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Food and Agriculture
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Продовольственная и
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Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة
الغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

AFRICAN FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

TWENTIETH SESSION

Nairobi, Kenya, 1 - 5 February 2016

GENDER, YOUTH AND EDUCATION

I. Background

1. Women and youth have a huge untapped potential to play a stronger role in halting deforestation and achieving sustainable management of the world's forests. Yet, they are often overlooked by programmes and management approaches within the forest sector. Institutional reforms addressing forest tenure, access to markets and capacity development in the area of sustainable forest management cannot be successful without the full engagement of women and youth.
2. Educational programmes relating to forests and trees are crucial to achieving sustainable forest management and national sustainable development goals. Nevertheless, forestry education is deteriorating in many countries. Society's recognition of the diverse roles of forests is gradually declining, resulting in the loss of a direct connection between people and forests. Decreasing enrolments in forestry schools and changes in the skill sets needed by professional foresters have caused considerable uncertainty amongst forestry educators. Many of the concepts and approaches that were appropriate 10 or 15 years ago no longer correspond to society's needs.

II. Women's participation and leadership in forestry

3. Despite a wealth of studies demonstrating the critical roles that women play in managing forests, agroforestry and tree genetic resources, women's contributions remain underappreciated. Although the policy environment for addressing gender inequality has improved over the past decade, women continue to be disadvantaged by insecure property rights and limited access to forest, trees and land resources. They also suffer from discrimination and male bias in the provision of services, including credit and technology, and are often excluded from decision-making at household, community and national levels.

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4. There is ample evidence that gender inclusion contributes not only to more sustainable forest management but also to more equitable distribution and enhanced food security and nutrition. Nevertheless, most countries still face challenges in implementing gender-sensitive forest policies. Clearly more needs to be done by the forest sector to fully capture the opportunities that gender equality provides.

5. A recent FAO-RECOFTC¹ study in Asia suggests that having gender-integrated forest policies alone is not enough to reduce pervasive gender inequalities in forestry. These policies must be supported by technical expertise for facilitating gender-sensitive policy implementation and practice. Moreover, clear targets, gender guidelines, strategies and action plans, supported by adequate budgets and institutional mechanisms in forestry departments and agencies, must be in place so that gender mainstreaming becomes an achievable milestone within a set time frame.

III. Engaging youth in the forest sector

6. It is commonly understood that youth are the future. Despite this, policies, educational initiatives for youth, awareness-raising on forestry-related issues and youth participation in the forestry debate remain absent or at best limited. The forest sector needs to focus more strongly on reaching out to youth and involving them to ensure that the next generation will contribute to a sustainable forest sector that can meet the needs of the future.

7. Youth constitute a large part of the world's population. Many, especially young children, are particularly vulnerable to forest degradation, which threatens their food security and overall living environment. Young people will be more exposed than others to the long-term impact of forest degradation because of their longer life expectancy. They will have to live for quite some time with the consequences of the deteriorating forests that they may inherit.

8. Young people do not need to be passive witnesses of current forestry practices. They are well-placed for invention and the development of new forms of action and activism and for generating effective responses to issues of concern. The challenge remains how to reach youth to raise their awareness and provide them with opportunities to become active members of our society's efforts to manage sustainably forest resources.

9. One way to equip young people with a better understanding of forestry issues is through more effective environmental education. Although at a limited scale, schools have already shown that they can be effective avenues for forestry education. However a lack of background knowledge can be a barrier for teachers trying to deliver an appropriate forestry learning programme. This is an area where foresters can more proactively lend their expertise, by becoming involved with schools and arranging classroom visits or field trips.

10. When young people are equipped with an understanding of society's need for forests and the benefits that forests provide, they will understand the benefits of a range of management tools, such as protection, planting, sustainable harvesting, etc., and they will become active contributors to sustainable forest management by adopting good practices.

11. In a paper published by the FAO Regional Office in Africa², scientists and youth representatives expressed concern about the lack of attention paid to the voices of young people. They argued that it is crucial to include youth in decision-making on forest management in order to inform the planning of sustainable activities essential to their livelihoods. One avenue to empower rural youth could be through better use of modern technologies, such as social media, as demonstrated by some

¹ FAO & Center for People and Forests. *Mainstreaming gender into forest policies in Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok, 2015

² FAO Regional Office for Africa, *African Youth in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development*, Nature & Faune, Volume 28, Issue 1, 2013

young farmers. This seems to be a promising approach to mobilize youth around common issues of interest and to promote social learning for sustainable forest management.

12. Older generations also have a role to play in engaging youth in supporting sustainable forest management. Inter-generational exchanges between older people, who have good empirical and/or professional knowledge, and young people, who have developed their education at school and through mixing with other people, travelling and social media, can be a formidable source of inspiration to the benefit of all.

IV. Providing a modern forestry education

13. The role of foresters is constantly evolving in a context of growing demand for forest goods and services, a profusion of stakeholders and an increasing emphasis on food security and poverty alleviation. In many countries, forestry curricula have to be adapted to these new requirements and trends. New approaches to forestry education need to be developed, including continuous learning, the integration of forest topics into other fields of study, and the mobility of students and teaching staff. This will require greater networking to ensure that individuals better understand what is needed and how they can meet those needs.

14. Many developing countries have inadequate forestry education facilities. In addition, some existing forestry education institutions lack the financial means to provide an effective education to their students. While increased financial support for forestry education is not likely to materialize in the current economic situation, forestry education could benefit from a certain rationalization of its capacities and from closer collaboration with related fields.

15. To address these issues and in response to the request of the 20th session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission, FAO conducted a survey on forestry education and knowledge in the region to propose new educational initiatives. A regional workshop on forestry education was also organized in Latin America.

16. To coordinate guidance from the main regional stakeholders regarding forestry education and knowledge and to address related challenges, the 22nd session of COFO welcomed the initiative and the steps taken towards the establishment of a global Advisory Panel on Forest Knowledge (APFK), endorsed the draft operational guidelines of the APFK and invited countries to support this initiative. The Committee requested that the Panel should:

- be time-bound and funded from extra-budgetary resources;
- have a broad scope and focus on technical, human and social issues of forest knowledge.

17. The Committee requested FAO to:

- continue enhancing the forestry-related knowledge base and, in collaboration with other partners, continue disseminating this knowledge by, inter alia, including education and research initiatives in FAO's regional activities under FAO's Strategic Objectives;
- report back on progress on the development and the work of the Advisory Panel on Forest Knowledge (APFK) at the Committee's 23rd Session.

V. Points for discussion and consideration

18. The Commission is invited to exchange perspectives on gender policies, youth and forestry education, considering their tremendous potential to influence positively the forestry sector to meet today's and tomorrow's societal needs and with a view to formulating recommendations to COFO 2016 to further strengthen FAO's work in this area.

19. The Commission may wish to invite countries to:

- mainstream gender and youth into their forest policies and ensure and monitor their implementation;
- increase the participation of women and youth representatives at forestry events;
- identify major challenges facing the future of forest education and explore innovative approaches to tackle these challenges and attract more students to the field of forestry;
- provide adequate resources to FAO to strengthen gender and youth mainstreaming in forestry.

20. The Commission may wish to recommend that FAO supports countries by:

- strengthening capacity and providing technical support for gender and youth mainstreaming in forest policies and their implementation;
- supporting the economic empowerment of women in the forestry value chain through enterprise development;
- working with the APFK to provide guidance for modernizing forestry education.