

Discussion Summary
ECOSOC Ministerial Roundtable Breakfast
Promoting pro-poor generation of wealth, food security and peace
through sustainable forest management: Global Realities and Regional Innovations
4 July 2007
Lausanne Room 1, Delegates Dining Room, Geneva

An estimated 1.6 billion people worldwide depend on forest resources for food, fuel, medicine and income. According to World Bank statistics, over 90% of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty depend on forests for some part of their livelihoods. Forests provide multiple ecosystem benefits, and international trade in global forest products is in the order of US\$270 billion.

To highlight this critical role of forests in rural development and pro-poor growth, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat and the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) hosted a Ministerial Breakfast on 4 July 2007, in Geneva. The present summary highlights some of the key issues and concerns that emerged during the discussions.

The Director of the UNFF Secretariat noted the recent adoption by the Forum of a landmark international instrument on sustainable forest management. He stressed that implementation of the instrument would galvanize international cooperation on a number of priority areas, including reversing the loss of forest cover worldwide and enhancing forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits.

The Director of OSAA highlighted the role of regional cooperation and collaboration in supporting national efforts on areas ranging from environmental management to climate change. He noted the contributions of regional processes such as the African Union (AU), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and Central African Forestry Commission (COMIFAC) in facilitating dialogue at the regional level.

The Director General of the National Planning Commission of Namibia spoke of the unique geographic and environmental conditions in his country. Some of the key issues he mentioned included population pressure on scarce land resources, bush encroachment of the savannah, overpopulation of certain protected wildlife such as elephants, and the importance of traditional, indigenous knowledge related to use of forest resources for food and medicine.

The Permanent Representative of Denmark remarked that the increased international attention on climate change had reenergized the debate on forest-related issues. He pointed out that active engagement by the United Nations Forum on Forests in the climate change debate would serve to revitalize discussions at the Forum. He noted that greater participation by African countries could help to bring the "triple bottom line" on the benefits of reforestation into the equation.

The Permanent Representative of Portugal spoke of devastation of his country's forests due to forest fires caused by unusually hot temperatures and strong winds. He pointed out that recovery of forested land requires a long-term perspective. He reiterated the need for greater links between the forest policy dialogue and climate change debate, and mentioned several upcoming climate change events that could provide opportunities to make these links. He also called for activities by the UN to inform public opinion on forests.

The Director-General for Global Issues of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan mentioned the work being undertaken by International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), noting that while there is general agreement on conceptual issues related to illegal logging, the main challenge remains in implementation of measures to combat illegal logging. He stressed that strengthening forest governance was key to the

implementation of sustainable forest management. He also highlighted the links between water resources and forests and the role of forests in adaptation and mitigation of climate change.

The Vice Minister of External Relations, Bolivia pointed out that his country is home to the largest dry tropical forest area in the world, and that one-third of the national forested area is being preserved as forestland reserves and parks. He cited conversion of forestland to cattle pasture as one of the primary drivers of deforestation in Bolivia, and mentioned that measures were being taken to reverse this trend.

The First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of India, noted that population pressure was the key driver of deforestation in his country. He highlighted the critical role of community level engagement and the need for an ecosystem management approach at the local level. He highlighted the recent adoption of the non-legally binding instrument as positive step in international forest policy and called for further strengthening of UNFF to promote implementation of the instrument.

The President of the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, India, stressed that both problems and solutions to forest-related issues should be addressed at the grassroots level. He pointed out while traditional social, cultural and religious beliefs supported the protection of forest resources, that sustainable economic development such as through horticulture and agro-forestry was also needed.

The Director-General of the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation called for repositioning forests in mainstream media and the public eye, to galvanize political and public support for forest protection and reforestation. He stressed the need for better monitoring of global forest cover and reforestation activities using existing technologies such as satellite imagery.

The Permanent Representative of Brazil noted that while there was general support for forest preservation activities, the need to provide economically sustainable livelihoods from forest resources was equally pressing. He shared his hopes that that implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on forests would help countries in making sustainable forest management economically viable.

The Senior Food Security Development Officer of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) highlighted the role of forests in supporting food security. He also noted the community development and learning aspects of social forestry, and the social benefits of urban forests (trees outside of forests).

The Co-Chairs closed the discussion by thanking participants for their insightful comments and concrete suggestions and called for greater collaboration and coordination to maximize future efforts to strengthen forest management and raise the political and public profile of forest issues worldwide.