

## **Presentation of the West Africa Forest Convergence Plan COFO side event – 27 June 2014**

A side event on the West Africa Forests Convergence Plan for Forests (WAFCP) was held on Friday, 27 June, and opened by **Douglas McGuire**, Team Leader, Forest Resources Management Team, Forest Assessment, Management and Conservation Division, FAO, HQ, Rome.

Mr. McGuire recalled that the Plan was officially endorsed by the Council of Ministers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in December 2013, although the process has been under way for some time based on an idea that originated in 2006. Following a number of national consultations involving the 15 West African countries, in 2013 the main document was produced, covering a wide range of areas that were clustered in seven priority intervention areas.

The Plan's transboundary and subregional nature renders it particularly important as a tool for fostering cooperation across West Africa. Its projected cost, estimated at more than US\$50 million over the next five years, underscores the need for the full cooperation and political will of participating states.

In his presentation, **Fernando Salinas**, Senior Forestry Officer, Regional Office for Africa, Accra, Ghana, explained that the Plan's overarching aim was to ensure the joint and sustainable management of forestry and wildlife resources in the subregion. ECOWAS is an economic community comprising 15 member states with approximately 300 million inhabitants and shared forest cover of about 73 million hectares. The rate of deforestation in West Africa, including conversion of land for other purposes, is about 870 thousand hectares a year, one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. Lack of cooperation between various stakeholders, as well as the negative consequences of a number of violent conflicts in the area, have had a negative impact on forest conservation.

**Mr Salinas** recalled that there are several priority intervention areas in the Plan: policy harmonization and analysis; knowledge of the dynamics of forest ecosystems; management of forest ecosystems and reforestation; preservation of biodiversity; promotion of the socioeconomic benefits of forest ecosystems, to increase capacity development in institutions and among local communities in support of full sustainable use of resources; forest research; and information, education and communication, including encouraging local communities to take responsibility for forestry resources. In principle, one institution will be responsible for the organization and implementation of each of these areas.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:

- the Plan will allow member countries to share their resources, which often do not correspond to national boundaries, although the potential for cooperation within the WAFCP was complex.
- Currently there were some transboundary resource conflicts in West Africa, including those over wood rights and transhumance. In Senegal, for example, forest resources are illegally harvested and taken across the border into neighbouring states. Increased cooperation between the Plan's member states, including in the harmonization of forestry policies, will help mitigate transboundary resource conflicts.

- Effective awareness raising among key actors in participating countries would be an important aspect, in order to ensure that they are fully familiar with the Plan and support its full implementation.
- The need to involve local stakeholders, particularly women, young people and farmers' associations in forestry and environmental resource management would be essential. The Plan's goals need to be made clear to local stakeholders in order to enlist their full engagement and support.
- Noted that West Africa's resources belong to the entire world community and called for international support for the protection of these vital resources.
- Noted that people themselves can be the enemy of good forest management, citing that the highest rates of deforestation in West Africa coincide with areas of greatest population growth and rates of transboundary movement. He called for a realistic and holistic approach to forest management and conservation that considers energy, construction and agricultural production needs as well as demographic trends in order to ensure that the needs of those who depend on forest resources are safeguarded.