



FAO FORESTRY

FAO Committee on Forestry – continuing to grow

The eighteenth session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO), the most important FAO statutory body in forestry, was held at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, from 12 to 16 March 2007. Judged a great success, the meeting attracted almost 600 participants from governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

The biennial sessions of COFO bring together heads of forestry services and other senior government officials to identify emerging policy and technical issues, seek solutions and advise FAO and others on appropriate actions to take. COFO reports to the Council of FAO. Participation in COFO is open to all FAO member countries.

In addition to decisions relating to FAO’s programme of work, delegates addressed substantive issues such as forests and energy, forest protection, community-based sustainable forest management and progress towards sustainable forest management. FAO also presented the *State of the World’s Forests 2007* (see “Books” section of this issue), analysing progress towards sustainable forest management.

Visitors to the COFO atrium exhibit; rare forestry books on display in the David Lubin Memorial Library; forestry photo contest; and posters depicting FAO projects

Enriching the meeting were a wide range of side events, information sessions and in-session seminars featuring numerous partners along with FAO. Subjects covered included national forest programmes and poverty alleviation, fire management, forest health, forest tenure, small- and medium-scale forest enterprises, watershed management, the interface between forestry and agriculture, and reducing carbon dioxide emissions from deforestation.

Other attractions included an atrium exhibit displaying the work of FAO and other forest-related organizations, a poster exhibit summarizing the work of 88 FAO forestry projects, a forestry photo display drawn from an international contest sponsored by FAO (see p. 94) and a display of rare forestry books dating back to the eighteenth century. At the opening reception, an international children’s choir sang about trees and forests.

In welcoming remarks the first day, FAO Deputy Director-General David Harcharik reviewed the good and the bad news – that forest area is stable or increasing in 57 countries, but that forest area declined in 83 countries in the first five years of the new millennium. “Climate change is creating conditions that increase the threats to forest health in many ecosystems, especially fragile boreal forests”, he said. “And external forces – including poverty and underdevelopment, expanding populations



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Weaving knowledge into development

As emblems of the slogan “Weaving knowledge into development”, FAO distributed handicraft items made from non-wood forest products to COFO delegates: document folders woven from bamboo by a village cooperative in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (left photo), and cords for meeting passes hand-woven by Guatemalan villagers and vibrantly coloured with natural dyes derived from forest plants (right photo). An FAO project has been assisting such small village enterprises to develop their businesses and market their products, thus assisting livelihoods and promoting better management of the resources. The colourful woven cords enlivening delegates’ attire throughout the week were a vivid reminder of how knowledge and skills handed down from generation to generation can contribute to local economic development.



FAO/S. GROUWELS



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and difficult economic conditions – are putting pressure on forests that are often beyond the capability of forest managers to control. In fact, the countries that are facing the most serious challenges in achieving sustainable forest management are those with the highest rates of poverty and civil conflict.”

Substantive agenda items

As noted by Harcharik in his opening speech, wood has always been the leading source of energy in many countries, but biofuel alternatives to fossil fuels are now being sought at a much more aggressive pace than in the past – which calls for attention to economic and environmental dimensions of wood energy. The COFO session on forests and energy emphasized the need for comprehensive and integrated national bioenergy strategies and integration of wood energy issues in national forest programmes or other forest strategies; for analysis of the social, economic and environmental impacts of changes in the use of wood for energy generation; and for dialogue at the national and regional levels to help increase institutional and technical capacity related to the sustainable production and consumption of bioenergy, including wood energy.

Harcharik also noted the timeliness of addressing forest protection, pointing out that there is strong evidence that the

increasing severity of forest fires and pest infestations in some countries is related to global warming. “The health of many forests is more than ever threatened by insects, disease and fire”, he noted. “Poor forest health, in turn, poses a direct threat to biodiversity as well as to many other goods and services provided by forests and is good reason for COFO to take a new look at forest protection, perhaps by considering a more integrated, long-term and strategic approach.” The session on forest protection emphasized exchange of information and experiences on wildfires, pests and invasive species through networking, capacity building and international cooperation.

A session on community-based sustainable forest management, entitled “Putting forests to work at the local level” emphasized the importance of establishing secure forest tenure, transparent and simple legal procedures, incentives aimed at economic sustainability, development of community-based enterprises, capacity-building in local communities and conflict prevention among stakeholders. Discussions noted that property rights and community landownership have lagged behind other reforms in forest governance.

