Reducing poverty in Asia-Pacific through small-scale forest enterprises

Forests and trees are a lifeline for many rural people, providing the means to retain good health and avert extreme poverty through the barter or sale of forest products. Recognizing this potential, FAO invited 21 experts from Asia-Pacific countries to determine how, with the right incentives and opportunities, small-scale forest enterprises could be significant drivers of economic growth and poverty reduction in the region.

Summary of Colombo meeting

Encompassing commercial forest-resource-based activities ranging in scale from individuals, small holders to forest community or forest producer organizations, small-scale forest enterprises (SSFE) are the backbone of rural activity in many developing countries with large forest sectors. Working predominantly in the informal economic sector, SSFEs nevertheless make important contributions to local economies, and with the right conditions and incentives their presence in the economy could grow significantly.

Recognizing this potential, FAO has organized a series of expert meetings on “Creating an enabling environment for the development of small-scale forest enterprises (SSFE)”. The first two – covering Latin American and African countries – were followed by the last in the series, for Asian countries, and was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in October 2017. Twenty-one experts representing governments, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and research institutions from Asian countries attended the meeting, to look at ways of overcoming challenges specific to SSFEs in the region. At the macro level, this includes working with state and non-state actors to create an enabling policy, legal and institutional environment conducive for SSFE development.

Under the overall guidance of FAO Forestry, the experts developed their thinking further and outlined potential options and solutions in a series of plenary sessions and working groups, leading to the meeting’s overall conclusions.
Concrete outcomes of the Colombo meeting include agreement on the:

- need to undertake tenure reforms, as appropriate, to confer SSFEs with a legal status and to promote enabling factors for SSFEs, including innovative financing mechanisms, public-private-people partnerships, capacity building, and access to markets and technology.

- need to promote effective coordination of sectors involved in SSFEs through integrated approaches that improve the economic efficiency of SSFEs while sustaining ecological services. The actual modalities and mechanisms for doing this are described in the meeting’s key outcomes [see below].

- importance of establishing a regional SSFE initiative or programme to help coordinate existing initiatives and mobilize resources for synergetic and effective collaboration in support of SSFE development in Asia and the Pacific.

In such an environment, the potential of SSFEs to help grow local and national green economies in Asia and the Pacific, while reducing poverty, is huge.

Read more in the report and summary of key outcomes of the expert meeting on Creating an enabling environment for the development of small-scale forest enterprise in Asia and the Pacific, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from 19 to 21 October 2017.

Visit the website of the FAO Forestry Community-based Forest Enterprise Development website
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