

UNFF7 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 19 APRIL 2007

On Thursday, 19 April, the Seventh Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF7) convened at UN Headquarters in New York to discuss the non-legally binding instrument (NLBI) on all types of forests, and the Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) for the period 2007-2015. Delegates convened in two working groups throughout the day: Working Group I discussed the NLBI, addressing national measures, international trade in forest products, means of implementation, and a facilitative process for national implementation; and Working Group II discussed the MYPOW draft text, addressing the preamble and a proposed matrix for the MYPOW on themes and cross-cutting issues.

WORKING GROUP I – NLBI

Throughout the text, the EU requested replacing references to SFM implementation and the Global Objectives with NLBI implementation, and, opposed by BRAZIL, replacing references to UNFF with “the governing body of this instrument.”

NATIONAL MEASURES: On public awareness and education, the US opposed reference to universal access to education. On involving indigenous communities in training and education systems, BRAZIL and INDIA, opposed by the EU, AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND, requested deleting references to communities embodying traditional lifestyles and management approaches. Delegates agreed to delete reference to participatory research.

On stakeholder participation, the AFRICAN GROUP, opposed by the EU and MEXICO, requested deleting reference to transparent participation. The EU requested replacing stakeholder “empowerment” with “active participation.” COLOMBIA, BRAZIL and INDIA, opposed by the EU, requested deleting reference to forest owners and private sector development of certification schemes. CHINA, opposed by many, suggested only referring to private forest owners.

On private-public partnerships, INDIA and BRAZIL, opposed by MEXICO, suggested promoting “good business practices” rather than “criteria and indicators.”

INTERNATIONAL TRADE: Delegates debated whether to retain this chapter, given competency in other fora. On encouraging trade, proposed deletions included: encouraging investment (the EU), developing and implementing international rules (COLOMBIA) and removing barriers (VENEZUELA). The EU, COLOMBIA, VENEZUELA and JAPAN, opposed by CHILE, MEXICO and NEW ZEALAND, favored deleting the paragraph.

On facilitating legal trade, the US opposed reference to “a mutually supportive relationship between trade and environment.” MEXICO favored “measures applicable to trade should not compromise SFM.”

COLOMBIA, VENEZUELA and BRAZIL, opposed by INDONESIA, proposed deleting text on promoting cooperation in forest law enforcement and governance to combat illegal harvesting and associated trade.

On strengthening capacities to address illegal forest-related practices, COLOMBIA requested deleting “and associated trade.” BRAZIL and CHILE recommended reverting to agreed language from UNFF6.

VENEZUELA, INDIA, BRAZIL, CHINA and others recommended deleting a paragraph on ensuring that voluntary certification and labeling schemes operate in accordance with relevant international obligations. MEXICO, AUSTRALIA and the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC preferred retaining the concept.

MEXICO, the AFRICAN GROUP and SWITZERLAND highlighted the importance of promoting forest products and services valuation, while AUSTRALIA cautioned against promoting an unattainable task.

The US, ARGENTINA and others, opposed by the EU, JAPAN, COSTA RICA and SWITZERLAND, suggested deleting reference to public procurement supporting international policies for legally sourced timber. Delegates agreed to delete references to establishing mechanisms to address illegal forest-related practices and associated trade and assess voluntary certification schemes.

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION: BRAZIL, with many developing countries, requested reference to significant new and predictable financial resources. AUSTRALIA, opposed by CUBA, proposed deleting reference to reversing the decline in ODA for SFM.

On mobilizing resources for national action, the EU suggested referencing national programmes rather than, *inter alia*, SFM and poverty reduction strategies. On incentives to reduce forest loss, the AFRICAN GROUP proposed including debt cancellation.

CUBA, supported by INDIA, PANAMA, VENEZUELA, BRAZIL, PAKISTAN and ARGENTINA and opposed by the EU and JAPAN, proposed a new subparagraph on developing a forest fund for SFM. IRAN emphasized supporting “developing” countries’ efforts. AUSTRALIA proposed prioritizing SFM in national development plans.

On “institutions” to create markets, the EU preferred “capacities” and MEXICO, with the AFRICAN GROUP, COSTA RICA and COLOMBIA, preferred markets for “environmental” rather than “ecosystem” services. The US proposed alternative language promoting recognition of forests’ multiple values in the marketplace. VENEZUELA, INDIA, BRAZIL and COLOMBIA opposed reference to markets.

On strengthening mechanisms for SFM, BRAZIL and PAKISTAN, opposed by the US, favored deleting reference to voluntary codes of conduct. PAKISTAN, CHINA and COLOMBIA, opposed by INDIA, the US and BANGLADESH, called for deleting references to wildlife.

CUBA requested reference to facilitating access to environmentally sound technologies (ESTs). The EU proposed deleting reference to innovations helping indigenous and local communities, while the US suggested “transfer of ESTs, including for the benefit of indigenous peoples.”

The US and COLOMBIA requested specifying that access to traditional knowledge occurs with the consent of knowledge holders. On benefit sharing, the EU and MEXICO, opposed by BRAZIL, VENEZUELA, INDIA and SENEGAL, suggested referencing the Convention on Biological Diversity and the World Intellectual Property Organization rather than “relevant international agreements.”

Delegates agreed to delete references to inviting CPF and the GEF Council to mobilize access to and resources for EST transfer. The US and the EU, opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP and INDONESIA, favored deleting reference to technical assistance.

On financing mechanisms, the AFRICAN GROUP, the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, SENEGAL, BRAZIL, INDIA, COLOMBIA, ARGENTINA and INDONESIA, opposed by AUSTRALIA and SWITZERLAND, supported options on a global forest fund and on assessing current funding mechanisms. The EU, opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP and ARGENTINA, proposed alternative text on exploring a voluntary portfolio approach.

