



منظمة الأغذية
والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

联合国
粮食及
农业组织

Food
and
Agriculture
Organization
of
the
United
Nations

Organisation
des
Nations
Unies
pour
l'alimentation
et
l'agriculture

Organización
de las
Naciones
Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

WORKSHOP ON STRENGTHENING REGIONAL ACTION – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE IPF/IFF PROPOSALS FOR ACTION IN AFRICA

Accra, Ghana, 16-18 February 2004

IMPLEMENTING PROPOSALS FOR ACTION OF THE IPF/IFF

INTRODUCTION

1. The international forest community, through sustained dialogue over the last ten years, has achieved a great deal. These positive results build on the forest outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED): the Forest Principles¹, relevant chapters of Agenda 21, and the conventions covering biological diversity, climate change and desertification.
2. The dialogue is continuing in the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) with efforts now focusing on the implementation of sustainable forest management through nearly three hundred proposals for action. In this regard, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) that FAO chairs is playing a key role. Its fourteen members, comprised of international organizations, institutions and secretariats, are enhancing cooperation and coordination within and outside the forest sector at global, regional and national levels like at no time in the past.
3. Despite these and other positive developments, deforestation and forest degradation are continuing at alarming rates, especially in tropical developing countries. As worrisome is the fact that the environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects of forests are still too often dealt with in an uncoordinated fashion. Thus, the forest community must strengthen its collaboration with partners, including those outside the sector, to bring about needed change.

HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL FOREST POLICY DIALOGUE

4. The difficult debate on forests at UNCED set developing countries against developed countries largely on whether or not to launch negotiations for an international legally binding instrument for forests. Developing countries felt their sovereign right to manage forests within their borders would be threatened. On the other hand, developed countries were concerned that care was not sufficiently being taken to safeguard the global environmental benefits that forests

¹ Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests

For reasons of economy, this document is produced in a limited number of copies. Delegates and observers are kindly requested to bring it to the meetings and to refrain from asking for additional copies, unless strictly indispensable.
Most FAO meeting documents are available on Internet at www.fao.org

provide. In developed countries, those who wanted to conserve forests pushed for a convention out of concern over the destruction of tropical forests. Because the forest industry believed it would provide a competitive advantage in the timber market, it supported this approach as well. Developing countries opposed a convention, claiming that it would try to prevent them from using their natural resources for economic development. Over time, some countries changed their views. Now, a number of developing countries are in favour of a convention while some developed countries are against it.

5. Despite lengthy debates, the forest outcomes of UNCED represented a historic breakthrough when consensus was reached on the Forest Principles. For the first time, countries agreed to a common basis for commitment and action at international, regional and national levels. However, the absence of a global forum to discuss forest policy issues was seen to seriously impede progress in achieving sustainable forest management worldwide. Thus, three years after UNCED, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) was established under the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). It was given a two-year mandate to pursue consensus and coordinated proposals for action on a number of forest issues; and to submit final conclusions and policy recommendations to the fifth session of CSD in 1997.

6. Although IPF agreed to more than two hundred proposals for action, it was not able to finalise discussions on matters related to finance, transfer of technology, trade and the environment, or on the need for a global forest convention. In fact, many countries stated that they were not prepared to endorse the idea of a legally binding instrument until they had a better indication of the elements it might contain, including financial and other mechanisms to facilitate national implementation.

7. The Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) was subsequently established to (i) promote and facilitate implementation of IPF proposals for action as well as review, monitor and report on progress toward sustainable forest management; (ii) address matters left pending from IPF; and (iii) identify possible elements and work towards a consensus on future international arrangements, including a legally binding instrument. As with IPF, this new body was given a time bound mandate (1997-2000) at the end of which it had to report outcomes to CSD.

8. Three years of deliberations produced additional proposals for action but failed to reach agreement on the question of a legal instrument. Thorny issues relative to finance, transfer of technology, and trade also remained unresolved. To end the stalemate, countries reached a compromise that resulted in the establishment of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), initially for a five-year period (2000-2005).

9. As part of the broader international arrangement on forests, UNFF is expected to:

- facilitate and promote the implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action,
- provide a forum for continued policy development and dialogue,
- enhance cooperation and programme coordination on forest-related issues,
- foster international and cross-sectoral cooperation,
- monitor and assess progress in achieving sustainable forest management,
- strengthen long-term political commitment.

10. Furthermore, based on an assessment of progress toward sustainable forest management at international, regional and national levels through reporting by governments, organizations, institutions and instruments, UNFF will "...consider, with a view to recommending to the Economic and Social Council and through it to the General Assembly, the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests."² It is expected that these discussions will build on previous deliberations and conclude at the fifth session of UNFF in

² ECOSOC resolution E/2000/35 contained in E/2000/INF/2/Add.3

2005. Thus, countries participating in the forest policy dialogue must soon turn their attention to examining options for future international arrangements.

