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COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

EIGHTEENTH SESSION

Rome, Italy, 13-16 March 2007

PROGRESSING TOWARDS FOREST SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

Introduction: Sustainable Forest Management - an Evolving Concept

1. Twenty years ago the concept of sustainable development gained widespread attention and acceptance through the report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the so-called "Brundtland Report", 1987).
2. Fifteen years ago the concept of sustainable forest management took root in the "Forest Principles" adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992.
3. Ten years ago international consensus was reached on the steps that countries needed to take to achieve sustainable forest management when the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) agreed on proposals for action, including the implementation of national forest programmes, criteria and indicators and forest resources assessments.
4. The world has largely agreed on the broad scope and concept of sustainable forest management, and the focus now is on how to implement and achieve this objective. Discussions in the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions, the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) and other fora in recent years have emphasized implementation of sustainable forest management.
5. Over the years, the concept of sustainable forest management has evolved and various initiatives to promote its implementation have emerged, such as model forests and market mechanisms, including certification schemes. In 2004, a milestone was reached when seven thematic elements of sustainable forest management were acknowledged by the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), contributing to the agreement on global objectives on forests in 2006.
6. Although not explicitly defined as forest management objectives, the thematic elements have frequently been used as a framework for defining and monitoring progress towards

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sustainable forest management. Also, sustainable forest management relates closely to the ecosystem approach and the Millennium Development Goals.

7. The *State of the World's Forests* (SOFO 2007) provides an overview of progress towards sustainable forest management in each major region of the world. This Secretariat Note supplements SOFO 2007 and aims at providing a basis for discussions during the 18th Session of COFO in March 2007 under the item "Progressing towards sustainable forest management."

8. Guidance from COFO is sought on tools and mechanisms that support translating the concept into implementation, and on the ways in which countries and FAO could further emphasize the inter-sectoral dimensions of forestry, including poverty, rural livelihoods, economics and land management.

Considerations on Implementation and Feedback

9. The sustainable forest management concept is successful politically because it is a flexible view of forestry capable of embracing an ambitious array of environmental, social and economic objectives. However, it is challenging to evaluate progress and provide adequate feedback to policy-makers on the impacts, outcomes and experiences at the operational levels.

10. In local implementation, the large variance in stakeholder priorities must be taken into account. Inevitably, a wide range of different approaches and solutions are applied, depending on the actual or potential role of forestry in achieving overall development in the local context. Tools and mechanisms are developed that (a) facilitate linkages between policy objectives and local implementation, and (b) integrate forestry objectives with overall development aspirations.

11. For this, feedback from local implementation is necessary. Such feedback needs to be based on monitoring and reporting that address social, environmental, economic and institutional aspects, as well as cover the wide variation in local realities. Systematic feedback to the policy level is a prerequisite for enhancing the role of sustainable forest management in sustainable development.

Selected Tools and Mechanisms

12. Countries and other partners are increasingly using a variety of tools and mechanisms to help improve forest management and monitor progress. These include national forest programmes, management guidelines, best practices, criteria and indicators, standards for certification, case studies in search of excellence, model forests, as well as national and global forest assessments. From this variety, the following were compiled in this document as they represent fields where guidance from COFO is considered particularly valuable at this point in time.

Multi-stakeholder Derived Guidelines

13. FAO has a long track record of developing guidelines¹ to help build capacity and increase awareness and to share knowledge on forest management issues. Currently, FAO facilitates the development of voluntary guidelines on planted forests and fire management, through multi-stakeholder processes. These describe voluntary, guiding principles and actions that can help

¹ For example, the FAO Model Code of Forest Harvesting Practise (1996) (www.fao.org/docrep/V6530E/V6530E00.htm). The FAO internet site includes 15 codes of practice related to forestry and more than 50 voluntary guidelines developed by FAO and partners (www.fao.org/forestry/site/32807/en).

orient policy and practices toward more holistic and cross-sectoral approaches. They can be used by forest and land-use policy makers, planners and senior managers, both in the public and private sectors.

14. In addition to stakeholder consultations, the draft guidelines and the process for developing them were discussed at the Regional Forestry Commissions. The multi-stakeholder approach facilitates the establishment of broad partnerships for their implementation. Guidance is sought from COFO on the continued process and implementation of forestry guidelines. Draft guidelines will be available in January 2007 at the FAO website.

