

Forest Cover

A Global Forest Coalition Newsletter on International Forest Policy

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About Forest Cover

Welcome to the second issue of *Forest Cover*, the newsletter of the Global Forest Coalition. This coalition was established by a group of NGOs and Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) to facilitate the informed participation of NGOs and IPOs in intergovernmental meetings related to forests. The Global Forest Coalition will also promote the implementation of the results of these intergovernmental meetings and try to ensure that the various instruments and institutions are consistent with each other.

Forest Cover is published four times a year. It features reports on important intergovernmental meetings by different NGOs and IPOs and a calendar of future meetings. The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Global Forest Coalition, its founding members or the editors.

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CBD Forest Expert Group Meets Again

By Max Ooft, AHTEG member; Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname (OIS)

Introduction

The *ad hoc* technical expert group (AHTEG) on forest biological diversity (FBD) was established following decision V/4 taken by the Fifth Conference of the Parties (COP-5) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Its purpose is to assist the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) in its work on forest biodiversity. The group's work will end with its report to SBSTTA's Seventh Meeting, which will take place in November.

AHTEG met for the first time from 27 November – 1 December 2000 in Montreal, Canada (*see also the report in Forest Cover no.1 by Gudrun Henne*). During that meeting it was decided to refine the background document prepared by the CBD Secretariat before the second AHTEG meeting. The various chapters of this background document were circulated to AHTEG members and posted on the CBD website for peer review and comments.

A group of Global Forest Coalition members and some other NGOs sent in comments, highlighting, among other things, the need for a sound forest definition based upon the Convention itself. They also highlighted the need to address the real underlying causes of forest loss, including for example the role of Export Credit Agencies. This was the first time that CBD documents have been formally

made available for public comments **before** their presentation to the CBD bodies (in this case SBSTTA).

AHTEG 2

The second meeting of the ad-hoc technical expert group (AHTEG) on forest biological diversity (FBD) took place in Edinburgh, Scotland from 23 – 27 April 2001 and was chaired by Gordon Patterson of the Ministry of Forestry of the United Kingdom. Participating in their personal capacity were sixteen governmental delegates, four intergovernmental organizations (FAO, ITTO, GEF, UNEP), four (semi-) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Greenpeace, WWF, CIFOR, and IUCN), one Indigenous People's organization (IPO) (Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname [OIS]), six members of the CBD Secretariat, two observers (Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture and Overseas Development Institute) and one facilitator from the UK. The meeting had a relaxed, positive atmosphere of mutual respect.

AHTEG worked throughout the week in three working groups. Their topics were: (1) status, trends, and research issues; (2) goods and services, threats, and conservation and sustainable use of forest biological diversity; and (3) conditions for successful implementation of recommendations. There were daily plenaries to evaluate progress.

The meeting decided to make three major submissions to SBSTTA-7:

1. The AHTEG report of about 15 pages, including a summary of the background document prepared by the CBD Secretariat and circulated for comments.
2. A matrix of recommendations on all three topics discussed by AHTEG. These recommendations are to be organized according to goals, objectives, activities, ways and means, actors and time frame, and will be annexed to the report.

3. The background document itself, in the form of a glossy CBD publication with ISBN number.

Outstanding work

Each of these three submissions still needs some work. The AHTEG report, for example, was not ready at the end of the meeting, and only the outline was adopted. (Even this required some discussion, since the CBD Secretariat presented an alternative outline on the last day of the meeting in which the proposed recommendations were not organized into a detailed matrix. This alternative was rejected.)

After a meeting to edit the report in mid-June, a second version will be circulated for comments by the end of June. Comments must be received before mid-July.

The editing and refining of the matrix of recommendations will follow the same schedule. Redundancies need to be identified and the conclusions of the different working groups need to be harmonized. In addition, gaps must be filled in in the various columns of the matrix of recommendations covering ways and means, specific activities, actors and time frame.

The background document, meanwhile, will remain open for comments until the end of May and then circulated again before being adopted by AHTEG. All these AHTEG documents will be finalized before August 1st.

Following an inspiring presentation by Gudrun Henne (Greenpeace) on the benefits of measurement as a way of evaluating progress, a proposal was made to define **targets** for the CBD program of work on forest biodiversity. The group then agreed to start discussing how such targets might be defined.

