

UNFF13 Highlights: Tuesday, 8 May 2018

UNFF13 resumed on Tuesday, 8 May 2018, at UN Headquarters in New York. In the morning, delegates continued their policy dialogue on the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 (UNSPF), with two panels addressing the linkages between forests and sustainable production of forests products, water, ecosystem services, climate, and energy. In the afternoon, delegates began discussing the draft UNSPF communications and outreach strategy.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan

Panel Discussion on Contribution of Forests to the Achievement of the SDGs and Transformation towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies: UNFF13 Vice-Chair Tomas Krejzar (Czech Republic) introduced a panel on linkages between forests, water and ecosystem services.

Hiroto Mitsugi, Chair, Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), presented the key messages from the Conference "Working Across Sectors to Halt Deforestation and Increase Forest Area":

- achieving SDG15 by 2030 requires urgent action now;
- legal, inclusive and sustainable value chains in agriculture and forestry that prevent deforestation and degradation should be promoted and upscaled;
- civil society and particularly youth should be empowered as agents for change for realizing the full value of forests and halting and reversing deforestation; and
- the technical and business capacity of small producers should be developed, forestry education at all levels strengthened and consumers educated.

Meine van Noordwijk, Chair, Global Forest Expert Panel (GFEP) on forests and water, explained that the GFEP report to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) will review existing science to respond to three questions:

- to what extent, where and for whom is ongoing change in forests increasing or decreasing human vulnerability to climate variability and change in water resources?
- what can national and international governance systems and co-investments in global commitments do in response to changes in water security? and
- how can the SDGs be used to increase the coherence and coordination of national responses in relation to forests and water across sectors and from local to national and international scales?

David Ellison, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, discussed the state of scientific debate on the water-forest paradigm, and whether more forests really mean more water. He explained that many studies focus on the level of water catchment basins, and

conclude that more forests mean less water, whereas a broader view taking into account terrestrial evapotranspiration suggests a different conclusion.

Michael Jenkins, CEO, Forest Trends, US, presented on payments for forest ecosystem services. He recommended developing indicators for integrating them into national accounts, development policies and planning, and called for public sector commitments and risk-taking to encourage private sector investments.

David Ganz, Executive Director, Center for People and Forests, Thailand, commented that sustainable forest management (SFM), aided by forest certification, should benefit local communities, advocating private sector interaction with local communities through free, prior and informed consent.

In the ensuing discussion, CONGO highlighted the Congo Basin Blue Fund. COSTA RICA reported its fund for pricing ecosystem services for smallholders, lamenting the inadequacy of global prices for carbon. INDIA announced its reversal of deforestation and increase of forest cover by 1% as of 2018, aiming for 3% by 2030. PALESTINE asked for UNFF help in protecting Palestinian forests from destruction caused by Israel. PAKISTAN stressed non-forest causes of deforestation. The EU called for eliminating harmful subsidies and for good governance. FINLAND noted increasing demand for both timber and ecosystem services. MALAYSIA highlighted forest certification for supporting trade of sustainably and legally sourced timber, and compatible procurement policies. Referring to ongoing work on forests and water under the Water Convention, SWITZERLAND urged UNFF to collaborate closely with that body.

A second panel examined the linkage between forests and energy and the sustainable production of forest products. Jitendra Vir Sharma, The Energy and Resource Institute, India, presented on innovative financing mechanisms for SFM in his country. He reported that wood fuel is the highest emitter of greenhouse gases and that sustainable fuel would help his country achieve several goals including climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and improvement of forests qualities.

Gary Bull, University of British Columbia, discussed energy in the context of forests. He said the share of renewable energy vs. fossil fuel energy remains low. He recommended, *inter alia*:

- support for more forest financial mechanisms;
- accelerated use of engineering technologies;
- expanded and improved forest information systems technologies;
- promotion of SFM in multiple ways; and
- institutional reforms that increase collaboration.

Duncan Brack, Chatham House, noted that 60% of the world's forests are used for wood production and identified the drivers of wood products consumption. Observing that by 2060 we can expect

a fall in global demand for fuelwood but an increase in demand for other wood products, he cautioned that rate of forest cover loss increased by 51% in 2016 compared to 2011. He recommended, *inter alia*:

- policies to support legally and sustainably produced wood products in both consumer and producer markets;
- support for private sector initiatives to source legal and sustainable products;
- reform of forest and land use legislation, including clarification of land tenure and access rights;
- improvements in forest governance and law enforcement;
- greater protection for critical areas of forest; and
- systems of payments for ecosystem services.

Ganz explained that in order for biofuels to become a feasible option, countries need to have economies of scale to support the large scale infrastructure development needed for them.

In the ensuing discussion, participants raised issues related to, *inter alia*: valuation of non-carbon ecosystem services (New Zealand); illegal logging (Australia); supporting countries transitioning to biofuels (Papua New Guinea); promotion of natural capital (US); increasing focus on bioenergy (Canada); and creating a compelling, united narrative on the importance of forests and biodiversity up to 2030 (Convention for Biological Diversity).

