NOTE FROM THE UNFF SECRETARIAT

RESTORATION OF THE WORLD’S FORESTS

Introduction

Forest-related problems came onto the international political agenda at the UNCED in 1992, and featured prominently during the rest of the decade. In the Millennium Declaration, heads of state and government decided, inter alia: “To intensify our collective efforts for the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.”

However, the high level political recognition did not bring lasting solutions to the most pressing problems. In recent years, forests seem to have receded in political importance Nonetheless, in his Report to the forthcoming General Assembly, the Secretary-General has stated that for many environmental priorities, including forests, regional and global efforts must be strengthened.

This roundtable provides an opportunity to discuss ways of securing greater political recognition of the importance of restoring the world’s forests, and achieve high level commitments to restoration.

The need for forest restoration

In spite of the commitments that have been made, the forest area has continued to decline in most regions of the world. The rate of deforestation remained alarmingly high in the 1990s and was estimated at 14.5 million ha/year. This loss of forest cover was only partly counterbalanced by the 3.6 million ha of natural expansion of forest and the establishment of 1.6 million ha of plantation forests. Thus, the net annual loss in forest area in the 1990s was estimated to be 9.4 million ha (or over 1000 ha per hour).

Short-term consequences of deforestation and forest degradation include biodiversity loss, adverse impacts on the livelihoods of people living in and around forests, and reduced local availability of wood and other forest products. In the long run, it contributes to climate change and to the changing of the world’s ecological system. These are matters of global concern.

Causes of deforestation and forest degradation

Causes of deforestation and forest degradation are not only complex and variable between and within regions, but often reflect more fundamental socio-economic issues of poverty, population pressure and institutional weakness. In addition to natural causes, direct and indirect effects of human activity such as atmospheric pollution, illegal felling, legal and illegal change of land-use,

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1. *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all, A/59/2005, paragraph 57*
2. According to the FAO Forest Resources Assessment 2000
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unsustainable forest management practices, as well as effects of war and continued civil unrest, contribute substantially to deforestation and forest degradation.

Most of the human-related factors stem from an inadequate recognition of the value of forests in the economic system; in particular, non-market environmental values are frequently discounted or ignored. Consequently, policy measures can result in the creation of perverse incentives and disabling economic conditions for sustainable forest management: in some situations they can also stimulate illegal activity. Examples of such policy measures include the sale of forest concessions at prices that do not reflect their full value and various forms of support for agricultural production. In addition, overriding economic and political exigencies may exert pressure to ignore legislation aimed at promoting sustainable forest management.

It can be concluded that current high levels of deforestation are primarily of human origin. In addition, many decisions that affect forests adversely are taken outside the forest sector and driven by forces that have little or no regard for the importance of forests. To be successful in fighting deforestation and forest degradation requires good understanding of the underlying driving forces and the development of new strategies for addressing them effectively.

Developing priorities for forest restoration

The concept of sustainable forest management (SFM) provides a framework for addressing underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation. Understanding of SFM has been evolving since the Rio Principles were agreed in 1992 and the international community has developed over 270 proposals for action to facilitate its implementation. Criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management have also been developed, in the context of regional priorities, to provide a basis for setting targets and measuring progress. In light of the criteria and indicators emerging from nine regional processes (comprising about 150 countries containing 97% of the world’s forests), the fourth session of UNFF acknowledged seven thematic elements as a reference framework for SFM. These are: the extent of forest resources; biological diversity; forest health and vitality; productive functions of forest resources; protective functions of forest resources; socio-economic functions; and the legal, policy and institutional framework.

Many countries have formulated national forest programmes (or similar frameworks) to analyse problems and develop solutions, translating global and regional priorities to reflect national circumstances. Approaches to forest restoration vary according to needs, but frequently include such elements as:

- improved law enforcement and governance to combat deforestation and forest degradation;
- extension of forest resources through ecologically sensitive establishment of plantations to take the pressure off natural forests;
- application of agroforestry techniques addressing issues of livelihood and environment;
- building on the forest landscape restoration approach which emphasizes the need for forest resources best suited to contributing to human well-being and ecological integrity.

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3 Proposals for action by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests
4 UNFF resolution 4/3 (paragraph 6)
Public participation is invaluable in the process of formulating and implementing such programmes. Effective implementation also depends upon having in place the fundamentals of peace, good governance and adequate resourcing.

Resourcing forest restoration

Ideally, sustainable forest management is self-financing. In practice, however, given that many forest outputs, such as biodiversity or carbon sequestration, are public goods and are undervalued or not valued at all by the market, SFM is not necessarily self-financing. In most cases, external funding is needed to correct this fundamental market failure and to meet the cost of managing forests to deliver public or non-valued goods and services.

Many countries have been unable to implement strategies to combat deforestation and forest degradation due to a shortage of funds and capacity. Commitments made to increase official development assistance (ODA) have not yet led to an increased flow of such assistance to the forest sector; and development aid has shifted away from thematic projects, towards broader programmes and direct budget support. If forest restoration is to attract ODA, it must be identified as a priority in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and similar macro-level development and assistance strategies. To achieve this, national forest programmes must explain why forest-related activities are a priority, demonstrating their linkages with and contribution to other development priorities (such as poverty alleviation and other elements of sustainable development) in order to justify external funding. There also needs to be high-level political support, to ensure the economic, social and environmental case for forest restoration is recognized when decisions are taken about national priorities and programmes.

In addition to seeking contributions from national budgets and ODA, there is a need to explore innovative sources of funding. New opportunities could potentially include: increasing the revenue generated from forest resources; promoting forest-related business opportunities and charging for environmental services; encouraging private sector investment; promoting private-public partnerships; creating a global forest fund to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition; and other innovative mechanisms including debt-for-nature swaps, and use of the Global Environment Facility and the Clean Development Mechanism to finance projects relevant to their target areas.

The roundtable may wish to address the following questions:

- What are the real causes of deforestation and forest degradation? What approach should countries take to tackling deforestation and forest degradation, particularly when significant challenges arise from outside the forest sector? What capacity and institutional building is needed for successful law enforcement?

- To what extent do national policies promote forest restoration through application of the concept of sustainable forest management? What needs to be done to ensure that priorities identified in national forest programmes are reflected in wider national policies? How can political commitment be secured? How can internal coordination over cross-sectoral issues, such as forestry, be improved?

- To what extent have the financial implications of achieving forest restoration been addressed? What measures could be taken at the international and national level to make...
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adequate levels of funding available? What are the best mechanisms for correcting market failure, so that a proper value is placed on forest outputs, including public benefits?

The high level segment at UNFF5 has a unique opportunity to address the fundamental problems of deforestation and forest degradation, and launch work towards meaningful solutions. It should be acknowledged that the approaches taken so far have not been effective enough. The high level segment may wish to consider how best to promote forest restoration and to declare political commitment to working towards an economically and politically enabling environment for sustainable forest management.