

Enhancing the role of forests in achieving the Millennium Development Goals

COFO 2005 drew attention to forestry's role in meeting MDGs, which are at the top of the development agenda today.

The global development agenda shifted emphasis after the Millennium Summit in September 2000 and subsequent consolidation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are based on goals agreed in world summits and global conferences held during the 1990s. Sustainable development efforts are now more firmly centred on reducing poverty, and the MDGs are increasingly used as a guiding framework for international development assistance.

Each of the eight MDGs (see Box) has quantitative targets to be achieved by the year 2015. Indicators have been identified for the targets to monitor progress. The proportion of land area covered by forest globally is one of the indicators for the seventh MDG.

In addition to quantitative, time-bound targets, the Millennium Declaration calls for other actions, including intensified

efforts for “the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests”, an international commitment to sustainable forest management made in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and subsequently pursued in the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) and the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) as well as other fora.

The recognition at UNCED of the connection between sustainable forest management and sustainable development was reinforced ten years later at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. There, countries stated that the achievement of sustainable forest management “is an essential goal of sustainable development” and that it is “a critical means to eradicate poverty,

The links between forests and reduction of poverty and hunger are obvious around the world; forests provide food for the table, fuelwood to cook it and products for medicinal and nutritional needs



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significantly reduce deforestation, halt the loss of forest biodiversity and land and resource degradation and improve food security and access to safe drinking water and affordable energy”.

The seventeenth session of FAO’s Committee on Forestry (COFO) highlighted the contribution of forests – referring collectively to natural and planted forests, other wooded lands and trees outside forests – to the achievement of the MDGs. Countries underscored the need to increase international commitment and action towards sustainable forest management as a vehicle for sustainable development.

FORESTS AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Forests make the most direct contribution to Goal 1, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and Goal 7, ensuring environmental sustainability. However, they also have an indirect role in helping to meet the other MDGs through their multiple social, economic and environmental functions. For example, forests help reduce child mortality and improve maternal health (Goals 4 and 5) through their contribution to food security and by providing natural medicines. Forest-derived income helps enable rural

families to send their children to primary school (Goal 2). Gender-sensitive forest programmes around the world are helping to empower women and improve their access to forest-derived benefits (Goal 3). Forest-related measures are also being taken to mitigate the negative impacts of HIV/AIDS and other diseases (Goal 6).

Eradicating hunger and poverty

Much has been written about the poverty-deforestation relationship; in many places, poverty (including food insecurity) is an underlying cause of deforestation and forest degradation. More recently, attention has been paid to the links between forests and poverty reduction and between forests and food secu-

urity. Tens of millions of people depend on forests as a major source of subsistence and cash income, while hundreds of millions of people depend on forests to supplement their livelihoods (Angelsen and Wunder, 2003). Forests can provide crucial safety nets, keeping many poor rural people from sinking deeper into poverty or serving as a lifeline in times of emergency (FAO, 2003). The links between forests and reduction of poverty and hunger are especially obvious in marginal areas, such as arid zones and mountainous regions and remote forest areas, where poverty is greatest and economic opportunities are limited.

Forests have the potential to help people rise out of poverty, for example through forest-based employment and

UN Millennium Development Goals

- 1. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger**
- 2. Achieve universal primary education**
- 3. Promote gender equality and empower women**
- 4. Reduce child mortality**
- 5. Improve maternal health**
- 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
- 7. Ensure environmental sustainability**
- 8. Develop a global partnership for development**



Forest-based employment is critically important to the livelihoods of millions; an estimated 12.9 million people are employed in the industrial forest sector, like these workers in Brazil



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The informal sector may provide employment to twice as many people as the forest industry, such as this basket maker in China, flute maker in Ecuador and maker of wooden utensils in the Niger

source of income, but how large and widespread the transfers will be (and the degree to which poor people will benefit) is still uncertain. This potentially important area merits further development.

Ensuring environmental stability

Environmental sustainability is an essential foundation for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The poor are generally the most vulnerable and thus the first victims of environmental deterioration or related tragedies. Failure to achieve environmental stability will undermine social and economic development efforts. Forests play critical roles in sustaining the health of the environment by mitigating climate change, conserving biological diversity, maintaining clean and reliable water resources, controlling erosion, protecting agricultural soils, sustaining and enhancing land productivity, protecting coastal and marine resources, providing low-cost and renewable energy and enhancing the urban environment. These environmental services are well documented and their social benefits well understood, but the means to capture their economic values are as yet underdeveloped.

