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Agricultura

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## ASIA-PACIFIC FORESTRY COMMISSION

### TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

Clark Freeport Zone, Pampanga, Philippines, 22-26 February 2016

### FORESTS AND NATURAL DISASTERS

### SECRETARIAT NOTE

1. Increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters all over the world have drawn attention to the need for a more holistic approach in dealing with natural disasters including floods, landslides, storm surges, tsunamis, earthquakes, cyclonic winds and wildfires. In the period 2005–2014, the International Emergency Disasters Database (EMDAT) recorded an annual average of 171 disasters in the Asia-Pacific region. The average annual total of disaster fatalities in Asia and the Pacific for the period was 43,000 people. Average annual economic losses total more than US\$78 billion<sup>1</sup>. Annually, 146 million people in the region have been affected by disasters during 2005-2014. Floods and storms account for most of the fatalities and damage to property.

2. The United Nations University for Environment and Human Security compiles an annual World Risk Index, which calculates the risk of becoming the victim of a disaster resulting from an extreme natural event for 171 countries. A country faces a high risk if it is highly exposed to natural hazards and if its society is highly vulnerable. A number of Asia-Pacific countries rank highly in the World Risk Index including Vanuatu (1); Philippines (2); Tonga (3); Bangladesh (5); Solomon Islands (6); Cambodia (9); Papua New Guinea (10); Timor-Leste (11) and Brunei-Darussalam (12).

3. While disasters have always occurred, there are indications that for those influenced by human activities and climate change their frequency and intensity are increasing. In particular, climate change is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of disaster events in the future. The most vulnerable in this regard are the small island developing states, which are severely threatened by rising sea levels and the potential for recurring disasters such as typhoons and storm surges. Mountain ecosystems, which are disproportionately affected by climate change, are also particularly vulnerable to the increase and frequency of natural disasters such as floods, landslides and avalanches. There are also clear indications that the impacts of natural disasters are particularly severe on the poorer segments of society. These people often live in the most hazard-prone areas and their ability to take appropriate measures – even

<sup>1</sup> 2014 US dollars

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when early warnings are available – remains limited. In the wake of increasing losses of life and damage to property, many countries are making efforts to take preventive measures to minimize damage and to improve their abilities in disaster management.

4. Forests and forestry often can play crucial roles in mitigating some natural disasters and their impacts, and in post-disaster reconstruction and recovery. Evidence from the Asia-Pacific region demonstrates that forests, when appropriately planned and managed, can withstand and protect against natural disasters of varying degrees and types including tsunamis, storm surges, cyclones, droughts, landslides, and floods. Appropriately planned forests and tree planting can mitigate the spread and impacts of wildfires, rehabilitate landslide-affected areas, help to stabilize slopes, and protect riparian zones. However, trees and forests also have limitations in the degree of protection they can afford.

5. A number of institutions, including the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and FAO are giving increasing attention to forests and natural disasters, and efforts to minimize the impacts of such disasters on local people, increase resilience, and support more effective recovery and rehabilitation. One of FAO's five Strategic Objectives is to "increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises", which very clearly links work in forestry to assisting countries develop capacities in preparedness, response and recovery from natural disasters.

6. In recent years, FAO has collaborated in a range of seminars and workshops relating to forests and natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as producing a variety of publications on the role of forests in mitigating natural disasters. These include:

- an international seminar on the role of forests in natural disasters and revival of forests and forestry held in Sendai, Japan in February 2012;
- a pre-session seminar on forests and natural disasters held prior to the 25th session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission in Rotorua, New Zealand;
- a workshop on forests and natural disasters in the Pacific held in Nadi in July 2015;
- publications relating to (i) forests and floods; (ii) forests and landslides; (iii) the role of coastal forests in the mitigation of tsunami impacts; and forests and droughts (in progress).

7. FAO also has an extensive emergency assistance programme that has aided in the wake of a number of natural disasters in the region.

8. The 25th session of APFC requested that FAO give increased attention to building resilience of forests to natural disasters, including developing a regional action plan in relation to forests and natural disasters. An initial roadmap to a regional action plan has been developed, which identifies that a strategy and action plan should have three major and interrelated strands:

- i. Compilation of knowledge and information on best forestry practices for mitigating the impacts of a range of natural disasters;
- ii. Effective promulgation of the knowledge and information to the wide range of people and institutions that can benefit from it;
- iii. Supporting these people and institutions to effectively utilize forestry methodologies to build resilience to natural disasters.

9. The roadmap also identifies that partnerships among international, regional and national organizations will be a critical component of an effective regional strategy and action plan for forests and natural disasters.

**Points for consideration**

10. The objectives of this session are to share experiences and to provide guidance on developing a regional strategy and action plan on forests and natural disasters. In this regard:

- The Commission may wish to discuss specific country needs and priorities in relation to utilizing trees and forests to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters.
- The Commission may wish to identify modalities for sharing experiences and best practices in this regard.
- The Commission may wish to request FAO to convene a working group to continue the process to develop and finalize a regional strategy and action plan on forests and natural disasters.