National Forest Programmes

15. Many countries work to establish a national vision and priorities for the forestry sector, strengthen national institutional capacity, enforce international agreements and increase stakeholder participation in decision-making. These are all part of a national forest programme process.

16. Such processes are ongoing in more than 130 countries. They are guided by the basic principles agreed at IPF in 1997, including national sovereignty and country leadership, inter-sectoral collaboration, participation and partnership. However, many of these processes have not yet realized their full potential as a national framework for policy development and implementation in forestry. FAO (www.fao.org/forestry/nfp) and the National Forest Programme Facility, a multi-donor partnership and a fund (www.fao.org/forestry/nfp-facility), are jointly working to build country capacity for the implementation of NFPs and to enhance the contribution of forestry to poverty alleviation.

Global Forest Resources Assessment

17. The most recent global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA 2005) included more than 40 variables, building on experiences from criteria and indicator processes. This enabled a first assessment of progress towards sustainable forest management at global and regional levels for the period 1990 to 2005. (www.fao.org/forestry/fra2005)

18. An Expert Consultation held in June 2006 (Kotka V) confirmed the successful involvement of countries in the FRA 2005 process (www.fao.org/forestry/site/35241/en). The meeting recommended that future assessments should continue to report on forest resources, their management and uses and the services they provide, and provide information according to the thematic elements of sustainable forest management, including legal, policy and institutional frameworks. It also recommended that FAO continue to strengthen the network of national correspondents, further develop collaboration on reporting with the environmental conventions and that FRA 2010 should include a remote sensing survey of land use dynamics in addition to country reports and special studies.

National Forest and Land Use Monitoring and Assessment

19. The lack of knowledge on the status, uses and benefits of forest resources and forestry policies and institutions remains a limiting factor for decision-making in most countries, especially in the developing world. To help strengthen national capacity and facilitate knowledge-based policy dialogue, FAO works with member countries and other partners to enhance national forest and land use monitoring, assessment and reporting, with a focus on institutional collaboration and information requirements by policy processes. (www.fao.org/forestry/nfa)

20. The monitoring and assessment approach builds on systematic field sampling and remote sensing, and includes social, economic and environmental parameters related to forest and tree resources on all land. So far 10 countries have benefited from direct FAO assistance, and over 30 additional countries have requested assistance. The capability of FAO to respond to these requests is limited by the shortage of resources. Current developments are geared towards integrated land use assessments to help inter-sectoral policy harmonisation.

Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration

21. The Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) brings a wide range of stakeholder groups together to identify and share information on practices that restore an agreed balance of the ecological, social and economic benefits of forests and trees, including rehabilitation of degraded land. (www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/restoration/globalpartnership/)

22. Together with the Forestry Commission of the United Kingdom, Forest Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), FAO is a steering committee member that provides technical support to countries to enhance the contribution of forests and trees to sustainable livelihoods and land-uses on landscape mosaic.

Best Practices to Improve Forest Law Compliance

23. A number of initiatives have emerged to improve forest law compliance to combat illegal practices, including regional forest law enforcement and governance (FLEG) processes, facilitated by the World Bank, and initiatives by the European Union and the G-8, among others. From these and from the measures taken at country level a number of best practices have evolved, which can serve to guide countries in their efforts to improve forest law compliance.

24. FAO and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) have jointly compiled and published these and, through a series of regional workshops, are promoting their use in information sharing among countries and in developing strategies and measures to combat illegality in the forest sector (www.fao.org/docrep/008/a0146e/a0146e00.htm). Political will and the fight against corruption are recognized as the pre-condition for achieving better forest law compliance.

Guidance requested from the Committee on Forestry

25. Guidance is sought from COFO on the development and application of each of the above-mentioned tools and mechanisms to facilitate progress towards sustainable forest management. Special consideration may be given to the following aspects:

- sector integration and multi-stakeholder cooperation in mainstream forestry within overall sustainable development and ensure a broad base for decision-making;
- improved linkages and feedback mechanisms between policy levels, management decisions and field implementation of forest management; and
- enhanced knowledge generation and sharing in support of national policies and decision-making, as well as harmonized national and international reporting.