

## **Item 6. The image of the forest industry**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This summary is based on the paper “Public Perception of Forestry Industry and Environment”, which was presented at the 48th session of the ACPWP in Shanghai, China on 6 June 2007 under item 8. A revised version was prepared early in 2008 and includes additional information and recommendations.

#### **WHAT IS IMAGE?**

“Image” describes a sentiment, picture or instinctive impression of a certain subject, a person, an organization, a product or an industry. An image can be negative or positive and tends to stabilize over time, but is also subject to dynamic changes.

“Image” is a keystone of successful marketing, be it of a product or of whole industries. Positive image requires permanent maintenance and periodical improvement by image campaigns. Once the image of a product, a company or an industry is damaged, for whatever reason, it is very difficult to rebuild public trust and a good image.

In common with “image”, the term “perception”, which was used in the previous paper at the 48th session, expresses a belief or opinion that one holds as a result of realizing or noticing something, especially something which is perhaps not obvious to other people.

#### **FACTS ARE FACTS, BUT PERCEPTION IS REALITY**

Over recent decades, discussions about the causes of deforestation and ecological risks have taken place in many fora. Some environmental groups claim that the forest products industry is one of the sectors most responsible for high deforestation rates, particularly in tropical countries. Press articles, reports and other documentary material directly link environmental risks with the forest products industry. Therefore, the public perception is that the more paper or wood products are consumed, the more deforestation is going to take place. This conclusion is a simplification and incorrect, but easily believed by a majority of people. The substitute product industries (metals, plastics or cement) profit from these negative perceptions and use them to gain market shares. Public perception and wood competition work here in concert and have a negative impact on the forest products industry, even though wood and paper products are ever more frequently certified as originating from sustainably managed forests or plantations.

To date, the forest products industry has not been very successful in communicating with the public about their efforts to conserve forest resources and use them sustainably, not only conserving existing resources, but also rehabilitating degraded lands, converting them into forests or increasingly making use of recycled resources.

There is a need to correct this public perception. The forest industry sector is aware of this and corporate publicity strategies have been developed accordingly.

### **Objective**

The aim of this note is to provide an understanding of the communication strategy used by forest industry stakeholders and of the current public perception of the relationship that exists between forestry industry and the environment. The paper reviews public perception of deforestation and environmental risks and recommends further steps required to improve the image of the forest industry.

### **THE IMAGE OF THE FOREST PRODUCTS INDUSTRY**

Consumers have been on “red alert” in recent years. They are highly critical of how wood is being produced across the globe. Bridging the gap between public perception and the reality of the wood chain is a major challenge for industries, governments and politicians. Forest industries, environmental groups, consumers, the media, policy makers and others can work together to close this gap.

Questions about how wood is grown, transported and marketed need to receive transparent and substantive answers because consumers are highly critical of the ways in which wood is produced, mostly believing that its production is the root cause of deforestation in many tropical forest countries.

### **STRENGTHS AND POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS**

The pulp and paper industry is in the unique position of being able to rely on its own internally-generated fuels from renewable biomass sources for more than half of its energy requirements. Wood residues and black liquor are carbon neutral. The industry is pursuing the concept of “closed cycle” operations in the bleaching cycle, in order to minimise liquid and gaseous emissions. This industry plays an important role in sustainable development because its chief raw material - wood fibre - is renewable. The industry provides an example of how a resource can be managed to provide a sustained supply to meet the current and future needs of society. In the U.S.A., the standard practice of using bark, wood waste and black liquor as fuel eliminates about 54 percent of the demand for fossil fuel in the forest products industry as a whole, including integrated pulp and paper and non-integrated mills.

With the increasing worldwide concern about climate change, governments are beginning to implement policies to increase use of biofuels, including wood. European Union Member States are introducing policies so as to achieve the new EU target of 20percent renewable energy by 2020, with consequences for the forest sector, both positive and negative, depending on viewpoints.

The entire wood supply chain is involved in development and implementation of appropriate policies for promoting renewable energy sources (RES). Energy, climate change and food security are amongst the hottest topics on the global political agenda in 2008. Fuel prices are rocketing; concerns are raised about energy security in the regions, and the debate on climate change and food security is gaining momentum. This is prompting widespread discussions on renewable energy sources (RES), placing the pulp and paper industry firmly on centre stage as the foremost industrial generator and user of RES in Europe. With the increasing competition in Europe for wood fibre from the paper and pulp sector, the panel sector and the energy sector, CEPI is concerned about market distortions caused by subsidies and the need for greater wood mobilization.

Conversion of forest resources to wood and paper products creates four times the added value of simply burning wood fibre for energy, in addition to six times more jobs.