On innovative financial mechanisms, the US and NORWAY preferred “portfolio” mechanisms. The AFRICAN GROUP proposed substituting debt “cancellation” for debt reduction mechanisms. NORWAY proposed deleting all references to debt. BRAZIL, opposed by URUGUAY, the AFRICAN GROUP, and the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, favored deleting a subparagraph on creating financial mechanisms to benefit communities.

On efforts addressing climate change, VENEZUELA and BRAZIL argued for first developing the forest fund. BRAZIL noted that only developing countries participate in the Clean Development Mechanism. On requesting financial institutions to allocate funds for forest projects addressing climate change, the AFRICAN GROUP proposed adding reference to addressing SFM, and COLOMBIA and VENEZUELA, opposed by FIJI, proposed removing reference to climate change.

FACILITATIVE PROCESS: ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, COLOMBIA and CUBA, opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP, requested deleting this section, disagreeing with the establishment of a new subsidiary body. The EU explained that the process aimed to promote the instrument’s implementation through facilitation and dialogue. JAPAN, MEXICO and others suggested that CPF members could carry out the proposed work. SWITZERLAND offered to facilitate informal discussions on this.

MONITORING AND REPORTING: INDIA, opposed by NEW ZEALAND, SWITZERLAND and JAPAN, suggested deleting reference to indicators.

WORKING GROUP II – MYPOW

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT: Delegates addressed the structure of future sessions, themes, and potential cross-cutting issues using a Bureau-proposed matrix outlining the proposed 2007-2015 work programme. While supporting means of implementation as a cross-cutting issue, CUBA, supported by the AFRICAN GROUP, ARGENTINA, JAMAICA, AFGHANISTAN and GUATEMALA, also insisted that it be the central theme at UNFF8, where proposals, including the Bureau’s proposed forest fund, could be analyzed in depth. SWITZERLAND and others opposed means of implementation as a “flagship” theme but, with AUSTRALIA and the US, supported its inclusion as a cross-cutting issue. BRAZIL suggested that UNFF8 address contributions to the Global Objectives, with future sessions addressing progress. The AFRICAN GROUP said main themes should be based on the Global Objectives, the NLBI, and the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action. ARGENTINA, MEXICO and others suggested a separate matrix section for the Global Objectives and NLBI implementation and review, to be addressed at each session, and delegates debated whether to combine this section with cross-cutting issues. The US, AUSTRALIA

and SWITZERLAND suggested addressing the Global Objectives in the context of the themes being addressed. The EU highlighted that thematic issues, being interlinked with the Global Objectives, do not need to be addressed separately, and advocated that the NLBI and Global Objectives’ implementation be addressed at every session.

Proposals for other cross-cutting issues included: regional and subregional reports; regional and stakeholder perspectives and CPF activities; forest-based tenure; and special needs of low forest cover countries.

Delegates suggested additional key themes for the proposed matrix, including: biodiversity; bioenergy; illegal logging; forest education and awareness building; disaster risk reduction; water and watersheds; desertification; safety and health for forestry, research and development; and agro-forestry. For UNFF8, proposed themes included: forest certification; indigenous knowledge and practices; rehabilitation and restoration; forests and sustainable development; and establishing a forest funding mechanism. AUSTRALIA, opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP and the SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY, proposed that nature-based tourism be removed from UNFF10. SWITZERLAND, BRAZIL and GUATEMALA cautioned against a “shopping list” of themes and called for focusing on select key areas.

Delegates debated whether to cluster the various themes. Some delegates stressed that topics should be politically relevant to the international agenda to enhance UNFF’s appeal. The AFRICAN GROUP said the Forum must also remain open to regional processes. ARGENTINA, the EU, IRAN and others suggested that the key themes reflect the three pillars of sustainable development.

Presenting his proposed MYPOW, noting consistency with the three pillars of sustainable development and citing the growing importance of forests in climate discussions, SWITZERLAND strongly urged that UNFF8 address forests and climate change. He suggested addressing forests and livelihoods (UNFF9), forests and globalization (UNFF10), and UNFF and options for the future (UNFF11).

The US proposed addressing: forests and environmental sustainability (2009); forests and livelihoods (2011); mainstreaming forests and economic development (2013); and review and consideration of future actions (2015). AUSTRALIA proposed the themes: SFM and global environmental sustainability (2009); forests for people and livelihoods (2011); and forests for growth and sustainability (2013). IRAN cautioned against focusing on climate change above all other global environmental problems.

CHINA advocated elaborating on national and international actions, taking into account specific needs of different countries. PERU said the issue of growth and sustainability should be addressed at an earlier session. Supporting the US and Swiss proposals, the SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY said Peru’s concerns would be covered under cross-cutting issues.

PREAMBLE: The EU, supported by ARGENTINA and MEXICO, suggested referring to the NLBI. ARGENTINA, COSTA RICA, INDONESIA, VENEZUELA and the AFRICAN GROUP requested reference to the Millennium Development Goals. The EU proposed text emphasizing the importance of strengthening political commitment for implementing SFM and the Global Objectives.

IN THE CORRIDORS

In the MYPOW room, some delegates lamented an apparent lack of focus, reflected by burgeoning shopping lists of cross-cutting issues and themes assembled in a cumbersome matrix. One delegate noted this could hinder the Forum’s progress and, in the longer term, its ability to make a difference in any one of the issues being proposed.

Meanwhile, a formerly disbanded G-77/China convened a meeting to attempt to rediscover commonalities. As one delegate put it, “we were separated but not yet divorced so we are seeing if we can reconcile some of our differences.” With big differences over whether the NLBI can be adopted without a forest fund, it remains to be seen whether this marriage can be saved.