FAO presented voluntary guidelines on responsible management of planted forests and on fire management which had been developed through a multistakeholder process. The



Winning entries



Autumn fall
Csaba Jekkel, Hungary
(winner)



Near Biala Podlaska
Wojciech Gil, Poland



COFO 2007 Forestry Photo Contest



*Branches reflected on
the Danube River
Czimbal Gyula, Hungary*



*In an arid desert
Alireza Shahrar,
Islamic Republic of Iran*



committee welcomed the guidelines and recommended that members and forestry stakeholders make use of them. COFO also recommended that the guidelines be maintained as living documents, to be updated and improved by incorporating feedback from implementation at the country level. The committee invited FAO to strengthen the implementation of guidelines for reduced-impact forest harvesting, and to prepare additional voluntary guidelines for arid and semi-arid zone forests and for trees outside forests, through a similar process.

Other recommendations concerned the development, promotion and implementation of management tools to bridge the gap between policy and actions at all levels, with an emphasis on intersectoral and landscape approaches; continued support to national forest programmes (including continued collaboration with the National Forest Programme Facility); and continued promotion of best practices to improve law compliance in the forest sector. COFO recommended that FAO, in collaboration with the United Nations Framework for the Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), assist in capacity-building to develop and implement climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, including reduction of emissions from deforestation. The committee emphasized FAO's role as a knowledge and communication centre for forestry that should stress information and analysis in support of sustainable forest management. The committee also supported further strengthening of the Regional Forestry Commissions.

Special event

The day before the official start of COFO, delegates were welcomed by FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf to a Special Event on Climate Change, at which Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo delivered the keynote address. Presenters noted that deforestation accounts for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change, stressed interlinkages between forests, climate change, biodiversity and watershed management, and examined climate change impacts on agriculture and forestry, including pest and disease migration and increased forest fire risk. That afternoon, a Forum on Forests and Energy reviewed bioenergy derived from wood, noting that half of all trees harvested are burned, and that new technologies can increase energy efficiency. The forum also noted that forest industries have a role in addressing climate change through sustainable forest management, recycling and the substitution of wood for more energy-intensive materials such as steel and concrete.

Satisfied participants

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (see www.iisd.ca) reported that "the eighteenth session of FAO's Committee on Forestry may be recorded in the annals of history as one of its most successful forest-related meetings. The meeting was superbly organized,

disciplined but broadly participatory and accommodating, richly informative and always running on time. Delegates found the massive exchange of information gratifying. ... Some veteran participants described COFO18 as the most substantive forest policy meeting in years." ENB also praised the exchange of substantive technical information, freedom from political constraints and controversy, and information intensity.

The final report is available at <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/012/j9643e.pdf>

Alliance for action launched at international fire conference

Fire is an important tool in agriculture and ecosystem maintenance. Wildfires, however, which are frequently the result of negligence or arson, destroy millions of hectares of forests and woodlands, resulting in loss of human and animal life and immense economic damage. Fires are increasing as a result of climate change, and they are affecting larger areas and becoming more severe in several regions. National and international fire management policies, developed through cooperation with all stakeholders, are essential for the protection of landscapes, ecosystems, people and property.

Since the late 1980s, a series of international conferences has brought together technical fire management experts and the authorities concerned with policy and national practices in wildland fire management. The most recent, the fourth International Wildland Fire Conference, was held in Seville, Spain from 14 to 17 May 2007 and was attended by more than 1 500 participants. It was held under the auspices of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), FAO and the European Commission, and hosted by the Government of Spain and the Regional Government of Andalusia.

The meeting addressed the full range of fire management activities including monitoring, early warning, preparedness, prevention, suppression and restoration. It looked at the state of the art in fire science, fire management and fire management training.

FAO and its partners presented an update on a global strategy to enhance international cooperation in fire management, being developed at the request of the Ministerial Meeting on Forests held at FAO in 2005. The strategy, elaborated through a participatory process, includes a recently published global assessment of fire management (see "Books" section of this issue); a review of international cooperation; and Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines (available at www.fao.org/docrep/009/j9255e/j9255e00.htm).

A Fire Management Actions Alliance was launched at the conference to promote, implement and update the voluntary guidelines and to enhance international cooperation in fire management at all levels. Initially 35 partners – national agencies, universities and international organizations – joined the alliance.



The meeting also set forth recommendations to promote:

- global resource sharing to assist countries with fire management planning activities;
- development of regional strategies for fire management;
- research to address the consequences of climatic, land use and land cover, and socio-economic changes on fire regimes;
- the UNISDR global and regional Wildland Fire Networks.

South Africa offered to hold the next conference, tentatively planned for 2011.

