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de las  
Naciones Unidas  
para la  
Alimentación y la  
Agricultura

# COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

## TWENTY-FIRST SESSION

Rome, Italy, 24-28 September 2012

### STATE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS 2012

#### FORESTS AT THE HEART OF A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Rio+20 Conference examined the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Sustainability implies a balanced cycle of consumption and production. The cycle is harmonious if key natural resources are not depleted and ecosystem functions are not impaired. Sustainability also entails balancing economic interests and social responsibilities with a sense of shared trust for the planet. It calls for a transition to a greener economy that is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive and that results in improved human well-being and social equity.
2. The tenth edition of FAO's "State of the World's Forests 2012 (*SOFO 2012*)" endeavors to reinforce a fundamental truth: forests, forestry and forest products are central to a sustainable future and they must play a critical role in our successful transition toward a greener economy. Forests are key to fulfilling the long-term objectives of sustainability at all levels, including through the provision of essential goods and services in a greener economy. The forest sector has a rich experience in ensuring a balance between consumption and production and can provide an excellent illustration of how the growing demand for food, fibre and energy can be met while minimizing waste and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
3. Sustainable forest management and the use of forest products also present important opportunities to address the issues of equity and justice. Equally, preservation of forest capital benefits future generations creating a constant or expanding stream of social benefits. *SOFO 2012* presents insights into these themes and highlights where forests' contribution will be most important in the future of sustainable and greener development.
4. This paper presents a summary of *SOFO 2012*, highlighting the main findings and messages.

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## **II. FORESTRY AS AN ENGINE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EQUITY**

5. *SOFO 2012* notes how forest use and economic development have strong linkages. A similarly strong relationship has been observed between the destruction of forests and economic decline. The publication provides a short regional overview of these effects and the history of how the concept of ‘sustainability’ was shaped by the forest sector nearly 300 years ago.

6. *SOFO 2012* highlights how forests, forestry and forest products and services could be key to improving rural livelihoods, reducing poverty, and promoting equity. It explains, for example, how investments in wood-based enterprises will generate additional employment, create real and durable assets and help revitalize rural areas. Noting that the value of woodcraft exports has more than doubled during the period 2002 to 2010 and farm forestry contributed up to 40 percent of farm income in certain areas, it highlights the importance of small and medium scale forest-based enterprises and the need for investment in creating an enabling environment to build and sustain such enterprises.

7. Greening the economy with forestry can also open a wider range of possibilities to rebalancing the present social, economic and regional asymmetries and inequalities. About 350 million of the world’s poorest people, including 60 million indigenous people, depend on forests for their daily subsistence and long-term survival. They include the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, and often the politically weakest groups of society. Low capital requirement and flexibility to adapt to diverse conditions and capacities are other attributes of investing in forestry that particularly benefit the poor.

## **III. WOOD AND NON-WOOD FOREST PRODUCTS AS A VITAL MEANS TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

8. By volume, the most widely extracted good from forests is wood. Wood being intrinsically natural, recyclable, reusable, and biodegradable, holds tremendous potential for increased use in our journey towards a sustainable future. These prospects range from its use in green buildings and other infrastructure to recyclable parts in cars and computers. The unique characteristics of wood lend it to be an excellent substitute raw material for many consumer goods and products that are made of cheap materials, harmful to the environment and economy. Wood is comparatively light for transport, easy to transform, yet durable.

9. Wood products store carbon for extended periods of time. The environmental and sustainability credentials of wood and wood products are gaining importance and the global demand for wood and fibre is expected to almost double by 2030. Such transformation could be the best possible way forward – environmentally friendly, socially responsible and economically sound.

10. A number of non-wood forest products such as bamboo, rattan and cork are playing an increasingly important role in environmentally friendly building and a large variety of other uses. In addition, in many regions of the world wild foods from the forest such as fruits, edible leaves, insects, bushmeat, mushrooms and nuts constitute important supplements to staple diets, especially for poor rural populations. In addition, forest plants are an important source of traditional medicines and are often used a for the development of modern pharmaceuticals.

11. *SOFO 2012* notes that the use of “good” wood should not be disadvantaged by programmes arguing that it is not environmentally friendly. It calls for a changed public perception for enhanced usage of wood and other forest products meeting the conditions of business and social responsibility.

## **IV. FORESTRY AS A KEY COMPONENT OF GREENING OTHER SECTORS**

12. Forests, forestry and forest products could play a vital role in greening key sectors of the economy such as agriculture, energy, transport and housing. Greening these sectors would entail more

ecological and economic efficiency at all levels of the value chain. Integrating tree cultivation with farming is already gaining importance as a significant component of climate smart agriculture. Similarly forest products can substitute non-renewable, energy intensive raw materials in the housing industry. *SOFO 2012* illustrates several of these possibilities.

13. Noting the use of forests as a crucial source of bioenergy throughout the history of humankind, *SOFO 2012* underlines the importance of this energy source. Wood energy is still the dominant source of energy for over one third of the world's population. With the intensification of the search for renewable energy sources, *SOFO 2012* notes considerable opportunities for forest biomass-based energy to emerge as a cleaner and greener alternative.

## V. FORESTS AS A SOURCE OF CULTURAL, AESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL FULFILMENT

14. With more leisure time and discretionary income, interest in recreational and other non-consumptive uses of forests has increased dramatically. The longing of the public to visit and cherish forest and wildlife areas is growing and as much as one-half of world tourism is now nature-based. As floods and water scarcities have become more frequent and severe, urban residents are also touched by the loss of forests. Urban forestry is receiving further impetus to offer a host of environmental and social services such as providing green spaces, recreation facilities, and aesthetics to urban and peri-urban residents.

15. *SOFO 2012* calls for taking into account the above key messages to ensure successful integration of forests and forestry into future policies, programmes and investments that seek sustainability. It also emphasizes strong measures to spur dramatic changes to gain a wider acceptance of the role of forests in fostering bio-based green economies. They include, first and foremost, policies and programmes to provide entrepreneurs with the requisite incentives to promote forests and sustainable utilization of forest resources. They also include removal of perverse incentives that result in deforestation and degradation and conversion of forests to other uses. Creating appropriate revenue streams for forest ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration can also encourage forest owners and managers to protect and restore forests. Open and decentralized systems of management can help promote efficiency and transparency and offer a diversified range of opportunities for local entrepreneurs.

16. Forests, forestry and forest products will not solve all of the challenges of moving toward greener economies, but they certainly provide excellent examples and a source of hope for a sustainable future.

## VI. POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

- The Committee may wish to invite countries to take into account the key messages of *SOFO 2012* by integrating forests and forestry into their policies, programmes and strategies for greening the national economy, including the promotion of the use of wood from sustainable origin as an environmentally friendly material.
- The Committee may wish to invite the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) to consider the findings of *SOFO 2012* at its 10<sup>th</sup> Session on Forests and Economic Development.
- The Committee may wish to recommend FAO to support countries in enhancing the contribution of forests and forest products to economic development by:
  - creating an enabling environment to develop and sustain small enterprises for wood and non-wood products;
  - promoting sustainable forest industries;
  - broadening the range forest products by including new and innovative products;
  - creating a favourable investment climate for forestry.

- The Committee may wish to request FAO to decide on the focus of SOFO 2014 with a view to supporting the review of the international arrangements on forests in 2015<sup>1</sup> and invite UNFF to consider SOFO as a major source of information for that review.
- The Committee may wish to consider the findings and main messages of SOFO 2012 in its deliberations on Agenda Items 5 and 6.

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<sup>1</sup> paragraphs 19 and 22 of UNFF Resolution 7/1 E/2007/42