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POLICY MEASURES TO SUSTAIN AND ENHANCE FOREST BENEFITS

1. A continuously growing population in many countries translates into growing demand for forest benefits such as raw material for housing, energy and food and more pressure on land use. The benefits people demand is also expected to shift, given that consumption patterns of urban citizens and growing middle-income classes are different from those living in rural areas. At the same time, poverty remains a pervasive issue in rural areas. Many of the small-scale subsistence producers, family farmers, landless agricultural workers, women or elderly people depend on forest benefits for subsistence and income.

I. FOREST POLICIES AND MEASURES ADDRESSING FOREST BENEFITS

2. The analysis of policies and reports of 121 countries for SOFO 2014 has shown that the amount of policies and measures taken in the period 2007-2013 by countries to promote the provision of socio-economic benefits from forests is impressive. There is a continuing trend towards incorporating Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) as a broad national goal and increasing stakeholder participation. However, few countries appear to specify targets in terms of the number of people that are to benefit and target groups for measures, or to monitor and evaluate implementation. Few countries report adjustments to institutional frameworks, indicating that capacity to implement policies and measures is a major bottleneck for enhancing socioeconomic benefits.

3. Around 60 countries have taken measures to improve the access of local communities, families and individuals to forest resources and markets in recent years, particularly for non-wood forest products (NFPs). At least 26 have addressed tenure reform, mainly to better support local livelihoods. About half of the 22 countries that have revised their NFPs or forest policies since 2007 address poverty reduction and out of 41 Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers produced issued recently, 37 address forests. This indicates that countries are better recognizing forests' contribution to poverty reduction compared to the past.

4. Almost all countries reported on measures to strengthen access to markets, including removing legal restrictions on harvest permits (albeit mainly for non-wood forest products rather than wood), adjusting financial incentives, and supporting capacity development. Many countries have put emphasis on allowing and supporting the development of producer organizations, boosting incomes of indigenous peoples, local communities and smallholders.

5. Around 60 countries have taken measures to encourage forest investment since 2007 and forty countries reported measures on forest funds. However, only limited attention is still paid to enabling and promoting domestic, local or indigenous community investment.
6. Voluntary certification is by now well established as an instrument that complements public forest policy instruments, with public forests certified in 61 countries by 2013. At the same time, verification of the legality of timber harvested is slowly expanding. Both are market-based tools to enhance the role of the private sector, transparency and accountability.
7. Low efficiency and waste issues in the provision of forest products remain largely ignored by policymakers in many countries despite their importance in helping sustain the provision of forest benefits. Several countries emphasize the expansion of processing capacity in policies.
8. The broad range of values provided by forests is widely recognized in NFPs and policies as integral part of sustainable forest management, but few countries have taken concrete measures on the provision of forest services in operational planning. Fourteen NFPs or forest policies issued since 2007 explicitly address ecosystem values, but only few specify concrete action. Payment for ecosystem services continues to be used by some countries, and is being explored and piloted by several others, particularly for recreation, water and carbon.

II. KEY POLICY MEASURES TO SUSTAIN AND ENHANCE FOREST BENEFITS

Enhancing access to resources and markets

9. Securing access to forest resources is one of the key enabling factors to support livelihoods, sustain socio-cultural values, and spur investment in more sustainable resource use. Many countries have taken measures to enhance and secure access of local communities, families and individuals to forest resources and markets. Overall, this has resulted in stronger rights for more people to manage and extract forest products. However, rights are often expanded only for subsistence use and exclude timber or commercial use by communities.
10. Some countries have also improved access to markets by, for example, strengthening legal frameworks and enabling environments for small-scale forest enterprise and producer organizations. Many of these necessarily are taking part in informal economies and markets, the dominant source of livelihoods in many rural areas. Few countries explicitly address related decent employment or gender issues. A growing number of countries also explore development of new markets, including for different new forest products, eco-tourism, and payment schemes for ecosystem services.

Addressing the sustainability of production

11. Many policy measures are set with a view to ensure the sustainability of the resource base. In some countries, the reluctance of forestry administrations to enhanced access to some of the socioeconomic benefits from forests may be rooted in concerns about the impact of numerous small-scale producers on the sustainability of forest management. For example, three of the most significant benefits derived from the consumption of forest products are the use of wood fuel for cooking and heating, the use of forest products as building materials and the use of bush meat as an important source of animal protein. But, in many countries these are highly restricted or prohibited. This does not only make the use of important benefits of forests technically illegal, this approach is also unlikely to succeed in the face of growing demand. The lack of rule of law could complicate the situation even further.
12. Replacing the current emphasis on prohibition with one of shared responsibility and enhanced accountability for sustainable production is a major challenge both for forestry administrations and for the different stakeholders required to shoulder the responsibilities that come with increased access rights. Forest administrations are required to play a different role compared to the past, learning how to best govern forest management undertaken by large numbers of people involved in informal activities. Voluntary and market-based instruments such as forest certification or the verification of legality of timber harvested are as useful tools helping to strengthen the role of the private sector as an

accountable partner. However, many policy challenges remain, including inadequate means to ensure responsible performance of small-scale producers, a lack of policy thinking on efficient processing value chains, and weakly understood, recognized, or governed benefits provided through services.