Important issues

Several important observations can be made about the AHTEG meeting:

1. The ecosystem approach as described in decision V/6 of COP 5 was strongly promoted as a way of conserving and sustainably using forest biological diversity. Among the principles of this approach are that management should be decentralized to the lowest appropriate level; conservation of ecosystem structure and functioning should be a priority; an appropriate balance should be sought between conservation and use of biodiversity; and all relevant stakeholders and expertise must be involved in decision-making.

2. The need for an “enabling environment” for forest biodiversity conservation was underlined. This involves policy and legislative reform, economic incentives, and public education and awareness.

3. The importance of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, virtually unacknowledged in the background papers, has been stressed to some extent. Among the issues discussed were rights to land and to forest use and management by Indigenous Peoples and local communities; support for maintenance of indigenous cultures; effective participation at all levels; the value of traditional knowledge and the menace of biopiracy.

4. The group did not discuss extensively the relation between forests and climate change, as it was very clear that there were divergent views. There was also no time to address in detail issues such as forest fires and other direct and underlying causes of forest loss and degradation. Recommendations on these issues are relatively broad and general.

5. The issue of protected areas (PAs) was not singled out for extensive discussion, as it was felt that the group’s recommendations for conservation and sustainable use applied to all forests, whether inside or outside PAs. Some specific measures, however, have been formulated.

6. Little notice was taken of the activities planned over the next few years by the UN Forum on Forests, and much more work

needs to be done to harmonize UNFF and CBD. The same is true for other processes such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification. An overview prepared by the Secretariat of the forest biodiversity work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests was not even considered.

7. Happily, the meeting did not focus on “pure” forestry issues. The holistic, intersectoral and multidisciplinary approach to forests seemed to be generally accepted.

8. It is hoped that SBSTTA will share this attitude. Otherwise many relevant issues may be dropped because they are referred to other bodies and processes where they also do not get appropriate attention. There is a special risk of this happening to issues involving Indigenous Peoples and local communities and the so-called “enabling environment”. It is noticeable that the Secretariat already tends to refer everything that has the word ‘indigenous’ in it, to the CBD Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Articles. I, on the other hand, have insisted that indigenous issues are crosscutting and must be part of the mainstream of all CBD work.

For more information: <http://www.biodiv.org>.

Looking for Action in the Land of cUNFFusion

*By Simone Lovera, Sobrevivencia-Paraguay/
Friends of the Earth International*

Plans to Promote Proposals

Can a Plan of Action lead to inaction? Yes, it can.

Imagine a group of 50-plus governments with quite diverse visions concerning a concept called “sustainable forest management”. Imagine that this group had succeeded, one way or another, in agreeing upon no less than 280 conclusions and proposals for action through a difficult negotiation process of almost five years called the Intergovernmental Panel and Forum on Forests Process (IPF/IFF). Sounds like a great

basis for action, doesn't it? So what are we waiting for?

Well, the problem is that one of these proposals for action asks for a plan of action. So many of the governments who met to discuss the future of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) from 12 to 16 February 2001 in New York felt they should wait for this plan before they can act. Of course, one may wonder what a plan of action would add to 280 proposals for action. Adding to the confusion was uncertainty about what was actually meant by the "plan of action" mentioned somewhere in the ECOSOC resolution establishing the UNFF in the first place.

Components, Issues and Priorities

Fortunately, NGOs, some governments, and even the Secretariat of the UNFF are trying to provide some directions in this land of confusion. In various discussion papers and proposals prepared for the first session of the UNFF, which will take place from 11 to 22 June in New York, several outlines of a plan of action are being put forward. But, as the Secretariat notes, each country will want to give priority to its own proposals for action, programmatic components and crosscutting issues.

But they also admit that each country will want to give priority to other proposals. So even if UNFF-1 succeeds in agreeing upon what a plan of action *is*, they would need yet another round of complicated negotiations to agree upon global priorities. In the worst case, the action plan will not be established until the final day (well, probably the morning after the final day) of the second session of the UNFF, in 2002, which is now set as the deadline for the development of the plan of action. This implies that the proposal for a plan of action itself will have led to yet another two and a half years of inaction.

