



## FAO FORESTRY



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*The opening session of the Twenty-first Session of COFO at FAO headquarters*

### Twenty-first Session of the Committee on Forestry and third World Forest Week

The Twenty-first Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) was held at FAO headquarters, Rome, Italy, on 24–28 September 2012 in conjunction with the third World Forest Week. The session was attended by 618 people, comprising delegates from 129 countries and one member organization, representatives of seven United Nations agencies and programmes and the Holy See, and observers from 25 intergovernmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations.

The COFO agenda was developed with the direct support of the COFO Steering Committee based on inputs from the regional forestry commissions, and recommendations for FAO Forestry were developed in the same manner. The overall theme of the event was “Forests: a green pathway for human development”. Delegates discussed how best to translate the outcomes of Rio+20 into action and recommended that FAO consider supporting countries in enhancing the contribution of forests and forest products to economic development and seek ways to maximize the contribution of forests to greening economies.

There was also considerable discussion on ways of strengthening forestry’s cross-sectoral linkages, under the following themes:

- integrating forests with environmental and land-use policies at all levels;

- forests, trees and people together in a living landscape: a key to rural development;
- broadening the financial basis for sustainable forest management: wood and non-wood products, services, innovations, markets, investments and international instruments;
- sound information and knowledge base for better policies and good governance.

COFO made a number of recommendations, including that FAO support countries in:

- promoting the important role of forests in maintaining the productivity of agriculture and natural resources and in strengthening forestry and agricultural linkages across sectors, policies and agencies to improve food security;
- achieving their development goals for wood energy;
- strengthening governance mechanisms and integrating forest issues into key environmental and land-use policies at all levels and by hosting and supporting the Forest and Farm Facility;
- strengthening national forest information systems and promoting interorganizational collaboration at all levels to strengthen the information and knowledge base for forest-related governance.



COFO also recommended that the FAO Council consider:

- identifying FAO's role in achieving the Bonn Challenge and strengthen its capacity in land-use planning;
- increasing support for the development of improved tools and mechanisms for enhanced financing of the forestry and rangelands programmes in member countries in the Near East Region;
- implementing the Global Forest Resources Assessment Long-term Strategy and prepare a set of voluntary guidelines on national forest monitoring;
- strengthening the FAO fire management programme;
- taking into account the recommendations of the strategic evaluation;
- providing information to members on the intended steps for strategic planning and clarify how work on forests will be budgeted;
- implementing the recommendations of the regional forestry commissions.

In parallel to COFO, nearly 50 side-events were held to communicate, more intimately, forest-related initiatives, challenges and changes at the global, regional and country levels. For the first time, a forestry share fair was also held. Share fairs are interactive events at which information and knowledge about projects, programmes, initiatives and ideas are shared in participatory and engaging ways. Its purpose is to enable interactive multi-way exchanges among participants, creating an environment of trust in which everyone learns together. Participants talk about how to do things better and how to best go forward in their own work. During COFO and the third World Forest Week, seven share-fair events were held on topics ranging from a proposed "SFM toolbox" to forest policy in Central Africa.

### FAO's contribution to the International Year of Forests

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2011 the International Year of Forests (IYF) and requested the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests to serve as the international focal point for its implementation, in collaboration with governments, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and international, regional and subregional organizations and processes as well as relevant major groups. The purpose of the IYF was to raise awareness on the sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests for the benefit of current and future generations. "Forests for people" was the IYF's main theme, highlighting the dynamic relationship between forests and the people who depend on them.

To support national efforts to promote the IYF, FAO developed a communication toolkit as an open source for both national authorities and civil society. This saved money and human resources in the field, as officers were not required to invest

resources in producing their own materials. This toolkit, which continues to be developed, can be found at [www.fao.org/forestry/iyf2011/toolkit/en/](http://www.fao.org/forestry/iyf2011/toolkit/en/). An application for use on mobile devices was created to increase the accessibility of FAO forestry-related information and to act as a tool for learning and education. FAO regional offices increased the visibility of the IYF, including through various publicity activities and events.

Collaborative actions from CPF member organizations involved an IYF timetable, with selected members responsible for developing specific programmes, including thematic press releases, related to monthly themes. Of 26 identified themes, FAO was the lead agency for:

- forest and water;
- managing risks of forests under climate change;
- forests and tourism;
- urban forestry;
- forests and food security;
- forests and mountains.

The IYF helped spread the message of the importance of forests to a wide audience, and it highlighted the potential advantages of establishing a mechanism to sustain attention on forests. At its 20th Session (Rome, 4–8 October 2010), COFO recommended that countries and FAO consider capitalizing on the momentum generated during the IYF by observing an International Day of Forests. The United Nations General Assembly will consider the idea when it convenes in late 2012.

### Countries adopt global guidelines on tenure of land, forests and fisheries

In May 2012 the FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS) endorsed a set of global guidelines aimed at helping governments safeguard the rights of people to own or access land, forests and fisheries.

The *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* outline principles and practices that governments can refer to when making laws and administering land, fisheries and forest rights. They are based on an inclusive consultation process started by FAO in 2009 and then finalized through CFS-led intergovernmental negotiations that included the participation of government officials, civil-society organizations, private-sector representatives, international organizations and academics. The aim of the guidelines is to promote food security and sustainable development by improving secure access to land, fisheries and forests and protecting the rights of millions of often very poor people.

"Giving poor and vulnerable people secure and equitable rights to access land and other natural resources is a key condition in the fight against hunger and poverty. It is a historic breakthrough that countries have agreed on these first-ever global land tenure guidelines. We now have a shared vision. It's a starting point that



will help improve the often dire situation of the hungry and poor,” said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva.

Much public debate has focused on the “land-grabbing” phenomenon, which is one of the issues dealt with in the guidelines. While the guidelines acknowledge that responsible investments by the public and private sectors are essential for improving food security, they also recommend that safeguards be put in place to protect the tenure rights of local people from risks that could arise from large-scale land acquisitions and also to protect human rights, livelihoods, food security and the environment.

Investment models exist that do not result in the large-scale acquisition of land, and these alternative models should be promoted. Investments should also promote policy objectives such as boosting local food security and promoting food security, poverty eradication and job creation, and “provide benefits to the country and its people, including the poor and most vulnerable”.

The guidelines address a wide range of other issues as well, including:

- the recognition and protection of legitimate tenure rights, even under informal systems;
- best practices for the registration and transfer of tenure rights;

- making sure that tenure administrative systems are accessible and affordable;
- managing expropriations and restitution of land to people who were forcibly evicted in the past;
- the rights of indigenous communities;
- ensuring that investment in agricultural lands occurs responsibly and transparently;
- mechanisms for resolving disputes over tenure rights;
- dealing with the expansion of cities into rural areas.

Graziano da Silva said that FAO stands ready to provide support and assistance to countries in adapting and implementing the guidelines. The Organization will now develop a series of technical handbooks designed to help countries adapt the guidelines to their local contexts and put them into play. The Organization will also provide targeted technical assistance to governments towards that same end.

In October 2012 the FAO Committee on Forestry invited member countries to implement the guidelines and recommended that FAO support their implementation.

*Adapted from a press release issued by FAO on 12 May 2012.*

**FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva**

