

Looking outward: incorporating international forestry in higher forestry education and research¹

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Adding an international dimension to higher forestry education and research could enhance the preparation of professionals to address global issues and fill a serious gap facing intergovernmental debates.

Unlike global environmental issues and policies for most natural resources, forestry concerns – particularly trade, deforestation and sustainable forest management at large – have been difficult to address internationally. After the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, the world was able to reach agreements and ratify conventions on certain matters such as climate change, biological diversity, desertification and endangered species. More recently, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2003, addressed water, energy, habitat, agriculture and biological diversity (WEHAB) but not forestry directly, much to the disappointment of the forestry community – although the WSSD Plan of Implementation recognizes sustainable forest management as essential to achieving sustainable development.

Curricula of forestry schools rarely focus on the issues discussed at the international level. This shortcoming could stem from lack of knowledge about global issues, the international debate and the needs of international organizations for certain knowledge and skills. It could also result from low interest on the part of students and faculty, a shortage of resources and uncertainty about future employment for graduates.

This article advocates offering undergraduate courses and postgraduate degrees in international forestry. It identifies issues important in the international arena over the past decade with which forestry students should be familiar. It proposes means of improving institutions' capacity to offer international

courses so as to equip foresters and forestry researchers to address current and emerging issues at the global level.

INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON FORESTS

After consensus was reached on the "Forest Principles" (in full, the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests) at UNCED, countries recognized that a global forum to discuss forest policy issues would be vital to achieving sustainable forest management worldwide. Thus, three years after UNCED, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) was established under the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. At the end of its two-year mandate (1995 to 1997), it was succeeded by the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) (1997 to 2000).

IPF and IFF agreed to more than 200 proposals for action towards sustainable forest management, but they were unable to resolve thorny issues related to finance, transfer of technology and trade. The discussions also failed to produce agreement on the question of an international legal instrument for forests. To end the stalemate, countries reached a compromise that resulted in the establishment of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), initially for a five-year period (2000 to 2005).

UNFF's objectives include:

- facilitating and promoting the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action;
- providing a forum for continued policy development and dialogue;
- enhancing cooperation and programme coordination on forest-related issues;
- fostering international and cross-sectoral cooperation;

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- monitoring and assessing progress in achieving sustainable forest management;
- strengthening long-term political commitment.

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), an interagency body consisting of 14 international organizations, institutions and instruments active in forest issues, chaired by FAO, was established in April 2001 to support the work of UNFF and to enhance cooperation and coordination on forests. This type of teamwork is relatively new in the global arena, and CPF is leading the way in many respects. Major intergovernmental fora, including the World Summit on Sustainable Development, make reference to CPF achievements.

FAO's six Regional Forestry Commissions (for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Near East and North America) and Committee on Forestry (COFO) also serve as venues for international dialogue on forests. Every two years, they bring together the heads of national forestry agencies from around the world, first at the regional and then at the global level, to discuss forest policies, to review the trends in forest resources and to recommend changes in national forest priorities and programmes.

Thus issues pertaining directly and indirectly to forests and forestry are dealt with in a myriad of fora both vertically (at the national, regional and global levels) and horizontally (political, legal, economic, environmental and social dimensions). Forestry is featured prominently in the discussions and work programmes of the intergovernmental bodies of the three main post-UNCED conventions. However, without strongly disputing this trend, forestry professionals feel that forests are more than climate, biological diversity and desertification combined.

To prepare future foresters to participate in deliberations at the international level, universities could invite government negotiators, diplomats and international experts to teach and guide research on a part-time or voluntary basis



One of the principal forest issues under debate since UNCED is whether or not to launch negotiations for an international legally binding instrument for forests. At UNCED, many countries, particularly developing countries, felt that a forest convention would threaten their sovereign right to manage forests within their borders. They also argued that insufficient attention had been given to historic deforestation in industrialized countries and threats to temperate and boreal forests. Many developed countries expressed concern that care was not sufficiently being taken to safeguard the global environmental benefits that forests provide. Over time, some countries have changed their views.