Themes we Like and Themes we Don't...

Of course, we are all very happy and impressed that the UNFF is now talking about action. "Implementation" and "action" were,

without doubt, the two main buzzwords at the organizational session in February. However, this action-oriented atmosphere was polluted by another buzzword: "policy – development".

What will be the outcome of this "policy-development"? Yet another 200 or 300 proposals for action? No matter how beautiful the multi-year program of work looks like, with ministerial and multi-stakeholder debates and expert groups on themes like forest fires, protected areas, consumption, community forestry, and other themes we all know and have nightmares about¹, one thing has to be kept in mind: talking about an issue does not necessarily lead to action. Certainly not if the result of the debate is formulated as one among 500 proposals for action that have to be integrated into yet another plan of action in order to become reality.

Real Action and Discipline

So is there any hope in this land of cUNFFusion? A little bit. If governments are sincere about the commitment to real action they expressed at UNFF-0, they should give absolute priority to the first mandate of the UNFF: promoting implementation. This mandate should be seen as the framework for the other functions of UNFF, including policy development. This way, the UNFF could even become a quite innovative UN body.

However, taking this approach means having the discipline not to raise any discussion items that might lead to the re-negotiation of existing proposals for action, or, worse, the introduction of new ones. Most of all, it means agreeing this year on a concise plan of action outlining these instruments for promoting implementation and their financial and institutional basis and deadlines, rather than yet another list of "things we would like to do if we would ever get our act together".
For more information:
<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/forests>.

¹ Such as the never-ending Forest Convention debate

CBD Addresses Impacts of Climate Change

By Sandy Gauntlett, International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Studies, Aotearoa/ New Zealand

The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which met from 12 to 16 March in Montreal, made several historic decisions on the impact of climate change on biodiversity and on the symbiotic relationship between the two issues.

In a haze of UN- speak, the SBSTTA urged co-operation with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change on the urgent need to curb the loss of biological diversity which results from global warming.

It noted that climate change was already causing coral bleaching – an issue of direct relevance to the survival of hundreds of thousands of people, since damage to coral atolls and their peoples from even small changes in ocean temperatures can be devastating. Without coral reefs to protect them from the ocean’s vagaries, most coral atolls would be awash in no time.

The SBSTTA did not mention the refugee problem that would be created by climatically-induced coral destruction, although the Indigenous Peoples Forum at the Sixth Conference of the Parties of the Climate Convention at the Hague had earlier called for recognition of the category of environmental refugees created by developed nations’ excess emissions. But recognizing that coral bleaching is a problem implicitly puts the issue on the table for future fora.

The SBSTTA also recognized that climate change and biodiversity loss can reinforce each other. It called for emphasis both on how efforts to mitigate climate change could cause biodiversity loss and how biodiversity loss could make climate change worse.

After recognizing that biodiversity loss does not exist in a vacuum, the SBSTTA invited other UN, scientific and other forums and organizations to help integrate international conservation and environmental efforts into a more holistic and ecosystem-based approach. It also said that the CBD and UNFCCC should start working more closely together, and formally requested the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to nominate experts to a joint expert group that has been set up to address this issue and further develop collaborative action.

In welcoming these calls, several NGOs and IPOs pointed out that this is exactly the approach that civil society has been advocating for a long time. Miguel Lovera, coordinator of the Global Forest Coalition, observed that the onus was now on new bodies like the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) to join in this spirit of co-operation, and consider the implications for biodiversity loss and climate change of their own recommendations.

“This may well mean that UNFF has to take a more visionary approach than is customary in timber discussions, and formally recognize the great difference that exists between natural forests and agro-tree plantations”, Lovera said.

After the SBSTTA conference came another meeting important for forests and forest peoples: the Panel on Access and Benefit Sharing of the Biodiversity Convention.

