



WORLD OF FORESTRY

Large-scale gathering of small-scale entrepreneurs

Indigenous and other forest-dwelling communities have long managed and protected forests and owned and operated small-scale forest enterprises. Until recently, however, these enterprises operated largely in the shadows of formal forest industry and their contributions to forest conservation, employment and local development were largely underappreciated. Despite having an important impact on the conservation of natural resources, they face an array of challenges including insecure land tenure, lack of financial support, excessive red tape, high taxes and inaccessible markets.

In Rio Branco, Brazil from 16 to 20 July 2007, the largest-ever international gathering of community forestry entrepreneurs and policy-makers from Africa, Asia and Central and South America was held to debate the best ways of assisting the sustainable development of community-based operations.

The international conference “Community Forest Management and Enterprises: Global Issues and Opportunities” brought together more than 250 leaders of forest communities, public forest agencies, forest industry and conservation groups from more than 40 countries. The conference was organized by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the Rights and Resources Initiative, the Global Alliance of Community Forestry and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). It was hosted by the Government of the State of Acre and the Government of Brazil through the newly created Brazilian Forest Agency.

The programme was framed around the case studies and findings of *Community-based forest enterprises in tropical forest countries: status and potential*, a report commissioned by ITTO and produced by Forest Trends and the Rights and Resources Initiative, which was released at the conference. The report surveyed community enterprise leaders, other forest communities, community federation leaders, forestry professionals and policy-makers, donors and outreach organizations. It indicated that community forestry enterprises employ more than 110 million people and that forest communities are responsible for the management of around 370 million hectares of natural forest worldwide. Despite their scant financial, technical and technological resources, community forest enterprises worldwide invest US\$2.5 billion in forests annually.

Case studies presented at the conference included community forest management for timber and sawnwood production in Mexico; butterfly farming in the United Republic of Tanzania; and extraction of seed-oil from *Pongamia* trees for conversion to biodiesel in India.

Participants' recommendations included a commitment to:

- work together to ensure that legal access to land and natural resources be included in national laws;
- lobby governments to provide lines of credit dedicated exclusively to community enterprises;
- adopt measures to combat poverty and encourage social justice and policies of inclusion within communities;



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- call for the immediate suspension of high taxes imposed by governments on forest community enterprises;
- seek economic and administrative help to reach consumer markets for sustainable products;
- create, through ITTO, a special fund for financing community organizations.

In addition, the entire contingent from Africa (26 officials and community leaders from 12 countries) issued a statement calling for substantial support for the continent in realizing the potential of community forest enterprises. They urged further discussion of a “time-bound plan for systematically expanding community forest tenure, management and enterprise in African countries to agreed achievable targets by 2015”.

First high-level seminar on biofuels in Africa

As in the rest of the world, the biofuel sector is one of the most dynamic and rapidly changing sectors in Africa. The continent has enormous energy needs which are largely unmet. With rising and volatile oil prices, interest in biofuels has surged over the past five years. Several African countries, mainly net oil importers, have taken steps to develop biofuels, particularly liquid biofuels, to ensure stable, secure and environmentally friendly energy supplies. In other regions of the developing world, other biofuel technologies such as gasification and biogas are beginning to demonstrate market potential.

In line with its overall strategy to elaborate policies and strategies for the development of clean, new and renewable energies, particularly biofuels, the Commission of the African Union (AU), together with the Government of Brazil and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), organized the first-ever high-level seminar on biofuels in Africa. Held at AU



headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 30 July to 1 August 2007, the seminar brought together some 250 participants representing AU member States, African regional economic communities, UN agencies, the scientific community, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The theme was "Sustainable Biofuels Development in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges". The seminar was held to help policy-makers, the private sector, regional institutions and other key stakeholders in the biofuel industry make informed decisions in developing biofuel policies, strategies, programmes and projects in Africa.

The seminar noted that given Africa's climate, vast land resources and availability of labour, biofuels would have the potential to provide the necessary energy for industrialization and poverty reduction. Biofuels can reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels and increase energy security. They can also help reduce the rate of global climate change, which in turn will increase Africa's access to climate-related finance. Energy crops for biofuel production can be an important source of job opportunities for rural communities in Africa. However, there are risks, including expansion of agricultural frontiers, deforestation, environmental problems associated with monocultures and food security problems. Therefore, there is a critical need to maximize the benefits and simultaneously minimize potential risks and trade-offs in developing biofuels in Africa.

The Brazilian biofuel experience was presented as a possible model for application in Africa. The seminar also examined biofuel conversion technologies for ethanol, biodiesel, biogas and biomass gasification. Issues related to policy and regulatory frameworks, financing and environmental sustainability were also discussed.

A Ministerial Roundtable met on the last day of the meeting and adopted the Addis Ababa Declaration on Sustainable Biofuels Development in Africa. The declaration calls for the development of enabling policy and regulatory frameworks; Africa's participation in global sustainability discussions; the formulation of guiding principles on biofuels to enhance Africa's competitiveness; and minimizing the risks of biofuel development for small-scale producers. It invites development partners to enable North-South and South-South cooperation, and public financing institutions to support biofuel projects. It also proposes the establishment of a forum to promote access to information and knowledge on biofuels.

Recommendations from the plenary sessions were consolidated into an Action Plan for Biofuels Development in Africa, which was annexed to the Addis Ababa Declaration. It notes that existing policies, strategies and laws governing energy development cut across sectoral boundaries, involving institutions dealing with forestry, agriculture, environment, water, industry, electricity and petroleum; coordinating the roles of these institutions in biofuel development is a complex challenge. It also notes the challenge of ensuring that biomass energy plantations provide a sustainable

supply to meet growing energy demand, without taking up land needed for food crop production; competition can be avoided by increasing food production on current agricultural lands, establishing large tree plantations and using modern forestry practices.

Helping forestry help the poor

Crippling poverty, violent conflict, insecure ownership and restricted access to basic resources are everyday challenges confronting 300 million rural villagers who live in and around the often dwindling forests of Asia and the Pacific.

To highlight successes and problems encountered in efforts to make forestry assist the poor more effectively, the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) and the Rights and Resources Initiative (a coalition of community forestry organizations) convened the International Conference on Poverty Reduction and Forests: Forest Tenure, Markets and Policy Reforms. Held in Bangkok from 4 to 7 September 2007, the conference was attended by about 300 people.

In the opening session, a panel of experts from five Asian countries shared their first-hand experience of rural life and their views on answers to issues such as persistent poverty, armed social conflict, the need for legal reform, obstacles to community use and control of forests and insecure property rights. Discussions revolved around concepts, issues and lessons learned from forestry reforms intended to assist the poor; opportunities and threats; and capacity building. Participants examined the role of communities, forest tenure, markets and enterprises, and policy and governance.

The report *Land, forest and people: facing the challenges in South-East Asia*, compiled by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), RECOFTC, the Rights and Resources Initiative and the Forest Peoples Programme, was launched at the conference. The outcome of detailed national reviews and regional workshops, it reveals the precarious situation of millions of people whose lives depend on the fast-depleting forests of Southeast Asia, showing that a huge gap remains between legal options and realities on the ground. The report notes that many who depend on the forests do so insecurely and even illegally; the result is poverty, marginalization and sometimes violence. Important progress is being made, however, in policy reforms; across the region, communities are increasingly being given legal rights to forests.

The report can be downloaded from: www.recoftc.org