

The power of forests

This edition of *Unasylya* comes in the wake of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, which, among other things, produced a document called *The Future We Want*. In it, world leaders renewed their commitment to sustainable development and stated that “the wide range of products and services that forests provide creates opportunities to address many of the most pressing sustainable development challenges”.

Foresters should be pleased with these words because they indicate that forests are starting to get the recognition they deserve. In this edition of *Unasylya* we look at the power of forests to bring about sustainable development. In their overview article, Rao Matta and Laura Schweitzer Meins set out the many contributions that forests can make, such as the sustainable provision of food, energy, wood and ecosystem services. They call for a repositioning – towards the centre – of forests in sustainable development initiatives and say that strong global leadership is needed “to instil broad understanding about the socio-economic benefits of investing in forests”.

Don Koo Lee writes about the extraordinary reforestation efforts of the Republic of Korea since the 1960s and sets out the role of forests in achieving his country’s vision of a low-carbon, green-growth society. The experiences of the Republic of Korea show the power of forests to restore ecological integrity and support sustainable economic development. The government is now reaching out regionally in the hope of assisting other countries in their own endeavours.

Maharaj Muthoo describes forest certification as a soft policy instrument to encourage ethical trade and commerce and improve market access for forest products, including both wood and non-wood products. He says that forest certification can be an agent of sustainability, equity and justice in the forest sector and suggests that innovative people–public–private partnerships are needed to best exploit its potential.

If the forest industry is to be an effective contributor to sustainable development it is essential that its employees enjoy safe working conditions. Claudia Peirano describes a process of ongoing training and social dialogue in Argentina that has halved forest-sector accidents.

Zoraida Calle and her co-authors make a case for a shift from input-intensive cattle-grazing on degraded pastures in Latin America to environmentally friendly intensive silvopastoral systems, claiming that the incorporation of trees in cattle-ranching systems will reduce soil degradation, sequester carbon and help protect water resources. It will also create jobs – perhaps five

times as many as conventional cattle-ranching – and produce high-quality food and other products. Pedro Brancalion and his co-authors show that the restoration of degraded forest lands can increase incomes for ranchers and farmers through the production of timber and the sale of ecosystem services, among other things. Cattle-ranching is so widespread in Latin America that a move towards silvopastoral systems and forest restoration could have a huge positive effect on the environment, the productivity of the land and employment.

The late Alf Leslie, an innovative thinker, once predicted that the value of ecosystem services would be worth US\$2.6 trillion per year in 2040, more than ten times the value of all other forest products combined (Leslie, 2005). This is only one person’s (informed) guess, but monetizing even a relatively small fraction of such value would have huge implications for forests and their owners, managers and dependents. Interest has been growing in REDD+, a proposed policy to incentivize developing countries, through financial payments, to deliver forest-based ecosystem services related to greenhouse gas abatement. While negotiations have tended to focus on reducing deforestation in tropical rainforests, Margaret Skutsch and Mike McCall make a case for community forest management in REDD+ and suggest that it may be more effective in addressing emissions from degradation than from deforestation and that it may be particularly efficient in dry tropical forests. Abidah Setyowati says that negotiations on REDD+ need to better incorporate a gender perspective or risk further disadvantaging women.

Rounding out this edition of *Unasylya* is an article by Alberto Del Lungo on a regional FAO project to promote the use of urban wastewater for irrigating tree plantations in four North African countries, and an article by Robert Simpson and co-authors describing the outcomes and second phase of an initiative to strengthen forest law enforcement, governance and the legal trade of timber.

The articles in this edition of *Unasylya* suggest that awareness of the role of forests, and a willingness to pay for that role, will grow in coming decades; forests are too culturally, ecologically, economically and socially important to be neglected for much longer. Their move into the mainstream of development policy will do the world a power of good.

Reference

Leslie, A. 2005. What will we want from the forests? *Tropical Forest Update* 15(1): 14–16.