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ASIA-PACIFIC FORESTRY COMMISSION

TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

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

REGIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE GLOBAL FOREST RESOURCES ASSESSMENT 2015

SECRETARIAT NOTE

1. Forests and forest management have changed substantially over the past 25 years. Overall, this period has seen a series of positive results. Even though, globally, the extent of the world's forest continues to decline as human populations continue to grow and demand for food and land increases, the rate of net forest loss has been cut by over 50 percent. At the same time, the attention paid to sustainable forest management has never been higher: more land is designated as permanent forest, more measurement, monitoring, reporting, planning and stakeholder involvement is taking place, and the legal framework for sustaining forest management is nearly universal. Larger areas are being designated for conservation of biodiversity at the same time as forests are meeting increasing demand for forest products and services.

2. The Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015 (FRA 2015) contains results for 234 countries and territories, including contributions from 155 countries representing the hard work of national correspondents who prepared country reports that present government forest statistics in a common format. When FRA began in 1948, FAO was the only organization collecting and reporting global forest resource information. Today there are many international and regional organizations involved in measuring, monitoring and reporting forest resource data, mostly using remote sensing with little or no information other than tree cover area estimates. In 2011, six international organizations and processes came together to create the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ), representing some 100 countries and 88 percent of the world's forest area. These organizations now jointly collect data on over 60 percent of the total number of variables collected through the FRA process.

3. FRA 2015 was launched at the XIV World Forestry Congress in Durban, South Africa in September 2015. FRA 2015 notes that the total global forest area in 2015 is 3 999 million hectares, a decrease of 3.3 million hectares per annum from the 2010 total forest area of 4 015 million hectares. Global forest area has declined by 129 million hectares since 1990 and presently forests cover 30.6 percent of global land area. Natural forests comprise the bulk of the world's forests amounting to 93 percent of global forest area or 3.7 billion ha in 2015. Most natural forest falls into the category of "other naturally regenerated forest" (65 percent); the remaining 35 percent is reported as primary forest. Planted forest area has increased by over 110 million ha since 1990 and accounts for 7 percent of the world's forest area.

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4. Forest area in the Asia-Pacific region¹ in 2015 totals 723 million hectares, 18.1 percent of the global total. Forest area in the region has increased by 5 million hectares since 2010 and 20 million hectares since 2000. The bulk of the increase in forest area since 2000 has come in the East Asia subregion, where the total forest area has increased by 30.2 million hectares, to 257 million hectares. Forest area in South Asia has increased by 4.3 million hectares since 2000. Conversely, in Southeast Asia forest area has declined by 10.2 million hectares since 2000 and, similarly, the Pacific subregion has lost 2.3 million hectares of forests.
5. The countries in Asia and the Pacific with the largest forest areas are China (208.3 million hectares), Australia (124.8 million hectares) and Indonesia (91 million hectares). An additional ten countries have more than 10 million hectares of forests. Federated States of Micronesia (92 percent), American Samoa (88 percent) and Palau (88 percent) have the highest proportions of forest cover among the countries and territories of the region, while Nauru, Tokelau and Pakistan have, proportionately, the least forest cover. On a per capita basis, Niue (12 hectares), Australia (5 hectares), Papua New Guinea, Mongolia, Solomon Islands and Bhutan (all 4 hectares) are the most forest-rich countries, while Nauru, Tokelau, Maldives, and Singapore have the lowest areas of forests per capita. Overall, the Asia-Pacific region has 0.18 hectares of forest per person.
6. The majority of the forests in Asia and the Pacific are regenerated natural forests² which constitute approximately 63 percent of the total forest area. Primary forests comprise 19.5 percent of the total, while planted forests account for 17.4 percent of the region's forests. The area of planted forest in the Asia-Pacific region has increased by 16.8 percent since 2005, from 108 million hectares to 126.1 million hectares. While the majority of this increase has occurred in East Asia and particularly in China, significant planted forest area increases have also occurred in South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Conversely, the area of primary forests in the region has declined by 6.7 million hectares since 2005. While primary forest area has increased modestly in East Asia, disturbances in primary forests in the Pacific and Southeast Asia have seen significant tracts of forests reclassified as regenerated natural forests. The overall area of natural forests in the region (including both primary forests and regenerated natural forests) has declined by 9.7 million hectares since 2005.
7. In general, FRA 2015 identifies a number of positive trends in forest management for the Asia-Pacific region. Forest areas designated as being managed for soil and water protection and for conservation of biodiversity have increased. Forest areas within protected areas have also increased, as has the area of forest certified under international certification schemes. Conversely, negative trends include declining areas of primary and natural forest, evidence of forest degradation in many countries including reductions in growing and carbon stocks, and prevalence of forest fires especially in El Niño years.
8. Materials relating to FRA 2015, including summary tables for most of the variables collected through FRA 2015, an analytical synthesis report, and access to the Forest Land Use Data Explorer (FLUDE) an online portal that allows data analysis of FRA and other FAO data are available at: <http://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/en/>. A more comprehensive regional Asia-Pacific analysis of FRA 2015 data is currently in preparation.

¹ Asia-Pacific region in this instance is defined as the countries and territories that constitute the East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Pacific subregions.

² While a number of smaller countries and territories have not reported on forest characteristics, FRA 2015 data for these categories account for 99.9 percent of the region's forests.