One of the major issues that has always frightened Indigenous Peoples is how to protect customary knowledge from outside exploitation. Most Indigenous Peoples recognize this exploitation as a colonizing process. If we are serious about sharing the world’s treasures with each other, including knowledge, then we have to demonstrate a willingness to legislate against patenting life forms, to share both the benefits and burdens associated with the use of natural resources that Indigenous Peoples view as their heritage, and to view the world we all live in

as a natural treasure that nurtures and supports us all, rather than just as a gigantic rock containing resources to be exploited. There is a clear need for an ecosystem-based approach to both biodiversity loss and climate change.

Indigenous Peoples all over the world are bearing the brunt of current climate impacts. We will be closely watching the results of forums like UNFF to gauge for ourselves how genuine the will is on the part of various governments to act to create positive change. Only positive action has any chance of convincing us that the outside world has grown up enough to earn the right to any more of our knowledge. As Indigenous Peoples, we have to demonstrate to our elders that we have earned the right to that knowledge. Why should we expect any less of those others with whom we share our world?

For more information: <http://www.biodiv.org>

Ex silvis -- Jan Pronk: How Low Can You Go?

By Miguel Lovera, GFC Coordinator

In April, Minister Jan Pronk, President of the Sixth Conference of the Parties (COP-6) of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, launched another proposal to try to clear the way for an agreement at the second installment of COP-6 in July. The main aim of this proposal was to seduce US President Bush into kindly reconsidering his rejection of the Kyoto Protocol.

For most of the decent world, this is sheer servility. The US government's repudiation of Kyoto on the ground that it is against its fossil fuel industry's "economic interest", makes the US into a public menace to humanity, for the pursuit of that interest is bringing death and environmental havoc to the planet.

In his submissiveness to the US, Pronk goes the whole nine yards. In fact, he revives a number of issues that had already been gobbled. Admittedly, Pronk does take

account of a number of guiding principles put forward by G-77 folks on the use of land and forests to "mitigate" climate change. . These principles call for sound science, reliability in accounting, and reviews by expert teams. They also demand that so-called "human-induced" changes in the biosphere that have effects on climate be accounted for separately from "natural" changes, though we all know this is undoable. Moreover, they urge that the Kyoto Protocol be consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity. The principles also reiterate the Kyoto objective of reducing industrialized countries' emissions by five per cent.

Yet Pronk's proposal would allow industrialized countries to claim huge amounts of "climate credits" for activities involving land and forests on their own territories. The only activity he doesn't allow as being worthy of credit is cheesemaking! Perhaps he thinks this makes the proposal "impartial". Under Pronk's proposal, an industrialized country could claim to be "compensating" for all of its burning of fossil fuels simply by saying it was improving its "forest management". That means that the US, merely by building a few fire surveillance towers in the woods, or buying a few jeeps and hiring a few more park rangers, could claim it no longer needs to cut industrial emissions. This is a major threat to the Kyoto Protocol.

Governments and organizations with something to gain will lose no time in taking advantage of Pronk's loophole. One source of mischief is the definition of "forests" put forward by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). According to the FAO, forests can include just about any land with trees on it, no matter how exotic, no matter how few, no matter how genetically engineered. . Planting trees on an industrial scale is thus sure to be presented as a "climate solution", no matter how much it deflects attention from the real problem.

Given the dominance of the FAO definition of forests, it is hard not to be pessimistic.

After all, even the Convention on Biological Diversity seems to sympathize with this definition. This is a dismal state of affairs, since all the opportunities to counteract it and the actions it justifies were centered around this forum. At the first meeting of the CBD's Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group, the FAO terminology was even adopted as the working definition for the group despite the opposition of NGO representatives attending the meeting!

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) seems set to make the situation even worse. One of the UNFF's predecessors, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), succeeded, after relentless efforts, to undermine the standing of the CBD in forest issues but in the end, made some worthwhile recommendations. Yet the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), which succeeded the IPF, did what Philip II did with the Spanish Empire: sat on it and watched it fail.

So Mr. Pronk introduces one further level of complexity to our lives --, or, to be less dramatic our work. It is disturbing that we have so far seen only seen scams to weaken the Kyoto Protocol and to bail out Annex I countries from their commitments. If "Plan Pronk bis" is any indication, we may go even lower.

