

AFRICAN "WALL OF TREES" GETS UNDER WAY

Three years after it was first proposed, preparations for an African "wall of trees" to slow down the southwards spread of the Sahara desert are finally getting under way. The "Great Green Wall" will involve several stretches of trees from Mauritania in the west to Djibouti in the east, to protect the semi-arid savannah region of the Sahel – and its agricultural land – from desertification.

A plan for the proposed US\$3 million, two-year initial phase of the project – involving a belt of trees 7 000 km long and 15 km wide – was formally adopted at the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) Summit on Rural Development and Food Security in Cotonou, Benin, last month (17–18 June).

North African nations have been promoting the idea of a green belt since 2005. The project has been scaled down to reinforce and then expand on existing efforts, and will not be a continent-wide wall of trees, despite the name of the project.

The Great Green Wall will involve two planting projects on the east and west sides of Africa. The Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) is working with scientific consultants and representatives from the arid nations of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal to launch pilot planting projects planned for September 2008. Another planting programme, including Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and the Sudan, should be finalized within two months under the auspices of six states in the Horn of Africa, linked through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Mariam Aladji Boni Diallo, the Benin-based president of the CEN-SAD summit organizing committee, says she hopes the Great Green Wall will consist of more than just trees. Diallo told SciDev.Net that "reforestation, restoration of natural resources and the eventual development of fishing and livestock breeding" were priorities for the project. However, she said that funding for the project was still tentative.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)-linked non-profit Observatory of the Sahara and the Sahel has prepared a report on the project, saying the labour-intensive project should be used to create employment but advising that payments be partly withheld for two years until the trees are established, and that payment be based on plant growth.

The project will be monitored from Tripoli by CEN-SAD, and Senegal will provide "close technical cooperation" because of its success in fighting desertification. (*Source: SciDev.Net Weekly Update, 7–13 July 2008.*)

CONGO BASIN PASSES 1 MILLION HA MILESTONE IN SWING TO SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

Yaoundé, Cameroon. Over one million ha of Congo Basin forests have now achieved certification under the world's leading sustainable forestry scheme.

The world's second largest block of rain forests, the Congo Basin, is a haven for indigenous peoples and endangered species. It is also important in sequestering carbon and safeguarding water supply and quality

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification has been granted for forestry operations on 1.2 million ha, a significant step towards the World Wide Fund for Nature's (WWF's) Green Heart of Africa network initiative goal of certifying 50 percent of production forest in the Congo Basin. The certification involves logging companies SEFAC, Transformation Reef Cameroon (TRC) and WIJMA in Cameroon and CIB in the Republic of the Congo. To promote responsible forest management and trade in the Congo Basin, WWF-Central Africa Regional Programme Office (CARPO) has set up the Central Africa Forest and Trade Network (CAFTN), a part of WWF's Global Forest and Trade Network (GFTN), which provides support and guidance to logging companies to help them understand better how good logging practices can contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, improve local livelihoods and lead to a market advantage.

By 2012, WWF expects that 7 million ha of forest in the Congo Basin will be under certification while another 5 million ha will be progressing towards credible certification. (*Source: ENN News, 4 August 2008.*)

ECUADOR'S CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY VOTES TO APPROVE RIGHTS OF NATURE IN NEW CONSTITUTION

On 7 July 2008, the Ecuador Constitutional Assembly voted to approve articles for the new constitution recognizing rights for nature and ecosystems. "If adopted in the final

constitution by the people, Ecuador would become the first country in the world to codify a new system of environmental protection based on rights," stated Thomas Linzey, Executive Director of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund.

"Ecuador is now leading the way for countries around the world to make this necessary and fundamental change in how we protect nature," added Mari Margil, Associate Director of the Legal Defense Fund.

Over the past year, the Legal Defense Fund has been invited to assist delegates to the Ecuador Constitutional Assembly to rewrite the country's constitution. Delegates requested that the Legal Defense Fund draft proposed Rights of Nature language for the constitution, based on ordinances developed and adopted by municipalities in the United States of America.

These local laws recognize that natural communities and ecosystems possess an inalienable and fundamental right to exist and flourish, and that residents of these communities possess the legal authority to enforce their rights on behalf of these ecosystems. In addition, these laws require local governments to remedy violations of such ecosystem rights.

In essence, these laws represent changes to the status of property law, eliminating the authority of a property owner to interfere with the functioning of ecosystems and natural communities that exist and depend upon that property for their existence and for flourishing. The local laws allow certain types of development that do not interfere with the rights of ecosystems to exist and flourish. (*Source: The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund via the Community Forestry Resource Center (CFRC) Weekly Summary, 17 July 2008.*)

FOREST HOT SPOTS PINPOINTED FOR CLIMATE, ANIMALS

Poznań. A UN atlas pinpointed on Friday parts of forests from the Amazon to Madagascar where better protection could give the twin benefits of slowing global warming and preserving rare wildlife.

