



## XIII World Forestry Congress – Forests in development: a vital balance

*O. Serrano*

*Facts, figures and highlights from  
the largest forestry gathering ever.*

The first World Forestry Congress was held in 1926, the second ten years later, and congresses have been organized approximately every six years since 1949, in partnership between FAO and a host country. The XIII World Forestry Congress, held in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 18 to 23 October 2009, was the largest forestry gathering ever. Over 7 000 experts had the opportunity to present and discuss their work, share their experiences and increase their networks across the continents. Participants from 160 countries gathered at the exhibition grounds of the conference centre La Rural to exchange views around the theme of the congress, “Forests in development: a vital balance”.

Participants – who take part as indi-

viduals and do not represent their countries or organizations – came from all continents, with the greatest part, as expected, from Central and South America, and fully half from Argentina. They included policy-makers (including a number of ministers responsible for forestry), researchers, forest practitioners and representatives from industry, financial institutions and development agencies. All 14 members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) were represented, as were many non-governmental organizations. The attendance of students was remarkable: some 1 200 representing a broad range of universities, many supported by associations such as the International Forest Students Association (IFSA) and the Latin

**Olman Serrano**, Senior Forestry Officer, FAO, was Associate Secretary General of the XIII World Forestry Congress.



*Leopoldo Montes, Secretary General of the XIII World Forestry Congress, welcomed participants to the congress on Sunday evening, 18 October*



*FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf addressed the opening plenary, noting that considering forests as an integral part of wider economic and social development goals will help greatly in efforts to reduce poverty, hunger and malnutrition*

### Near East Forestry Day 19 October 2009

Near East Forestry Day was organized in conjunction with the XIII World Forestry Congress, under the aegis of the FAO Near East Forestry Commission, to share with the international forestry community the key concerns of forestry in the Near East and North African Region – including rangelands and biodiversity conservation, wildlife and protected areas, forest plantations in arid and semi-arid zones and the role of Near East forestry in the international dialogue

This special event offered a unique opportunity for forestry experts, policy-makers and representatives from government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to exchange views and experience, explore business opportunities and interact with high-level panellists from the region. It attracted representatives from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen, among others.

The gathering raised awareness on the need to share lessons learned and to follow up results achieved in addressing desertification, degradation of forests and woodlands, water scarcity and soil erosion. Participants underlined that further efforts should be developed to integrate appropriate forest policies and strategies in general land resources management. Much attention was focused on how to mobilize the necessary resources to reverse the declining trend of forest resources in the region. Participants also emphasized the importance of collaboration between the private and public sectors and among governments, NGOs and research institutions, as paramount for the promotion and valorization of forest products and services in drylands.

A concrete outcome was a set of recommendations and conclusions, developed by a core team of forest experts attending the event, to be presented to the next session of the Near East Forestry Commission, to be held in Tunis, Tunisia from 5 to 9 April 2010.

American Forest Science Students Association (ALECIF).

Nearly 600 participants came from Africa and Asia. More than 200 participants from developing countries were able to attend thanks to a sponsorship programme coordinated by FAO and financially supported by the governments of Finland, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

For the first time, countries from the Near East were strongly represented at the World Forestry Congress and organized a special event to present their common concerns (Box).

While the World Forestry Congress is a global technical forum, it attracted the interest of high-level policy-makers. Most of the world's heads of forestry services were present. The host country organized a ministerial event attended by ministers responsible for forestry in Argentina, Chile, China, Costa Rica, New Zealand and the Republic of the Congo.

#### CONGRESS PROGRAMME

The technical programme included 282 presentations, selected from over 3 000 abstracts submitted, covering the seven main thematic areas and 42 subthemes:



To celebrate the opening of the congress, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, President of Argentina, planted a tree at the Casa Rosada – the presidential headquarters – symbolizing the country's commitment to the conservation and management of forest resources

