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LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

TWENTY-THIRD SESSION

San José, Costa Rica, 18-22 October 2004

SIDE MEETING: REGIONAL CODE OF PRACTICE FOR REDUCED IMPACT FOREST HARVESTING IN TROPICAL MOIST FORESTS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Information Note

INTRODUCTION

1. The natural forests and plantations of Latin America and the Caribbean cover 964 million hectares: Central America (including Mexico), 73 million; the Caribbean, 6 million; and South America, 885 million) which is 25% of the world's forest cover of 3 869 million hectares. The Region's forest cover represents 47.8% of its overall land surface, 952 million hectares of which are natural forests and approximately 12 million hectares plantations or 1.2% of the overall forest area (FRA 2000).
2. In South America, 96% of the forests are tropical. In Central America and the Caribbean almost 100% of the forests are tropical, apart from Mexico where it is 70% (SOFO 2003).
3. The Region's total production of roundwood, including wood for fuel and industrial uses, came to 439 million cubic metres in the Region (Central America, 89 million; South America, 343 million; and the Caribbean, 7 million), which is equivalent to 13% of the world's overall production. For the same year the Region's production of principal forest products was: 39 million cubicmeters of sawnwood, 10 million cubicmetres of wood-based panels, and 12 million metric tonnes of wood pulp. This represents 10%, 5% and 7% respectively of overall world production. In terms of the value of the import and the export of forest products, these amounted to US\$5.9 billion and US\$5.5 billion respectively, which represent 4% and 4% of worldwide imports and exports for the same year (FAO Yearbook on Forest Products, update 2002).
4. The forest sector also plays an important role as a source of rural employment as well as providing valuable environmental functions of forests.
5. Large forest areas have become degraded after wood harvesting. Present harvesting techniques and the way they are implemented are to blame for a significant share of the damage. They often underutilize the resource and have a negative ecological and social impact. But there are other aspects of the deforestation process, for exampel the informal use of forests.

6. The annual net loss of the Region's forests for the 1990-2000 period amounts to 4.04 million hectares: Central America lost 0.34 million hectares, South America lost 3.71 million hectares and the Caribbean gained 0.01 million hectares. In the rest of the world the annual net loss for the same period was 5.35 million hectares. There was a wide variety between the Region's countries in terms of forest area change percentages over the ten-year period. Gains fluctuated between 2% and 50%, whereas losses varied between 1% and 57%. Although the Region's forestry cover experienced a net loss slightly lower in the 90s compared to the 80s, the loss is still significant. (FRA 2000).
7. Cultural and socio-economic problems in the region will have a strong influence in increasing or reducing deforestation rates. More stable and consistent policies and administration of natural resources can contribute to a positive trend. A coordinated effort needs to be made to formulate policies which can help achieve sustainable uses of forest resources.
8. Management of tropical forests is a difficult task owing to the complex ecological ecosystems of the tropics and the lack of control and consistent action plans implemented by the governments. To secure the future of forestry, human resources as well as forest resources must be managed in a sustainable manner. With more and more international markets for tropical wood demanding that it should come from managed forests, the governments and private sector are being pushed to implement sustainable forest management.

HARVESTING PRACTICES

9. Most natural harvesting operations in the tropical forests of Latin America are carried out in a conventional manner, using ground-based harvesting techniques consisting of a chainsaw operator carrying out felling and cross cutting in the forest or on the landing and a crawler tractor or skidder extracting trees or logs to a landing for measurement and loading before being transported to the log buyer. The planned Regional Code of Practice for Reduced Impact Forest Harvesting in Tropical Moist Forests of Latin America and the Caribbean is therefore targeted at this form of operation.
10. Writing the Regional Code draws upon the FAO Model Code of Forest Harvesting Practice (1996) and is driven by the fundamental principle "that it is possible to conduct forest harvesting operations in ways that are consistent with the needs of sustainability" and that significantly reduce negative impact. At the same time (1996) the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) committed itself to developing a regional code of practice, which was endorsed by the APFC membership at its seventeenth session in 1998 as a product of joint efforts of the APFC members and FAO. As a consistent follow up activity, and with the help of FAO and international donors, several countries, initiated writing their national codes of forest harvesting practice including reduced impact logging (RIL) practices. In 2003, the Regional Code of Practice for Central and West Africa was completed under the FAO/EC Partnership Programme and is expected to be implemented in the region in the near future.
11. Although the promotion of environmentally sound forest harvesting has encouraged many companies to adopt reduced impact practices, the extent to which these have actually been implemented in the field has been inadequate.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

12. "Codes of forest practice" are sets of regulations or guidelines which are designed to help foresters in government agencies and forest enterprises select practices to be followed in carrying out forest management and utilization operations. In theory, practices which conform to a code of forest practice should achieve a desired outcome, such as the harvest of commercial timber from a specific area of forest in a way that meets standards for sustainable forest management. Whether a code of practice is mandatory or voluntary depends upon the legislative framework within

which the rules or guidelines are adopted, the cultural history of the country or region, and even the attitudes of operators towards the results that the rules or guidelines are intended to achieve.

