

Social and Cultural Aspects of Forests:

Poverty Reduction and Development in Forest Landscapes

Introduction

IUCN would particularly like to highlight one element related to *Social and Cultural Aspects of Forests*:

- Forest actions to contribute to the achievement of poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals

While progress was made in recognizing these important linkages at UNFF-3, UNFF-4 now needs to rise to the challenge of turning this recognition into agreement on next steps for operationalising this relationship. This briefing note offers some recommendations for consideration by UNFF-4.

Recommendations for UNFF-4

International recognition of the role of forests in poverty reduction and sustainable human development is only the first step and to a certain extent has already been achieved, including in the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and UNFF-3. However, as stated in the Secretary-General's Report on Social and Cultural Aspects of Forests: *The poor demonstration and documentation of the linkages between the role of forests and poverty reduction has manifested in insufficient allocation of national resources and official development assistance for sustainable forest management.*

Improvements in national policies for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and in the preparation of poverty reduction strategy papers to better include forest related actions therefore need to be supported by the necessary national budget allocations, as well as by the country strategies and programming frameworks of bilateral and multilateral donor agencies.

UNFF-4 should:

- ☑ Explicitly recognize the synergies between the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action, the UNFF Plan of Action and the Millennium Development Goals
- ☑ Invite the UNFF Secretariat to collaborate with the UN Millennium Project and interested governments, CPF members and Major Groups to put in place a mechanism or process for full integration of forest issues into the MDG+5 Summit process and beyond
 - This could take the form of a thematic PrepCom for MDG+5, or UNFF Intersessional workshop on Forests and MDGs. Issues to be considered could include the potential contribution of community forest ownership and management. Benchmarks could be identified to assess how forests are contributing to achievement of the MDGs, particularly with respect to livelihood outcomes. The event could form part of an ongoing UNFF intersessional process, similar to the model provided by the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration.
- ☑ Recognize the value of the landscape approach as a framework for making equitable trade-offs between ecological, social and economic requirements and related forest functions between one site and another, while ensuring that there is no net loss or decline of functions at the landscape level

- Recognize the role of good governance arrangements and the potential contribution of regional Forest Law Enforcement and Governance processes in delivering progress on poverty eradication and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals

UNFF-4 should urge countries to:

- Allocate to the poor greater rights and responsibilities for the use, management and ownership of forests and other environmental assets, recognizing developments in the areas of decentralization and devolution and building on the outcomes of the Interlaken UNFF intersessional workshop on this
- Mainstream forests into poverty reduction strategies and other related processes
- Improve links between poverty reduction processes and national forest programmes

This would involve, among other things:

- o Improving knowledge to build the case on the contribution of forests to the poor
- o Incorporating subsistence activities and the provision of a forest resources safety net into poverty reduction strategies
- o Strengthening the capacity of forest departments to participate in sustainable development and poverty reduction processes, and to make effective use of livelihood approaches
- o Establishing or enhancing coordination mechanisms between forest and environment – and finance and economic planning ministries

UNFF should call on countries, bilateral and multilateral donors to:

- Recognize the need to strengthen the access of the rural poor to forest resources and identify innovative sources of financing to reward environmental stewardship, e.g. forest landscape restoration initiatives
- Allocate the necessary national resources to forest actions which contribute to poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals
- Channel funds and other support to capacity building initiatives that aim to restore forest functions equitably across forest landscapes
- Examine and address constraints to market entry for the forest goods and services produced by indigenous and local communities

Background

As evidenced by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the predominant concern of the international community is the eradication of poverty. The UN Forum on Forests has an important role to play in making this happen. The development of regional forest law enforcement and governance processes is also contributing to making effective linkages between the poverty, development and forest agendas.

Millennium Development Goals

Given that forests do play a critical role in the lives of the rural poor and of forest-dependent communities everywhere, the international forest arena must better align with the concerns and priorities of the broader international community, and in particular, the forest dialogues in the UNFF and any future International Arrangement on Forests need to be linked to the Millennium Development Goals – conceptually and in practice through implementation action. This link is not only relevant to MDG 7 on ensuring environmental sustainability, but also to the other goals relating to health, education, gender, etc. As stated in the Report of the Secretary-General on Social and Cultural Aspects of Forests: *The Millennium Development Goals of poverty reduction and ensuring environmental sustainability therefore hinge on sustainable management of forests, since this is a component of achieving overall environmental stability and sustained economic growth.*

IUCN's poverty and conservation work has demonstrated that forests can impact on these other aspects of development. For example, in the Lao PDR, IUCN has worked with villages in Oudomxay province on developing a marketing and sustainable use strategy for non-timber forest products, particularly bitter bamboo shoots and wild cardamom. From 1996 to 2002 (during the period of the Asian economic crisis) considerable advancements were made in reducing poverty and improving livelihoods. Household income increased by up to five-fold, food insecurity was eliminated, child mortality decrease, school enrolment double, and inequities in access to education were eliminated. The village acquired new infrastructure and services, while villagers' range of expenditures widened, improving quality of life. Forest allocation gave the village legal authority over a defined natural area, which helped them resist incursions from outside, resolve internal conflicts, and provide enduring incentives. This type of forest-related information, collected in these terms, can contribute to building the case for the role of forests in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and in reducing poverty.

