

First Step Towards Sustainable Forest Management?

The first substantive session of the United Nations Forum on Forests convened from 11-23 June 2001 at UN Headquarters in New York. The Forum was established on 18 October 2000 by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as a subsidiary body with universal membership and is charged with advancing policy development and dialogue on forest management and related issues.¹ For years, forest programmes have been country-specific; the Forum provides an opportunity to promote global norms in the field, without losing the flexible nature of national plans.

The UNFF organisational session and the informal consultations on the Multi-Year Programme of Work took

place from 12-16 February in New York. (See last issue at page 159). During these consultations, it was broadly suggested that the Forum take up the three pillars of sustainable forest management – economic, social and environmental concerns.

During the present session, delegates debated and adopted decisions on the UNFF's Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW), the Plan of Action (POA) for the implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IPF/IFF) proposals for action, and the initiation of the UNFF's work with the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF). ➤

Opening Statements

The Assistant Secretary-General for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Patrizio Civili, addressed the Forum on behalf of the Council's Under-Secretary-General, Nitin Desai. He said that the first substantive meeting of the Forum marked the beginning of an important new phase of the Organisation's policy considerations on those issues. The deliberations at the Rio Summit had initially sparked the concern of the interna-



Delegates discussing the provisions on Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting (MAR)

Courtesy: IISD

tional community on forest issues. Many different views had emerged on the relationship between policies aimed at protection of the environment and sustainable development. Much attention had been paid to the importance of sustaining national forests and, indeed, the Rio Declaration remained a landmark achievement for forests, he said.

The highly complex nature of resource preservation issues – including the protection of energy, water, mountains and coastal zones – made broad cooperation critical to the formulation of international policies on forests. Any agreed initiatives should consider the crucial role forest management could play in the eradication of poverty and sustainable development for all.² Moreover, cooperative action must be guided by comprehensive multi-sectoral policies.

Patrizio Civili also outlined the aims of the meeting. He said that during this first substantive session, the Forum should stress the importance of participatory consensus building on international forestry issues as well as the imperative of coordination. It should also work to build consensus on the largest possible number of issues and proposals for action, thus formulating a realistic agenda for the next five years. That agenda should aim to mobilise national as well as international political support on forest issues as well as identify pragmatic, feasible targets and timetables that would promote political commitments.

Chairman Mubarak Hussein Rahmtalla (Sudan) recalled that the Forum's establishment was among the most concrete legacies of Agenda 21 (the comprehensive plan for global action in all areas of sustainable development), which was adopted in Rio in 1992. The new ECOSOC body took on particular significance as the world com-

munity prepared for the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development next year in South Africa. The Forum had an opportunity to define its own scope of work, initiate a framework for a plan of action, design new approaches in international cooperation, and expand coordination through the newly formed Collaborative Partnership on Forests.³ The success of the new enterprise would be defined by action on the ground. Initiating a plan of action was central to the Forum.

Hosny El-Lakany, Assistant Director-General, Forestry Department, UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Chairman of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) said the session would set the course for intergovernmental forestry deliberations and action. To that end, the partners had agreed to expand its membership slightly, and three new institutions had been invited to join. These were the secretariats of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). He was pleased to note that the GEF would join the Collaborative Partnership.

Two major tasks for the near future were to implement the proposals of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), and assist countries in their national implementation, in particular through the development of their national forest programmes. The second major task was to assist the Forum in monitoring, assessing and reporting on progress towards its objectives.

Organisational Matters

The Forum adopted its agenda and programme of work, which proposed that delegates begin drafting decisions on the MYPOW and the Plan of Action during the first week of the session. It also elected the Chairmen of its Working Groups: Knut Oistad (Norway) for Working Group I on the Multi-Year Programme of Work; and Slamet Hidayat (Indonesia) for Working Group II on the Programme of Action.

The officers of the Bureau are as follows: Mubarak Hussein Rahmtalla (Sudan), Chairman. Vice-Chairmen: Slamet Hidayat (Indonesia), Alexey Kornienko (Russian Federation), and Gustavo Suarez de Freitas (Peru).

