

Curriculum revision for sustainable forest resource management in southern Africa

O. Hamid

Natural forests in the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have been subjected to increasing pressure of exploitation as a result of increasing demands for forest products. Governments' capacity to protect and conserve these forests has been declining every year because of financial constraints, inadequate trained staff and the loss of technical staff as a result of HIV/AIDS. In recent years, these countries have made fundamental changes in forest policies whereby local communities are becoming partners in managing their natural resources. This shift to a participatory approach calls for an urgent reorientation of forestry training.

To help forestry education and training institutions cope with the new demands, the SADC Programme AAA.5.9, "Improvement and Strengthening of Forestry Colleges in the SADC Region", was launched in 1989 with support from the Government of Finland. The programme included a curriculum development component aimed to establish systematic procedures for curriculum design, development and evaluation, and to update curricula of technical forestry education and training institutions, incorporating multidisciplinary topics such as agriculture, range management, wildlife, biodiversity, environment, gender and extension.

In 1998, the SADC Forestry Sector Technical Coordination Unit, in cooperation with the Curriculum Development Centre at Zimbabwe College of Forestry/Forest Industries Training Centre, published a practical manual to assist curriculum designers at colleges in the region (*SADC AAA.5.9 curriculum development philosophy and procedure*). A 2001 review of Programme AAA.5.9 found that the curriculum revision procedure was well established and effective. Some colleges had revised their curricula in commercial forestry and wood technology and were keeping them up to date. However, the programme was less effective in incorporating gender, social forestry aspects, participation, issues related

to HIV/AIDS, new policies and paradigm shifts into the curricula.

A final phase of the programme was therefore developed to continue the focus on curriculum reform in a limited number of countries, particularly to strengthen the coverage of poverty alleviation, local forest governance and community-based natural resource management. This phase, launched in October 2003, was targeted to Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia, as these countries have a new policy framework in place although they lack capacity at the local level.

In the first six months, the project has created good national and regional networking and linkages between forestry colleges and their stakeholders. Internet facilities have been installed in three colleges, motivating staff and linking them with other related organizations. A needs assessment carried out through meetings, workshops and correspondence has identified some of the gaps between the skills developed using current curricula and those required by national forestry plans and programmes. The needs assessment has shown the importance of colleges' contribution to communities not only on technical issues, but also with regard to social aspects. Subjects such as communication skills, entrepreneurship, HIV/AIDS, gender and environmental management will therefore be incorporated in the new curricula.

Osman Hamid is Chief Technical Adviser (CTA) to the project "Support to Forestry College Curriculum Revision in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia".