



“Forestry’s Contribution to Poverty Reduction”

Final report and resolutions

17th Commonwealth Forestry Conference Report

Introduction

The 17th Commonwealth Forestry Conference took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 28 February to 5 March 2005. The conference was attended by delegates from over 30 countries. The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka opened the Conference and gave the inaugural address.

The thoughts of all participants were very much with the people of Sri Lanka as the recovery effort continued following the devastating tsunami of December 26th 2004, echoing the message of the Commonwealth Secretary-General: 'I would like, once again, to express the sympathy of the entire Commonwealth family to all those who have suffered – and continue to suffer – from this tragedy. The Commonwealth stands ready to assist in the process of reconstruction in all Commonwealth countries affected'.

The theme of the conference was **forestry's contribution to poverty reduction**. The Millennium Development Goals place strategic importance on the eradication of poverty. The World Bank estimated that in 2001 there were 1.2 billion poor people in the world (based on a 1 \$US per day criterion) and that over 800 million people were chronically hungry.

The conference took place at a time of increasing recognition that forestry has a crucial role in sustainable development. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse stated the need for an appropriate balance between satisfying development needs and ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources. He emphasised the effects of inappropriate forest management on soil and water resources, and thus on agricultural productivity, and highlighted how removal of coastal trees had contributed to the destructive power of the December 2004 tsunami.

Themes

Within the Conference theme, sessions were structured around four cross-cutting themes: the Changing World, Governance, Forest Goods and Services, and Stakeholders. From the presentations and subsequent discussions, key issues emerged that form the basis of the conference resolutions.

1. Tsunami

The loss of many lives and destruction of property and natural resources by the recent tsunami has brought into focus the importance of conserving coastal habitats. The scale of damage may have been significantly lower if mangrove ecosystems and coastal forests had been nurtured and protected. Mangrove forests can protect and stabilise coastlines, protecting coastal communities from tsunami and cyclone impacts, and enhance local fishery resources. Mangrove conservation and sustainable use depends on integrated planning,

encompassing the human, physical and biological aspects of the mangrove environment within a single management framework.

2. The role of forestry in poverty reduction

There are inescapable links between the world's forest resources and the well-being of society. Forests have a significant contribution to make to the welfare and livelihoods of the poorest in society. However, forestry is currently under-performing on poverty reduction due in part to weak governance. Trade-offs are sometimes necessary in seeking to achieve wider social outcomes, like poverty reduction and gender equity, and these need to be understood and resolved at a political level, whilst recognising the imperative for sustainable forest management.

3. Institutional frameworks for social justice and good governance

Top-down, centrist approaches to forest governance have often failed either to achieve social justice or sustainable forest management. Effective regulation needs community control of forest resources and land tenure, and actions to increase access to markets (such as micro-finance initiatives, removal of regulations that discriminate against small producers and training for forest communities), set within a strong and agreed governance framework. Public, non-government and private sector institutions must recognise the different needs and coping strategies of the very poor, the challenges of engagement with globally influenced markets, and the need for consistent and sustained support. Enabling the very poor to adapt to accelerating environmental and climate change is an ever more pressing need.

4. National governance

Stronger national-level linkage is needed between forestry and those sectors of government concerned with finance, poverty, health and rural development if forestry is to play its proper role in poverty reduction. As budgets increasingly reflect the imperatives of Millennium Development Goals, especially in poorer countries, it is vital that the forestry sector demonstrates its relevance to poverty reduction. Forestry sector processes, such as national forest programmes must be explicitly linked to national poverty reduction processes.

5. The need for high quality information in the public domain as a catalyst of good governance

Transparency is a crucial catalyst of good governance. Commitment to freedom of information, for example through published evaluations by independent third parties of governance and sustainable forest management processes, promotes genuine dialogue and fosters a climate of mutual trust. Good quality information, together with improved means of dissemination, are essential for

meaningful monitoring and evaluation, and to achieve recognition of the value of the full range of forest outputs. Good national data are needed to argue authoritatively for the contribution forests can make to social priorities like poverty reduction, not only directly but also through their indirect contribution to human and environmental health.

6. Developing a community-centred approach to sustainable forest management

The socio-economic and governance context of community forest resource use is as important to the contribution of forests to local poverty reduction as the nature of the local forest resource. Foresters, funders and project managers need to better appreciate what makes local communities more or less effective in forest management. For effective capacity building, the process is crucial; making decisions in a culturally equitable way is as important as making the right decisions for meaningful participatory forest management. Capacity building for civil society should be paralleled by training of the public sector in decentralised transfers of real managerial decision making.