- **Forests and biodiversity** – state of the forest and assessment techniques, deforestation and forest fragmentation, restoration and rehabilitation, biodiversity, conservation management, wildlife, forest genetic diversity;
- **Producing for development** – forest management, planted forests, agroforestry systems, maintaining and increasing forests' productive capacity, forests and energy, forest utilization practices, non-wood forest products, trees outside forests and other wooded land;
- **Forests in the service of people** – forests and water, forests and climate change, tourism and recreation, urban and peri-urban forests, mountain forests and livelihoods, valuation of environmental services and benefit sharing;
- **Caring for our forests** – forest fire, invasive species, pests and diseases, other disturbances;
- **Development opportunities** – sustainability and economic viability, industry and forest development, small and medium-scale forest enterprises, forest products trade, forest certification, forests and poverty alleviation;
- **Organizing forest development** – international dialogue and pro-

cesses, instruments for forest planning and development, institutional settings, law compliance and good governance, research, extension and education, intersectoral policies and influences, contribution of the forest sector to national and local economies, forest information;

- **People and forests in harmony** – land tenure, indigenous peoples, communities and institutions, participatory management and processes, work in the forestry sector, gender and forestry.

Sixteen invited keynote speakers introduced the main thematic areas in plenary.

Five plenary sessions, 62 technical sessions and three special fora provided multiple opportunities for participants to share and increase their knowledge of forest and cross-sectoral issues. In addition over 100 side events were organized by institutions with particular forest-

related interests, including indigenous peoples, mountain ecosystems, biological diversity and financing. More than 1 500 posters were displayed, providing an additional opportunity for presentation of field experiences.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

##### Fora on topical issues

Full-afternoon fora were dedicated to two subjects: forests and energy, and forests and climate change. These well-attended sessions, held in the plenary hall, included high-level keynote presentations followed by substantive panel discussions.

The main outcome from the climate change forum was a message from the organizers of the World Forestry Congress to the fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP 15) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Box p.6).

Participants in the Forests and Energy

*Euclides Pereira, representing the indigenous peoples of the Brazilian Amazon, dismissed the notion of an "untouched" Amazon, for indigenous practices have always involved intervention in nature (including the development of food crops that have contributed to feeding the world); he drew attention rather to indigenous peoples' long experience in conserving their lands, natural resources, water and biodiversity*



## Forests and climate change: from Buenos Aires to Copenhagen

Linkages of forests and climate change were discussed in four technical sessions (mitigation, impacts and adaptation, policies and institutions, forest carbon and carbon markets), in 14 special events organized by partner organizations, and during a half-day forum entitled “Forestry and climate change: to Copenhagen and beyond”.

The results of the various sessions are reflected in the following message from the congress, adopted on Friday, 23 October 2009, to COP 15 of UNFCCC (Copenhagen, Denmark, December 2009):

*The XIII World Forestry Congress (WFC) notes with concern the impacts of climate change on forests and strongly emphasizes the important role forests play in climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as the need for forest-dependent people and forest ecosystems to adapt to this challenge.*

*Forests are more than carbon. They harbor two thirds of all land-based biodiversity, and generate critical ecosystem goods and services such as water, food, and income from over 5 000 commercial forest products. Forests sustain the cultural and spiritual identity of billions of people, foremost among them the indigenous peoples and local communities.*

*The XIII WFC calls for urgent action and endorses the main messages of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests’ Strategic Framework for Forests and Climate Change, of its Expert Panel on Adaptation of Forests to Climate Change, and of The Forests Dialogue’s Statement on Forests and Climate Change, in particular the following:*

- *Forests contribute positively to the global carbon balance. Maintaining high carbon stocks by reducing deforestation and forest degradation and promoting the sustainable management of all types of forests, including the conservation of biodiversity, forest protection and restoration, should be among the world’s highest priorities for the forestry sector.*
- *Sustainable forest management provides an effective framework for forest-based climate change mitigation and adaptation.*
- *For forests to fully achieve their potential in addressing the challenges of climate change, forest governance should be improved, financing and capacity building should be enhanced, and processes to empower disenfranchised people, including indigenous peoples and other forest dependent communities, be strengthened.*
- *Sustainably harvested forest products and wood fuels can reduce greenhouse gas emissions if they substitute neutral or low emission, renewable materials for high-emission materials.*
- *Even if adaptation measures are fully implemented, climate change would in the long run exceed the adaptive capacity of many forests and therefore forest-based climate change mitigation and adaptation measures should proceed concurrently.*
- *Intersectoral collaboration, strengthening forest governance, establishing positive economic incentives, and improving sustainable livelihoods of the poor are essential for reducing deforestation and forest degradation.*
- *Accurate forest monitoring and assessment help inform decision-making and should be strengthened in a coordinated and transparent manner.*
- *Actions on climate change mitigation and adaptation in forestry would benefit from a more active engagement of forestry professionals.*

