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Продовольственная и
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Объединенных
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Organización
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Unidas
para la
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COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

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COMMUNICATING THE ROLE OF FORESTS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FORESTS (2011)

INTRODUCTION

1. With only five years left until the 2015 deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on world leaders to attend a summit in September 2010 to accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs. In 2012 the next UN Conference on Sustainable Development - also called the 'Rio+20' Earth Summit - will take place in Brazil, to review commitments and address emerging issues such as the green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development and institutional frameworks for sustainable development.

2. The forestry community has long been aware of the links between sustainable forest management and sustainable development but this understanding often does not extend beyond the boundaries of the sector. Forests, trees and forestry have much to contribute directly through the multitude of products and services they provide as well as sources of income and employment not only for people living in and around forests but also for the wider community. However, the failure to fully reflect these linkages in government programmes or policies or in information provided to the public can have significant ramifications for both forests and sustainable development. There is an urgent need to step up efforts to raise awareness among governments and decision makers at national and international levels of the important role of forests and forestry in sustainable development. However, raising awareness is not enough. There is also a need for the forestry community to engage more with other sectors, especially those involved in national development strategies, based on the premise that cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration can only be effective when the mutual benefits and comparative advantages are recognised and acknowledged. Foresters themselves need to take a more proactive approach in furthering this understanding.

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3. Forthcoming key events, including the International Year of Forests 2011 (IYF); the 9th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests with the overall theme of “Forests for people, livelihoods and poverty eradication” and especially its Ministerial Segment; and the Rio+20 Earth Summit provide important opportunities for the international forestry community to communicate to the world the important role of forests in the achievement of the MDGs and for sustainable development in general. The Committee’s 20th Session takes place at a time when preparations for these events are under way and constitutes an excellent occasion for members to discuss how to bring the issue of forests’ and forestry’s contributions to sustainable development to the attention of world leaders and to consider the role of FAO in supporting this process.

THE ROLE OF FORESTS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4. Forests contribute to sustainable development and to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, in a multitude of ways: they can reduce hunger and poverty, provide employment and income, are a source of biodiversity, can store water, stabilize the soil and mitigate climate change by sequestering and storing large amounts of carbon.

5. The importance of forests in reducing poverty and hunger is increasingly better documented. The World Bank estimates that more than 1.5 billion people worldwide rely directly or indirectly on forests for their livelihoods. Other sources estimate that more than two billion people, a third of the world’s population, use biomass fuels, mainly firewood, to cook and to heat their homes; hundreds of millions of people rely on traditional medicines harvested from forests; and in some 60 developing countries, hunting and fishing on forested land supplies more than a fifth of protein requirements. Still, more concrete data to quantify and demonstrate this reliance, especially at country level, is needed. The many contributions of forests still do not appear in government statistics as they are part of the subsistence economy or of the informal economic sector. In the context of the Global Resources Assessment (FRA) 2010, FAO is currently undertaking a major study analyzing the contributions of forests to poverty reduction in selected countries, with a view to developing parameters to be measured by countries to make their own assessments in the future.

6. There are many documented cases of the importance of forest products to subsistence and income generation of local people living in and around forests. These include edible plants, fruits, bush meat, edible insects, medicinal plants, fibers, fuel wood and charcoal and many others. Some of them even constitute an important part of the rural economy in certain regions and are traded regionally or sometimes even internationally. For example, bush mango, a forest fruit, is an important non-wood forest product (NWFP) in Cameroon and is traded regionally. It is estimated that the city of Yaoundé alone consumes over 420 tons of bush mango per year. For many rural people, especially women, small forest-based enterprises, marketing mainly non-wood forest products, are an important source of household income. Data from an FAO project show, for example, that in the Democratic Republic of Congo almost 22% of household income comes from NWFPs, about half of it from African plum (*Dacryodes edulis*).

7. In many developing countries, forest-based enterprises provide at least one third of all rural non-farm employment. At the global level, around 10 million people are employed in forest management and conservation. However, given that a large proportion of forestry employment is in the informal sector, forest work is probably much more important for rural livelihoods and national economies than the figures suggest.

8. There are also other, more indirect contributions: for example, agroforestry, i.e. the combination of trees with agricultural crops, has beneficial effects on agricultural production. The trees provide shade to shade-loving crops, can be used as mulch, may fix nitrogen and improve the soil or may be used as fodder for animals. Agroforestry systems may help increase agricultural yields or at least prevent soil degradation and erosion.

9. Finally, forests provide a number of important ecosystem services. They are home to 90% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity. FRA 2010 estimates that they store 289 gigatonnes of carbon in their biomass alone and have a large potential for mitigating climate change. Forests also have important roles to play in climate change adaptation strategies. Forests can protect watersheds, prevent erosion and are a source of carbon-neutral, environmentally friendly energy. Forest products and services can also become an important part of green economies (one of the main themes of the Rio+20 Conference in 2012). Wood products are often more environmentally friendly and require less energy to produce than alternative raw materials such as metal or plastic.

