

Forest Cover

A Global Forest Coalition Newsletter on International Forest Policy

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About Forest Cover

Welcome to the ninth issue of *Forest Cover*, the newsletter of the Global Forest Coalition (GFC). This coalition was established by a group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) to facilitate the informed participation of NGOs and IPOs in intergovernmental meetings related to forests. *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. *For free subscriptions, please contact Simone Lovera at: lovera1@conexion.com.py.*

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Ex Silvis: New Climate, Old Definitions

By Miguel Lovera, Coordinator, Global Forest Coalition

The Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change (AHTEG) of the Convention on Biodiversity met for the third and last time from May 13 to 16 in Helsinki. It was +15°C / 59°F, as warm as it gets in Finland. People like me were wearing winter coats and gloves. The Finns were out in the sun, getting a tan. Either way, the hospitality of our hosts didn't permit the cold to get through.

The AHTEG, along with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), have recognized, on the basis of firm scientific evidence, that climate change is already affecting life on the planet. Living things are experiencing a new environment, courtesy of human beings, and doing what they can to adapt. Humans have been the most reluctant on this score – at least, some humans. Some of us still put a lot of energy in denying that change is upon us, repeating claims like “the climate changes periodically and humans have nothing to do with it”.

Such claims are perhaps to be expected from denizens of sectors, which profit directly from the use of fossil fuels and from the new global religion of consumerism. What's more difficult to figure out is why other sectors

can't bring themselves to abandon similarly outdated claims, such as that large-scale tree monocultures are forests.

Take the Food and Agriculture Organization. FAO goes on and on defining forests as land with tree canopy, regardless of what kind of trees they are, how they got there, or how they are managed. And FAO's definition, lamentably, is the one repeated by nearly everybody involved in forestry. Come on, you community forest stewards, you ecologists, you biologists, you priests and politicians -- surely you can do better than that! Say something!

In 1996, Carrere and Lohmann wrote:

"Plantations, like forests, are full of trees. But the two are usually radically different. A forest is a complex, self-generating system, encompassing soil, water, microclimate, energy, and a wide variety of plants and animals in mutual relations. A commercial plantation, on the other hand, is a cultivated area whose species and structure have been simplified dramatically to produce only a few goods, whether lumber, fuel, resin, oil, or fruit. A plantation's trees, unlike those of a forest, tend to be of a small range of species and ages, and to require extensive and continuing human intervention."

Without resorting to any false dichotomy between "natural" and "artificial", this definition suggests the crucial differences between forests and the violently simplified landscapes of industrial plantations.

The AHTEG has compiled a wide array of information about the effects of climatic trends on species distribution and showed how much faster current rates of loss are in comparison with rates during previous periods of rapid climate change. It has assessed both negative and positive potential impacts of climate change on biodiversity. But the AHTEG has also stressed that decisive steps must be taken to avoid biodiversity being devastated by climate change *mitigation* activities. Quite clearly, in cautioning against a misguided reliance on so-called "carbon

sinks" as a way of countering climate change, the AHTEG scientists had in mind a definition of the difference between forests and plantations like that proposed above.

Such a stance is crucial. In the world of the Kyoto Protocol, where every collection of lignified shoots counts, the reluctance to define forests as what they are is even more dangerous than it has been in the past, when it has been a driving force of deforestation.

The AHTEG's work reminds us that there is no sound justification left for neurotically continuing to use old definitions of forests and planning large-scale monocultures, instead of putting all available resources toward the promotion of a global environmental restoration effort for the sake of biodiversity and the climate. It is time to throw out the dictum "By right means, if you can, but by any means make money".

UNFF: Replacing Planted Crops and Natural Forests

By Abraham Baffoe, Friends of the Earth-Ghana

Roughly 100 representatives from governments, forestry industries, and non-government and Indigenous Peoples Organisations met from 24 – 30 March in Aotearoa/New Zealand to formulate recommendations for the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) on the role of "Planted Forests in Sustainable Forest Management".

For many people concerned about forests, the agenda of this UNFF Intersessional Experts Meeting would have made perfect sense. Many people believe that promoting "planted forests" helps conserve natural forests and that their management is a contribution the forestry industry makes to sustainable development. Yet from the point of view of a forester from the South who is concerned about the wanton destruction of the world's forest resources and its consequences for the livelihood of the Southern rural poor, the meeting's focus was questionable.

