

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The First Central American Information Policy Workshop, organized by FAO, took place in Valle de Ángeles, Honduras, on 10-12 October 2007. Approximately 50 participants attended the workshop. Most of these were foresters, information and information technology professionals from forest administrations, universities, and other stakeholders, such as presidents of associations representing farm owners and people that work with trees outside forests, non-wood forest product associations, etc. from Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Guatemala, Costa Rica and El Salvador. In addition, two key speakers were invited from Argentina and Paraguay and representatives of the Inter American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN), National Biodiversity Institute (INBio), CATIE/IICA and FAOR Panama.

The objective of the Workshop was to promote dialogue and exchange between different stakeholders on concrete, innovative and sustainable solutions that are being applied and/or can be applied for the development of information policies that favour and facilitate the access to forestry information, environmental, ecological, biodiversity and other areas related to the forests. It was the first time that foresters, information and information technology professionals and other stakeholders got together in Central America to discuss ways to improve access to forestry information.

The Workshop had two types of activities: plenary sessions, in which participants presented their experience (see Workshop proceedings - Annex 3), and working groups, in which participants had the opportunity to discuss and producing proposals. There were four working groups of four hours each, in two afternoons. All participants attended the working group sessions.

The key scientific and technical challenge is to improve access to existing and emerging sources of information on forestry, environmental, biological, and socioeconomic matters to develop better ways to integrate information in support of a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and application efforts, and related policy making initiatives. Along with other challenges identified by the participants, the following were considered crucial: although Central American countries have many stakeholders generating information about forestry and related areas such as biodiversity, the environment, ecology etc. this information is distributed in a fragmented way. There is no connectivity between those who are generating information and those who need it. The forestry and environmental information has to travel a long way to reach the policy maker and other stakeholders.