Countries in favour of a legally binding instrument on forests today are concerned that forest issues are being dealt with (sometimes even splintered) in a number of different ways through various multilateral environmental agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). They maintain that a convention on forests would address all types of forests and all forest values in a comprehensive manner by providing a

common agenda for action, a framework for implementation and objective standards and targets for measuring the performance of countries.

Countries opposed to a forest convention argue that voluntary arrangements such as the nine regional and ecoregional processes for criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management prove that binding measures are not needed. They claim that a single global instrument would never achieve as much as the many successful regional treaties, organizations, initiatives and partnerships; that voluntary approaches based on incentives are more effective than legally binding agreements, which ultimately are not enforceable or effective; and that a convention would duplicate existing international or regional arrangements, adding little if any value.

A CASE FOR HIGHER INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

International forestry education and research deal with subjects related to global, cross-border issues. Topics cover, *inter alia*, intergovernmental deliberations on forests; forest related conventions, instruments and treaties; and ways to realize global economic, environmental and social benefits from forests.

Some topics and subtopics addressed by agencies, organizations and processes working in forestry at the international level

Extent of forest resources: deforestation, promotion of natural and planted forests, rehabilitation and restoration of degraded lands, maintenance of forest cover

Forest biological diversity: conservation and protected areas, protection of unique types of forests and fragile ecosystems, ecosystem diversity

Forest health and vitality: forest degradation, airborne pollution, fire, insects, pests and disease, invasive alien species

Productive functions of forests: sustainable timber harvesting, non-wood forest products

Protective functions of forests: soil and water conservation, contribution to global carbon cycles, fragile ecosystems, conservation strategies

Socio-economic benefits of forests: supply and demand, employment and income generation, indigenous and community management systems, traditional knowledge, valuation of goods and services, economic instruments, tax policies and land tenure

Legal, policy and institutional framework: national forest and land-use programmes, criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, monitoring, assessment and reporting, science and research, public participation, governance and law enforcement

International cooperation and trade: financial assistance, technology transfer, capacity building, international trade in products and services, illegal trade in forest products

- promoting joint programming, including joint research and application for funds;
- encouraging faculty to spend sabbatical leaves with specialized agencies;
- hosting staff from international organizations as visiting teachers and researchers;
- providing consultancies to agencies on specific issues;
- training graduates at international organizations (apprenticeship);
- encouraging staff to undertake research of direct relevance to international issues and strengthening ties with international research centres;
- playing a more active role in scientific bodies such as the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO) and other CPF member organizations;
- publishing scientific opinions on relevant international issues;
- participating in country delegations to international fora as technical advisers to diplomats.

A PROPOSAL FOR INITIATING A CONSORTIUM FOR INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY EDUCATION

Notwithstanding the recognized difficulties facing forestry education at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and the limitations to addressing international forestry issues in the curricula for postgraduate programmes, the failure to educate forestry students about international issues constitutes a serious gap in forestry education systems. It is therefore proposed that forestry curricula at the undergraduate level should include a general course on international forestry, and that specialized postgraduate courses should be developed to cater for such needs. Specialized courses addressing forestry issues with international dimensions could best be dealt with in continuing education systems.

Some schools and research organizations, mainly in North America and Europe, have for many years taught and researched tropical and/or dryland forestry. Some have attracted foreign students to be taught "local" forestry. While commendable, this is not what is meant by teaching and carrying out research on issues of global concern as described above. Schools that have added an international dimension to their curricula in recent years have done so mostly at the postgraduate level and in continuing education programmes.

It is understandable that the primary aim of forestry schools, at least at the bachelor's degree level, is to produce graduates who have the skills to satisfy

local needs. But many schools are seeking to put out more graduates than the local forestry sector can support.

