

A Communication Approach on the Ukrainian Forest



Foreword

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Background and Problem Analysis

Introduction

There is a growing interest in how communication can support the goal fulfilment and generally increase efficiency in development processes. Communication is in this context defined as “a tool to create participation, to achieve objectives and to contribute to dialogue and good quality”. (1. Sida’s Communications Policy, 2002.)

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study, in collaboration with the Europe Department and the Information Department at Sida, is:

- To analyse the communication aspects of the existing Sida financed UFSMP project in the Ukrainian forest sector, prior to possible support of the next phase of the project.
- Propose communication measures in regard to possible support of the next phase of the project.

Methodological approach

The activities have been conducted in cooperation with staff from the Europe and Information Departments at Sida. To achieve the established goals and taking into account the complexity of communication in the Ukrainian forest sector, the work has entailed:

- In depth interviews with Swedish consultants with expert knowledge of the Ukrainian forest sector, Ukrainian forest researchers, Ukrainian and Russian journalists with expert knowledge of the political agenda, representatives from Ukrainian civil society and Sida officials.
 - Reviewing of Sida reports, Swedish consultants’ papers, other donor reports, international and Ukrainian research papers and news articles on the forest sector and political set up in Ukraine.

Around 30 fact-finding interviews were held with key players and stakeholders and 35 documents were reviewed, which form the basis for the formulation of a strategy that will enable Sida to support the communication process in the Ukrainian forest sector.

The approach used here to analyse communication possibilities within the Ukrainian forest sector is generally known as the *Arena Approach*. The

method is based on visualizing different “arenas” and describing the players on these arenas and their relationships. The approach has taken inspiration from the methodology of the French sociologist Pierre Bordieu.

Communication problems in the UFSMP-project

The Sida Ukrainian Forestry Sector Master Plan (UFSMP I and II) has been directed at the national level, at the State Committee of Forestry (SCF), as well as at the local level at the Leskhozoes (local forest management bodies). At the national level the aim has been to contribute to and support the on-going review of forest legislation, to develop a national forest policy and to reorganise institutions for the State forest management and forest authorities. All these issues have a high political significance and imply far-reaching reforms.

To put these reforms into effect, strong support is required from the top political level as well as from higher officials within the SCF. During UFSMP II, there have been clear political obstacles towards any progress in the modernisation of forest legislation, national forest policy or institutional development. The partner in Ukraine has been the State Committee of Forestry and associated partners Teterev and Vyshe-Dubechansky leskhozoes. The Swedish consultant has been Ramboll Natura AB.

Analysis of Communication in the Ukrainian Forest Sector

General background and political context

Economy

The Ukrainian economy has been rapidly growing since 2000. The GDP per capita was 970 USD a year according to World Bank figures 2003. Unemployment is rampant, especially in the rural areas where industries around the Kolkhozes (farming communes) have fallen apart. Corruption is a major problem in all sectors.

Elections

After massive popular protests the presidential elections of 2004 were clearly won by Victor Yushchenko, whose winning strategy was based on a strong alliance between civil society and the political parties opposed to the former President, creating a platform for a new kind of society. As a result of this strategy, political analysts agree that Yushchenko's victory creates conditions for a true shift of power in Ukraine. "The orange revolution" will end the post-Soviet era in Ukraine and could be the beginning of the end of the widespread corruption in Ukrainian politics, starting a process where Ukraine moves towards a state based on the rule of law.

Media

Many Ukrainian media outlets are privately owned, even though the government and authorities still have a great deal of influence over the media. The Kuchma government has seen censorship and the closure of several opposition papers. Several journalists investigating high-profile crimes have died in mysterious circumstances. Journalist Georgiy Gongadze disappeared in 2000 and his body was found and eventually identified a year later. In 2003 the media watchdog Reporters Without Borders noted that physical attacks on investigative journalists had increased "alarmingly".

During the protests that followed the presidential elections in 2004, journalists at the state-run TV rejected the network's usual pro-government line. For the first time in years, balanced opposition views were aired.

Oligarchs and corruption

There are several economic groups within Ukraine who have gained enormous wealth after the Soviet collapse. Political connections are vital

for any economic outcome. Oligarchs control all but one of the main television stations and influence heavily for instance finance and steel.

