

Decision on future international arrangement on forests deferred

The fifth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-5) was held in New York, United States, from 16 to 27 May 2005 and was attended by some 300 government officials, including about 40 ministers responsible for forests.

UNFF, established in 2000 as a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), was given a five-year initial mandate to provide a forum for intergovernmental dialogue on forests. With this term drawing to a close, the main tasks of UNFF-5 were to review the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests, to assess progress and to consider future actions. But as negotiations progressed throughout the two-week session, it became apparent that the differences between countries and regional groups were too significant to overcome at this point. Despite lengthy negotiations, UNFF did not reach agreement on the future of the international arrangement on forests.

A high-level ministerial segment and policy dialogue with heads of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) took place on 25 and 26 May with a view to discussing forest law enforcement and governance, forest restoration and the future of the international arrangement on forests. However, owing to slow progress in the negotiations on the future of the UNFF process, the ministers decided not to issue any declaration. UNFF-5 will therefore not convey any ministerial input on sustainable forest management to the Millennium +5 Summit which is to review the implementation of the Millennium Declaration in September 2005.

However, efforts were made at UNFF-5 to develop a set of global goals with the following aims:

- to reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation;
- to enhance forest-based benefits and the contribution

of forests to the achievement of internationally agreed developments goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);

- to increase significantly the area of protected forests and sustainably managed forests and to increase the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests;
- to reverse the decline in official development assistance (ODA) for sustainable forest management and to mobilize new and increased financial resources for SFM implementation.

In the end, countries decided to complete the consideration of the following items at a sixth session of UNFF, to be held 13 to 24 February 2006 in New York:

- possible global goals;
- future working modalities of UNFF, including issues such as the cycle of future meetings, potential for introducing regional approaches and the possibility of discontinuing the process;
- means of implementation, notably financing for sustainable forest management, UNFF and CPF;
- strengthening the role of CPF in the future international arrangement on forests;
- an option of a legally binding instrument on forests;
- a possible voluntary code or guidelines on sustainable forest management.

Governments also agreed that UNFF-6 should consider inputs from civil society representatives. On a positive note, UNFF-5 continued to applaud the work of CPF and the CPF members' joint efforts and collaborative spirit.

Opportunities for forest landscape restoration

Forest landscape restoration is the activity of establishing a mix of land use practices that will help restore the functions of forests across a whole landscape to benefit both communities and the natural world. The emphasis is on restoring the supply



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of forest benefits such as clean water, timber production and nature conservation, rather than simply maximizing tree cover on individual forest sites. To do this it is necessary to involve everyone with a stake in the forests. The concept implies a stronger relationship between rural development, forestry and other natural resource management and conservation approaches. At a recent workshop in Petrópolis, Brazil, over 100 representatives of local, provincial and national governments, international and non-governmental organizations and the private sector gathered to share knowledge of good practices and opportunities in forest landscape restoration, to stimulate political support and to demonstrate its implementation around the world. The Forest Landscape Restoration Implementation Workshop, held from 4 to 8 April 2005, was convened in preparation for the fifth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF). It was hosted by Brazil and organized by the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration – a network of governments, organizations, communities and individuals who recognize the importance of forest landscape restoration and want to be part of a coordinated global effort.

Sessions and discussions focused specifically on five themes:

- understanding forest landscape restoration;
- benefits of forest landscape restoration for people, livelihoods, environmental services and sustainable economies;
- tools for decision-makers;
- governance and partnerships;
- investment opportunities, innovative financing and policy initiatives.

The workshop concluded with the presentation of the Petrópolis Challenge, which defines forest landscape restoration as a vehicle for delivering internationally agreed commitments on forests, biodiversity, climate change and desertification, and notes its key role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The document, while noting that there is no blueprint for successful forest landscape restoration, highlights its track record in restoring key goods and services in degraded or deforested lands to improve livelihoods. The Petrópolis Challenge was presented by Brazil and the United Kingdom at UNFF-5, together with the report of the workshop. For more information on the event see: www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/restoration/globalpartnership

Promoting “green growth”

Rapid economic growth in Asia and the Pacific has raised alarm bells as environmental issues have at times been neglected for economic gains. However, sustainable development is critical to bolstering economic growth, and environmental challenges can be turned into opportunities. The fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED 2005) was the first meeting in the region to address the symbiotic relationship between economic growth and environmental

sustainability, which the conference dubbed “green growth”.

