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AFRICAN FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION
NINETEENTH SESSION
THIRD AFRICAN FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE WEEK
WINDHOEK, REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA 30 September - 4 October 2013
Theme: Development of the Forest and Wildlife Sectors for effective contribution to Food Security and a Green Economy in Africa
THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS: A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR RAISING AWARENESS

Introduction

1. The broad range of forest goods and services and their contribution to sustainable development is well known in forestry circles but often forgotten or disregarded outside the forest sector. Policy maker and the general public often have a very narrow understanding of forests leading to inadequate representation in the economic or societal agendas. The need to heighten the visibility and value of forests to all countries and sectors was recognized long time ago. As early as 1951, the 6th Session of the FAO Conference adopted a resolution recommending that a “*World Festival of the Trees be celebrated annually in each member country on a date suited to local conditions*” in order to arise “*mass consciousness of the aesthetic, physical and economic value of trees*”¹. In spite the forward-looking nature of this recommendation, its uptake and impact remained relatively low.

2. Twenty years later, the 23rd General Assembly of the European Confederation of Agriculture (CEA) recommended the celebration of a World Forest Day. CEA also recommended that FAO could provide the organizational background for such a day. Although the 16th Session of the FAO Conference in 1971 resolved that FAO should support the establishment of the Day, subsequent intergovernmental consultations, including in COFO, had not resulted in a consensus and the issue was taken off the political agenda. The celebration of forests and trees remained a national level activity with little international coordination. Still, over 40 countries around the world had been organizing events annually, mostly on 21st March.

¹ C 1951/REP

3. A major step in improving the visibility of the forest sector resulted from the UN General Assembly (GA) declaring 2011 the International Year of Forests (IYF) in order to raise “*awareness at all levels to strengthen the sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests for the benefit of current and future generations*”². IYF has brought unprecedented attention to forest issues worldwide and provided ample opportunities to communicate key messages to the broadest possible audiences.

4. While preparing for the Year’s activities, it was recognized that interest in forest issues should not fade away with the passing of the Year. For this reason COFO recommended at its 20th session that countries and FAO “*increase the visibility of forests and sustainable forest management in sustainable development at the global level*” including by “*considering the strengthening of the idea and profile of the observation of an international day of forests*”³. The 37th Session of the FAO Conference supported the establishment of an International Day of Forests (IDF) and the Director-General communicated this decision to the president of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

5. On a parallel track, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) decided to recommend the ECOSOC and, through it, the GA to consider the establishment of an IDF. ECOSOC supported this recommendation but, in the absence of a draft resolution, the GA could not take action. In response, Algeria initiated a draft resolution at the 67th session of the GA which, after careful negotiations, was adopted in December 2012, proclaiming “*21 March of each year the International Day of Forests ... in order to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of all types of forests and of trees outside forests*” and requested the UNFF secretariat, in collaboration with FAO, to facilitate the implementation of the Day, in collaboration with governments, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and international, regional and subregional organizations and processes as well as relevant major groups⁴.

Celebration of the 1st International Day of Forests

6. The adoption of the IDF resolution in late December allowed little time for member countries, FAO and other international partners for preparations and coordination. In the short time available, FAO efforts were three-fold: a) to provide support to member countries; b) collaborate with CPF and other partners; and c) organize its own events for the celebration.

7. In supporting member countries, FAO took similar approach to what proved to be a successful approach during IYF: FAO launched a specific website for the IDF as a platform for sharing information and disseminating outreach materials for use in country-level actions. These materials included a 60-second video spot advertising the IDF, a logo, posters and banners, a collection of key messages related to forests, and outreach suggestions for forest communicators. The website also included an online platform to where members of the public and governments could upload photos related to the celebrations worldwide.

8. The impact made through this website is quite difficult to measure, though there are some notable outcomes:

- In the period of March-April, the IDF site was the third most visited one within the FAO Forestry website, with about 50 thousands visitors in the period. While the average number of daily visitors is around 5-6,000 on the Forestry site, on 21 March the number of visits exceeded 16,000.
- The video spot, that was prepared in 11 languages, ran successfully on major international networks and national televisions (including in Somalia). The original production cost of about \$30,000 generated approximately \$3,000,000 worth of free airtime -- it ran on CNN 589 times, 37 times on EuroNews and 48 times on Deutsche Welle. While there is no inventory of

² A/RES/61/193

³ COFO2010/REP paragraph 46

⁴ A/RES/67/200

all the broadcasts worldwide, it is fair to estimate that the messages reached hundreds of millions of viewers. The spot also received 22,000 visits on social media.

9. CPF considered that time was very short for coordinated actions and decided to focus its attention on supporting future IDF celebrations. The CPF Communicators' Group held a teleconference on this subject and agreed to develop a concept and action plan by taking the following approach: develop thematic focuses and associated visual identity for future IDFs; establish partnerships to support the celebrations; coordinate the involvement of Goodwill Ambassadors; coordinate the launch of campaigns and contests related to the IDF; in cooperation with IFSA, develop information kits for education materials; produce jointly a video/film for IDF; use existing and upcoming publications to promote the IDF; further develop and distribute the IDF communication toolkit; strengthen activities on social media; and collaborate in supporting countries and assessing needs.

10. FAO also held two international events to celebrate IDF. The first and primary focus of the IDF celebrations took place during the 3rd Mediterranean Forest Week in Algeria. The celebration in Algeria included a high level segment of the Mediterranean Forest Week where participants adopted the Tlemcen Declaration, a tree planting ceremony involving children, a press conference and the launch of the first State of the Mediterranean Forests report. Secondly, at FAO Headquarters in Rome, a celebration ceremony and a technical seminar was held to discuss forests in the landscape context. The celebration in FAO headquarters was opened by the Director-General who encouraged countries to consider a zero illegal deforestation target in the context of the post-2015 debate, noting that *"stopping illegal logging would do much to end hunger, extreme poverty and bring about sustainability"*⁵.

11. The celebration of the first IDF has generated considerable attention to forests, but a comprehensive picture of the celebration around the world has yet to be drawn. FAO measured for example, that FAO's IDF press release generated over 560 articles in the media around the world, but information on activities in member countries is largely missing with the exception of the 50 tree planting photos provided by countries and members of the public on the IDF website. To enhance coordination and sharing of information in the future, FAO intends to create, as part of the IDF website, an open web-platform (similar to those used to support some of the regional Forest Weeks) where relevant national actions can be uploaded by member countries.

Points for consideration

12. The Commission may wish to:

- Share information on and discuss experiences of the celebration of the first International Day of Forests;
- Advise its members on possible future actions for enhancing the impact of IDF;
- Recommend appropriate actions for FAO in supporting its members in the celebrations.

⁵ <http://www.fao.org/forestry/36578-0db1b7ddf323794a97c6f7b2899bd5a02.pdf>