Wood is the most renewable and sustainable of the major building materials. When comparing the environmental effects of common building materials, wood has the least impact on total energy use, greenhouse gases, air and water pollution and solid waste.

## **WEAKNESSES AND NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS**

Some environmental groups try to convince the public that they contribute to forest loss when using wood. This widespread assumption is misleading. European forest area is constantly growing; in the case of North America's forests, there is about the same amount of forest cover today as there was 100 years ago, even though the wood consumption per capita is higher than in any other region in the world (Moore P., 2002).

Unfortunately, illegal logging can be a profitable activity, both for the producer's and consumers, to meet the increasing demand for timber in Europe, North America and Northeast Asia. Forest industry is seen by many observers as a source of substantial risk for ecology and legality.

Some environmental NGOs consider that forest plantations are not "real" forest. Forest plantations have in some countries substituted natural forests, or their establishment has caused local populations to move to other areas, often connected lands-use change and deforestation at the new location. They also perceive forest plantations, as monocultural deserts, which threaten the biodiversity and causes damage to soil and water sources as well. Another issue is the growing recognition of indigenous peoples' rights. Increasingly, the public is also questioning conventional industrial practices and their negative environmental impacts. Various actors have translated these concerns into a variety of protests against forestry operations.

Plantations and monocultures are controversial as regards their environmental impacts, e.g. potential lack of biodiversity, occasional use of non-native species and fertilization. Hence, certification of large-scale forest plantations, although increasingly taken up by the main certifiers, is a complex issue. Management of natural forests and forest plantations in tropical regions in the world are of particular interest for certification activities. The wood of fast-growing species such as eucalyptus, pine, bamboo, or hybrid poplar is in demand by both the bioenergy sector and the wood and paper processing industry. Forest plantations are seen as a major contributor to meeting predicted future high demand for forest resources (Kraxner,2007b), already in 2005 they covered about 60 percent of the global industrial roundwood consumed (FAO, 2008).<sup>3</sup>

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

Forest certification was originally introduced to promote sustainable forest management and to reward good forest practices. In later years, social and legal aspects were added to the environmental prescriptions of forest certification. Signing up to "responsible environmental stewardship" aiming to "preserve forest habitats for future generations" and "preserve life through the protection of wildlife habitats" will certainly broaden the acceptance of industrial practices and products.

An important instrument to address negative perceptions is education. Numerous polls over the past decades have indicated consumers' growing environmental awareness. These polls, taken by Gallup, Wirthlin, Roper, and others, present sobering conclusions:

- loss of habitat and species is a concern, including the disappearance of forest cover at an alarming rate;

---

<sup>3</sup> Page 22 <http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/docs/fpama/2007/fpamr2007.pdf>

- the environment is so important that continuing improvement must be made regardless of cost;
- more government regulation will provide a better environment.

It is readily apparent from the above that achieving public acceptance is essential to protection of our raw material source, the forest. Public acceptance, or the lack of it, will define what products we make and how we operate our mills. (Baldwin, Richard F. 2004).

## THREATS

A worst case scenario for both the forestry sector in general and the paper and wood industry specifically demonstrates the case of a company operating in South East Asia. Besides unsustainable investments in infrastructure and wood resources from illegal logging, the resulting products are also illegally traded and marketed, jeopardizing undisturbed operations of the forestry and wood industry in general, because of the total lack of acceptance of these practices by the end consumers and the public. Needless to say, these poor practices are rejected by the majority of the industry.

“Logging companies promise us wonders: work, schools, hospitals, but actually, they seem to be only interested in their own short term profits. What will happen when our forests have been emptied? They will leave and we'll be the ones left with damaged roads, schools with no roofs and hospitals without medicine.” (Pasteur Matthieu Yela Bonketo, CEDEN<sup>4</sup>, Congo)

Certainly it could also be asked, why governments do not in first place fulfil their responsibility to provide their population with roads, schools and hospitals, and instead leave it to the private sector? According to the Global Forest Watch, nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the rainforests in a South East Asian country have now been destroyed. It has been estimated that 40 percent of the wood consumed by the local pulp and paper industry is likely to have come from illegal sources. Friends of the Earth claim that paper of one of the companies accused of illegal acts is in widespread use in the United Kingdom, anonymously and with the support of British banks.

All this reflects not only in the image of the paper industry, but of forestry as a whole. It does not help much to complain about other industries like the steel, concrete, plastics or oil industries, which are based on non renewable resources and involve heavy energy input to manufacture and use their products, thus contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions.

It seems to be a contradiction, that one of the few industry sectors depending on renewable resources and on a significantly high amount of recycled material is blamed most by consumers and the public for operating in an irresponsible and unsustainable manner. It is a public belief and perception (or perhaps rather a dream), that forests should be kept dominantly untouched or only slightly used. Only in a very few countries is public opinion of the forest industry friendly and based on facts.