The meeting asked, for example, what the global target for area of “planted forests” should be, and how the UNFF could help set and achieve this target. It went on to ask what individual countries could do to encourage sustainable forest management in these “planted forests”.

Yet it neglected to discuss what happens to poor farmers’ food crops when they have to compete with subsidized tree plantations, or what the effects on natural forests in Southern countries are when farmlands or “degraded” lands are converted into tree plantations. The truth is that tree plantations of the kind discussed in the Aotearoa/New Zealand meeting tend to displace and worsen the economic plight of rural farmers and increase the already existing high deforestation rate in Southern countries.

Why, then, should the UNFF have to set targets for tree plantations that undermine sustainable forest management, poverty alleviation and sustainable development in general in Southern countries? What is the point of such targets?

The causes of forest degradation and deforestation in many cases involve socio-economic factors. Promoting plantations without addressing these factors, and without looking at other measures appropriate to different countries and regions, is both simplistic and colonial. A better strategy would be to promote forest management as an integral part of subsistence agricultural systems in Southern countries.

In some African countries, many farmers have already been denied even enough arable land for subsistence agriculture, as the forests and farmlands they rely on have been either gazetted as forest reserves or given out to multinational companies for mining or other activities incompatible with farming.

In recent times, “sustainable forest management” has come more and more to mean plantation development rather than sustainable management of natural forest. Plantations increase in worldwide area while

natural forests decline. Highly-marketable, premium-priced certifiable wood products are coming more and more from plantations rather than from the relatively large uncertified area of natural forest. The whole world, including the UNFF, seems intent on replacing natural forests with plantations. This trend helps explain the need for the concept of “planted forest.” Yet in truth, plantations are unlike forests. Generally managed for timber pulp and other economic commodities, plantations tend to be unable to provide food, fodder and medicines and to perform services like purifying and regulating water supplies and providing diversified habitats for wildlife or aesthetic and cultural benefits. Genuine sustainable forest management (SFM) recognizes that forests must be managed as complete ecosystems to supply a wide variety of such goods and services for present and future generations.

UNFF ought to adhere to such a concept of SFM and promote planted forests only in areas where they can fulfill these purposes and not seek to replace natural forests altogether.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/forests>

“Planted Forests”: The Catchword and the Vision (or Lack of it)

By Sandy Gauntlett, GFC Oceania Focal Point, Aotearoa/New Zealand

The key to the United Nations Forum on Forests Experts Meeting on “planted forests” in Wellington, as Abraham Baffoe suggests above, lay not in the papers presented so much as in the topics of the meeting itself.

As any facilitator knows, the questions you ask will to some extent pre-determine the answers you get. In Wellington, the intention was obviously to mobilize arguments in favor of tree plantations. Discussion groups were given no choice but to take up topics such as “the benefits of planted forests” and the “barriers to creating a planted forest industry”.

After a field trip in Rotorua, the meeting started with three days of papers on the challenges to and benefits of “planted forests” and on “ensuring and facilitating SFM.” The first day was aimed mainly at cheering commercial plantations and their “benefits” to the environment. Well-managed plantations, it was urged, can help preserve biodiversity and restore trees to blighted landscapes. Wink Sutton’s paper “Wood, The World’s Most Sustainable Raw Material”, for example, was little more than an argument for increased consumption (and planning for consumption) of wood, and hence for more plantations. Luckily, George Asher of the Federation of Maori Authorities, the only Indigenous presenter, provided some much-needed perspective on this issue in his paper on Maori involvement in the Tuwharetoa plantation project. Asher stressed that although profit maximization was important to the project, it took second place to environmental (*kaitiakitanga*) and cultural (*tikanga*) goals.