*The XIII WFC stresses the need to reduce poverty as a driver of deforestation and to safeguard the rights of indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities, and recognizes the important roles that the private sector and civil society play in climate change adaptation and mitigation.*

*The XIII WFC supports the inclusion of REDD-plus in the agreement on long-term cooperative action under UNFCCC, including enhanced incentives for conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries; and calls for further support for adaptation in the forest sector.*

Forum debated the implications of bio-energy production for the forest sector. They shared their perspectives on the state of the art of wood-based energy production technologies, the social and environmental impacts of bioenergy production and the opportunities that bioenergy-related policies present for sustainable development (Box opposite).

The Investment and Financing Forum was another innovative event (Box p. 8). Representatives of financial and development institutions, forest and investment funds, private equity funds, forestry enterprises, banks and government representatives discussed strategies on how to overcome the current financial crisis with new business models, industry

restructuring, new financing instruments and non-traditional investment opportunities.

### **Business meetings – for business and others**

Parallel to the main programme, space was set aside to accommodate interaction among private-sector participants,



More than 1 500 contributors presented posters

including forest products producers, traders, financial institutions and investors. On Wednesday 21 October, a full-day Business Roundtable brought together 205 representatives from enterprises involved in forestry-related activities, from 31 countries. Over 1 000 face-to-face meetings were registered, totalling US\$35 million in business pledges.

Many forest-related groups and organizations – for example, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and the Board of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) – held meetings in Buenos Aires prior to the congress week, taking advantage of the presence of experts from around the world. FAO and the German Agency for

### Congress participants express caution about bioenergy developments

The Forum on Forests and Energy attracted about 2 500 participants and included presentations from nine speakers covering a wide range of technical and policy issues related to the subject. The discussion came back often to three major issues:

- *Bioenergy and land-use change.* Many presenters noted that the replacement of fossil fuels with biofuels will have significant impacts on land use. Key issues that have to be considered in this respect include the possible conversion of forests to biofuel crops, increased competition for agricultural crops between food and fuel use, and the socio-economic implications of large-scale changes in land use, landownership and land tenure. The use of degraded land and existing biomass wastes reduces the impact of bioenergy developments on land use, but is not entirely without problems.
- *Bioenergy technologies.* Most biofuel development at present focuses on liquid biofuel production derived from agricultural crops, but the technology to produce liquid biofuels from wood is improving and production is expected to increase greatly in the future. The pulp and paper

industry shows keen interest to develop both biochemical and thermochemical technologies to convert cellulose into bioenergy, and the biorefinery concept is expected to be an important technological platform. About US\$3.8 billion is currently invested in research and development into such second-generation technologies; they have now reached demonstration plant scale but are still some way from being economically viable compared to existing types of liquid biofuel.

- *The use of wood for bioenergy.* Wood is already by far the largest source of bioenergy and it will remain so in the future. Much of this is fuelwood and charcoal used in developing countries, but more modern uses of wood for heat and power generation are rapidly becoming more widespread. In general, wood has many advantages for bioenergy production compared with existing alternatives. However, the use of wood for bioenergy will increase total wood demand, so the sustainability of production and competition with other existing wood uses are important issues that should be considered.

A number of presenters described the ambitious bioenergy policies already in place in North America and Europe and noted that many developing countries are also developing or implementing policies in this area. In addition, several international partnerships are addressing technical and policy issues related to bioenergy and its sustainable development, for example the formulation of principles, criteria and indicators for bioenergy production.

After the technical presentations, the members of the audience voted on whether they thought bioenergy development would be good or bad for the forestry sector. The interesting result was that about 50 percent thought it would be bad and 40 percent thought it would be good (with about 10 percent undecided). Thus, it seems that many issues of concern must be examined and resolved before the forestry community can give its wholehearted support to bioenergy development.