Once the image of a product, a company or an industry has been damaged, for whatever reason, it is very difficult to rebuild public trust and a good image.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Government, legislators, forestry companies, local actors and consumers of forest products and services all need to work together to ensure the long-term integrity of the world's forests, which deliver such a wide range of goods and services to society, both locally and globally. It is critical for producers and importers of timber to move their business to the forefront of sustainability by

---

<sup>4</sup> Congolese NGO active in Equateur province

endorsing socially and environmentally responsible practices. Such statements by leading companies and their CEOs represent a significant step forward.<sup>5</sup>

Sustainable forest management (SFM) is often called into doubt by the public and this particularly affects the image of forestry. The idea that certain sectors of the industry are highly polluting is generally accepted (in particular the pulp and printing industries). However, efforts to improve this should be based on mutual trust, collaborative learning, mutual recognition, communication strategy and constructive co-operation among industries people, stakeholders and actors from the forestry sector.

Environmental sustainability is both an issue for producers and consumers. Companies that do not adequately address environmental challenges could face limits on growth and suffer serious, negative consequences for their reputations. Companies are now expected to provide an "environmental pedigree" for their products, detailing the supply chain from the tree to the final consumer product. They are also expected to communicate this information to their stakeholders, for example through a sustainability or corporate social responsibility report.

Forestry industries should work cooperatively towards their collective goal of achieving sustainable forestry at a global level. Through a series of cross-country public activities, they should communicate and disseminate their values and identify strategic directions, objectives, and actions required to further advance this goal. It is important to communicate to the public the fundamentally important role the industry has in the economy and in society at the national, provincial and even local level, both now and in the foreseeable future. Communications messages need to stress both the current strengths of the industry and address the perceived weaknesses, in terms of resource management, environmental performance and the use of advanced technology. The existing gap in knowledge, belief, attitudes and action of forestry industry has generated the need for strategic communication.

Strategic, professional communication requires:

- Relevance: - focus on the people, - get the people's attention, talk about things that are relevant to them; - adapt the message or delivery to the audience and adapt it over time (e.g. societal evolution);
- Consistency: - ensure consistency of the message within an organization; - make the message consistent with organisation's image (and vice versa);
- Clarity: - use a language that people understand; - use simple messages and images; - talk to people and not for people;
- Continuity: - develop a long-term perspective, - repeat action over time; - ensure sustainability of messages and actions;
- Honesty: - no propaganda; - give the whole picture; - admit mistakes;
- Reliability: - base your information on sound knowledge; - keep to your promises, policies, plans; - do what the people expect from you;
- Openness and transparency: - give as much information as necessary, as quickly as possible;
- Listening and learning: - listen to the audience and learn from the process; - interact with your public; - know your audience and listen to its concerns, (raising awareness of forests and forestry, Report of the FAO/ECE/ILO team of Specialists on Participation in Forestry and the FAO/ECE Forest Communicators Network, 2003), (G. Jansen, EFI. 2005).

Some suggestions for better communication:

- UNEP guidebook on producing effective environmental campaigns;
- Best practices in Forest Communication – European Forest Institute;
- A recent study in the US shows that the concept of renewability related to forests is not well-received. The concept of recycling and replanting is much more positive and likely to offset the negative perception of forestry.

---

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from GLOBE International

All strategic communication planning should involve some variation on these steps:

- Identify the problem and determine whether communication should be part of the intervention;
- Identify the audience for the communication programme and determine the best ways to reach them;
- Develop and test communication concepts, messages, and materials amongst representatives of the target audiences;
- Implement the forestry communication programme based on results of the testing;
- Assess how effectively the messages reached the target audience and modify the communication programme if necessary.

### Target Groups

- Schools: Youth initiatives. Special attention to attractive teaching materials (DVDs, internet) and by visits to forests;
- Media;
- Architects and builders: organizing competitions for constructing building with wood, etc.;
- Universities;
- NGOs.

### Messages

- Forest sector should identify joint messages or joint interests to fuel message;
- Forest sector are starting to use simple messages that evoke positive images: “More wood is growing than is being cut”, “Wood is recyclable”;
- Visual methods are needed to convince the public; simple slogans are very useful, something NGOs have understood already for a long time.

### Responsibilities and cooperation in communication

Interested parties have undertaken standard polling to clarify public attitudes towards forest industry activities, but little if any research has been conducted about the underlying factors that shape public perceptions of ecological impacts from these activities. A clearer understanding of the fundamental influences shaping lay perceptions and differences between lay and expert views would be helpful in many contexts: predicting and diagnosing conflicts about forestry practices, designing risk communication efforts regarding ecological impacts associated with forestry, and clarifying the public values that should be considered in making ecological risk management decisions (McDaniel *et al.*, 1997).

