



SPREADING KNOWLEDGE

THE heart of FAO's task in Forestry is to help people of many lands to follow the arduous road of forest conservation and use. To this end many devices contribute — conferences, study tours, discussions, visiting specialists in various fields — all aimed at direct co-operation with technicians of the countries concerned. Such measures are indispensable.

But reflection, experience, and the most casual study of statistics show such a method of consultation can work only slowly with the many nations and very many problems demanding attention. Only the written word can really fill the void.

The activities of FAO and other agencies are unquestionably stimulating interest in forestry in many places. But clearly the enthusiastic director of administration or research and the ambitious forestry worker still cannot find a ready-made answer to the proper and insistent question, "Exactly where can I find the most significant technical material produced to date, which may contain fertile ideas applicable to my own project or task?"

Current bibliographies necessarily list the trifling and the weighty alike, and the annual thousands of titles inevitably bewilder the student unless he already knows which authors or journals usually say something worth-while.

The admirable and painstaking *Forestry Abstracts* issued on behalf of the British Commonwealth countries singles out technical publications judged significant, but, like the Bibliography of the United States Department of Agriculture, it deals only with current material.

In too few of the many aspects of forestry have comprehensive and up-to-date critical summaries of work been prepared by men equipped with the necessary scholarship, maturity, poise and critical faculty. Such analyses are usually only national in scope. Many more of an international scope are needed.

Naturally enough, for local, regional or national projects, authors tend to write specifically to a limited audience, and so commonly the "review of previous work" and "selected bibliography" tend to cover primarily only individual, institutional or national items.

This kind of parochial approach was understandable in times before the United Nations undertook the task symbolized by the term "Unasylva." Today it is not enough. Authors and directors now have the opportunity, and indeed an obligation, to aid in the great task of spreading knowledge and ideas to eager workers everywhere, to help them avoid the dead ends of earlier work, and to give them a solid foundation of the world's tested experience.

The recognized discipline of scholarly work involves exploration of pertinent technical literature, and the top ranks of workers and directors are usually not, in fact, as parochial as perusal of their summaries of earlier work might indicate. Some workers and institutions already have made the change. The problem is to make the exception the rule.

Spreading knowledge through the written word has been one of FAO's core functions from the very beginning. This Editorial also recognizes the need to help readers identify the most authoritative and worthwhile information available to them – an observation more timely than ever now with the proliferation of information on the Internet.