After the meeting came a field trip to the country’s South Island. Most overwhelming for me was an excursion to an intensively-managed Indigenous forest timber production area. Owned by an ex-FRI scientist, it was operated as a family business and used as an experiment station for natural forest management systems. More than 90% of the timber extracted came from dead trees or trees downed by storms and wind. Logs were cut to length on the spot and milled in a small mill on the farm. Natural regeneration ensured regrowth. The major area of interference with “natural” processes was in the use of pruning to improve timber quality. On the farm, too, was an extensive experimental area of planted trees. Instead of clearcutting, spot-felling, spot-logging and local milling were relied on throughout, and expectations are that operations will continue to be profitable. One of the family members managing the farm operated a honey business, using beehives scattered around the landscape to take advantage of naturally-occurring honeydew.

For years, NGOs in this country have been advocating the use of natural processes,

Indigenous trees as dividers and wind breaks, and local logging, milling and spot-felling. Here was a business proving all this was not only possible but profitable. I was torn between optimism and the realization that such farms tend to be mere showpieces far removed from the reality of most plantations in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Overall, my impression of the meeting was that it had been used (as such meetings often are) as a showcase for the host country’s way of doing things. Unfortunately, the Aotearoa/New Zealand way varies from the very good to the quite destructive. This suggests once again that we need a set of agreed definitions that can help us distinguish between good and bad management in various local contexts.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/forests>

Viterbo Meeting Sidesteps Issues of Implementation, Participation

By Stuart Wilson, Forests Monitor, UK

In preparation for the third United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) an *ad hoc* expert group meeting was organised in March in Viterbo, Italy. The meeting was to review what had been done so far to carry out the Proposals for Action (PfAs) coming out of the last five years of meetings by the UNFF’s predecessors, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). (This history is available on the UNFF website: [http://www.un.org/esa/forests/.](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/))

However, things didn’t turn out that way. Many delegates, supported by the chairs of the meeting’s working groups, decided to talk instead about the state of the world’s forests – which had been the topic of a previous experts’ meeting in Japan in November 2001. In the end, they wound up merely stating some obvious conclusions about forest decline and the obstacles which stand in the way of doing anything about it.

The recommendations participants made for the future were more positive, but still neglected the crucial issue of participation by civil society in national forest policymaking and monitoring. Recommendation 2, for example, recognizes that not all PfAs are applicable to all countries. Yet it does not address the question of who decides which PfAs are relevant where. This is unfortunate. Non-government and Indigenous Peoples organizations (NGOs and IPOs), as well as the rest of civil society, must be clearly guaranteed a say.

Recommendation 5 is better, proposing that national-level working groups promote participation in the assessment of relevance of individual PfAs. Yet many participants at the Viterbo meeting were opposed to including any civil society representatives in such working groups.

NGO had expressed hope that methodologies for monitoring, assessing and reporting on policy implementation would be presented and defined at the meeting. Yet when one working group section was asked to give examples of how such monitoring could be carried out, the reaction was mainly silence.

Fortunately, recommendation 12, in line with the position of many NGO participants in the UNFF, does urge the UNFF to “give a high priority to its work on monitoring, assessment and reporting”. In NGOs’ view, the major function of the UNFF should be to go even further, and promote implementation of the PfAs.

It was encouraging that the meeting included representatives of NGOs prepared to make meaningful contributions to the process. Unfortunately, many of their comments were ignored despite years of collective experience in the IPF, IFF and the UNFF. Even more worryingly, no Indigenous Peoples’ representatives were invited to the meeting.

Civil society must be enabled to participate in the formation of the future *ad hoc* Expert Group on Approaches and Mechanisms for

Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting (recommendation 19) – a group key to any future success of the UNFF.

The three NGO representatives at the Viterbo meeting took advantage of an opportunity to discuss the future of UNFF with Pekka Patosaari, its Co-ordinator and Head of Secretariat. A subsequent letter from NGOs and IPOs to Patosaari expressed “*genuine concern that the UNFF is failing to implement its mandate as set out in ECOSOC resolution E/2000/L.32. . . . the UNFF is not fulfilling its function as . . . a coherent, transparent, and participatory global framework for policy implementation.*”

The letter also stressed that the UNFF has so far “*failed to . . . build upon the transparent and participatory practices established by the CSD, the IPF and IFF.*” The full text is available on request.

A summary of the Viterbo meeting by the IISD can be found at <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/sd/sdvit/sdvol83num1.html>. The final report of *ad hoc* Expert Working Group can be downloaded at: http://www.gtz.de/forest-policy/download/Documents/National_Initiatives/Report_Viterbo_Initiative_support_unff.pdf.