7. Illegal logging

Illegal logging and corruption undermine the potential of forestry to make major contributions to poverty reduction. The process of securing agreement on what is illegal is basic to promoting sustainable forest management that is ecologically sound, economically viable and socially equitable. Purely punitive responses to illegal logging may not be effective or appropriate in the context of poverty reduction. Finding incentives to change forest use patterns can form an effective part of governance strategies.

8. A role for the market place in promoting good forest governance

Certification and customer demand for sustainably produced timber products are levers for improved governance of forest resources. Raising consumer understanding and expectations about sustainably produced forest products can result in timber company recognition that corporate social responsibility is part of a sound business strategy. Premiums for sustainably produced forest products, the traceability processes and third party wood chain monitoring are valuable tools in promoting good governance. A new drive for 'fair-trade' timber may be a way of improving returns to small local producers.

Bringing services such as integrated water resources management, carbon storage, biodiversity protection and landscape amenity into the market offers financial incentives for improved land use management and, if set within a sound governance framework, helps local communities to realise the economic potential of sustainable forest management.

9. A call for action from the 17th Commonwealth Forestry Conference

A defining feature of this conference was the substantial involvement of practitioners with policy makers and academics, bringing an emphasis in many presentations and discussions on implementation and action based on current global knowledge.

Political commitment is crucial and needed to achieve a move from policy dialogue to actions and implementation. The forestry sector has a responsibility to demonstrate why and how countries stand to benefit by adopting measures and making sacrifices to achieve sustainable forest management, improved governance and sustainable poverty reduction.

17th Commonwealth Forestry Conference Resolutions

Resolutions

There are inescapable links between the world's forest resources and the well-being of society. The 2005 Commonwealth Forestry Conference recognises that forests make a significant contribution to the welfare and livelihoods of the poorest in society and calls for the following actions by Commonwealth governments:

1. Coastal forests have an important role in mitigating the impacts of tsunami and storm events.

This Conference calls on the international community and national governments engaged in post-tsunami actions to:

- **Provide support and co-ordinate efforts to restore damaged forest and use coastal afforestation, as part of wider coastal protection measures in response to the Indian Ocean tsunami.**
 - **Actively pursue preparation and implementation of integrated coastal forest management plans, with the participation of local communities, in particular to conserve and extend mangrove forests as a contribution to the sustainable livelihoods of the coastal communities.**
 - **Ensure that timber for reconstruction comes from sustainably managed forests.**
2. Increasing the ability of the poorest in society to adapt to change is a crucial component of building capacity to alleviate poverty.

This Conference calls on Commonwealth governments to increase the focus of forestry programmes on poverty reduction and on helping the

most vulnerable in society to adapt to socio-economic, environmental and climate change.

3. Stronger national-level linkage is needed between forestry and other sectors of government if forestry is to play its proper role in poverty reduction.

This Conference calls upon Commonwealth governments to involve their forestry departments, civil society and non-government partners fully in wider government programmes for social justice, poverty reduction and mainstreaming gender, ensuring that National Forest Programmes are explicitly linked to national poverty reduction strategies and incorporated into expenditure frameworks.

4. Transparency is a crucial catalyst of good governance.

In accordance with the UN Millennium Declaration, this Conference calls on Commonwealth governments to apply the highest standards of transparency in forest-related financial, monetary and trading systems, as well as involving civil society and forest communities in monitoring and evaluation of forest resources.

5. The capacity and culture of national forestry departments, and their implementation partners, is critical for increasing the contribution of forests to poverty reduction.

This Conference urges Commonwealth governments to give increased priority to forestry department training programmes and organisational developments that increase capacity for participatory forest management and inter-sectoral planning and implementation.

6. More effective action is needed to manage logging activities in accordance with the principles of sustainable forest management.

This Conference urges Commonwealth governments to recognise the impact of uncontrolled and/or illegal logging and use of other forest products on the least powerful in society and to work together on national governance strategies that foster legal, sustainable and socially just forest use.

7. Creating and expanding markets for products and services from sustainably managed forests can contribute to rural livelihoods and poverty reduction.

This Conference urges Commonwealth governments to:

- **Adopt and promote procurement from sustainably managed forests.**
 - **Increase recognition of the wider values of forest products and services through evaluation of the costs and benefits of sustainable forest management, and the promotion of these messages to forest managers, stakeholders and the public.**
 - **Provide economic mechanisms to bring forest services into the market place.**
 - **Take further steps to enable small forest producers to access markets and secure a fair return for their products and services.**
- 8. This Conference calls on the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to give political commitment to these actions in realising the potential of national forest resources for the alleviation of poverty.**