More than 500 participants, including delegates from 52 countries and representatives of UN agencies, international organizations, academia, non-governmental organizations, business and industry, attended this event in Seoul, Republic of Korea from 24 to 29 March 2005. Participants identified a series of mechanisms that can assist in promoting environmentally sustainable economic growth, including internalizing environmental costs; improving the eco-efficiency of production and consumption (i.e. linking financial and environmental performance to create more value with less environmental impact); and encouraging the development of markets for green products and services and environmentally sound technologies.

The conference noted that areas in which governments’ efforts had resulted in significant progress included increased rates of forest plantation and slower loss of forest cover, among others; however, it also noted that these improvements in performance did not address the environmental pressure arising from economic growth. Green growth would require policy shifts and the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development: economic development, social development and environmental protection.

The Conference produced a Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development, a Regional Implementation Plan for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific 2006–2010, and the Seoul Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth (see www.unescap.org/mced).

Forum on sustainable energy addresses wood energy issues

With the increasingly urgent need to develop energy sources that are not based on fossil fuels, biomass is coming into its own. This theme was recently addressed at the Fifth Global Forum on Sustainable Energy (GFSE-5), held in Vienna, Austria from 11 to 13 May 2005. With its long tradition of wood use for energy, high percentage of forest cover and strong political and consumer interest in biofuels, Austria was an appropriate backdrop for this event. Above all, the meeting considered enhancing international cooperation on biomass, with particular emphasis on strengthening institutional capacity to promote South-South cooperation.

Around 160 participants attended the meeting, representing government agencies, UN bodies, business and industry, non-governmental organizations and academia. Also attending were members of a number of energy-related partnerships launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002, who thus had an invaluable opportunity to discuss their progress. Co-sponsors included the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, the City of Vienna, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).



A session on potentials and challenges for increasing biomass use addressed prospects for international collaboration and links between biomass and trade. One session focused on Africa, with presentations addressing women as stakeholders on biomass issues, improving household energy use and health issues related to cooking smoke. The German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) described its three-step strategy to reduce fuelwood demand in Africa by means of clean and efficient stoves, enhanced fuelwood supply through sustainable forest management, and substitution with other fuels such as gas or kerosene. Also addressed were synergies and conflicts between food and biofuel crops; concerns about negative environmental and social impacts if natural woodlands are replaced with bioenergy crops; and biomass in the mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol. Two working groups discussed biofuels for sustainable transport and biomass (including wood pellets) in electricity production and household heating. A panel discussion compared regional views about strengthening institutional capacity for biomass.

The meeting produced a set of draft recommendations towards improving incentives for sustainable energy and international cooperation. To improve the use of traditional biomass (including woodfuels), recommendations included enhanced research and data collection, lowering of costs and local development of improved biomass technologies, for example by building on FAO's experience with improved wood-burning kilns, ovens and driers in applications such as food processing and brick and tile making. To promote modern biomass systems, recommendations included setting targets, developing new financing mechanisms and legal frameworks, and enhancing knowledge and capacity.

The recommendations will feed into the upcoming review of progress on the Millennium Declaration by the UN General Assembly, due to take place in New York, United States, in September 2005, and they will be considered by the Commission on Sustainable Development in 2006–2007.

Phased approaches to certification

Forest certification helps consumers support sustainable forest management by purchasing wood products that they know are from well-managed forests. Unfortunately, however, more than 90 percent of currently certified forests are in temperate countries, and tropical developing countries continue to lag far behind.

Phased approaches to certification have been proposed as a way of helping developing countries catch up in forest and timber certification. A phased approach would allow companies and other forest owners seeking certification to obtain market recognition for their efforts towards improving their forest management practices even before full certification is achieved.

From 19 to 21 April 2005, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), in cooperation with the Swiss State

Secretariat for Economic Affairs and Intercooperation, convened a workshop to raise awareness of the merits of phased approaches and to facilitate understanding of the procurement policies of buyers and public agencies. Held in Bern, Switzerland, the International Workshop on Phased Approaches to Certification covered the following issues:

- market requirements of certification, public procurement policies and the implications of both for tropical timber producers;
- implementation of phased approaches within existing certification schemes;
- implications of legal origin and compliance as baseline requirements;
- status of regional initiatives;
- the support and cooperation needed.