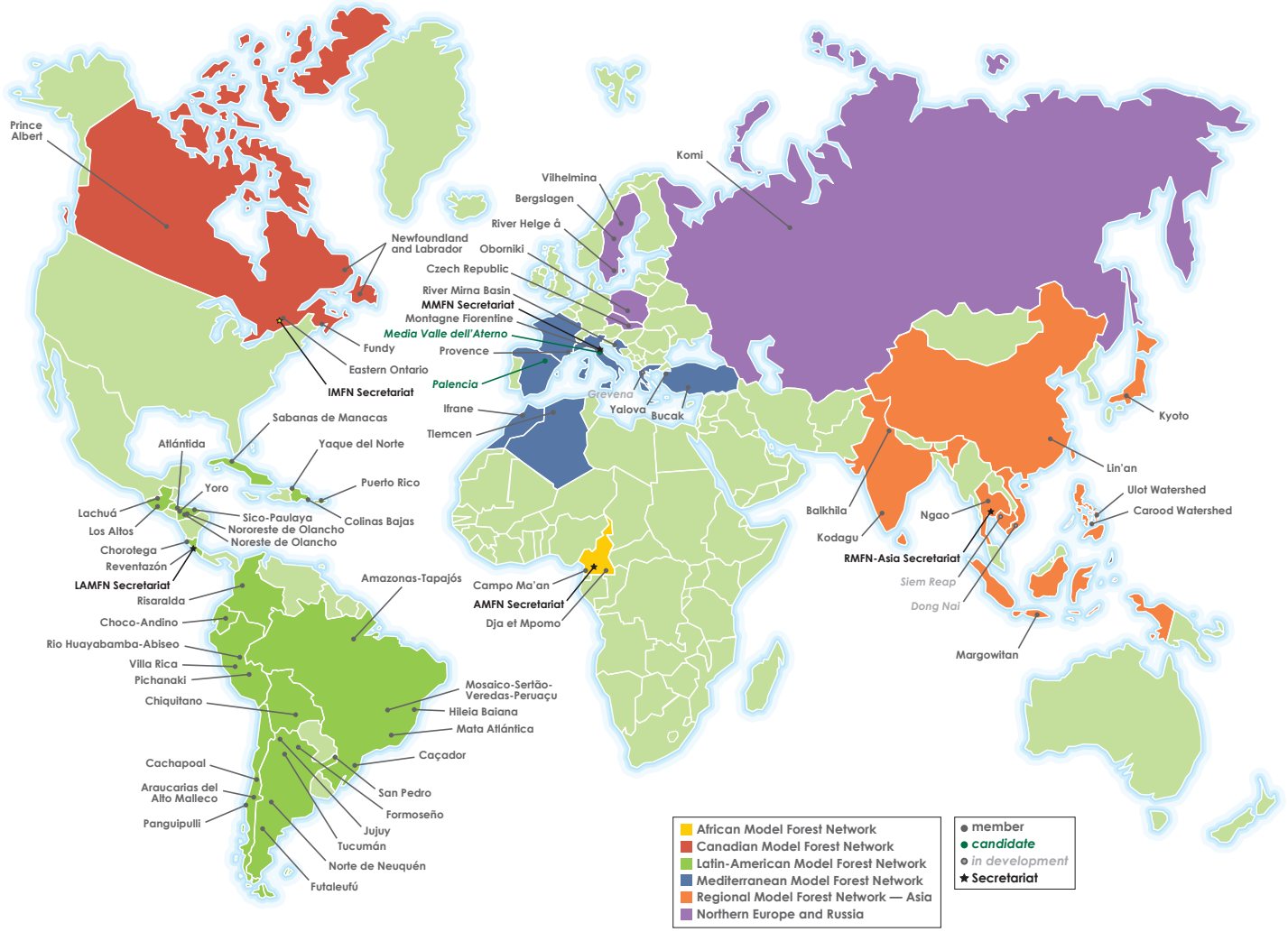
1) Creating transparency and accountability for members
2) Building on partnerships
3) Cost-sharing
4) Consensus building
5) Equitability in decision making and resource allocation
6) Unity in diversity
7) Respect differences of values, political, culture, social and economic conditions
8) Priority given to the sustainable management of forests and natural resources

PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

We have set ambitious goals and can only achieve them in partnership with others. We strive to work more effectively as we continue to evaluate how best to support stakeholders on the ground while also responding to global challenges. We will continue to provide a forum where marginalized people and communities will have access to decision-makers and put forward sustainable solutions to the challenges they face. New and existing partnerships will be crucial in our endeavours.

New members and partners are always welcome!
For more information, please visit our website at rmfnasia.org.

Model Forests were first developed in Canada in the early 1990's to advance the sustainable management of forest-based landscapes and other natural resources. Since that time, more than 60 model forests have been established in 30 countries around the world, making the IMFN the world's largest experiment in sustainable natural resource governance at a landscape scale.



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IMFN website: **www.imfn.net**

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