Report on Other Forest-Related Meetings

Collaborative Partnership on Forests Established

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) -- the direct successor to the Interagency Task Force on Forests (ITFF) that served the Intergovernmental Panel and Forum on Forests process since 1995 -- was formally established on 4 and 5 April in Rome, Italy. As of now, the partnership comprises the same eight agencies that formed the ITFF (the CBD Secretariat, FAO, World Bank, UNDP, Center for International Forestry Research, UNEP, UN Department on Economic and Social Affairs, and the International Tropical Timber Organization). A few other Convention

Secretariats (for example, of the Climate and Desertification Conventions) and other institutions (GEF) have also been invited to join the process. *For more information:* <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/forests>.

CSD Weak on Bush's Rejection of Kyoto

Observers who had hoped that the 15th annual commemoration of the Chernobyl disaster on April 26 would lead to a clear rejection of nuclear energy by an institute that calls itself the Commission for Sustainable Development were proven wrong last month. The Ninth session of the CSD, which took place from 16 to 28 April in New York, produced an amazingly weak statement on the environmental and social risks of nuclear energy.

CSD also failed to come up with a clear statement regarding another hot environmental issue: the recent announcement of the Bush Administration that they will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol. As they failed to reach consensus (because of the US's presence), the CSD could only agree upon a weak statement that they "noted the ongoing negotiations under the Kyoto Protocol".

Hardly any reference was made to the importance of fuelwood as the main source of energy for the rural poor and the importance of sustainable forest management for this purpose.

In general, this session of the CSD was seen as the most disappointing ever, leading to an overall feeling amongst the 500 participants that the CSD should be up for serious reform, if not closedown, at Rio plus 10.

For more information please visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd9/>

Smooth First Prepcom for Rio plus 10

Considering the frustrations at CSD- 9, the subsequent 10th session of the CSD, which served as the first preparatory meeting (Prepcom) for the "Rio plus 10" World Summit on Sustainable Development, went remarkably smoothly. But then, the meeting, which took place from 30 April to 2 May in

New York, did not discuss any real substantive matters. It was decided that the agenda of the Summit would be based upon the regional preparatory processes that are taking place between now and January 2002.

The main decisions of this first Prepcom concerned procedural matters like the dates and locations of the other three Prepcoms and the Summit itself, support for national and regional preparatory processes for the Summit; and procedures for participation of NGOs. The latter are quite progressive. There will be an advanced procedure to accredit NGOs/IPOs that are not accredited to ECOSOC yet, and there will be various types of multistakeholder dialogues and other participation processes. *For more information please visit: <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org>*

Calendar of Forest-Related Meetings 2001

(see also: <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages>)

****First Substantive Session of the UN Forum on Forests, 11 – 22 June 2001, New York, US.** This meeting will have to agree upon a multi-year workprogram and a Plan of Action for the UNFF and the structure and modalities of work of this forum. *For more information: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/forests>.*

****Meeting of the Subsidiary Bodies to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Conference of the Parties 6 bis, 16 - 27 July 2001, Bonn, Germany.** This meeting will try to come to an agreement on the many outstanding issues under the Kyoto Protocol, including the role of Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry activities. While the US has announced they will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol anyhow, they are still planning to attend the negotiations. See also the column by Miguel Lovera above. *For more information: <http://www.unfccc.int>*

Fifth Session of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention to Combat Desertification, 17 - 28 September 2001, Bonn, Germany. *For more information: <http://www.unccd.int>*

****Seventh Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 29 October - 9 November 2001, Marrakesh, Morocco.** Considering the uncertain political situation surrounding the Kyoto Protocol, the agenda for this meeting is as yet completely unknown. *For more information: <http://www.unfccc.int>*

****Seventh Meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 12 - 16 November 2001, Montreal, Canada.** Forest biodiversity will be the main theme of this meeting (See also the report by Max Ooft above.) *For more information: <http://www.biodiv.org>.*

Second Prepcom for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, 28 January - 8 February 2002, New York. The main agenda items for the WSSD will be based upon the outcomes of the regional preparatory meetings, but they will undoubtedly include global environmental governance, the impacts of globalization, and poverty reduction. *For more information: www.johannesburgsummit.org*

*(** Meetings to which GFC can probably facilitate Southern NGO/IPO participation)*

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