Locating funding for forestry activities online: FAO's database of funding sources for sustainable forest management

L. Hall

Online information about funding for sustainable forestry activities is more limited than might be expected, but a new database should help make support more accessible to a wider range of stakeholders.

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As part of the CPF Sourcebook on Funding for Sustainable Forest Management (see preceding article), FAO has developed a database of online funding sources for forestry activities. It is restricted to agencies that have online sites giving clear guidelines and application procedures. The database contains information about each source and links to the appropriate Web pages.

The database includes sources of funding (e.g. grants, loans and equity investments) not only for traditional forestry projects, but also for various other activities that could contribute to sustainable forest management such as research, overseas study and training. It includes both funding sources that target sustainable forest management directly and those that include it within a broader remit such as biological diversity conservation, development or environment. The funding sources range from those supporting individuals and small non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to those that make funds available to much larger institutions, governments and forest enterprises. Funding sources supporting activities throughout the world are included, although an effort has been made to focus on sources of funds available for disbursement in developing countries or available to developing country nationals.

The information currently stored in the database was collected through Web searches, links submitted to FAO and links from other Web sites that disseminate information about funding sources, such as those of Both Ends (www.bothends.org), the European Tropical Forest Research Network (www.etfrn.org) and Tropenbos (www.tropenbos.nl). Because most of this information was collected using keywords in the English language, the database may contain only some of the funding sources that are promoted on the Internet in other languages. The database contains a large number of funding sources based in the United States, perhaps because of this language bias and also because of the prevalence of Internet use in that country.

As much as possible, the information presented on the Web sites of the funding sources has been transferred into the database without editing or modification of the contents. Keywords identifying target areas, target groups and target subjects have been assigned to each funding source according to the information presented on their Web sites. Where available, minimum and maximum levels of funding by each funding source were also included in the database, although many organizations do not provide this information.

All of the keywords and the general text describing the database are available in English, French and Spanish, but the detailed descriptions of each of the funding sources remain in the original language of the source (mostly English). In view of the digital divide, FAO has the facility to print on demand extracts from the database for any country in the world.

Currently, the database is updated and new sources are added in response to comments and feedback received by FAO. It is anticipated that the complete content of the database will be reviewed and revised every one to two years.

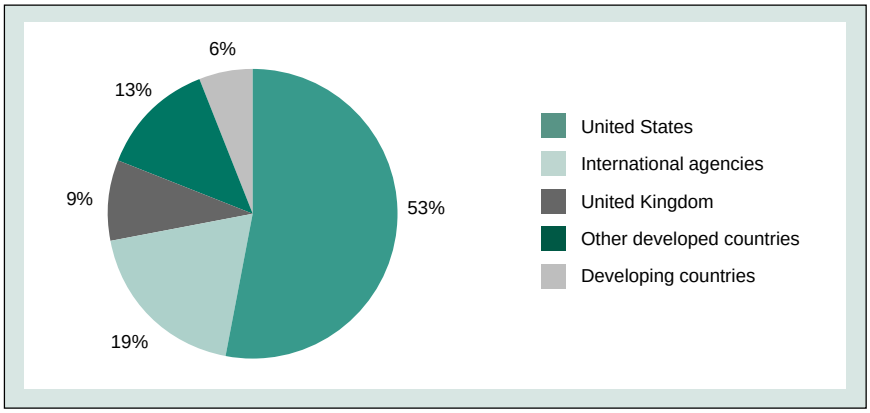
The database is available online at www.fao.org/forestry/finance-sources and on the CPF Sourcebook site at www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-sourcebook-database. Those who would like a hard copy can write to the Forest Economics Service, FAO, Rome.

WHAT FUNDING IS AVAILABLE, AND TO WHOM?

As of December 2002, the database held a total of 348 funds, from 221 different sources. Some characteristics of the funding agencies included in the database are shown in Figures 1 to 3.

