



UNFF HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 18 MAY 2005

On Wednesday, delegates convened in a morning Plenary to engage in a moderated panel discussion on policy needs, achievements and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. In the afternoon, delegates met in group consultations and coordination sessions to consider the first draft of the Chair's text and draft elements of a ministerial declaration.

ASIA-PACIFIC DAY: Delegates convened in a panel discussion on forests in the Asia-Pacific region, moderated by Naria Andin (The Philippines).

David Kaimowitz, Centre for International Forest Research, discussed challenges for sustainable forest management (SFM) in Asia, including: relatively high population densities in forests; decline of natural forests; illegal logging; bribery; bank fraud; and inappropriate use of forest subsidies. He stated that many of these problems are exacerbated by rapidly increasing demand in China for forest products, and that India will likely follow this path. He indicated that since forested regions remain some of the poorest in Asia, forests will be integral to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. He said that tenure reform is facilitating small-scale and community-based forest management, new opportunities for small operations, and the development of non-timber forest products. He identified emerging and ongoing issues that need to be addressed, including: the impact of climate change on forest health; biodiversity management outside protected areas; and violent conflict in forested regions. He highlighted the growing importance of valuation and payment for environmental services, such as China's "grain for green" programme.

Bin Che' Yeom Freezailah, Malaysian Timber Certification Council, spoke on SFM and certification efforts in Asia. He avowed that the tropical timber trade can play a strategic role in achieving SFM, with certification assuring consumers that forests meet their demands. He reported on a recent study on private forest sector experiences in SFM, which found that management is often inadequate and unsustainable and that management plans are often not implemented. He also noted that despite numerous efforts, some success stories and clear SFM-certification links, certification is difficult due to uncertain and inadequate "green premiums" on certified timber. He drew attention to tropical forest issues, including: a general correlation

between countries' GDP and ability to achieve SFM, due to differences in costs of SFM and in availability of resources; rich and complex ecosystems that increase SFM costs; low biomass production; a negative image of tropical forests due to misperceptions regarding forest governance; and competition from temperate and boreal timber.

He noted a continuing lack of success in achieving SFM, implementing certification and decreasing the rate of deforestation. He reported on development of certification schemes and codes of practice for reduced impact logging within the region, and called for implementation of all criteria and indicators for SFM and for credible certification schemes with compliance verification, which could address illegal logging and ensure legality as a first step.

He called for compliance with national laws, increased understanding and phased approaches to certification, more commitment and resources for SFM by Asian and donor countries, public procurement policies that would encourage market acceptance of a "green premium" for certified wood, and international assistance in establishing certification schemes.

Kanchan Lama, Society for Partners in Development, Nepal, presented on initiatives to empower women through community-based forest management in Nepal. She said poverty is rooted in discriminatory ownership of productive resources such as forests, noting that rural women are deprived of property rights, information, services, and opportunities to organize. She outlined efforts to promote gender equality and empower women through: building capacity; promoting environments that recognize women as development agents; establishing district-level NGOs and associations at the national level; networking and mentoring; and sharing lessons from grassroots-level experiences with national and international fora. Lama identified lessons learned, including that: social mobilization through gender mainstreaming can enhance power transformation; lack of property rights makes women vulnerable; and access to productive assets enhances women's economic status and enables them to reduce poverty by diversifying livelihoods. She recommended resource reallocation, legal reform, capacity building, and gender mainstreaming in technical departments.

Hiro Miyazono (Japan) presented on Japan's contributions in support of SFM, as well as experiences in establishing coastal forests. Noting Japan's role as a major importer of



wood, he stated that the country has a great responsibility to support SFM and has launched environmental conservation initiatives for sustainable development that address several global environmental issues of concern, including forests. On Japan's approaches to support SFM, he emphasized emerging cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the private sector, bilateral and multilateral cooperation, international dialogue, and regional approaches, including the Asia Forest Partnership. Miyazono then recounted Japan's afforestation efforts on its northern coast, which seek to mitigate shifting sand, prevent fog inflow and buffer wind and tidal waves. He listed technologies Japan has been developing for forest establishment, including sand embankment and terracing and the use of triangle fences. He also commented on the multiple functions of newly established forests, including the possible correlation between coastal plantations and the enhancement of fisheries.