Changing laws in Ukraine has historically been very difficult. Quoting an article on lobby groups in *Invest-Gazeta* by Serhiy Vovk, “Parliamentary lobbying. Sometimes corridors end in a wall”: “One major company has told Invest-Gazeta that lobbying for an “ordinary” law costs between 1 million and 15 million dollars, while the adoption of an individual “privatisation” law will knock you back by a considerably larger sum.”

Tensions

The election highlighted tensions between different groups within and around Ukraine:

- *Tension between Ukrainians and Russians living in Ukraine.* A significant minority of the population of Ukraine are Russians or use Russian as their first language. Many Russians do not speak Ukrainian, which is the official language. Russian influence is particularly strong in the industrialised east of the country, as well as in the Crimea. However, during the first time after the election the key word has been reconciliation among the two groups.
- *Tension between the new administration and oligarchs.* There are high expectations that Yushchenko will deal with corruption. He has during his campaign vowed to “end corruption” and send “bandits” to jail, referring to the *oligarchs* and corrupt politicians. All *oligarchs* seem to initially have tried to prevent change, as they have vested their power in a form of status quo, constraining development. When the winds started to blow in favour of Yushchenko, the *oligarchs* one by one shifted to support him, as it became increasingly more obvious that he would become Ukraine’s new President.
- *Tension between East and West.* Yushchenko is more western oriented while his opponent Yanukovich was strongly supported by Russia. The international rhetoric surrounding the elections brought back memories from the cold war and many observers were surprised by the wholehearted support Russia gave Yanukovich. To lower these tensions, President Yushchenko has chosen to visit Russia as the first foreign country to assure the Russian administration that it wishes to continue its good relations with Russia.

Characteristics of the forest sector from a communication perspective

To describe the forest sector from a communication perspective, the most feasible approach seems to be to describe what the forest sector is NOT.

Not specific compared to other sectors

Possibilities of solving communication problems cannot be found within a hypothesis that the forest sector is positively different from other sectors. On the contrary, the forest sector is one of the sectors where Soviet structures have prevailed. The sector is relatively intact after the breakaway from the Soviet Union. It is hard to find a sector where domination from state structures is as complete and where modern management and

legislation is as scarce. The consequence is that the forest sector is probably one of the most difficult areas in Ukraine to induce political and economic change.

Not submitted to supply and demand driven processes

Compared with the agriculture sector, where supply and demand driven processes are taking place and where institutional and legal change have taken place, there are no signs of any such development in the forest sector. Demand is totally controlled by the State and is not subjected to competition. Neither is there at present any large pulp industry in Ukraine that would put pressure on change in legislation to make it more suitable for supply and demand driven processes.

Not economically important

Despite having a large potential the forest sector does not presently constitute an important sector of the Ukrainian economy even though forestry and woodworking have considerable importance in the Western and Central regions. At the national level, the forest sector contributes to no more than three per cent of GNP. Furthermore, it is dominated by obsolete technical resources and by organisational structures inherited from the Soviet Union era that are apparently counterproductive. The consequence is that political and economic players do not prioritise issues related to forestry. The situation can be described as a frozen moment, where all players patiently await political change while safeguarding their power positions.

Not overexploited

The problem is not overexploitation of forests as, for example, is the case in parts of Russia. Once again, the situation is exactly the opposite. Ukraine has more forest reserves than any other European country and the political elite continues to establish even more reserves at a rapid pace. One consequence is that the economic potential that the forest offers is not taken care of. Another consequence is that NGOs do not engage in the issue, as the forest sector does not pose an environmental problem. Once again a comparison can be made to Russia, where national and international environmental NGOs have played a vital role in bringing about change in the forest sector. The lack of engaged NGOs in Ukraine prevents sustainable forest management.

Forest legislation is not isolated from other legislative processes

The forest law depends on numerous other legal acts and in particular on legislation addressing civil administration, land use, natural resources and nature conservation. All these legislations have a complicated structure and are interrelated. A process of high interest is the formulation of the New Land Code, which in many aspects constitutes the basis for all issues concerning land. The key issue in most of these aspects of land legislation is land ownership and structures to induce a demand-driven economy. All these processes have one thing in common: without political there will be no change. Compared with other legislative systems, once again the Forest Code that regulates the forest sector is among the most obsolete and inefficient. The consequence is that it is not possible to develop forest legislation *per se* without reforming other legislative systems.

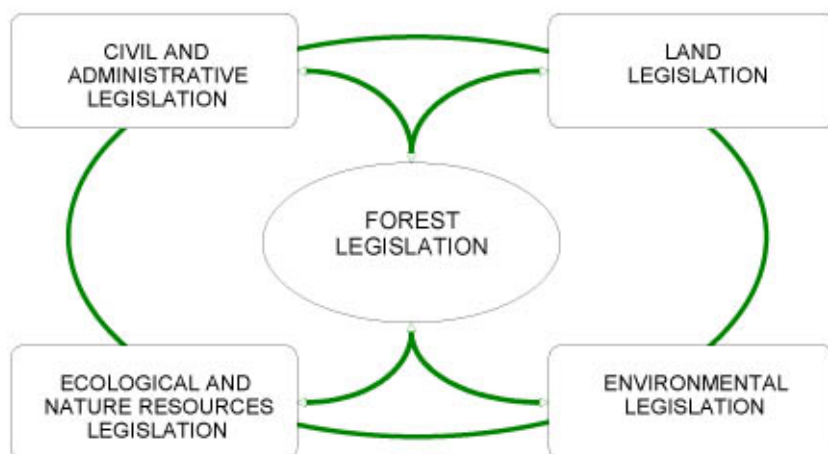


Fig 1: Forest legislation in a wider perspective

Situation not caused by individuals

Compared with, for instance, the Baltic Countries, where a clear change in the political elite has taken place, the Ukrainian political system is still in many parts conserved from the time of the Soviet System. In the Baltic Countries, from where the UFSMP has taken much inspiration, the political elite is devoted to changing the system, while in Ukraine the main purpose is to use the present system for personal benefit. In a similar situation concerning the forest sector in a Baltic country, one possible strategy would be to define the pockets of resistance to change and focus on measures to clear the obstacles in these groups. But this is not a feasible approach in the Ukrainian forest sector because the entire system has so far mainly been about preventing change.

The consequence is that a political change at the top is necessary to make way for change in the forest sector and even if this occurs, pockets of resistance will remain due to the orthodoxy of the forest sector.

The Ukrainian forest sector seen as a communication arena

The general difficulty in the sector with regard to communication is to find mechanisms that pressure decision-makers to modernise and rationalise the forest sector in order to generate economic growth and find ways of reducing poverty, particularly in rural areas and smaller towns and villages.

The approach used in this study into the feasibility of such an attempt is called *The Arena Perspective*. In brief, the approach consists of visualising an “arena”, in this case the forest sector in Ukraine, depicting the various players on this arena and reviewing their relationships. In this case, it is of particular interest to investigate which players can function as change agents, meaning players that have a position/role where they are likely to be able to generate positive change.