Poverty Reduction Strategies

Poverty reduction strategies (particularly Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers – PRSPs) are sometimes described as the 'road map' for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. While progress has been made in acknowledging the role of forests in poverty reduction strategies, it is still the case that specific forest-related activities are not often included, and therefore the necessary budget allocations are not made.

Appropriate activities could include:

- community forestry
- forest landscape restoration (see below)
- protected areas that deliver social benefits
- community-based approaches to forest fires
- carbon sequestration projects that deliver social and environmental benefits
- good governance through the application of a landscape approach
- development of forest-based micro-enterprises.

In the Scolel Te project in Chiapas, Mexico, since 1996, small farmers have become active participants in the global carbon market while restoring degraded lands. More than 700 individuals in 40 communities have signed up to the scheme and planted over 700 hectares of trees. A trust fund has been set up as a clearinghouse for carbon credits, two-thirds of the value of which goes to the farmers. Sales in 2002 amounted to around US\$180,000. Scolel Te is also helping to restore a degraded environment and to improve the quality of life of local villagers. The trees help reduce erosion and improve the soil, provide a supply of saleable timber, fruit, medical plants and fuelwood, helping to take pressure off existing forests and their biodiversity.

Merely saying that forests have been excluded from poverty reduction strategies will not address this challenge; forest departments need to systematically address poverty and poverty reduction in their sectoral planning processes such as NFPs. As noted in the Secretary-General's Report on Social and Cultural Aspects of Forests: *only a few national forest programmes devote a substantial portion of resources to issues such as poverty, decent work, and the role of women, youth and indigenous people...*

Negotiating Equitable Trade-Offs in Forest Landscapes

A superficial commitment to mainstreaming forests and the environment in the fight against poverty is likely to fail, risking outcomes such as "sustainable poverty" and continued environmental degradation. Traditionally, environment and forestry ministries have not fully engaged in the poverty debate. They now need to more energetically address broader sustainable development issues, assuming an active role in promoting the conservation and sustainable management of forests as a key poverty reduction tool and building a convincing case for greater national and donor investment in natural assets for the benefit of poor people.

This will require identification of equitable trade-offs between economic development, forestry and conservation interests. Balancing these different objectives is a necessary part of repositioning forests in the broader international political agenda. A first step will be to better articulate what a livelihood emphasis means within forest policy and vice versa. This will also imply a shift of attention from an emphasis on win-win – supposing that all parties can get

everything they want – to a practical understanding of how land use trade-offs can be better optimised to ensure no net loss of forest functions at a landscape level.

These issues are arising in a number of forest-related arenas, including the regional Forest Law Enforcement and Governance processes.

The recent progress in promoting forest restoration within a landscape context also provides an example of how land use trade-offs can be dealt with. The Forest Landscape Restoration approach aims to strike a balance between the ecological, social, and economic requirements for sustainable and equitable resource use, based on the outcomes of an inclusive land-use negotiation.

A forest landscape can be described as a contiguous area of land, between a 'site' and an 'eco-region' in size, e.g. a water catchment, with a specific set of ecological, cultural and socio-economic characteristics distinct from its neighbours, that is, or once was, dominated by forests and woodlands and which continues to yield forest-related goods and services.

The Secretary-General's Report on Social and Cultural Aspects of Forests states that: *On the one hand, forest landscapes are formed by cultural belief and management systems, and on the other hand cultures are materially and spiritually built upon the interaction between man and forests.*

The Intergovernmental Forum on Forests concluded that: *... Where possible, protected areas should form part of a landscape continuum, where the conservation of biological diversity, environmental services and other values are also accorded priority in the wider context of other forest management and land-use practices in surrounding areas.*

Forest landscape restoration brings people together to shift the emphasis away from simply maximising tree cover on individual forest sites to optimising the supply of a range of forest benefits such as cultural values, clean water, timber production and nature conservation within the broader landscape.

In the Shinyanga region of Tanzania much of the land had become semi-desert by the mid-1980s. Forests had been felled as part of a tsetse fly eradication scheme, large blocks of land had been converted to cash crops, and overgrazing had become a serious problem. In 1985, the Government agreed to promote the restoration of the use of traditional ngitilis or forest enclosures by local peoples. Efforts were made raising awareness of the need to restore degraded landscapes, providing technical training, and establishing local rules. Over a period of 15 years, 250,000 hectares of natural woodlands were regenerated. The restored ngitilis have transformed the lives of local peoples, providing animal fodder, wood products and water during the dry season. The results were driven by the establishment of secure land tenure rights, building on local knowledge and institutions, and on what people (rather than external experts) wanted to do, with less emphasis placed than in the past on cultivation and cash crops.

Forest landscape restoration is a collaborative venture. If it is to succeed, it must involve everyone with a stake in the forests, from local farmers to charcoal makers, from game hunters to logging companies. Between them, they must identify the various goods and services that matter most and work out how best to restore them. In short, forest landscape restoration means getting the right mixture of approaches, at the right scale, to deliver the forest goods and services that people and societies need.

This approach is being further developed and promoted by the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration, which now includes more than 20 governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.

Conclusion

Countries need ensure that the international forest policy arena is better aligned with the broader international community in a post-WSSD world. This will allow forest issues to recapture the attention and funding they used to enjoy and support implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action and other international commitments on forests.