The Conference Statement can be found at: www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/sevilla-2007/Conference-Statement-en.pdf

Second outlook study for Asia and the Pacific

In recent years, unprecedented economic, social and environmental change in the Asia and the Pacific region has significantly altered the way its forests are regarded and used. To examine the implications of these changes for forestry and to support policy review and reform, the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC), in partnership with member countries and other international organizations, has launched the second Asia-Pacific Forestry Sector Outlook Study (APFSOS II).

APFC sponsored the first APFSOS – a projection to the year 2010 – from 1996 to 1998. Since then, the study has served as a benchmark for other regions; FAO, in partnership with countries, has now carried out similar studies for Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and West and Central Asia. These outlook studies have an invaluable role in delineating the links between the future of forests and other domains, and helping to steer strategic planning and policy and project design related to sustainable forest management.

In April 2006, the twenty-first session of APFC recommended that the first outlook study be revisited and extended to the year 2020. APFSOS II is a wide-ranging initiative to gather information, review trends, and examine choices for action and their likely outcomes. Its specific objectives are:

- to identify emerging socio-economic changes that have an impact on forests and forestry;
- to analyse probable scenarios for forestry developments to 2020;
- to identify priorities and strategies to address emerging opportunities and challenges.

APFSOS will help countries place their own policy objectives in a regional and global context, to facilitate better national policies and planning.

The study commenced in October 2006 and is expected to be completed by December 2008. Country papers are being prepared through national focal points between March and October 2007. At the same time, selected authors and partners are preparing thematic studies on a dozen topics of crucial interest to the development of forestry in the region. Workshops were held in February 2007 to brief the national focal points on how to develop

the country papers and outlook scenarios. A Scientific Committee has been established to provide overall technical guidance.

The process will culminate in a regional conference entitled “The Future of Forests in Asia and the Pacific: Outlook for 2020” to be held in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 16 to 18 October 2007. Diverse stakeholders will share their views on emerging changes, probable scenarios and their implications for forests and forestry in the region.

The study team has launched a newsletter to inform partners of progress and share information. To subscribe or to obtain more information, contact:

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Towards a better understanding of forest tenure issues

Deforestation and forest degradation resulting from population growth, agricultural expansion, increasing demand for wood products, illegal logging, industrial development, unsustainable commercial trade of non-wood forest products and rapid economic growth have triggered debate not only on the effectiveness of public-sector forest management but also on forest resource tenure and institutional arrangements. Over the past 20 years, many countries have increased efforts to empower local communities, to decentralize and devolve decision-making and to increase private-sector involvement in forest management. However, tenure issues are still a root cause of poor performance in the forestry sector.

To improve understanding of the nature and implications of forest tenure, FAO organized a technical meeting at its headquarters in Rome from 12 to 14 February 2007.

The meeting, entitled “Understanding forest tenure”, sought to define strategies for supporting forest tenure diversification which could not only enhance sustainable forest management, but also support forest-based poverty alleviation.

Presentations on major forest tenure trends at the regional level, in South and Southeast Asia, Africa and Europe, served as a basis for identifying best practices in forest tenure diversification. Non-governmental and civil-society organizations also presented their perspectives.

Working groups identified the main actors for forest tenure diversification. They also identified key principles for forest tenure reform, common messages based on these principles, and means of disseminating the messages to raise awareness of forest tenure issues and influence and engage main actors and policy-makers.

Finally, the participants identified strategies and actions for future



work in this area, including possible collaborative activities and synergies.

The meeting was attended by more than 30 representatives of government institutions, research and development organizations, FAO, other UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and other international organizations that have practical experience with issues related to forest tenure and in particular with forest tenure diversification.

Short course for forest policy-makers

Enhanced capacity for forest policy analysis, development and implementation was one of the key needs identified by countries at the twenty-first session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission in April 2006. In response to the delegates' recommendation that FAO assist in this area, FAO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific developed the first "Executive Education – Forest Policy Short Course", which was held from 22 April to 4 May 2007 in Nonthaburi, Thailand. The course was organized in collaboration with the National Forest Programme Facility, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the United States Forest

Service, the Thailand Environment Institute (TEI) and the Economy and Environment Program for Southeast Asia (EEPSEA).

The course brought together experienced international foresters, forest policy-makers and professional educators. The course facilitators integrated topics related to analytical and communication skills with an in-depth exploration of the economic, environmental and social issues that make forestry a uniquely challenging area for effective policy-making and implementation.

The 18 participants attending the first course originated from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Palau, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam and the Land Resources Division of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, based in Suva, Fiji. The core group consisted of mid- to upper-level forestry professionals playing important roles in all or part of the policy process.

Overall, participants viewed the course as successful. Their recommendations will be taken on board to encourage the active engagement of participants in discussions and group work and to increase the effectiveness of future courses. It is hoped that the initiative will serve as a model for other regions.