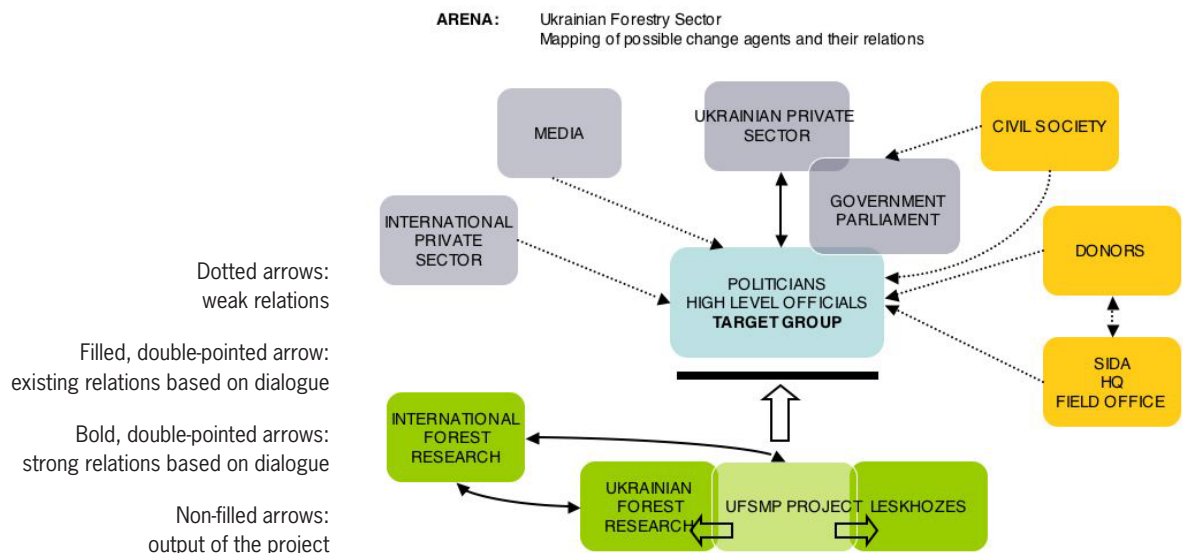


Fig 2: ARENA: The Ukrainian Forest Sector

Higher officials and politicians at involved ministries

This player is the target group that needs to be influenced in order to bring about change. At present, the political will to modernise forest legislation and management is perceived as very low. Representatives from this group have shown very little interest in the work of the UFSMP, not engaging themselves in a dialogue on pertinent issues and generally not even being willing to take part in the findings, proposals on modernisation of forest legislation, seminars, workshops and other activities organised by the UFSMP.

Ukrainian Forest Research

This group consists of Ukrainian experts in forest legislation and forest management and is a small but important player. The Ukrainian Head of the UFSMP, Mikhail Popkov, has a strong position in the group. This gives the UFSMP very strong links with the group, which represents an important part of the project. However, the group has very little chance of provoking change because they lack the necessary political status. In other words, as the communication problem is not technical but political, the group has little opportunity to act as a change agent from a short-term perspective. However, in the long-term perspective, assuming positive political change, the group is obviously extremely important.

International Forest Research

This group consists of international experts in forest legislation and forest management. The UFSMP have good relations with this group and many of the project activities are connected to these international experts. The group is important in a long-term perspective as far as it increases the capacity and competence in the Ukrainian forest sector. However, in a short-term perspective they play a minor role and have limited opportunities to induce change, as they are not involved in the political decision-making in Ukraine.

UFSMP

This group consists of the project team. One purpose of the group in a possible prolongation period is to show ways of improving sustainable forest management. Another purpose is to extend and implement new ideas through practical demonstration on site, bearing in mind future changes in the Forest Code. The group has over the years gone from directly focusing on legislative issues to a more practical and long-term approach focusing on professional development towards increased knowledge of modern forest management and legislation among Ukrainian forest professionals.

On this arena, the project can primarily be viewed as supporting the Ukrainian Forest Research Group and the Leskhozoes, increasing their possibilities of bringing about change.

Leskhozoes

This group consists of the people working in the Leskhozoes, the local forest management bodies. Their most important representatives are the Directors of the Leskhozoes. The possibility for this group to act as change agents is very limited as they do not receive the necessary information, their actions are strictly regulated by outdated guidelines and instructions and they are caught in a stern and strictly vertical hierarchy. Furthermore, most of the directors lack an academic profile and powerful political influence.

Media

This group primarily consists of Ukrainian media. The media in Ukraine is known to be professional while at the same time being controlled by the State and the oligarchs. However, when not restricted by political taboos, the Ukrainian media act like Western media in striving to report on issues of interest to their readers and viewers. This results in issues on forestry, particularly forestry legislation, being generally very low on their agenda. It is not an economically important sector, it is not interesting as a threat to the environment, detailed legislative issues are complicated and there are no interest groups putting pressure to highlight the issue in the media. Rather, influential economic and political groups are most likely not to encourage the media to handle the issue, as they have personal economic interests in the sector.

Government and Parliament

This group consists of members of the Ukrainian Parliament and Government. The group is somewhat intertwined with the target group of the study – higher officials and politicians at involved ministries. A parliamentary committee working on the new Forest Code for Ukraine has made a draft proposal on a new Forest Code that was adopted in the first hearing in Parliament. The process is to some degree viewed as a step forward among Ukrainian legislative experts. However, there is no significant difference between the proposed new Forest Code and the present. Furthermore, when the new administration will most likely not adopt the new proposal.

Members of the UFSMP team have not been admitted to the group and attempts by the team to further approach the committee have been

rejected, even if a few elements of the advanced proposals of the UFSMP team have been taken into consideration.

Government and Parliament are potentially the strongest change agents in the Ukrainian forest sector, given that political will is an absolute prerequisite for change and that advancement in the forest sector is strongly interrelated with advancement in other sectors. However, at present large segments of the group are driven more by personal economic interests than a profound interest in developing the country. A clear political vision for the forest sector is needed to go forward.