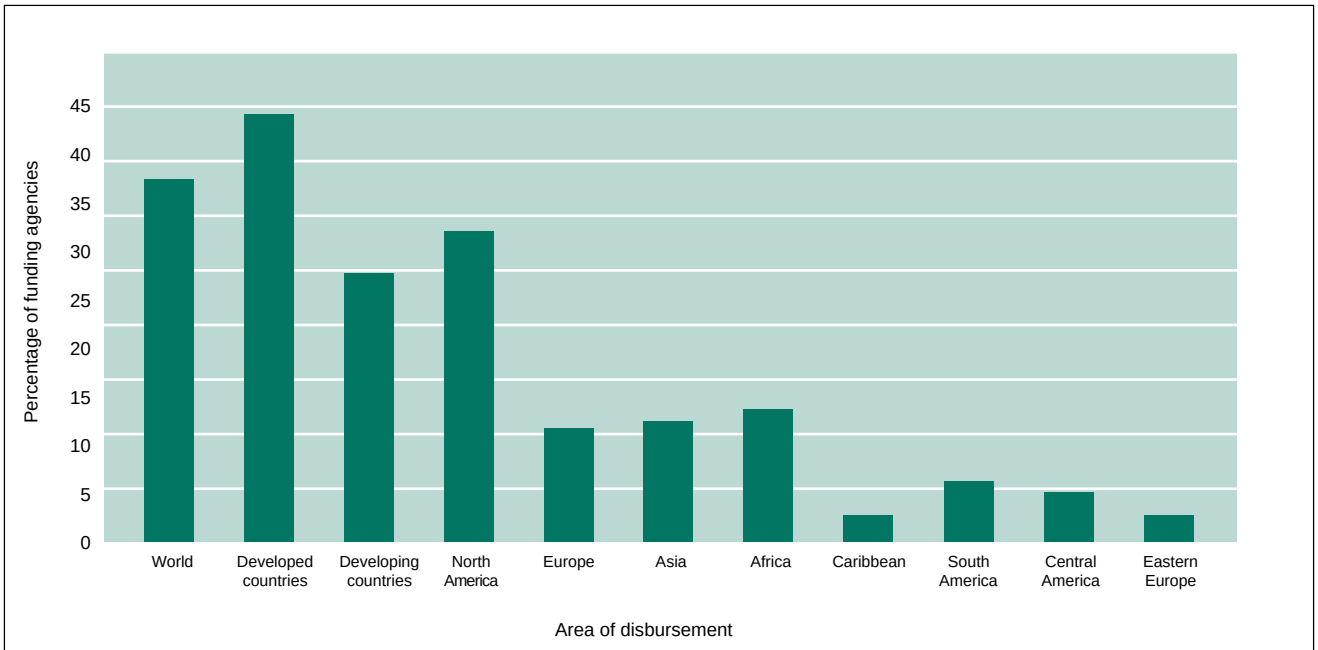
Over 80 percent of the funding agencies were based in the developed world, the majority in the United States (Figure 1). Of the remaining agencies, just under 20 percent were financed and/or administered by international agencies, although some of these have offices in developing countries. Only nine funding agencies were actually located in and largely supported by developing countries. Four of these were in India and gave funding exclusively to activities within India, and another four were from South Africa and Brazil. These countries are all well developed in terms of technology and conservation management structures relative to other countries in their respective regions. Although there may be many other sources of funding in developing countries, the use of the Internet for dissemination of application information seems uncommon, perhaps because fewer applicants have access to the Internet.

Funds restricted to activities in the forestry sector or to specific geographical regions are very limited in number, meaning that applicants looking for funding for forestry activities must often compete with applicants from other sectors or other regions. Furthermore, well over half of the funding sources identified in the database do not accept



1
Location of agencies in the database that allocate funding to developing countries

2
Distribution of regions where funds are to be spent



Note: The sum of percentages exceeds 100 percent because the regions above overlap and many funding agencies accept applications from more than one geographical region.

applications from developing country nationals, even if their funds may be used to support activities in developing countries. However, in some cases, partners in developing countries may be eligible to apply if the application is cosigned or submitted by a donor-country partner or if there is a donor-country disbursement agency in the country in question.

The FAO database provides information about eligibility criteria and direct links to application information. Prospective applicants will then need to consult the funding agency's Web site prior to submission of an application. Many of these agencies have complex Web sites, and on some of them contact information may be difficult to locate.

Very few of the funding sources included in the database provide short application forms that can be completed online. Most funding agencies have detailed application forms which take a long time to complete and often require supporting documentation. Applications may be difficult to submit online from areas with poor or unreliable Internet service providers.