## Conclusions from the Investment and Financing Forum 22 October 2009

Participants expressed a concern that investment in tropical forestry is wholly insufficient even though the rate of return on investments in forest plantations and sustainable forest management is in the range of 15 to 25 percent. Less than US\$1 billion per year of official development assistance (ODA) is devoted to tropical forestry. The barriers to forest investment in developing economies include the perception of high risk in long-term investments (because of insecure land tenure, political instability, weak institutions and regulatory frameworks, and human rights issues) and limited capacity to absorb investments (because of deficient financial infrastructure, lack of suitable partners and shortage of skills).

To improve the investment conditions in tropical forest countries, it is necessary to bridge four gaps:

- the investment gap – through local partnerships, reduced bureaucracy and capacity building in forestry, business and financial institutions;
- the risk gap for investments – through an enhanced role of the multilateral development banks (long-term loans, insurance for political and land tenure risks, and facilitation of trade financing);
- the knowledge gap – through enhanced investor relations, improved price transparency and promotion of country or sector investment plans;
- the market gap – through correction of market failures, establishment of fully functioning carbon markets and long-term carbon framework agreements, reduction of transaction costs, strengthening of price signals for sustainable products, capacity building of local banks and support for innovations.

A mechanism for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) that includes conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest stocks (REDD-plus) could catalyse economic transformations and increase investments in tropical countries. But deforestation goes far beyond the carbon issue, and the carbon market does not really function yet. Therefore, REDD-plus must be able to foster the establishment of sustainable private enterprises in order to be successful. To put the matter in human terms, some 1.8 billion people use forests and trees for part of their subsistence, some 500 million people directly depend on forest resources for their livelihoods, and some 50 million people live literally within forests. REDD-plus should help these people have a decent life.

Technical Cooperation (GTZ) organized an event on regional forest cooperation. The National Forest Programme Facility met with South American partners. The host country organized a special training course on forest genetics with global specialists a few days before the opening of the congress.

### Reaching beyond the forest sector

The World Forestry Congress was not only for foresters to discuss traditional forest topics, but embraced other subjects having an impact on forests. For example, an event lasting almost three days and organized parallel to the main programme was the Second International Forum on Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS). Keynote speaker M.S. Swaminathan, winner of the 1987 World Food Prize, called for an “ever-green” revolution based

*Valter Ziantoni won first prize in the World Forestry Congress photo contest for his image “Everyday Amazon”*



on dynamic conservation of agricultural heritage sites in an era of climate change. The Forum discussed agricultural systems and landscapes created, shaped and maintained by generations of farmers and herders based on diverse natural resources and using locally adapted management practices. These well-balanced agro-ecological systems include agroforestry practices in marginal or extreme environments where trees have an important role. A special address by Henri Djombo, Minister of Forest Economy, the Republic of the Congo, brought forestry into the GIAHS perspective.

#### Offsetting the carbon footprint of the congress

The enormous participation in the World Forestry Congress entailed high consumption of energy and thousands of kilometres of travel by air, sea or road, adding an enormous amount of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. To offset these emissions and contribute to climate change mitigation, the congress organizers arranged to purchase carbon credits from a biomass energy project in Brazil – creating the first “carbon neutral” World Forestry Congress.

#### CLOSING AND DECLARATION

The XIII World Forestry Congress concluded with a final declaration, summarizing the most relevant issues and recommendations resulting from the numerous presentations and discussions throughout the week. The declaration outlined nine findings and 27 strategic actions (Box p.10). Its preamble notes that:

*Forests are an invaluable asset for humanity providing livelihoods for billions of people, helping achieve environmental sustainability, and serving*

*Some scenes from the exhibition hall, including the inauguration by the congress organizers*



## Strategic actions recommended by the XIII World Forestry Congress

### Working with partners outside the forest sector

- *Initiate integrated cross-sectoral actions at global, regional, national and local scales on key issues, including climate change, bioenergy, water, biodiversity, food security and poverty alleviation to reduce adverse impacts on forests.*
- *Implement mechanisms for cross-sectoral monitoring and reporting to influence policies and actions related to forestry.*