Ukrainian Private Sector

The core of this group is a limited number of extremely powerful families and individuals closely tied to the political elite. In the forest sector, Viktor Medvechuk and Hryhorii and Ihor Surkis in particular have a substantial influence, despite the fact that the forest sector is one hundred per cent dominated by the State. One representative made the following statement of the forest sector, confirmed by many other sources: “Generally, the sector is grey. In some *oblasts* dark grey.” The relationship between the political and economic elite is complex and beyond the scope of this study. However, judging from experiences in other former Soviet satellites, it is probable that the core of the Ukrainian private sector will be quick to adapt, and become part of, any political elite as long as they can continue to do business. A small, but symbolic, example of this was demonstrated when the TV channel One plus One, owned by one of the most powerful oligarchs, Hryhorii Surkis, very early placed a web camera at Independence Square and broadcasted uncensored pictures from the demonstrations for political change in Ukraine directly on their website. One plus One was previously renowned for censoring all politically sensitive material.

Consequently, it might be assumed that the Ukrainian private sector will adapt, even though the group will protect its interests, particularly towards the international forest sector if it does not favour their business. On the other hand, prosperous alliances can be established between international and Ukrainian companies, as has been the case in the Russian forest sector.

The present inactivity is probably due to the unstable political situation inducing cautious behaviour in fear of making unfavourable alliances combined with the lack of a modern and efficient technical, legislative and institutional infrastructural framework in the sector. As the forest sector has great potential, it is most likely that the Ukrainian private sector will develop its activities in the sector. Whether this will constitute a positive or negative change is at present difficult to judge. Whatever the case, the Ukrainian private sector is, and will continue to be, a powerful player on this and related arenas.

International Private Sector

The international private sector is eager to take part in the development of the Ukrainian forest sector, taking into account that the country offers a great potential. The great amount of hardwood is of particular interest. At present, the international private sector is not a strong player on the arena but if legislation changes, international companies will take the opportunity to act as both investors and purchasers.

On the one hand, if these prospects are indeed good, international companies will become an important player on the arena. In Russia, cooperation between the national and international private sectors has created positive developmental processes. On the other hand, it seems as if many Ukrainians do not distinguish between the Swedish private sector and the Swedish authorities. As Sweden is a player on the international forest arena this might also be perceived as a threat to the UFSMP's possibilities of reaching the target group of higher officials and politicians at involved ministries, bearing in mind that they also, in many instances, have economic interests in the Ukrainian forest sector.

Civil Society

According to The Resource Centre for NGOs Development (GURT), there are approximately 37,000 NGOs in Ukraine. Even though most of them are GONGOs, Government Oriented Non Governmental Organisations, implying that they only function as a prolongation of the State, there are also certain NGOs, think tanks and other players in the realm of civil society that do exert a certain influence. Unfortunately, only about three per cent are involved in environmental issues and of these practically none are particularly concerned with the forest sector, as the sector does not represent an environmental problem. The consequence is that civil society is an unimportant player on the forest sector arena.

Donor community

At present, there are only three donors engaged in the Ukrainian forest sector: Sweden, Switzerland and The World Bank. All three donors have primarily worked at a technical level. The World Bank is prepared to assist in reforming the sector when Ukraine wants this, but so far the donor community can not be described as a powerful player on the arena.

Sida Headquarters and Field office

Sida has provided substantial support in the forest sectors of some of Ukraine's neighbouring countries with similar problems. The project has used this experience, and the members of the technical team have good control of the issue. Moreover, reviewing only Sida headquarters and field office, it seems hard to find routines and structures for communicating previous experiences within Sida, particularly between various departments at Headquarters. This diminishes the role that Sida can play on the arena – even though it might be added that in this particular instance it is subordinated to the need to cooperate with other donors, as the problems facing the Ukrainian forest sector are mainly of a political nature.

Summary of analysis

As seen in Fig. 2, which represents a simplified description of the forest sector arena in Ukraine, the UFSMP project mainly acts in the realm of Ukrainian forest research, Leskhozoes and international forest research and does not reach decision-makers to provoke change towards sustainable, long-term development.