Research into international forestry issues is desperately needed as well. To date, country reports or position papers have rarely been based on specialized academic research. Rather, the driving force behind national policy formulation has usually been pure political interest. Delegations to intergovernmental fora have rarely included academics or researchers as members or even as external advisers.

Universities may strengthen their ties with international organizations and agencies dealing with forestry in several ways, including the following:

However, no single forestry faculty, or even university, is equipped to address all global forestry issues in terms of human and financial resources. Furthermore, establishing a special department or unit for international forestry may not be warranted because of potentially low demand and enrolment. A Consortium for International Forestry Education could coordinate efforts to address such activities among a number of institutions by pooling human resources and coordinating, as a first stage, the offering of specialized courses for continuing education. A Consortium for International Forestry Education would not conflict with current efforts to organize the International Partnership for Forestry Education (see Box on p. 38).

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

The main constraint for incorporating international forestry education and research into the curricula of higher education institutions is that most schools

do not have a faculty that possesses all the needed skills. Given current scarce financial resources, it is unrealistic to expect that staff would be appointed solely for this area of teaching and/or research.

As an alternative, schools that are serious about establishing such a programme can attract, to supplement their own staff, a critical mass of scholars, government negotiators, diplomats and international experts on a voluntary or part-time basis to teach and to guide research. Forestry faculties could also collaborate better with faculties in other disciplines – e.g. those dealing with international policy, law and economics – in their own countries (or abroad).

Institutions for higher forestry education and research in developed countries, by virtue of their technical expertise and financial resources, can and should help build the capacity of institutions in developing countries, to the benefit of both. In formulating their curricula and requirements, institutions of higher forestry education and research in devel-

oped countries should be more aware of and responsive to the needs of developing countries, especially with regard to international forestry.

Traditional approaches to cooperation, which also help “internationalize” programmes, include:

- enrolling and training students from developing countries, especially at the postgraduate level;
- hosting faculty and postdoctorate fellows from developing countries to conduct research and/or teach;
- inviting faculty from developed countries as visiting teachers and joint researchers;
- advising graduate students jointly (twinning arrangements);
- providing consultant services.

Universities around the world can no longer ignore global forestry problems and concentrate only on producing graduates well trained to deal with local and national issues

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In forestry as in other disciplines, these activities have proved to be mutually beneficial to participating countries, universities and students over many decades, in scientific, political, economic, social and cultural terms. In recent years, however, diminishing financial resources and, to some extent, deteriorating security and political environments have reduced student and academic exchanges.

Many institutions offering higher forestry education and carrying out research, particularly in North America and Europe, have staff that can readily acquire the necessary experience to broaden international education. They are closer to the venues where much of the intergovernmental forestry debate, negotiations and decision-making take place. Thus, in addition to being equipped to conduct courses abroad, they can attract scholars from around the world and students from developing countries for training. Concerted and consolidated strategies are needed to avoid duplicating efforts and wasting limited resources. Governments and private donors should view assistance to international forestry education as an investment rather than a donation.

CONCLUSION

Debate on global forestry issues, driven by governments, business, pressure groups, consumers and other stakeholders, has impacts on forests and often shapes national forest policies. Political discussions at intergovernmental forestry-related fora are seldom founded on scientific and technical information drawn from research. Equally alarming is the fact that forestry practitioners, executives and policy-makers are inadequately educated to appreciate global forestry issues and to conduct negotiations on these issues when necessary.

Forestry schools have been trying to adjust their curricula to produce graduate foresters with necessary "core competence", augmented by study of allied disciplines. This is commendable for tertiary-level education. However, universities, as leaders of society, can no longer ignore global forestry problems and concentrate only on producing graduates well trained to deal with local and national issues. Global issues are too serious to be left to diplomats and politicians. It is high time that leading forestry education institutions pool resources and coordinate activities in order to offer training in international forestry, at least in some continuing education programmes. ♦