

Sixty years of collaborative partnership between FAO and IUFRO: towards the next sixty

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Two major global forestry organizations cemented their long-term partnership at the World Forestry Congress.

At the XIII World Forestry Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina in October 2009, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) and FAO celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of their collaboration, initiated with a first Memorandum of Understanding in 1949. For 60 years, the two organizations have provided mutual support in areas such as forestry education, forest extension, incorporating science in national forest programmes, support to national forest monitoring systems, and development and implementation of guidelines for planted forests, forest protection, forest genetic resources and forest fire management. In a recorded message sent from Sweden, Börje Steenberg, FAO's first Assistant Director-General for Forestry, now 97 years old, commended the IUFRO-FAO collaboration for creating and maintaining an active interface between science and policy, that is, between research and practice.

FAO and IUFRO share the common goal of promoting conservation and sustainable use of the world's forests. IUFRO, established in 1892, provides access for its partners to a global "brain pool" of about 700 member organizations in 110 countries and more than 15 000 scientists. FAO, founded in 1945, collaborates with the scientific community through direct relations with regional, national and subnational research institutions, many of which are IUFRO members.

History of cooperation

During the Second World War, the IUFRO Secretariat was located in Sweden; its main

task after the war was to re-establish international contacts.

FAO started working with international non-governmental organizations shortly after its creation in 1945. At the time, the idea of incorporating IUFRO into FAO was considered, to make it possible to formulate research aims more clearly, avoid unnecessary duplication of research projects and reduce costs.

Instead, however, the two organizations worked out an agreement in 1949 whereby IUFRO was given a special consultative status with FAO; the IUFRO Secretariat was established at FAO headquarters in Rome, but IUFRO remained independent.

In 1959, FAO asked to be released from the obligation of providing the Secretariat, but IUFRO's consultative status with FAO remained unchanged. In return, FAO was made a member of the extended IUFRO Board and maintains this status today.

Research capacity development

In 1983, IUFRO and FAO established the IUFRO Special Programme for Developing Countries (IUFRO-SPDC) to strengthen research related to forest resources in developing countries. Its first coordinator was Oscar Fugalli, who had just retired from leading FAO's Forest Management Branch. Through this programme, IUFRO provides assistance for the long-term development of the capacity of individual scientists and research institutions in developing countries. From mid-1998 to 2004, the IUFRO-SPDC Deputy Coordinator

IUFRO President Don Koo Lee (left) and then Assistant Director-General for Forestry of FAO Jan Heino sign an agreement for continued collaboration at the XIII World Forestry Congress, Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 2009



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for Africa shared office space with Forestry staff in FAO's Regional Office for Africa in Accra, Ghana.

IUFRO-SPDC offers training courses on working effectively at the interface of forest science and forest policy, and on linking science with practice in the context of international forest-related initiatives and agreements and their implementation in the context of national forest programmes. Collaborative activities of IUFRO-SPDC and FAO have included:

- the Global Forest Information Service (GFIS) Africa project, developed from a IUFRO-SPDC project and involving FAO experts;
- the Forestry Research Network for Sub-Saharan Africa (FORNESSA), developed jointly (from 2000 to 2004, the IUFRO-SPDC Deputy Coordinator for Africa was the FORNESSA Secretary);
- training workshops carried out through partnership of IUFRO-SPDC and FAO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific;
- forest genetic resources workshops in Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America in the 1980s, with considerable follow-up action;
- financial support provided by FAO to IUFRO-SPDC's Scientist Assistance Programme (SAP).

Terminology and definitions

The organizations have long collaborated in multilingual terminology initiatives. For example, in 1971, the Joint FAO/IUFRO Committee of Experts on Forestry Bibliography and Terminology published the *Terminology of forest science, technology, practice, and products* (Multilingual Forestry Terminology Series No. 1).

In the context of the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000, IUFRO carried out a comparative study on terminology with FAO financial support (1996–1997) to improve the comparability of national terminologies, concepts and classifications in forestry.

In 1998, FAO provided financial and technical support for a multilingual *Glossary on forest genetic resources*, developed with IUFRO's SilvaVoc Terminology Project, which

recorded not only the established and widely accepted definitions of some common terms, but also the use of the terms by some professions, organizations and countries. FAO and IUFRO are continuing to explore opportunities for mutual strengthening of SilvaVoc and FAOTERM, FAO's terminology database.

In the early 2000s, FAO and IUFRO, together with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), began a process to enhance common understanding of, and possibly to harmonize, forest-related definitions that are used internationally or are being developed by various international processes and bodies, such as the environmental conventions, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and FAO. Three expert meetings on harmonizing forest-related definitions for use by various stakeholders, held at FAO headquarters in Rome in 2002 and 2005, spearheaded the process. In addition, IUFRO, FAO and CIFOR organized a side event on terminology and definitions at the second session of UNFF in March 2002.

Collaborative Partnership on Forests

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), a consortium of 14 forest-related organizations and agencies, is led by FAO, and IUFRO is an active partner. IUFRO-led CPF initiatives in which FAO participates include:

- the Global Forest Information Service (GFIS), developed under CPF since 2005. An upgraded version of the GFIS gateway was opened in January 2007, with interfaces now in English, Finnish, French, German, Russian and Spanish.
- the Global Forest Expert Panels, launched in 2007 to provide objective and independent scientific assessments of key issues to support more informed decision-making at the global level. The first GFEP report, *Adaptation of forests and people to climate change*, was released in 2009.

Other cooperative activities

FAO contributed to the elaboration of the IUFRO Position Statement on Benefits and

Risks of Transgenic Plantations (1999) and subsequent work on biotechnologies in forestry.

In January 2008, FAO's Assistant Director-General for Forestry chaired an independent review initiated by the IUFRO Management Committee to assess the potential for adaptation and thematic reorientation of IUFRO's strategic priorities.

FAO and IUFRO have organized joint technical conferences. A recent example was the international conference on Adaptation of Forests and Forest Management to Changing Climate with Emphasis on Forest Health: A Review of Science, Policies and Practices, organized together with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in August 2008 in Umeå, Sweden. The conference attracted more than 300 researchers, managers and decision-makers from 50 countries.

Partnering into the future

Future collaboration between IUFRO and FAO should emphasize training and networking activities, terminology issues, online learning and other forms of forestry education, engaging students and young researchers, and related financing. Joint activities such as publications, conferences, workshops and training must be continued. A mutual concern and one of the most important future tasks will be to help institutions and countries build their capacity for research and for educating young people.

With forestry today very much in the limelight, above all because of climate change challenges and growing awareness of the need to reduce deforestation, IUFRO and FAO will have an increasingly important role to play in enhancing global forestry. Their partnership will be an important element in international efforts to address these and other crucial issues affecting forests and forestry such as bioenergy, water shortage, biodiversity loss and poverty.