Development of the UNSPF Communication and Outreach Strategy: On Tuesday afternoon, UNFF13 Vice-Chair Luciana Melchert Saguas Presas (Brazil) introduced a panel on the power of communication for the successful implementation of the UNSPF. Carolyn Liu, Asia-Pacific Forest Communicators Networks, moderated the session, noting that policymakers, governments and international organizations increasingly recognize an urgent need for forest sector to improve its communications across countries and internationally.

Robert Grace, M&CSaatchi Abel Group, South Africa, called for “brutal simplicity of thought” that transforms complicated information into a personal, emotional story by stripping away the complex layers, leaving simple messages which enter the brain faster and stay there longer.

Ingwald Gschwantl and Kai Lintunen, Forest Communicators’ Network (FCN), noted the challenges of negative “fake forest news” and said successful communication entails: political will; capacity to communicate well; sufficient resources; strategic planning; a specific purpose; solid evidence; understanding of the stakeholders; partnerships, for pooling resources and defining common messages; imagination and creativity; and perseverance.

Jennifer Hayes, US Forest Service, narrated the story of a fire researcher who “gives a human face” to fire data that needs to be communicated widely.

Gschwantl showcased how holding the Expo Milano 2015 in a real forest site served as a crowd puller.

Liu spoke on “participatory development communication” (PDC) for communicating effectively with local communities. She said sustainability requires involving communities in program interventions and entails: establishing a relationship with the community; engaging with them to develop a communication strategy; and then co-implementing the strategy.

Jasson Kalugendo, FCN Africa, recommended bringing communications to the beginning of any process in a rural community, rather than just “adding it on” at the end. He described a process by which researchers engaged with individuals to understand their needs and concerns, after which the community members reached agreement on the causes of problems, their impacts, and potential solutions. He said they then communicated to the broader community and sustainably applied the knowledge gained.

Lintunen emphasized the need to be vocal and proud in communication and to tell stories that make forests relevant to the audience.

Peter Csoka, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), explained how the FCN has increased outreach through regional communication networks in all continents, citing extensive capacity building through these networks.

UNFF Director Manoel Sobral Filho said the key messages of the UNSPF need to leave the negotiation rooms and be communicated to the public. Mita Sen, UNFF Secretariat, presented the draft communication and outreach strategy annexed to the Secretariat Note (E/CN.18/2018/2).

Regarding communication materials, SWITZERLAND recommended using art, literature and music, and the US suggested increased focus on social media. UKRAINE called for book format products in different languages.

On targeted audiences, CHINA said cities and governments should be included, and the EU called for nexus opportunities to engage political decision makers external to forest sectors.

On messages:

- NEW ZEALAND called for simplicity, the EU for achieving greater understanding of SFM; and JAPAN for better illustration of multiple functions of forests;
- ECUADOR asked for inclusion of best practice of indigenous and local communities;
- INDONESIA said the UNFF needs to portray what the world would be without forests;
- AUSTRALIA, supported by IRAN, said the scope should be the Global Forest Goals (GFGs), not the entire UNSPF;
- CHILDREN AND YOUTH called for focus on the plight of forests and how to save them; and
- FARMERS AND SMALL FOREST LAND OWNERS called for demonstrating compatibility between conservation and timber production.

The US said the omnibus resolution should urge the Secretariat to produce a compact hard copy publication on the GFGs. WOMEN said they would assist in mainstreaming gender into the strategy.

General Country Statements on Implementation of the UNSPF: IRAN underscored the need to enhance international support for developing countries in implementing the UNSPF. ISRAEL said it will continue efforts to generate master plans for all its forests. BRAZIL announced that it will restore 10 million hectares of forest by 2030. PALESTINE noted its US\$ 4 million investment in forests. MALAYSIA said ASEAN will contribute to reducing emissions from forests by harmonizing and adapting strategies on mitigation. INDONESIA said its government allocated more than four million hectares of forest to local communities to solve land-related conflicts. ALGERIA announced plans to increase its Green Dam to more than 4.2 million hectares.

In the Corridors

“I carve out everything that is not the elephant” is how one of the panelists on communications strategy explained the essence of his award-winning campaigns aimed at simplifying complex issues for greater impact. The “elephant in the room” in the mind of many was the discussion on UN DESA reform which is expected to take place on Wednesday. Hushed debate was heard on whether UNFF13 should consider a special resolution to express Member States’ displeasure with any plans to downsize or downgrade the UNFF Secretariat.

The afternoon plenary’s focus turned to how to formulate a compelling narrative that effectively conveys to both policymakers and average citizens the value of forests and the need for action, and whether the proposed UNSPF communications and outreach strategy can meet this challenge. A panelist observed that “you need the right people, with the right communication skills” to simplify complex forest issues for the wider public, explaining that “complexity is the hiding place of mediocrity and forests are too important a topic for mediocrity.” A participant was heard wondering aloud if the UNFF is up to the task, and another added “If you’re worried now, imagine what will happen if UNFF is downgraded.”