A full range of suggestions for better communication can be found in the paper “Public Perception of Forest Industry and Environment”.

### REFERENCES

- AF&PA, Harris. Interactive.** 2006. *Saving an American Industry. Case study.* American Forest and Paper Association. 1994, 1995.
- Baldwin, Richard F.** 2004. *Breaking New Ground: The Forest Industry quest for Public Acceptance.* Forest Products Journal 54 (January 2004): 8–14.
- Belden & Russonello,** Research and Communications.1996. *Current Trends in Public Opinion on the Environment: Environmental Compendium Update.*
- Bliss, J. C.** 1998. *Public Perception of Clearcutting.* Journal of Forestry, 98 (12), 4-9.

- Brunson, M. W.** A definition of “social acceptability” in ecosystem management. In M. Brunson, L. Kruger, C. Tyler, and S. Schroeder (Eds.), *Defining social acceptability in ecosystem management: a workshop proceedings*. General Technical Report PNW-369. Portland, OR: U.S. Forest Service.
- Cavanagh N., McDaniels T., Axelrod L., Slovic P.** 2000. *Perceived Ecological Risks to Water Environments from Selected Forest Industry Activities*. Forest Science 46 (3).
- Directorate-General for Enterprise. European Commission** 2002. *Perception of the wood-based industries. Qualitative study*.
- Einsiedel Edna F.** 1994. *Communication professionals, the public understanding of science and environmental risk*. University of Calgary.
- Emerson David L.** 1999. *Reinventing the Forest Industry: A Handbook for Would-be CEO's*. FAO/ECE/ILO Report. 2003. Team of Specialists on Participation in Forestry and the FAO/ECE Forest Communicators Network. *Raising awareness of forests and forestry*.
- Fernandez Carro, O. and Wilson, R.** 1992. Quality Management with Timber Crops, TAPPI journal, February: 49-52, in Lohmann, 1996.
- Counsell S.** 1998. *The Influence of the Private Sector in Forest Policy*.
- Howe, Shindler, Cashore, Hansen, Lach and Armstrong.** 2005. *Public influences on plantation forestry*.
- Jansen G.** 2005. *European Cooperation and Networking in Forest Communication*. Finnish Forest Association. European Forest Institute, Technical Report 20.
- Legg, Robert F.** 1999. *Positive Public Perception of the Forest Products Industry Hinges on Sustained Promotion, Education*.
- Lengths R.** 1997. *The Greatest Story Never Told*.
- Mater, J.** 2005. *The role of the Forest Industry in the Future of the World*. Forest Products Journal. vol. 55, No 9.
- Moore P.** March 26, 2002. *Greens don't see forest for the trees*. Co-founder of Greenpeace, is President of Greenspirit, an environmental consultant to government and industry.
- Murray S., Nelson P.** 2005. *How the Public Perceives Forestry (and Why It Matters)*. University of Washington,
- PAMSA.** 2006-2007. (Paper and Manufactures Association of South Africa). *A perspective on South Africa*.
- Pechlaner G., Tindall D.B.** 2003. *Changing contexts: environmentalism, aboriginal community and forest company joint ventures, and the case of Iisaak*.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers.** May 2007. *A Sustainable Forest Products Industry is a Business and a Consumer Issue: PricewaterhouseCoopers*.
- Shellenberger M., Nordhaus T.** 2004. *The death of environmentalism*.
- Shindler B., Brunson M., Aldred Cheek K.** 2004. *Social Acceptability in Forest and Range Management in Society and Natural Resources: A Summary of Knowledge*.
- Shindler, Cashore, Hansen, Howe, Lach and Armstrong.** 2005. *Public influences on plantation forestry*.
- Siry J., Cabbage F.** 2002. *Clecutting in the South: Issues, Status and Trends*. Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Forest Inventory and Analysis Symposium.
- Thang Hooi Chiew** (Assistant Director-General of Forestry (Macro & Micro Planning), Forestry Department Headquarters, Peninsular Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur ). 2001. *International Issues Relating To The Forest Sector With Specific Reference To Criteria And Indicators For Sustainable Forest Management In Malaysia. Paper presented at the Malaysian Timber Council (MTC)*. Kuala Lumpur, 18 April, 1998.
- Tonts M., Campbell C., Black A.** March 2007. *Socio-Economic Impacts of Farm Forestry*. NAFI web-site news. Wood and Paper industry welcomes Federal Government funding for future skills needs.
- UNECE -United National Economic Commission for Europe.** 2003. *What do Forest mean for Europeans*. Available at:  
<http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/pr/publist/doc%20to%20upload/Europeans%20and%20their%20fo%20rests.pdf>