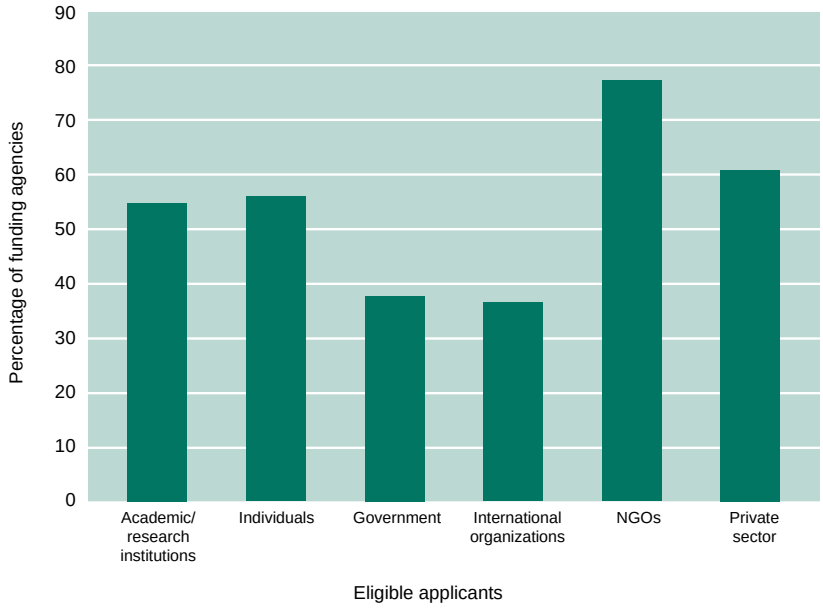
CONCLUSIONS

There is sometimes a perception in the donor community that financing for activities in support of sustainable forest management is readily available to those who know where and how to ask for it. The Internet is potentially a powerful tool for locating such funding, but the process of developing the database of funding sources has shown that online information about how to obtain funding (particularly from some of the larger donors) is scarce and difficult to find.

It is hoped that the database of funding sources will help to make support more accessible to a wider range of stakeholders. However, it is recognized that the database currently represents only a fraction of the funding that may potentially be available and that finding appropriate funding on the Internet may be more difficult in developing countries, both in terms of application restrictions and accessibility of information.

The onus for improving this situation lies at least in part with the funding agencies, which could make their information more user friendly and more readily accessible to applicants. Simplifying Web sites and Web pages, and providing clear links to information, with a minimum of graphics to reduce download time, would improve accessibility significantly. Ensuring that it is possible to open downloaded application forms with older software would also be useful. However, perhaps the biggest improvement would be if some of the larger donors would present more information online about how to work with them. The funding sources database and the broader CPF Sourcebook are a step in this direction. ◆

3
Distribution of types of applicant eligible to apply for funding



Note: The sum of percentages exceeds 100 percent because most funding agencies accept applications from more than one type of recipient.

Getting effective forestry research results from scarce resources

S. Appanah

Reflections from a workshop on strategies for innovative forestry research in Asia and the Pacific.

In general, public investment in forestry research in the Asia and the Pacific Region is lamentably low, especially since the 1997 Asian economic crisis. To explore ways and means to "do more with less", a group of researchers, managers and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector in the region came together in the regional workshop "Getting Effective Research Results from Scarce Resources: Strategies for Research and Innovation in Forestry", held from 2 to 4 December 2002 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.[1]

The workshop addressed the concern that the traditional public-sector monopoly of forest research, in the shape of the national forest research institutes (NFRIs), is beginning to be perceived as an obsolete institutional model for tackling current forestry problems. To avoid decline and marginalization, these institutes need to adapt to the rapidly changing environment and to devise more innovative ways of getting results.

Important points that emerged from the discussion include the following.

- **The role of science is evolving.** The need for "traditional" research is declining, and to adapt to new needs, NFRIs will have to take on the role of service enterprises and knowledge brokers.
- **"Know your donor" if you want more resources.** Research institutions need to recognize donors' priorities in order to attract finances for forestry research in a competitive environment.
- **Why not involve the beneficiaries, and make them pay for it?** A stakeholder-driven approach can improve the quality and impact of forestry research in developing countries. In Malaysia, for example, public institutions, with suitable policy revision and other strategies, have been able to draw funds from the private sector to pay for research.
- **Achieve more with less.** New and developing technologies such as remote sensing and geographic information systems (GIS) make research cheaper. Judicious investments in appropriate hardware, software and training can bring poorly funded NFRIs into the forefront of research.
- **Some are making money doing research!** A private agency in India, Tata Energy Research Institute, has made a credible foothold in forestry research through innovative approaches such as marketing of services and technologies. Also in India, environmental NGOs are operating on the border of research and advocacy to bring about results.
- **Finally, who said there is a scarcity of resources?** Perhaps resources are not scarce, but have shifted from government to business and civil society. Research institutions need to compete effectively for these potentially abundant resources. NFRIs should therefore build partnerships with others for support and access to particular skills.

The workshop concluded that there are many innovative ways to undertake research. Improvements can be made on three broad fronts: improving the efficiency and accountability of research; forging linkages with other research partners; and mobilizing resources for research. FORSPA is compiling the proceedings of the workshop, which are expected to be ready by June 2003.

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[1] The workshop was organized by FAO's Forestry Research Support Programme for Asia and the Pacific (FORSPA); the Asia Pacific Association of Forestry Research Institutions (APAFRI); the Sri Lanka Forest Department; the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO) Special Programme for Developing Countries; the United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service; the Canadian Technology Network (CTN); and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).