The reasons for this situation are:

- The sector is dominated by the State’s outdated structures and remains largely undeveloped since the Soviet Union era.
- The sector is not characterized by supply-demand driven processes.
- The sector is at present not economically important for Ukraine.
- Exploitation of forests is not an environmental problem.
- Forestry legislation is deeply interwoven with other legislative processes.
- Involved politicians and high level State officials lack interest in being part of a change process.
- Ukrainian researchers on forest management and legislation are few and not politically influential (weak relation).
- International forest researchers do not exert a political influence on decision-makers (weak relation).
- Leskhozoes are not independent and lack information, political influence and sufficient knowledge of the issues (weak relation).
- Media has until now been controlled and the issue has not been journalistically “hot” (weak relation).
- Government and opposition have not formulated a clear political vision or policy for the sector (strong but not useful relation).
- The Ukrainian private sector is dominated by a few individuals, is described as “dark grey” and there are no major investments in the sector (strong but not useful relation).
- The international sector is not active due to lack of a legislative framework (weak relation).
- The sector is not important to civil society (weak relation).
- Donors are few and have limited engagement (weak relation).
- Sida lacks efficient internal communication routines to make full use of previous experiences in the area (weak relation).

Conclusions on UFSMP and the forest sector

Analysing the UFSMP on a strictly defined “Forest Sector Arena” and assuming a short-term perspective, UFSMP appears to have little opportunity to reach the target group and thus support the creation of viable, efficient and pro-poor development of forest legislation and management. The proposed prolongation of the project has taken this into consideration and instead developed a long-term strategy to increase professional competence at a technical level to prepare the sector for change.

The new Land Code in Ukraine opens up possibilities for private ownership of land, including forests. However, if the privatisation process is not regulated, there is a major risk that the presently state owned forests fall into the hands of *oligarchs*. A political process, political decisions, and a new Forest Code are hence necessary to safeguard the interests of poor people in the rural areas.

As the next chapter concludes, taking into consideration the possibilities created by the present political change, the Sida strategy of maintaining presence and fulfilling work started in the Ukrainian forest sector seems wise, despite the present difficulties.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Political change and different perspectives make way for development

Despite the negative conclusions of the analysis, the political change that is presently underway opens many new perspectives. The power shift of the political elite brings to light a range of other perspectives and is doubtless the single most important factor when analysing the Ukrainian forest sector or any other sector, for that matter.

Bearing this in mind, it is also important not to have a too high belief that rapid and positive change will occur automatically. The strategy outlined in this chapter proposes a widening of the scope and analysing the Ukrainian forest sector in a broader context to open up possibilities for progress.

Applying a “land owning” perspective strategy

As seen in Fig. 3, the arena analysed is called *Ukrainian Land Ownership*. The arena describes the different players involved in issues concerning land ownership and the rights to use land in Ukraine. This is obviously a simplified outline, but it is useful from the aspect that it describes how a different perspective can open up new possibilities and demonstrates how a feasible strategy could be formulated. As seen in Fig. 3, the relations between the players on this arena are profoundly different from other relations.

Generally, by imposing a land owning perspective, the possibilities of utilising the positive processes that are likely to take place in Ukraine due to political change are by far greater than if a strict forest sector approach is maintained.