Documentation

Jagmohan Maini, the Coordinator and Head of the Forum's Secretariat, introduced the reports of the session, highlighting the importance of the development of a comprehensive programme of work, which was central to the work of the Forum. The work programme should focus on the implementation of forest initiatives at the country level, he said. There was also a need to emphasise capacity building, and the importance of sustainable development to human well being.

The Forum had before it the *Report of the Secretary-General on the multi-year programme of work* (document

E/CN.18/2001/5 and Corr. 1), containing the basic framework of the programme of work, which is designed to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and strengthen long-term political commitment to that end. The document also considers such issues as the schedule of the Ministerial Segments and organisation of multi-stakeholder dialogues at the Forum, and the establishment and schedule of international expert groups to advance forest-related issues for negotiations during Forum sessions.

The *Report of the Secretary-General on the Plan of Action* (document E/CN.18/2001/6 and Corr. 1) proposes a two-step approach towards the development of the Forum's plan of action. As a first step, the Forum will decide on the programmatic components of the plan, approaches for addressing key issues such as financial provisions; defining targets and timetables; and monitoring, assessment and reporting on progress. The next step will be the adoption of the plan of action, envisaged for the second substantive session next year.

Also before the Forum was a note by the Secretariat on the *Initiation of the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests with the Collaborative Partnership on Forests* (document E/CN.18/2001/7), which describes the mandate, role and objectives of the recently established CPF. It also gives information on the decision-making systems of various CPF members, as they are autonomous organisations with their own governing bodies and mandates. The note concludes by suggesting some specific tasks that the Forum may wish to invite CPF to undertake in support of its work. It suggests, among other things, that the CPF would be strengthened by a few other international forest-related organisations, institutions and instruments.

The Forum also considered a letter addressed to the Secretary-General dated 25 May 2001 from the permanent Representatives of Brazil, Denmark and Norway and the Deputy Permanent Representatives of South Africa and the United Kingdom (document E/CN.18/2001/8). The letter transmitted the *Report of the International Workshop of Experts on Financing Sustainable Forest Management*, which had been held in Oslo from 22-25 January 2001. That Workshop had been convened in support of the proposals for action of the Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and the programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

Delegates also had before them a note by the Secretariat on the *Accreditation of intergovernmental organisations to the United Nations Forum on Forests* (document E/CN.18/2001/9), which judged the activities of the following organisations relevant to the Forum's work and approved by its Bureau: Centre for International Forestry Research; International Tropical Timber Organisation, and the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe. The note recommended that those organisations be given observer status by the Forum.

Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW)

This proved to be the most contentious of the decisions negotiated during the session. Divergence in views over language on, among other things, its structure, moni-

toring, assessment and reporting, *ad hoc* expert groups, and involvement of major groups forced delegates into informal-informal consultations during the early morning hours on the final day. It was uncertain whether there would even be agreement on the MYPOW until the final hours, and there was even talk of a resumed session to complete the work.

Preamble

The lengthy debate on the contents of the preamble brought together all the contentious issues – *i.e.*, whether and how to refer to issues of financial resources, technology transfer, capacity building and trade, as well as a (possible) legal instrument.

Delegates agreed to stress that the MYPOW should embody ECOSOC resolution 2000/35, with concrete activities to be undertaken by the UNFF over the next five years, aimed at fulfilling the UNFF's principal functions, as well as at addressing the means of implementation and common items for each UNFF session.

Several delegations, including the EU and US, did not support references to finance. The EU and the US also opposed references to trade, technology transfer and capacity building as cross-cutting issues. Nigeria emphasised that the UNFF must address these issues, as they are critical in enabling implementation in developing countries. The EU replied that there was as yet no agreement on what the cross-cutting issues are, and suggested instead using "means of implementation" as in Agenda 21.

One of the most contentious issues that was also the subject of informal-informal consultations until the end of the session was a paragraph recognising the importance of financial resources, technology transfer and capacity building. This included the importance of the international trade of timber and non-timber forest products in both developed and developing countries in all types of forests, for realisation of the aims of the Multi-Year Programme of Work. The G-77/China supported its inclusion, while the US and the EU opposed it. Delegates agreed to retain the paragraph, with the inclusion of the references to international trade in wood and non-wood products.

