

**Comments by David Kaimowitz, Director General, Center for  
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**2006 High-Level Segment Preparatory Meeting of the United Nations  
Economic and Social Council on “Creating an Environment at the  
National and International Levels Conducive to Generating Full and  
Productive Employment and Decent Work for All, and its Impact on  
Sustainable Development”**

Distinguished chair, dear colleagues,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in this important roundtable. I am very happy to be here today, particularly because many time forestry activities get forgotten when people discuss employment.

In fact, a study done several years ago by Peter Poschen from the ILO estimated that forestry generates roughly 17 million formal sector jobs globally and the equivalent of another 30 million informal sector jobs; and while formal sector employment has tended to stagnate, informal forestry activities continue to grow. A recent World Bank review of 54 studies of household income in 17 countries in Asia and Africa found that on average forestry activities provided about one fifth of the households' total incomes. Collecting, processing, and selling fuelwood and all sorts of non-wood forest products is particularly important for women and many studies show that its precisely in situations of household or social hardship that people rely on forests most.

Even so, forest-based activities generally get neglected. There are a number of reasons for that:

First, as soon as anyone mentions forests people tend to think about the environment, and forget about how important things like fuelwood, medicinal plants, wild meat and construction materials are to poor people, and where they get the materials for all their carpentry, furniture, and construction work.

Second, many informal forestry activities are officially illegal, and don't get counted. There are all sorts of laws against small-scale logging, hunting wild animals, and similar things that supposedly help the environment but actually only breed corruption, deny opportunities, and criminalize the poor.

Third, these activities tend to get neglected for the very same reasons they are important for this discussion. They mostly involve really poor people, ethnic minorities, women, and other marginalized groups that generally don't get a lot of attention. And even for these people they are often not their main activity, but only one of a number of things they do to survive.

This *is* an area though where there are lots of opportunities. For example, the very rapid growth in urban populations in Africa has greatly increased demand for locally produced furniture, charcoal, medicinals, bushmeat and construction materials. That can be an great

opportunity, if we can work with local people to make the activities more sustainable and give them the support they need to increase their value added. We are also seeing a lot more interest from companies in South Africa and parts of Asia in contracting small farmers to plant trees to make pulp. Forest tenure reforms in a number of Latin American and Asian countries have also opened up new possibilities for commercial community forestry activities.

The key question for this discussion, of course, is not so much what are the trends, but what do we need to do so that forest-based activities can generate more and better jobs?

For that, I have six specific suggestions:

First, national governments need to continue to promote forest tenure reform, and give small farmers and local communities greater access to publicly-owned forests. Giving these groups access to those forests will almost certainly provide more jobs than turning them over to big companies.

Second, the various explicitly and implicit subsidies governments currently give to large-scale forestry activities and poorly managed forest rehabilitation efforts should be re-directed to activities designed to truly improve livelihoods.

Third, forestry laws and regulations need to be redesigned to stop criminalizing the poor and to encourage more participatory approaches to making forest management more sustainable.

Fourth, micro-enterprise development projects need to make specific efforts to support forest-based activities, and they need to work with producers to make those activities more sustainable. Currently most micro-enterprise development projects give very little attention to forest-based activities, except perhaps for carpentry and furniture. And our experience suggests that is not going to change without a very concrete explicit effort.

Fifth, we need to work closely with grass-roots forestry organizations where they exist. Right now those organizations tend to be much stronger in Latin America, South Asia, and the Philippines, but hopefully they will soon emerge in other regions as well, as countries become more democratic.

Sixth, these five points need to be fully reflected in the Poverty Reduction Strategies. Our experience has been that over the last few years a lot more Poverty Reduction Strategies talk about forests, but it is mostly rhetoric and there are very few concrete measures there that are likely to really help poor people. Unless we get those measures firmly into the priority policy and investment lists, it's going to be very hard to push them through.

In summary, we are convinced that forests are extremely important for getting people jobs and they could be a lot more important if we had the right policies in place. If this forum makes a few small steps in that direction, it will definitely have been worthwhile.

Thank you.