It is important to consider not only the environmental services that forests provide, but also the environmental impacts that would be expected if the supply of forest goods decreased. For instance, many wood substitutes are less environmentally friendly than wood.

LINKAGES BETWEEN FORESTRY AND OTHER SECTORS

Integrating development goals in forest policy

The MDGs call for the integration of the principles of sustainable development into environmental policies. Environmental sustainability is being mainstreamed in forest policies around the world, particularly since UNCED. The integration of the goals of poverty and hunger reduction in forest policies and plans, however, is less widespread.

The Forum on the Role of Forestry in Poverty Alleviation, organized in 2001 by FAO with the support of the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), identified the following strategies for targeting poverty reduction through the forest sector (FAO and DFID, 2001):

- strengthening rights, capabilities and governance to benefit the poor;
- reducing vulnerability of the poor;
- capturing emerging opportunities, e.g. improving access to markets;
- working in partnerships and enhancing participatory processes.

Community-based or participatory forestry, which is well established in many countries, is particularly well placed to address poverty reduction. Improving local peoples' rights and access to forest resources is a key to the success of community-based forestry programmes. Smallholder forest-based enterprises (including those based on

small-scale forest enterprises. An estimated 12.9 million people are employed in the industrial forest sector. Twice that many (particularly from the poorer sectors of society) may be involved in the informal sector, for example in the collection and sale of fuelwood and non-wood forest products (Lebedys, 2004).

In addition, trees outside forests, and particularly those in agroforestry systems, are extremely important components of rural livelihoods in many parts of the world (Garrity, 2004). Trees on farmlands, in grazing systems and scattered in the landscape are a source of products for subsistence use and for sale. These trees contribute to food security and poverty alleviation by improving agricultural productivity, diversifying income and reducing risk. Trees may be planted as a major crop in farm forestry systems for timber production. With increasing urbanization, the role of forests and trees in urban and peri-urban areas is also becoming increasingly important.

Payment for environmental services from forests is emerging as a possible

community–private sector partnerships) also show particular promise for poverty reduction. Some countries are working to strengthen forest governance through decentralization processes that allow the poor to derive more benefits from forests and be more involved in decision-making and forest management.

However, local political and economic realities, opportunity costs for the use of local resources and other factors may limit poor people's ability to benefit from community-based forestry programmes. Thus policies and programmes are needed that explicitly target the poor. However, few strategic approaches or methodologies have been designed specifically to improve the way that forestry addresses poverty reduction or prevention (Gilmour, Malla and Nurse, 2004).

Integrating forests in sustainable development

While some progress has been made in incorporating sustainable development goals into forest-sector policies and planning, the integration of forests and agroforestry into national sustainable development plans is less advanced. Forests and agroforestry are usually overlooked in national poverty reduc-

tion strategy papers (PRSPs), which are key planning mechanisms at the country level for implementing the MDGs. Since PRSPs help guide donor funding, their limited consideration of forests acts as a deterrent to external support for the forest sector in developing countries.

Bilateral and multilateral organizations have been reorienting their policies and programmes to focus on the achievement of the MDGs. Major organizations, including the World Bank, have aligned their objectives and funding strategies to the MDGs, and several are largely channelling their forest-sector funding to programmes that tackle poverty (Grosnow, 2003; World Bank, 2004).

Forest departments may need to be more proactive to ensure their involvement in the development of PRSPs and the inclusion of forests in national sustainable development plans. To this end, rigorous analysis is needed to demonstrate and quantify the contributions of forests and trees.

Improving intersectoral coordination

Intersectoral coordination is important for the achievement of all MDGs, but is particularly critical for reducing poverty and hunger and ensuring environmental sustainability. Improved intersectoral

cooperation and coordination will help efforts both to integrate the principles of sustainable development into forest-related policies and to integrate forests into sustainable development plans.

Forest-based poverty reduction efforts tend to be linked to other land uses and should form a part of rural development strategies. Intersectoral coordination is necessary for sound decisions on land use and resource allocation, particularly when there are trade-offs between national development goals. For example, it is inevitable that some forest land will be converted to agriculture in order to reduce poverty and hunger, but this will have economic, environmental and social impacts. Countries need to have effective cross-sectoral planning mechanisms to identify those lands that would make a relatively greater contribution to sustainable development if converted from forest to other land uses, and to minimize the negative impacts of land cover and land-use changes.

MONITORING AND ASSESSING PROGRESS

In September 2005, the Millennium Review Summit will undertake a comprehensive review of progress in achieving the MDGs and fulfilling commitments

Trees outside forests, and particularly those in agroforestry systems, contribute to food security, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability and should be a recognized part of countries' strategies and programmes to achieve the MDGs



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made at major UN conferences in the economic, social and related fields.