The atlas, issued at the 1-12 December UN climate talks in Poznań, Poland, identified hot spots with a high diversity of animals and plants in forests that were also big stores of carbon dioxide – the main greenhouse gas – in trees and soils. (*Source: Reuters in ENN Daily Newsletter, 5 December 2008.*)



FORESTRY TAKES ON THE CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE

Poznań. To ensure that sustainably managed forests play a key role in mitigating the negative effects of climate change, a new strategic framework is being launched by 14 international organizations known as the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

Aimed at policy-makers and those involved in the global forest sector, the strategic framework will assist countries to take up climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. These measures include the conservation of genetic variation, reduced impact logging and policies that ensure effective management responses to ecological change. The new framework supports the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Forests cover nearly one-third of the earth's land surface and account for almost half of its terrestrial carbon pool. Total carbon in forests was estimated at 633 giga tonnes in 2005 – equivalent to 160 tonnes of carbon per hectare, according to the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment.

Deforestation (primarily caused by agricultural expansion and urban and infrastructure development), forest degradation and other changes in forests contribute 17.4 percent to global greenhouse gas emissions, mainly in tropical developing countries.

"Sustainable forest management has a significant strategic role in achieving long-term climate change mitigation and it provides a robust framework for effective adaptation. This goes far beyond traditional management and includes conservation of biodiversity, support to livelihoods, provision of a range of forest goods and services, and issues related to governance and financing," says Jan Heino, Chairperson of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and FAO Assistant Director-General for Forestry.

The strategic framework of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests lays the groundwork for a coordinated forest sector response to the global climate change agenda and offers guidelines to all forest-related policy-makers and practitioners. Its strength comes from its cooperative formation by the world's major forest organizations. (Source: FAO Newsroom, 5 December 2008.)



NATURE LOSS "DWARFS BANK CRISIS"

Barcelona. The global economy is losing more money from the disappearance of forests than through the current banking crisis, according to an EU-commissioned study.

It puts the annual cost of forest loss at between US\$2 trillion and US\$5 trillion. The figure comes from adding the value of the various services that forests perform, such as providing clean water and absorbing carbon dioxide.

The study, headed by a Deutsche Bank economist, parallels the Stern Review into the economics of climate change. It has been discussed during many sessions here at the World Conservation Congress.

Some conservationists see it as a new way of persuading policy-makers to fund nature protection rather than allowing the decline in ecosystems and species, highlighted in the release on Monday of the Red List of Threatened Species, to continue.

Speaking to BBC News, study leader Pavan Sukhdev emphasized that the cost of natural decline dwarfs losses on the financial markets. "It's not only greater but it's also continuous, it's been happening every year, year after year," he said. "So whereas Wall Street by various calculations has to date lost, within the financial sector, US\$1-1.5 trillion, the reality is that at today's rate we are losing natural capital at least between US\$2-5 trillion every year."

The review that Mr Sukhdev leads, *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (Teeb)*, was initiated by Germany under its recent EU presidency, with the European Commission providing funding.

The first phase concluded in May when the team released its finding that forest decline could be costing about 7 percent of global GDP. The second phase will expand the scope to other natural systems.

Key to understanding his conclusions is that, as forests decline, nature stops providing services that it used to provide essentially for free. So the human economy either has to provide them instead, perhaps through building reservoirs, building facilities to sequester carbon dioxide, or farming foods that were once naturally available. Or we have to do without them; either way, there is a financial cost.

The Teeb calculations show that the cost falls disproportionately on the poor, because a greater part of their livelihood depends directly on the forest, especially in tropical regions.

The greatest cost to Western nations would initially come through losing a natural absorber of the most important greenhouse gas. (Source: BBC News, 10 October 2008.)



RAIN FOREST CONVERSION TO OIL-PALM CAUSES 83 PERCENT OF WILDLIFE TO DISAPPEAR

Conversion of primary rain forest to oil-palm plantations results in a loss of over 80 percent of species, reports a new review of the impacts of oil-palm production.

"By compiling scientific studies of birds, bats, ants and other species, we were able to show that on average, fewer than one-sixth of the species recorded in primary forest were found in oil-palm," said lead author Emily Fitzherbert from the Zoological Society of London and University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom. "Degraded forest, and even alternative crops such as rubber and cocoa, supported higher numbers of species than oil-palm plantations."

The results confirm that oil-palm plantations are a poor substitute for natural forests when it comes to conservation of biological diversity.

Despite the availability of large tracts of degraded and abandoned land, Fitzherbert notes that problems of "political inertia, competing priorities and lack of capacity and understanding, not to mention high levels of demand for timber and oil-palm from wealthy consumers" make forest clearance cheaper and easier. "Unless these conditions change quickly, the impacts of oil-palm expansion on biodiversity will be substantial," the authors conclude.

(Citation: Emily B. Fitzherbert, Matthew J. Struebig, Alexandra More, Finn Danielsen, Carsten A. Brühl, Paul F. Donald and Ben Phalan. How will oil-palm expansion affect biodiversity? *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, 23(10): 538-545. October 2008.)

(Source: mongabay.com, 15 September 2008.) ♣



Who is so deaf or so blind as he that willfully will neither hear nor see?

English proverb