Gopa Pandey (India) shared recent developments concerning SFM in India, including: poverty alleviation through forest management; the integration of UNFF themes, such as traditional forest-related knowledge and monitoring, assessing and reporting, into national forest policy; joint forest management; and the increasing importance of bamboo. She stressed the importance of zoning in forest planning, legal instruments, and capacity building in local staff and institutions. She described four stages of sustainable development, and noted the rising potential for employment related to afforestation and reforestation. She concluded by describing the various social, economic and environmental components that must be balanced in the implementation of sustainable forest management strategies.

Jomo Kwame Sundaram, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, noted the evolution of a UN development agenda in the 1990s, UN commitment to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals in the 2000s, and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which is running concurrently with UNFF-5. He said that past logging sites in Asia have declined in significance, and noted only modest success in efforts to promote wood processing industries and to capture timber rents to generate government revenue or to contribute to SFM and diversified economic development. He cited local timber politics, corruption, resource conflicts, water supply and quality problems, loss of soil and compromised ecosystems as negatively affecting the livelihoods of forest-dependent peoples. He also noted a migration of logging activities from Southeast Asia to Pacific, African and Latin American regions, with negative effects on the abilities of governments in those areas to introduce and enforce legislation to enhance sustainable development. He lauded the UNFF for offering the opportunity for developing countries to draw lessons from these experiences to ensure that their timber resources are not compromised for the benefit of the few.

CHINA questioned the accuracy of some of the information presented regarding his country, stressing that: timber imports in China are not rising; exploratory stages of decision making are integral parts of forest management; and China's afforestation achievements are the greatest in the world. He emphasized that China's *per capita* consumption of timber is below the world average and one-sixteenth of consumption in developed countries, and said equal access to development is a human right.

INDONESIA noted its achievements in SFM, including the development of a flexible national forest programme and an increase in protected forest area from 15 to 16.3 million hectares. He drew attention to the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) process in Asia, encouraged wider participation in it, and said a task force has been established to prepare a regional plan of action on law enforcement, transparency and customs regulations, which will be adopted during a ministerial conference in September 2005.

CROATIA stressed the importance of independent auditing for SFM, and noted that only four percent of forest products on the market are certified. NEW ZEALAND noted the development of a regional code of practice in Asia, and stressed the importance of country-led initiatives, decentralization of forest management, learning and sharing experiences, addressing underlying causes of deforestation, and targeting forest community needs. Noting that plantations provide some but not all environmental services, she said the conversion of natural forests to plantations is undesirable but that plantations have an important role to play in SFM. She also underscored the potential for valuation of and payment for environmental services.

INDIA commented on advances in his country's national forest programme implementation, emphasizing a commitment to meaningful partnerships and an institutional framework to ensure participation of all stakeholders, especially communities.

Responding to comments by India and China, Kaimowitz agreed that each country is responsible for its own forest management, and clarified that it was not his intention to blame either country for forestry problems in neighboring countries. He then pointed out that increased logging in other countries has been the result of increased demand for logs and forest products in some Asian countries.

PAKISTAN commented on overlap between UNFF and the CBD Forest Biological Diversity Programme of Work, noting the need for UNFF to rethink its strategy to focus on non-biodiversity-related aspects of forests.

Noting the cultural diversity within the region, LUXEMBOURG, on behalf of the EU, emphasized the importance of sub-regional processes in advancing SFM.

The US stated that the panel presentations demonstrate the potential of regional approaches. She then highlighted the importance of cooperation on forest fire management, noting that the issue extends beyond the Asia-Pacific region.

NEPAL called for a UNFF outcome that would strengthen social and gender equality initiatives already underway in his country.

In response to comments by Guatemala and Croatia, Freezailah stated that the slow progress in certifying tropical forests necessitates phased approaches to certification to ease countries into new standards.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Noting the complexity involved in preparing draft text, some delegates were of the view that the Chair's draft text is a reasonable reflection of country statements made during the first two days of UNFF-5. While most are of the view that a stronger arrangement is needed, some have said that a future IAF may not be dramatically different from what currently exists. Some were optimistic that potential disagreement concerning the voluntary code is not irresolvable.