



First Parliamentarians Conference on SFM in the Congo Basin Bulletin

A Daily Report of the First International Conference of Parliamentarians on the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystems

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS ON THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF CENTRAL AFRICAN FOREST ECOSYSTEMS: THURSDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2006

The First International Conference of Members of Parliament on the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystems entered its third day of discussions on Thursday, 26 October, in Yaoundé, Cameroon. In the morning, participants took part in field trips to an agroforestry research station, and a forestry school in Mbalmayo. In the evening delegates reconvened to listen to and discuss presentations made by moderators and rapporteurs of the parallel working groups on: national laws, sub-regional initiatives and international agreements; parliaments and partnerships for SFM; forest taxation; governance, and opportunities and challenges in community forests.

PRESENTATION OF GROUP PROCEEDINGS

PARTNERSHIPS: Moderator Appolinaire Matsembe reported on the group's deliberations and provided a brief appraisal of the methodology adopted by the working group to identify various partners and define the ability of each of the partners to promote SFM. Salvator Ndabirorere, Rapporteur, outlined opportunities for and constraints on partnerships, and said the group recommended actions for more effective partnerships. The first recommendation was the institutionalization of REPAR-CEFDHAC in the action plan. The second recommendation was to restructure and bolster existing resources in the area of sustainable resource management.

In the ensuing discussion, delegates discussed how REPAR can work more effectively, and its related costs. Addressing a delegate's suggestion of elaborating a chronogram of work for the action plan that is being discussed, the Moderator said that the group will discuss this on Friday.

Another delegate proposed establishing a union commission within the Central Africa region that would: have legislative power; take care of environmental and forest issues; and investigate the reasons for non-compliance with existing environmental legislations. He also suggested more interaction between the legislative and executive powers.

Moderator Matsembe noted that REPAR is the forum for discussion of environmental issues concerning Central Africa, and that suggestions should respect the legislative competence of each country and its national constitution.

FOREST TAXATION: Presenting the working group proceedings on forest taxation the moderator Timothee Fomete drew attention to discrepancies between the tax regimes of the Central African countries, and noted that forest exploitation was not generally beneficial to local communities.

Emmanuel Bayani Ngoyi reported that all the Congo basin countries had forest taxation regimes relating to tax felling and surface area, the revenues from which contributed to development activities. In relation to inconsistencies in

taxation rates, where high taxes encouraged unsustainable exploitation, the group noted the need to formulate modalities for distributing revenues, proposing that parliamentarians be instrumental in disseminating information relating to forest legislation as well as identifying appropriate projects, calling for the harmonization of laws and the need to check arbitrary executive action. Participants discussed the harmonization of the taxation rates in addition to discussing the modalities of a forest regeneration tax.

GOVERNANCE, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN COMMUNITY FORESTS: Patrice Passe Sanand, Central Africa Republic, presented findings from the working group's deliberations on governance and opportunities and challenges in involving local communities in the management of community forests. He said the group identified several constraints: the poor synergy between institutions; misappropriation of funds; chaotic use of resources; lack of incentive mechanisms; illegal activities; the absence of reforestation strategies; and the inequitable distribution of benefits. Passe Sanand indicated that parliamentarians should act as the interface between the executive power and citizens, noting the need for: capacity building for parliamentarians; a forest database; harmonization of forests policies and follow up implementation of laws by the executive.

In the ensuing discussion, some participants expressed concern that tax revenues are benefiting communities exploiting forests unsustainably, rather than compensating those communities that promote forest conservation. Participants also noted that Central African forests serve as lungs for filtering pollution created by developed countries and that these polluters should pay compensation. Another participant noted the need to build capacity amongst parliamentarians on international conventions, such as the Kyoto Protocol, which incorporates the "polluter pays principle". Another participant proposed that governments should not wait for financing and should allocate 2% of the annual budget to protection and management of forest ecosystems.

NATIONAL LAWS, SUB-REGIONAL INITIATIVES AND INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS: Rapporteur Joel Loumeto, Congo, presented the work of his group on the issue of national laws, sub-regional initiatives and international agreements. He underscored that delegates discussed strategies for an action plan in order to involve parliamentarians in implementing national legislation and proposed a definition of sub-regional initiatives. Loumeto outlined the group's suggestion of strategies to involve parliamentarians to enforce national legislation and international conventions, including the need to promote consistency between environmental and land tenure legislation and to update the draft action plan. He noted that the group also debated the relationship between national laws and international conventions on SFM. He said the group identified a list of sub-regional institutions that could work with REPAR for promoting enforcement.

Moderator of the plenary session, Abonem A. Tchoyi, Cameroon, suggested a small drafting group be formed to include the suggestions of delegates and update the draft declaration to be presented before plenary on Friday.



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