THE REGIONAL CODE OF PRACTICE FOR REDUCED IMPACT FOREST HARVESTING IN TROPICAL MOIST FORESTS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

13. It is planned to start with the preparation of the Forest Harvesting Code for tropical moist forests of Latin America and the Caribbean this year. It should be the fruit of collaboration between many organizations associated with tropical forestry and forest management in Latin America. It will not be a complete code of practice: this would be an unattainable goal, given the importance of local conditions in dictating economically feasible and environmentally sound forest harvesting practices. Rather, the Regional Code is intended to be used as a reference by FAO Member countries that are contemplating the preparation of their own codes of forest harvesting practice, if not already in place. The regional Code is being prepared, therefore, to provide information on a range of practices that are likely to be acceptable under various conditions, and also on practices which may damage timber or non-timber forest resources. To do this, the planned Regional Code assumes that it is first necessary to know what practices are technically and economically feasible; political institutions can then be used to establish policies and legislation, within in the context of the country's cultural and sociological framework that will motivate or enforce the adoption of such practices. The basic assumption of the Regional Code is *that it is possible to conduct forest harvesting operations in ways that are consistent with sustainable forest management.*

14. It is important to remember that it is not the forest harvesting practices themselves that are important, but rather the results that are to be achieved as a consequence of implementing these practices. In most cases, however, the goal of sustainable forest management cannot be attained unless environmentally sound harvesting practices are widely adopted by logging operators. If improved practices are adopted, it is more likely that the ecological, environmental and cultural values of forests will be retained, leading to the sustainable utilization of commercial timber from those forests.

15. A final caveat is that laws or policies which are overly-prescriptive tend to stifle initiative and thus make it difficult for practitioners to react creatively to changing situations.

16. The best codes of forest practice are those that provide a foundation for decision making and assessment and also permitting sufficient flexibility so that guidelines can be amended as more is learned about ecosystem function and silvicultural requirements, or as the socio-economic situation in a country or region evolves. It is also true that effective codes of forest practice cannot be developed in isolation from potential users and other interested parties. Efforts to develop such codes should involve government forestry officials, representatives of the forest industry, buyers, leaders of local communities, representatives of non-governmental organizations, technical experts, and individuals whose livelihood or cultural well-being depends on the sustainability of forest resources.

A REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

17. For the successful development and implementation of the Regional Code, a regional strategy, taking into account the economic, social and environmental particularities of the region, is indispensable. Therefore, this strategy requires the cooperation of all main stakeholders in the region, including forest industry, forest departments, NGOs and community groups.

18. It is proposed that the Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission act as a platform and forum, taking the lead in supporting the development and, after the Code has been

written, the implementation of the Regional Code. The value of such a commitment should not be under-estimated because it would:

1. reaffirm the commitment of the Central, South American and Caribbean countries;
2. motivate positive reforms in individual countries;
3. encourage cross-country exchanges of harvesting information and technology; and
4. pave the way for increased donor resources.

IMPLEMENTATION RESPONSIBILITIES

19. The implementation of the strategy and the achievement of the goals and objectives will involve appropriate actions by all stakeholders.

20. The Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission and the Governments of the Member Countries of the LACFC will have a major role to play in such actions, particularly through their respective Forest Departments. However, the private sector will have the primary role in implementing on and developing of implementation systems. Besides this, NGOs, research organizations and intergovernmental associations and international donor organizations are indispensable parties to the process.

STRATEGY OUTCOMES

21. In general, a Code development process has an immediate (within two years), the implementation process a mid-term (two to five years) and a long-term perspective, which will require the engagement of the different parties for up to ten years.

22. The expected outcomes of successfully implemented activities will include:

5. improved standard of harvesting operations in production forests of the region, allowing sustainable forest harvesting;
6. improved health and status of the residual stand and forest environment and societies dwelling in and around the forest;
7. positive economic impacts at the local level resulting from increased employment, economic activity and flow of benefits;
8. a sustainable and more efficient and competitive forest industry in the region which takes into consideration the social and environmental values of the forest;
9. improved institutional capacity and capability of staff and workers in the forest sector in the region;
10. enhanced understanding of the impacts of forest harvesting on different forest types, costs, benefits and effects on the societies and economies in the region and countries where undertaken; and
11. recognition of the role production forestry plays, at both the community and concession levels, and in preventing further environmental degradation.

The participants of the side meeting may examine further measures to be taken to enhance the development and implementation of the Regional Code of Practice for Reduced-Impact Forest Harvesting in Tropical Moist Forests of the region so that forestry is fully integrated into the national, sub-regional and regional development agenda.