The EU, with Switzerland and Canada, proposed referring also to the relevant ECOSOC resolution's paragraph on developing a legal framework. China and Brazil opposed the reference and the final text of the preamble does not include a reference to a legal framework.

Structure

This section addresses the structure of future UNFF sessions and the elements to be discussed. It identifies means of implementation and common items to be considered at all UNFF sessions.

Debate concerned which elements would be discussed at which session, as well as which issues would be discussed at all UNFF sessions.

The final text decides that the MYPOW should reflect the overall objectives of sustainable forest management, and that each UNFF session will address the principal functions as outlined in ECOSOC resolution 2000/35, with

particular emphasis on the IPF/IFF proposals for action.

It states that the UNFF sessions will focus, *inter alia*, on the following elements: UNFF-2: Combating deforestation and forest degradation. UNFF-3: Economic aspects of forests and forest health and productivity. UNFF-4: Traditional forest-related knowledge and social and cultural aspects of forests. UNFF-5: Review of progress and consideration of future actions.

The section also decides, among other things, that the means of implementation, including technology transfer, capacity building and finance will be addressed during each of the UNFF sessions, in the context of the elements for that session.

Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting (MAR)

Regarding these issues, delegates debated a paragraph listing the areas comprising the UNFF's MAR function.

Delegates accepted the text proposed by the G-77/China, calling on CPF member organisations to make information on financial resources and EST easily accessible to support national capacity building for collecting and reporting forest-related information in developing countries. However, Nigeria and the G-77/China objected to proposals by the Russian Federation to add countries with economies in transition, and by the US not to specify categories of countries.

The final text recognises that monitoring, assessment and reporting are among the UNFF's principal functions, and stresses the importance of the use of regional and national criteria and indicators (C&I) for sustainable forest management as a basis for reporting on SFM.

The text decides that the UNFF's MAR function comprises the following areas: progress in implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action; progress towards sustainable management of all types of forests; and review of the effectiveness.

High-Level Segments

Debate here centred on a paragraph on the focus of the first ministerial segment at UNFF-2. The US delegation urged that the endorsement of the Plan of Action be "a" focus of the segment, while the G-77/China preferred that adoption of the Plan of Action be "the" focus. They agreed that, *inter alia*, "an important focus" of the segment would be to endorse the Plan of Action as a contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Intersessional Work

This section recognises the need for intersessional work by ad hoc expert groups and country-led initiatives to inform, as well as provide scientific advice and advance the objective of the UNFF. This was the subject of intensive debate at the meeting in contact groups and informal-informal consultations up until the final hours of the session.

The final text recognises the need for intersessional work to inform, as well as to provide scientific and technical advice and advance the UNFF's objective in an open and transparent manner pursuant to the relevant ECOSOC resolution. It decides to recommend the convening of three

ad hoc expert groups, which will address 1) approaches and mechanisms for MAR; 2) finance and ESTs; and 3) consideration of, with a view to recommending, the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework.

Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination

Delegates reached agreement on the final text with little debate. It welcomes, among other things, the establishment of the CPF to support the UNFF in its work; and invites participation by CPF members and other international and regional processes and organisations, institutions and instruments at each UNFF session.

Review

This concerns the criteria to review the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests. The Global Forest Policy Project supported a list of criteria by which the success of the UNFF could be measured, but the US expressed doubt that an agreement on criteria could be reached at UNFF-1. A contact group met and discussed a text proposed by Canada on reviewing the effectiveness of the UNFF.

There was considerable debate over whether a set of criteria or benchmarks for reviewing effectiveness should be adopted at UNFF-2. Some felt that UNFF-2 was too early for the adoption of criteria.

The final text recalls the relevant paragraph 17 in ECOSOC resolution 2000/35, recognising that the UNFF should be dynamic and adapt to evolving conditions. The text stresses the principal functions of the UNFF and recognises the need to identify the criteria at UNFF-2.