10. To fully realize the potential of and benefits from the different contributions forests can make to sustainable development, sustainable forest management is key. Forests that are managed sustainably will continue to deliver ecosystem services while producing social and economic benefits. At the country level, national forest programmes are an important vehicle to promote sustainable forest management. They provide a platform to ensure active participation of all relevant stakeholders in decision making on forest policy development and implementation, serve as a basis for implementing the forest-related international agreements and promote cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration.

THE CHALLENGES

11. The link between forests and sustainable development is broken when forests are not sustainably managed and when deforestation and forest degradation continue. According to FRA 2010, 13 million hectares of forest were lost each year in the past decade. Although afforestation and natural expansion of forests in some countries and regions have reduced the net loss of forest area at the global level to 5.2 million hectares per year between 2000 and 2010, the gains made do not compensate for the losses occurring elsewhere with significant negative impacts on livelihoods. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that 1.7 billion tonnes of carbon are released annually due to land use change; with the major portion due to tropical deforestation. This represents about 17 percent of current global carbon emissions, the third largest source according to the IPCC. According to the Convention on Biological Diversity, up to 100 animal and plant species per day are believed to disappear together with tropical forest habitats. These figures suggest that there is a strong need to address the underlying causes of deforestation and to step up efforts to promote sustainable management. This is particularly important in the context of current efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD-plus). As mentioned earlier, national forest programmes should play a major role in this endeavour and need to be strengthened.

12. A second major challenge is the low visibility of the forest sector in many countries and the lack of "connectedness" of forestry to major national development strategies. At country level, forests are often perceived mainly as a source of timber. The forest sector has not succeeded in changing this perception and the other contributions are virtually unknown outside the forest sector. In addition, the often weak governance of the forest sector has negatively affected the image of forestry in-country and internationally. In 80% of countries, forests are publicly owned and a high proportion of these are also managed by the state, i.e. the "official" participation of

communities and private individuals or companies in forest management is still rather low, albeit increasing. This also contributes to the fact that so little is known about the importance of forests for local livelihoods.

13. This lack of connectedness further results in lack of awareness of other sectors' influence on the forest sector. It is still hardly recognized outside forestry circles that most of the challenges resulting in deforestation and forest degradation are generated by policy decisions related to land-use, agriculture, energy, transport, etc. The insufficient recognition of the role of forests weakens the effectiveness of the forest sector in competing for visibility and resources with the many other issues on the public agenda such as poverty, health, education, agricultural development. It is therefore imperative for the forest sector to bridge the communication gaps and to better connect with other development sectors, to make the many contributions of forests to livelihoods and the environment more visible and to play a more active role in the development and implementation of national development strategies.

14. An important constraint is that political attention is often captured by one particular function or service of forests rather than the full breadth of them. There is a risk however that disproportionate attention to particular goods or services can distort sustainable forest management to the detriment of others. The current focus on REDD may threaten to reduce the role of forests to carbon sinks. There is a need to reposition forests in the centre of sustainable development by communicating the full spectrum of their important contributions to decision makers both at the national and international levels. The forthcoming high-level events mentioned in the introduction provide excellent fora for this.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

Capitalize on the existing intergovernmental machinery

15. The forest sector benefits from a robust intergovernmental machinery comprised of global bodies with unique potentials to formulate policies and deliver key messages to multiple audiences, including other intergovernmental processes, and to foster policy and programme coordination at the global, regional and national levels. In addition, its intergovernmental processes and national actions are supported by a unique alliance of relevant international organizations, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), which has unparalleled capacity to further the recognition of forest issues and to provide strong support to national actions.

Put sustainable forest management into focus

16. The concepts of forest sustainability has been discussed and elaborated for centuries. Our understanding of forest ecosystems continues to grow and the demands society articulates for forest continue to evolve. The most recent definition¹ by the UN General Assembly has recognized this evolving nature of SFM. Recent discussion at various fora, including at the UNFCCC, indicate that work needs be done in furthering the common understanding of SFM, including through developing and delivering clear messages for decision takers and the general public alike about its nature, content, potentials and prerequisites.