### Influencing opinions and perceptions about the value of forests

- *Create innovative mechanisms that incorporate local and indigenous knowledge as a source of valid information to enrich global knowledge and the understanding of sustainable forest management.*
- *Strengthen interfaces between forest knowledge and society; focusing in particular on opinion leaders in local populations, as a way to influence policy-makers.*

### Economic mechanisms to take full account of forests' value to society

- *Foster the development of mechanisms at local, regional, national and global levels for realizing new economic values of forests that create financial incentives for landowners and communities to manage for these values.*
- *Focus immediately on climate change related mechanisms as the first priority with particular attention to REDD issues.*
- *Increase efforts to develop integrated policies and strategies for effective management of forest and water resources.*

### Planted forests

- *Recognize the importance of planted forests in meeting economic, social and environmental needs.*
- *Focus activities on degraded landscapes, especially restoration of degraded forest lands.*
- *Develop and implement technologies to maintain and enhance the productivity of planted forests and their contributions at local and landscape levels.*

### Forest bioenergy

- *Develop energy forests within the context of a sustainability framework to minimize the risk of unintended consequences across the forest, agriculture and energy sectors.*
- *Implement good governance policies for sustainable bioenergy development.*
- *Develop and improve technologies for more efficient production and diverse use of biomass for energy including second generation technologies.*

### Forests and climate change

- *Develop new approaches to enhancing carbon sequestration using forests and new options for managing forests in the face of climate changes and implement them widely.*
- *Provide informed and scientifically proved inputs to climate change negotiations.*
- *Simplify AR CDM rules and implementation of REDD-plus.*
- *Advocate that local needs currently met from forests are respected and reflected in international climate change-oriented mechanisms and policies.*
- *Expand research on adaptation to climate change and its impacts on ecosystems, economies and societies.*

### Fragile ecosystems, including arid zones, small islands, wetlands and mountains

- *Promote protection and restoration of fragile ecosystems to improve their resilience and adaptation to changing climates and human impacts and to maintain their vital environmental services, including food security and livelihoods for their inhabitants.*
- *Increase efforts to combat desertification through forestry-related actions.*

### Forest industry

- *Create an enabling environment of policy and legal framework for the forest industry sector.*
- *Expand research to develop new clean technologies and forest products.*

### Forest-related policies, good governance and institutions

- *Improve governance at all levels of the forest sector, including building capacity of forestry institutions to enforce laws and regulations, and facilitate sustainable forest management by state and non-state actors.*
- *Provide better mechanisms to recognize and value women's roles in both informal and formal domains.*
- *Improve worker skills and working conditions needed for safe and productive work in the expanding forest sector.*
- *Promote land tenure reform providing secure rights to communities and local stakeholders to use and manage forest resources.*
- *Develop financing strategies within the framework of national forest programmes using innovative instruments for investment and market development in forestry.*



*as a source of social and spiritual values for peoples, communities and nations. Through their sustainable management, forests can contribute to alleviating poverty, safeguarding biodiversity, providing the broad range of goods and services for present and future generations, in the context of a changing climate.*

The declaration affirms that sustainable forest management, although not sufficient alone to address the multitude of challenges facing forests, contributes to achieving the vital balance between humanity and nature that is needed for sustainable development, and that ongoing United Nations conventions and processes, such as the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests, provide useful institutional frameworks for action.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The whole congress week was rich in technical information exchange and lively discussions, everywhere from the plenary hall and the 14 other meeting rooms to the

**A congress in Buenos Aires would not have been complete without tango**



large exhibition area, the poster section, the ample space for journalists and the comfortable relaxation area.

The well-known Argentinian hospitality, the high-quality cuisine and the ample choice of cultural events made the participants' stay a very pleasant one, despite the tight technical programme and the multitudes attending.

Forestry and people who use or depend on forest resources will, in one way or another, feel the positive impact of this major event. Planning and holding a World Forestry Congress is a long-term investment, and the final declaration, while not a legally binding document, will guide efforts towards the vital balance of forests in development. ♦