Reversing loss of environmental resources is a target under Goal 7, ensuring environmental sustainability (UN, 2004), and data on the proportion of land area covered by forest, from FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA), will be reported as an indicator in conjunction with that goal. The other four indicators under that target, which relate to protected areas, energy use, carbon dioxide emissions and use of solid fuels, also have important relations to forestry. A broader picture of the contribution of forests to sustainable development, drafted by FAO and other UN entities and international organizations, will be provided in the "storyline" for the seventh MDG.

Agreement on a measurable global target for forests within the context of the MDGs could help boost the implementation of agreed actions on sustainable forest management while also serving as a reminder of the contribution of forests to sustainable development. Countries could also set – as many already do – their own national targets related to sustainable forest management in order to contribute to the achievement of the global target, within their national priorities and on the basis of agreements made at the international level. Should further consideration be given to developing a target or goal related to forests, FAO would be well placed to provide technical inputs to support such discussions.

FAO FORESTRY SUPPORT TO MDGS

FAO forestry programmes have the overarching goal of assisting countries in their efforts to undertake sustainable forest management – a clear contribution towards achieving the seventh MDG, ensuring environmental sustainability. Particularly relevant activities relate to forest management and conservation, especially for mountains, drylands and other marginal areas characterized by poverty; participatory forestry; agro-

forestry; wood energy; and wood and non-wood forest products.

More recently FAO has been addressing the goal of enhancing the contribution of forests to the reduction of poverty and hunger, through programmes on Forests, Poverty Alleviation and Food Security and on Participatory Forestry and Sustainable Livelihoods. Specific activities related to poverty reduction and thus to achieving the MDGs include:

- support to the development of enabling policy and legal frameworks addressing access and use of forest lands and resources;
- development of practitioners' guidelines for enhancing the contribution of forestry to poverty alleviation and food security;
- community-based forest enterprise development, for example through partnerships between foresters, communities and the private sector;
- development of modern wood energy systems and forest products markets for rural villages;
- support to marketing and trade of non-wood forest products;
- participatory diagnosis of forest policy concerns;
- analysis of the economic aspects of forest-poverty links;
- projects focused on poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods in several countries through the forestry field programme and through FAO's Special Programme for Food Security, whose forestry component has increased over time.

FAO's interdepartmental Livelihood Support Programme, which promotes good governance, participatory policy-making and knowledge and information sharing, is supporting six Central African countries to realize the contribution of non-wood forest products from forests and trees outside forests for food security.

Through its Regular Programme and in collaboration with the National Forest Programme Facility, FAO provides

direct support to countries to strengthen coherence and create synergies between national forest programmes and broader sustainable development policy and planning processes, thus assisting countries to adjust their policies and strategies so as to incorporate forests into sustainable development and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

Forests, trees outside forests and sustainable forest management have a vital role in the fulfilment of commitments contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, including the internationally agreed development goals. A strong linkage exists between development goals and the IPF/IFF proposals for action to achieve sustainable forest management. Demonstrating the linkages between forestry and poverty reduction is important for the sector's political visibility and support. Collection, analysis and dissemination of relevant data on forests is essential to demonstrate and raise awareness of the contribution of forests to development goals. Work is also needed to quantify and capture the economic values of non-wood and environmental services provided by forests in meeting development goals.

Policies and programmes in the forest sector should explicitly target the poor and ensure environmental sustainability. Guidelines for enhancing the contribution of forestry to poverty alleviation and food security currently being developed by FAO will contribute to that end. Targeting forestry action where poverty is concentrated and seeing forests and trees from the eyes of the poor could significantly change how actions are addressed in the forest sector.

The role of agroforestry and trees outside forests for poverty alleviation, food security and environmental sustainability needs further exploration. Agroforestry should be a recognized part of countries' strategies and programmes to achieve the MDGs.

Improved governance, stronger insti-

tutional frameworks and sustainable community-based forest management are fundamental to meeting development targets.

Support will be needed to assist countries to integrate MDGs into national forest programmes and to integrate forests in their respective PRSPs and other national development strategies. Intersectoral cooperation and coordination at the national level, for example with the agriculture and energy sectors, are paramount. Another important area is strengthening the reciprocal integration of national forest programmes and national biodiversity strategies and plans and national action plans for combating desertification. The challenge will be to link cross-sectoral issues without losing focus and to capture the contributions of all sectors to MDGs. ♦



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