¹ Sustainable forest management is a "dynamic and evolving concept, aims to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations." UN GA 62/98 p. 4

Take a strategic approach to communication

17. The magnitude of challenges requires better coordination of initiatives and focusing of resources for maximum impact. In order to facilitate this, FAO is developing a communication strategy for forestry, with a view to strengthening its own capacities as well as its ability to assist Member Nations in this regard. The strategy intends to build on lessons and experiences of past and current activities and on inputs from various fora, including relevant recommendations of the XIII World Forestry Congress (Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 2009). The following principles are being considered:

- i. target groups are diverse, different strategies are needed to reach them and new target groups such as youth and the donor community should be identified;
- ii. strategies should be flexible, responding to changing needs following periodic review and each strategy should identify its objectives, key messages, main information carriers, actors and partners, and should contain a plan of implementation and associated budget estimates;
- iii. communication activities in the coming years should be built around IYF in 2011 and forests and sustainable development in 2012;
- iv. information carriers need to be diversified in line with the evolving tools in information technology;
- v. a focus on sharing positive messages should be coupled with a readiness to highlight problems in a timely and pro-active manner; and
- vi. FAO's institutional capacities should be used widely and activities should be coordinated within FAO and among external partners.

Exploit fully the opportunities offered by the International Year of Forests

18. The UN General Assembly requested FAO, as chair of the CPF, to support, within its mandate, the implementation of the year². In so doing, FAO has invited CPF members to engage in a series of coordinated actions, thereby contributing to the forest sector speaking with one voice and suggested that the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat, the international focal point for the Year, pay particular attention to these actions. The recommendations included, *inter alia*, reaching out to major media networks, major industries interested in greening their activities, the forest industries and the private sector; coordinating initiatives such as the launch of forest-related contests, preparation of audio-visual materials, and the development of publications and information materials.

19. FAO's plan to promote the IYF includes proposals for strong publication outreach; broader and deeper web presence, including the use of social media and the initiation of some interactive projects; using selected FAO non-forest events to promote the IYF; increased engagement with civil society; development of press kits, education material, fact sheets and other information materials to help countries in planning and implementing their IYF-related activities. Due considerations are given to timing of events in order to maintain constant attention throughout the year.

² UN GA 61/193

Create a permanent platform for maintaining public attention to forests

20. The IYF will put forests in the limelight but by its nature it's a time-bound event. There may be advantages for the international forestry community to establish one or more mechanisms to promote forests in a sustained manner. A number of such mechanisms exist, mostly outside forestry, although the experience most relevant for forest may come from the World Forestry Day³. It has been noted that the Day's influence has remained below its potential due to various reasons including the lack of sufficient recognition and of coordination at the national and international level. The preparations for the IYF may offer an opportunity for Member Nations to consider these experiences and develop recommendations in this regard.

Strengthen capacities through collaboration and networking

21. Communication requires financial and human resources. Mobilizing expertise and creating a platform for sharing experiences can help to bridge resource gaps. At present there is no global mechanism that can facilitate such cooperation, although good examples exist at the regional level. A well functioning mechanism is the Forest Communicators' Network (FCN)⁴ which has been advising its parent bodies and Member Nations, principally in Europe, and developing proposals and toolkits for more effective forest communication. The positive experience of the FCN may serve as a basis for establishing a similar mechanism at the global level. Additional capacities may be mobilised within the CPF, whose member organisations possess considerable communication skills and capacities. The CPF offers great opportunities to harmonize activities and build a common platform for forest communication.

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

22. The Committee may wish to:

- i. encourage countries to better integrate forests within their broader development strategies.
- ii. increase the visibility of forests and sustainable forest management in sustainable development at the global level by:
 - communicating the significant contribution of forests in sustainable development to the 9th session of the UNFF and inviting it to use its unique position in the UN system to highlight forests' contributions to the global developmental agenda, including in the preparations for the Rio+20 Summit on Environment and Development;
 - urging countries as members of governing bodies of the CPF member organizations to integrate sustainable forest management into the developmental strategies of those organizations and support its implementation; and
 - urging countries to participate actively in the International Year of Forests (2011).

³ The World Forestry Day had been created by the European Confederation of Agriculture in 1971 and celebrated on 21 March.

⁴ established by the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission as a team of specialists

23. The Committee may wish to request FAO to increase its efforts to promote the concept of sustainable forest management by:

- i. clarifying further the role of forests and sustainable forest management in achieving sustainable development and in particular the Millennium Development Goals and communicating this role widely;
- ii. developing tools to quantify and value the full range of goods and services, thereby furthering the understanding of forests' contribution to major social and economic objectives, goals and targets;
- iii. supporting the development and updating of national forest programmes and assisting countries' in their efforts to integrate them into national strategies for sustainable development; and
- iv. helping enhance cross-sectoral cooperation and policy and programme coordination through efficient and proactive communication.

24. The Committee may wish to consider:

- i. requesting FAO to build on the opportunities offered by the International Year for Forests and the Rio+20 Summit in its communication activities;
- ii. increasing synergies and cooperation by inviting FAO to establish a global network on forest communication, with a view to assisting Member Nations and FAO in developing communication strategies and advising in their implementation and to consider approaches to maintain public attention on forests; and
- iii. inviting the CPF to increase its activities related to forest communication.