Strengthening implementation capacities and measuring performance

13. Many of the measures needed to sustain and enhance forest benefits are ambitious and likely to require shifts in the focus of forest policies. A central challenge for many countries is how to redirect and strengthen the capacity of forest administrations to deliver on expectations of society and implement these policies and programmes, jointly with other bodies, public and private. Making a case for investing in capacities to manage forests for people requires evidence of the benefits they provide and, ultimately, evidence that amended policies have resulted in improvements to human well-being.

14. Given that development policies tend to be people-focused, collecting data and reporting on the numbers of people that receive socioeconomic benefits is crucial. Better evidence is needed to help re-direct policies towards more effectively enhancing socio-economic benefits of forests, as is strengthened information on the implementation of policies. Securing funding to improve information on the socioeconomic benefits from forests is likely to remain a challenge. However, being able to demonstrate effects on people rather than on forest resources alone is likely to be an attractive proposition for national and international agencies that support these types of data collection.

III. THE WAY FORWARD

15. A common theme throughout this paper has been the importance of putting people at the centre for the development of policies and measures to enhance forest benefits. If this is done, it seems possible that the socioeconomic benefits from forests can meet the growing demands of society while maintaining the integrity of the forest resource base. A first step is to adjust national forest programmes and forest policies to better recognize the ways people use forests and more explicitly address these in goals, targets, programmes and plans of action.

16. Strengthened property rights and local control over forest resources give local producers more of a stake in the long-term sustainability of the resource. It is important to further enhance and secure access and use rights to forest resources, taking into account the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests adopted by FAO member countries in 2012. What is required is further strengthening access rights to those benefits that are essential for very large numbers of people, both for subsistence and as a source of income: energy, food, fodder, shelter – and to develop mechanisms to hold users more effectively accountable at local levels. Better organizing small-scale producers is a key means to strengthen governance of the many small-scale producers and enables forest administrations to more effectively engage with informal producers.

17. Finding new ways of generating benefits from forests will require effective enabling environments for related public and private investment and innovation. This requires better access to finance for small-scale producers and clearer and simpler rules that are locally adapted and enforceable to hold producers accountable. It also requires enhancing and aligning capacities of forest administrations with their new mandates and roles to more effectively govern such changes on the ground.

18. For all of the above, more and better information on people-aspects is paramount. Much better information is needed on the number and ways in which people currently benefit from forests, on people that should benefit from policies, and how to reach these on people benefiting from specific programmes on e.g. wood energy or community forestry, and ultimately on impacts on people. Similarly, more broad access to forest-related information is needed to a wider group of stakeholders involved in forest resource management and use. This requires a re-think of information management and communication.

IV. POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

19. The Committee may wish to invite countries to:
- assess the status and future trends in demands for forest benefits and take these into account in forest-related policies and measures;
 - strengthen their efforts to enhance direct benefits from forests to local people by improving access to resources and markets;
 - enhance and align capacities of forest administrations with new mandates and roles, governing the management of forests for sustainable provision of benefits and creating enabling environments for related investment and innovation.
20. The Committee may wish to invite regional economic integration organizations and regional dialogue fora, including Regional Forestry Commissions, to foster dialogue and provide venues for information and experience exchange on improving access to resources and markets strengthening governance mechanisms to sustainably provide and enhance the benefits from forests.
21. The Committee may wish to recommend FAO to support countries in:
- reviewing and revising national forest programmes to address people's benefits from forests more explicitly and directly in forest policies, programmes and plans of action and to address efficiency of production and waste reduction along value chains;
 - strengthening tenure rights, taking into account the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests;
 - enhancing and aligning capacities of forest related public administrations to more effectively govern sustainable forest resource management and use, and to adapt more swiftly to emerging challenges.
22. The Committee may wish to request FAO and invite the World Bank/PROFOR and other organizations to collaborate on strengthening data collection and information management systems on people's use and benefits from forests, improve broad access to information, strengthening transparency and accountability.