

UNFF8 HIGHLIGHTS: FRIDAY, 24 APRIL 2009

In the morning, UNFF8 delegates met in two working groups (WG): WGI on forests in a changing environment; and WGII on means of implementation. The afternoon working group sessions were postponed for WGI Co-Chairs to revise the recommendations on key challenges facing forests in a changing environment, and for informal consultations on the revised Co-Chairs' text on financing in WGII. Plenary reconvened in the late afternoon to take stock of progress made during the first week of the meeting, and plan the organization of work for the second week.

WORKING GROUP I

UNFF8 MESSAGE: Taking up discussions on the "UNFF8 message to the outside world," the EU, COSTA RICA, the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, INDONESIA, NEW ZEALAND and SWITZERLAND suggested addressing the message to all Rio Conventions, while CHILE preferred to concentrate on the UNFCCC COP 15. SWITZERLAND and NEW ZEALAND said the message should also go to UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice. BRAZIL and the US said the message should aim at communication and advocacy, not policy prescriptions.

The AFRICAN GROUP and NEW ZEALAND said climate negotiators are not informed of the importance of SFM in climate change. Noting that in her country, community forest areas have been "locked away" for carbon trade, PAPUA NEW GUINEA urged raising awareness among national government departments responsible for climate change issues. BRAZIL and the US said the message should invite member states to include foresters in their delegations to the UNFCCC.

Many agreed the message should convey the multiple roles of SFM beyond its contribution to combating climate change, and should call for enhanced cooperation and coordination with other conventions. The EU and the US suggested using the Collaborative Partnership on Forests' (CPF) Strategic Framework for Forests and Climate Change, and the results of the Global Forest Expert Panel on Adaptation of Forests to Climate Change as a basis. CHINA suggested considering reforestation activities and taking a broader perspective on countries' forest sectors to address all obstacles to achieving SFM. NEPAL proposed stressing the importance of land tenure security and called for active participation of forest user groups in funding mechanisms.

Co-Chair Ozols suspended the session to allow for the preparation of a revised recommendation on key challenges, which was distributed in the afternoon plenary.

WORKING GROUP II

FINANCING: Sudan, for G-77/CHINA, presented the basic elements of the Group's proposal on a global forest fund. She said the fund should aim to provide new and additional funding, including voluntary contributions, to achieve the four Global Objectives on Forests, promote SFM and implement the Forest Instrument, and that it should be equally accessible to developing countries, without conditionalities. Regarding structure, she emphasized minimizing overhead costs and hosting the fund within an existing institution. On governance, she suggested that the fund would function under the UNFF, with a governing body composed of representatives from at least three countries from each of the UN's regional groups, appointed by the UNFF, responsible for vetting projects proposed by developing countries. Regarding the communication strategy, she emphasized the need to engage all stakeholders and attract donors. On funding targets, she said that they could be defined by UNFF. Regarding operational procedures, she called for a simple and transparent approach that enables quick disbursement of funds. On eligible activities and priorities, she said that the fund should provide grants for projects that aim to implement national policies and programmes as outlined in the Forest Instrument. She encouraged simple reporting procedures for assessing the efficiency of the fund.

The EU, with AUSTRALIA, the US, NEW ZEALAND, SWITZERLAND and NORWAY, welcomed the Co-Chairs' text on a road map for financing SFM as a basis for negotiation. G-77/CHINA, supported by many members of the Group, called for the text to take into account the Group's views, prior to beginning negotiations. Chair Purnama said the Bureau would amend the text to reflect G-77/China's views. The revised text was distributed in the afternoon.

ACHIEVING THE GLOBAL OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTING THE FOREST INSTRUMENT: UNFF Director Jan McAlpine lamented the low number of national reports on implementation received. She stressed the need to streamline the reporting process, suggesting the involvement of the CPF, and asked how the Secretariat could be more effective in assessing implementation of the Global Objectives and the Forest Instrument.

SENEGAL highlighted difficulties faced by developing countries in collecting and collating the required information and, with GABON, supported using regional groups for reporting on implementation, noting that they can provide useful information and support for reporting. NEW ZEALAND noted the usefulness of regional criteria and indicator processes

in providing information for global processes. JAPAN called for a better exchange of information on initiatives supporting SFM.

The EU and NORWAY called for inviting CPF members to develop methods for monitoring progress in achieving the Global Objectives. AUSTRALIA and NORWAY supported a mid-2010 reporting timeline.

In clarifying how CPF members could provide inputs to reporting, CPF Chair Jan Heino gave an overview of the reporting process for FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010.

PLENARY

Delegates elected Modest Mero (Tanzania) as WGI Co-Chair, to replace Abdellah Benmellouk (Morocco).

Reporting on the progress made by WGI, Co-Chair Ozols noted that WGI had produced a compilation of recommendations on key challenges for forests in a changing environment. On WGII's progress, Co-Chair Kile noted that WGII will return to the issue of reporting on implementation and address the form of reporting for UNFF9. He added that a revised Co-Chairs' text on financial support for implementation of the Forest Instrument had been distributed, and will serve as the basis for negotiations in a contact group the following week.

Commenting on the proposed organization of work for the second week of UNFF8, G-77/CHINA, supported by many, preferred to convene WGII in a working group with interpretation, rather than a contact group. G-77/CHINA agreed to base negotiations on the Co-Chairs' revised text but, with AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND, raised concerns over the balance of the text. Delegates agreed to reconvene in a working group on Monday.

CHILDREN and YOUTH called for a portion of SFM funding to be directed towards education in African countries. SERBIA called for funding for countries with economies in transition.

IN THE CORRIDORS

What a difference a few words can make. A barely noticeable change in the "revised" Co-Chair's draft on financing from "consider the establishment of" to "decide to initiate a process under the auspices of UNFF to establish" a global forest fund and the addition of an appendix that lists possible attributes of such a fund brought the G-77/China back on board in the discussions on financing. The agreement triggered the spread of new optimism, and looking back on Thursday's dispute, several reckoned that the clash was mainly about "process and protocol." Others, however, were left feeling that the G-77/China proposal was not given its due consideration, having been merely "cut and paste" into the revised document rather than integrated in a meaningful way.

Working Group I participants appeared to converge towards the view that UNFF8's "message to the outside world" will be limited to raising awareness regarding the contribution of SFM to REDD, and that it will not address REDD funding or aim at directly influencing UNFCCC discussions. This way the only potentially sticky issue on forests in a changing environment was defused, which had some noting that "from now on it will be all about financing."

However, a scolding from the Secretariat concerning the lack of national reports delivered to UNFF for this session may provide further rationale for donors to insist on conditionalities being attached to the funding, namely on improving reporting and accountability. Some UNFF veterans recalled that the question of "how prescriptive should the fund be" could lead to similar controversies as the pre-UNFF5 discussions did over the merits of a legally binding versus voluntary instrument. Others questioned whether lack of reporting was a question of will or capacity, as donor countries had been equally reprimanded.

While assuring their optimism and good intentions, delegates indicated that they would come back on Monday well rested, and ready to fight through long nights, if necessary.



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