AFRICAN PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY PROCESS

11. As noted above, negotiations of the IPF/IFF proposals for action took place between 1995 and 2000. Considering the range of conditions and situations that exist in countries around the world, it is not surprising to note wide disparities in the degree to which commitments are being implemented. Throughout Africa, efforts have been hampered mainly because of two factors: lack of awareness of IPF/IFF and UNFF processes and outcomes; and lack of human and financial capacity to prioritise and implement them.

12. With regard to participation in the international dialogue itself, African contributions have also been modest, due in large part to a lack of information, including on the major issues at stake. Country representation is often shared between agencies in different ministries, making the development of coherent positions problematic. Moreover, the economic difficulties that most countries face, coupled with weak forestry institutions, hinder attempts to sustain efforts. With 32 countries classified as heavily indebted poor countries, African policy makers are preoccupied with finding ways to alleviate this burden. One possible approach to enhance the influence of African countries in international deliberations is to increase the participation of sub-regional organizations at meetings so that they can work with countries to ensure the concerns of their members are taken into account.

IMPLEMENTING IPF/IFF PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

13. Building on the Forest Principles and other UNCED outcomes, IPF/IFF proposals for action constitute an important advance toward sustainable forest management. They form the basis on which to move from political dialogue to action on the ground, addressing issues such as deforestation and forest degradation; health and productivity; conservation and protection of unique types of forests and fragile ecosystems; and the rehabilitation and maintenance of forest cover. Other areas relate, for example, to national forest programmes; public participation; criteria and indicators; monitoring, assessing and reporting on progress towards sustainable forest management; concepts, terms and definitions; and traditional forest-related knowledge. Cross-cutting issues such as international cooperation and capacity building are also discussed, focusing on financial resources, international trade, and transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

14. Most proposals concern governments but guidance is also given to international organizations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other major groups with regard to further developing, implementing and coordinating national sustainable forest management policies and programmes.

15. A number of country-led initiatives, some in partnership with international organizations, have synthesised the proposals for action and proposed various ways for countries to assess and to prioritise them, taking into account their specific circumstances³. Such information might provide a useful reference for countries that are about to begin the implementation process. Other sources of advice and guidance include members of CPF and of the National Forest Programme Facility who have gained considerable experience in this area, in the context of national forest programme frameworks.

³ For example, the Australia/PROFOR Summary of the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action - Implementing IPF/IFF Proposals for Action: a tool to assist national-level assessment of progress and priorities for action toward sustainable forest management, developed in support of the UNFF

THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION IN IMPLEMENTATION

16. Established in 1959 by FAO, the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission is the largest forestry forum on the continent. Heads of forestry and wildlife services meet every two years to discuss related issues of interest to the region; exchange information, experiences and technologies; provide advice to FAO and governments on priorities and programmes; and help develop regional inputs to the global forest dialogue, among other tasks. Thus, it can be an important tool in Africa to disseminate information, increase understanding of the challenges, strengthen regional participation in international processes, and facilitate the follow-up to UNCED agreements and decisions. Indeed, since UNCED was held more than ten years ago, follow-up to forestry outcomes has been an item on the agenda of the Commission at every session.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

17. Workshop participants may wish to discuss the following points with a view to making recommendations to the Commission on ways to improve the implementation of sustainable forest management in the region, including IPF/IFF proposals for action:

- identify steps and means within national forest programme processes to
 - i) assess the IPF/IFF proposals for action to determine their relevance to the unique situation in each country,
 - ii) identify priorities,
 - iii) implement, and
 - iv) monitor progress;
- consider the pros and cons of international, regional and sub-regional agreements on forests with a view to strengthening collaboration in Africa;
- build capacity to prepare for and participate in the international and regional forest policy dialogue;
- propose effective ways to prepare and disseminate papers, in a timely manner, in order to brief African delegations and harmonise their positions to the extent possible.

18. On the matter of improving African participation in the international dialogue on forests, the following questions may help focus discussions:

1. What are the advantages to Africa of actively participating in international and regional fora such as the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission, the FAO Committee on Forestry and the United Nations Forum on Forests?
2. What role can regional groupings play to increase the influence of Africa on the outcomes of international discussions?
3. Given resource constraints, what strategies are needed for Africa to reap the most benefits from its participation in the forest dialogue? Does it make sense to focus on regional and sub-regional gatherings?
4. What measures can be taken to ensure that the most suitable candidates are selected to represent their country at meetings?
5. How can sharing of information and follow up be made after meetings?