Development of a Plan of Action

Several delegations, including those of the G-77/China, the EU, Brazil and Australia, urged adoption of the Plan of Action at UNFF-1. The G-77/China stressed that the POA should include clearly defined timetables and targets. The EU emphasised that the Plan should work through existing instruments, as the UNFF does not have an operational mandate.

Delegates met in Working Group II to negotiate a draft decision on the Plan of Action prepared by the Bureau. During these discussions, debate centred on whether proposed measures should be aimed at implementation of the Plan of Action or of the IPF/IFF proposals for action. They agreed finally only to refer to implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals throughout the document.

The final text decides to adopt the Plan of Action of the UNFF to guide more effective and coherent implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action as it appears in the annex (see below), and invites all relevant participants to work with the UNFF to implement the Plan of Action.

Annex

This contains the Plan of Action of the UNFF. The final text states that the POA is a holistic and comprehensive response to the call for action with the aim of advancing the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action in the context of sustainable forest management at

various levels. It states that the responsibility for implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action directed at the national level lies with countries, and that the POA is also directed to the international, regional and sub-regional levels.

The implementation of the POA will require the establishment of national focal points, effective cooperation among CPF members, bilateral donors and countries, and public-private partnerships and active stakeholder participation. The text states that countries will set their own priorities, targets and timetables for the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action, and systematically assess and analyse these proposals in the national context. It also states that, as appropriate, countries will develop or strengthen national forest plans as defined in the IPF/IFF proposals for action or other integrated programmes.

Financial Resources and other Means of Implementation

The Plan of Action states that the provision of technical assistance, technology transfer, capacity building and financial resources, particularly to developing countries and countries with economies in transition, is essential to the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action and is needed to strengthen the capacity of relevant institutions and instruments engaged in this implementation.

The text also states that such assistance will be provided via bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including member organisations of the CPF, stakeholders and domestic resources; and urges all relevant actors to give greater priority to sustainable forest management in allocating resources.

Reporting

The Plan of Action states that reporting on progress in the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action is based on voluntary reporting, including by regional and sub-regional processes, drawing upon existing formats, as appropriate. Such reporting should include achievements, and should identify gaps and obstacles to implementation, among other things.

Work with the CPF

The text of the decision on initiating work with the Collaborative Programme on Forests reiterates that the CPF should receive guidance and feedback from the UNFF, in accordance with guidance provided by the governing bodies of its member organisations.

The decision, *inter alia*, invites CPF member organisations to identify practical means of mobilising their strengths and resources to support country-level implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action. It also recommends keeping the CPF membership limited, for the sake of efficiency.

UNFF-2

On 23 June, delegates adopted the draft decision on the date and venue of UNFF-2, which welcomed the offer of Costa Rica to host the meeting from 4-15 March 2002, and decided that the first high-level ministerial segment of the UNFF will be held during that session. (MJ)

Notes

¹ By its resolution 2000/35, the Economic and Social Council established the Forum as a subsidiary body with universal membership, which would act subsequently as a high-level intergovernmental body with ministerial segments to provide a forum for policy development and dialogue; promote the implementation of agreed actions towards sustainable forest management; enhance international coordination and cooperation in order to address effectively forest-related issues; and strengthen political commitment to sustainable management and conservation of all types of forests. The Forum also encourages the participation of civil society and, in that regard, would hold multi-stakeholder dialogues at each session in order to consider the inputs of various forest-related actors.

² Forests and woodlands cover nearly one-third of the planet, and in the developing world, more than 500 million people in more than 70 developing countries live in and around forests and depend on them for daily subsistence.

³ Last year, ECOSOC invited the executive heads of international organisations and instruments related to forests to form the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to enhance international coordination and cooperation. Established this year, the Partnership was based on the experience of the high-level, informal Inter-agency Task Force on Forests (ITFF) during the last six years. The current members of the CPF include, *inter alia*, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO); the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); and the World Bank.

The establishment of the CPF represents the commitment of its member organisations to support the Forum's work and to enhance cooperation and coordination among its partners.