Targeting 2010

By Simone Lovera, Friends of the Earth International

A meeting to prepare an agenda for discussions on the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) between 2004 and 2010 took place from 17 to 20 March in Montreal. The gathering, known as the Open-Ended Inter-Sessional Meeting on the Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Conference of the Parties (MYPOW), also discussed the results of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) as they relate to biodiversity.

The most controversial issue at the meeting was the WSSD recommendation that an international regime on benefit sharing should

be developed by the CBD. CBD veterans at the MYPOW meeting seemed to feel that this recommendation encroached on their territory, as they had just adopted the voluntary Bonn Guidelines on Access and Benefit Sharing. Many non-government organizations see the Bonn guidelines as a way of legalizing theft of genetic resources and traditional knowledge from forests and other ecosystems and some had hoped new international rules might enable Indigenous Peoples and local communities to put up a stronger defense. The WSSD recommendation is unlikely to save the situation, however. The MYPOW meeting decided that the same specialists that developed the Bonn guidelines will decide whether such rules will become a legally binding Protocol to the CBD. This so-called Expert Group on Access and Benefit Sharing will meet in December 2003.

A less controversial, but more complicated issue on the MYPOW agenda was how to evaluate progress on the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the CBD, and, in particular, the target of substantially reducing biodiversity loss by 2010. The MYPOW meeting asked the CBD Executive Secretary to develop indicators to help answer this question and to schedule a regular evaluation and review of progress in the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Subsidiary targets will be set to help assess progress towards the 2010 target.

All these mechanisms will be used to review progress on the expanded work programme on forest biodiversity adopted in April 2002, which will be reviewed in depth at the ninth Conference of the Parties in 2008.

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

Reports on Other Forest-Related Meetings

Sinks at the Falls

What kind of story do you need to tell in order to be able to claim that planting a certain number of trees "makes up for" a certain amount of fossil-fuel burning?

That was the main topic of a workshop organized by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) near the Iguacu Falls in Brazil on 12-14 February, and attended by delegates from 36 countries, two UN institutions and six non-government organizations (NGOs). The workshop was designed to help governments understand proposals for refining the Kyoto Protocol which are likely to be discussed at the June meeting of the technical Subsidiary Bodies of the UNFCCC.

The workshop focused on problems in accounting for carbon supposedly absorbed by afforestation and reforestation projects to be carried out under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). One challenge in equating tree-planting and industrial emissions is the "non-permanence" of trees, which can easily be cut or burned down, releasing their carbon to the atmosphere. Here the workshop concentrated on two proposals. One was to offer "insurance" against such risks. The other was to downgrade the status of the carbon stored in trees by making merely "temporary" Carbon Emission Reduction (CER) certificates to be issued as a reward for tree-planting. Most participants supported the proposal for temporary CERs, although some countries preferred the insurance option. Some participants also suggested that both should be used. Other challenges involved in trying to equate tree-planting with fossil-fuel emissions include:

- How to measure the releases of carbon to the atmosphere associated with any afforestation or reforestation project against that project's carbon absorption;
- How to prove that an afforestation or reforestation project results in more carbon dioxide absorption than would have been the case without the project; and
- How to quantify this supposed improved carbon absorption.

Most controversial was the issue of what to do about the socio-economic and environmental impacts of tree-planting CDM projects. One North American country claimed that

assessing such impacts was an "unnecessary" task. This stance ignored experience gained from pilot projects which had turned out to displace local residents from their land to make way for carbon-absorbing plantations. Other countries suggested that existing provisions for assessing socio-economic and environmental impacts should be adhered to. Still others proposed that a checklist of criteria should be added to all Project Design Documents for both environmental and socio-economic impacts. Some Southern countries objected, claiming that such criteria would impinge on their sovereignty (overlooking the fact that the CDM represents an international trading system destined to impinge on their sovereignty anyway).

The workshop also debated uncertainties, small-scale projects and the period during which carbon credits for tree-planting would be effective. As of now, CDM rules require certain small-scale energy projects to undergo merely simplified procedures to validate and verify their climatic effectiveness. Some African countries would like small-scale afforestation and reforestation projects also to be eligible for such streamlined treatment. What constituted "small-scale" reforestation projects, however, was a matter of controversy. One African country suggested a figure of 100-200 hectares, while a Latin American country considered 2,000-2,500 ha more appropriate.