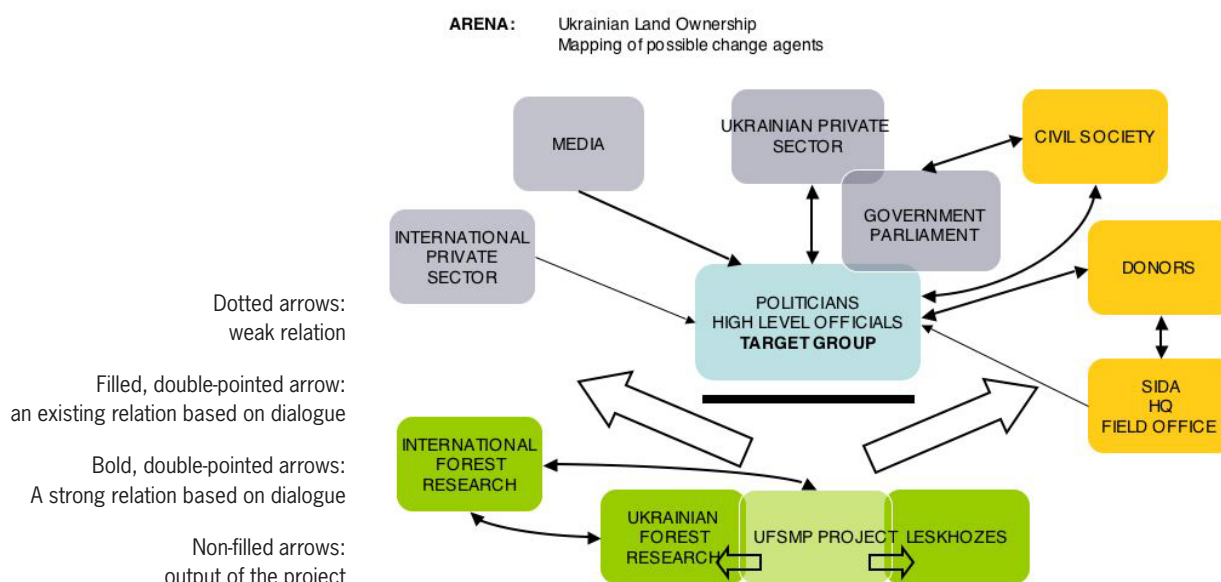


Fig 3. ARENA: Land ownership

Higher officials and politicians at involved ministries

There is no reason to expect an immediate change in attitudes in the target group, but as the target group will be deeply affected by political change, it is likely that this group will either be replaced or forced to adapt to the political reality. This change can be speeded up by pressure from other players in the arena, especially if these players are coordinating their efforts.

Ukrainian Forest Research

As seen by the analysis of the forest sector arena, forest legislation is deeply intertwined with other legislative processes. If there is a political will, Ukrainian legislative experts can use this momentum.. Taking into consideration the orthodoxy of the forest sector, it will be necessary to use other legislative advancements and connect them to forest legislation in order to push the process forward.

International Forest Research

The role of international forest research will be to continue to raise technical expertise within Ukraine. It might be feasible for the UFSMP project to not only create alliances with experts in the forest sector but also to widen the scope and seek expertise in for instance the role that legislation has played in change processes in neighbouring countries.

UFSMP

Bringing about change is difficult because the UFSMP is a small project concentrated on the forest sector. It is therefore important that the project uses the existing momentum to seek support from other players. This will require Sida supporting the communication needs for such a development as the project, even with political change, will continue to have difficulties

in reaching decision-makers. A Sida strategy where the project is connected with other players on the *land owning arena* would be a helpful tool for the project.

Leskhozoes

The Leskhozoes will be a minor player on this arena, but the Leskhozoes used for practical demonstrations in the UFSMP will have a greater opportunity to attract interest.

Media

The issue of land ownership will in the coming years become one of the “hottest” media issues. It is also likely that media will be more independent, thus opening up possibilities. If issues concerning the forest sector are presented in a *land owning perspective*, there will be a significantly better chance of media covering these issues.

Government and Parliament

It is hard to predict how fast political change will take place and be formulated as changed legislation. Whatever the case, it is probable that issues concerning land owning will be part of the political agenda.

Ukrainian Private Sector and the International Private Sector

It can be assumed that the fate of the Ukrainian private sector will follow the same course as the political bodies, as they are so closely intertwined. It will be of particular interest to review the relationships between the Ukrainian and the international private sectors..

Civil Society

Civil society presents, along with media and the donor community, the most important opening up of possibilities. The largest group of NGOs is engaged in human rights and political issues. Once again, the strategy is to show issues in the forest sector as seen from a land owning perspective, intertwined with related items on the land owning agenda.

Donor community

While there are few donors in the Ukrainian forest sector, the donor community is deeply engaged in issues that concern land owning. This would constitute a better base for donor coordination and for donors becoming players on the arena..

Sida Headquarters and Field office

The need to coordinate efforts from various departments at Sida prevails and is beyond the scope of this study. However, the study strongly recommends further studies in the area, as more efficient internal communication structures at Sida would generate a better base for goal fulfilment in all projects.

General conclusions and recommendations

The communication arena approach can be a useful tool in visualising different arenas and analysing the perspectives for projects, sector pro-

grammes or long-term development policies. In using this approach, it is important to visualise the different arenas. In this study, a broadening of the arena opened up possibilities to formulate a new, feasible strategy. In other situations, a micro-perspective on a certain arena can result in a similar opening up.

The greatest threat facing the UFSMP is to regard the project only as a forest sector project. This is very much in line with the strong sectoral thinking that has until now dominated the Ukrainian society. By adapting to this pattern, there seems to be very little opportunity of achieving sustainable development. The study thus recommends, from a communication point of view, that Sida continues its support of the Ukrainian forest sector by engaging in developing a supportive communication strategy with a broader *land owning* perspective, to benefit from changes and development taking place on *the land owning arena*. Integrating the project in this way in other, related processes on this new arena will be important to take the project out of its present impasse.

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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