Doha Deadlines Missed

Only two of the 44 issues that are on the negotiation agenda set out by the World Trade Organization in Doha in December 2001 had been agreed upon by March 2003. Negotiations on some 37 issues, including market access for timber as an environmental good and agriculture, have missed all possible deadlines: there is not even agreement on how these negotiations are to be conducted.

Yet the outcomes could have far-reaching consequences for forest policy, as they could undermine labeling and certification initiatives, remove barriers to trade in unsustainable timber, promote unsustainable

agriculture and force countries to privatize and allow foreign competition in protected area management. Such consequences can be particularly devastating for developing countries, whose forest resources are at stake. The next Ministerial meeting will take place in Cancun, Mexico, from 10 to 14 September. *For more information, please contact: <http://www.wto.org>.*

Funding Problems at CBD SBSTTA

The eighth session of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biodiversity, which met 10 - 14 March in Montreal, failed to agree on a draft work program on mountain biodiversity. The main reason was that due to a lack of funding, no expert group had been set up prior to the meeting to help draft a work program. Happily, this problem was overcome during the meeting itself, and an expert group set up which is expected to report directly to the seventh Conference of the Parties in March 2004. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.biodiv.org>.*

COFO Discusses Integration with other Processes

The sixteenth session of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) took place from 10 - 14 March in Rome, Italy. The meeting, which was more participatory than previous COFO meetings, highlighted the need for integration of the forestry-related activities of FAO with other international and national processes. It particularly recommended a clear link between the FAO medium-term work program on forestry, the Proposals for Action of the Intergovernmental Panel and Forum on Forests, and the expanded work program on Forest Biodiversity of the Convention on Biodiversity. The meeting also endorsed the new FAO entity on forests and freshwater.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.fao.org/forestry>.

ITTO on the Road to a New Agreement

On the agenda at the thirty-fourth session of the International Tropical Timber Council held 12-17 May in Panama City were

national-level efforts to address illegal logging and so-called “phased approaches” towards certification – ways of integrating sustainable forest management into forestry operations step by step.

The meeting also began to look at how a successor treaty to the International Tropical Timber Agreement might be negotiated. A preparatory meeting for these negotiations took place from 19-21 May in Panama City. The first session of the negotiations itself will take place 26-30 July 2004 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Very few independent NGOs or Indigenous Peoples’ Organizations participated in the discussions on these controversial issues. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.itto.org.jp>.*

Calendar of Forest-Related Meetings

More information on these and other intergovernmental meetings can be found at: <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages>.

- The third session of the United Nations Forum on Forests will be held 26 May - 6 June Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting will address economic aspects of forest management, forest health and productivity and the maintenance of forest cover. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/forests>.*
- The eighteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Bodies to the Framework Convention on Climate Change will take place 4 - 13 June in Bonn, Germany. The meeting will discuss forest-related projects under the Kyoto Protocol. *For more information, please visit: <http://unfccc.int/sessions/sb18/index.html>.*
- The sixth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification will convene in Havana, Cuba, from 25 August to 5 September. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.unccd.int/cop/cop6>.*

- The fifth World Parks Congress will take place 8-17 September in Durban, South Africa. The conference's main task is to analyze the value of protected areas and to elaborate ways to deliver benefits beyond protected area boundaries. *For more information please visit: <http://wcpa.iucn.org/wpc/wpc.html>.*
- The fifth Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization will be held 10-14 September in Cancun, Mexico. The current negotiations under the WTO could have far-reaching consequences for forest policy, but as most negotiations are in disarray it is likely that Cancun will be a stock-taking exercise only. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.wto.org>.*
- ** The twelfth World Forestry Congress, “Forests, Source of Life”, will take place 21 - 28 September in Quebec City, Canada. This congress is organized by FAO once every six years. It is open to all and addresses a broad range of forestry-related themes. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.wfc2003.org>.*

*(**Meetings at which the Global Forest Coalition can facilitate Southern NGO/IPO participation.)*

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