



Submission by the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries

I. Introduction

Pursuant to SBSTA decision FCCC/SBSTA/2006/L.25, taken in November 2006, the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests would like to contribute to the on-going discussion on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries with the present submission. The submission will primarily address ongoing policy approaches to the challenges presented by deforestation, paying particular attention to the policy decisions taken by member States in this regard since 1992 as well as prospects for future action.

II. Deforestation on the International Policy Agenda

There have been more than forty international organizations and more than twenty international agreements related to forests, yet no single international institution or instrument had the mandate to address holistically all aspects of forest policy until very recently. As a result, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established in 2000, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) with the objective of promoting sustainable forest management worldwide and strengthening political commitment to this end. As a global policy making body with full membership of the 192 member States of the United Nations, the UNFF is a subsidiary body of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and reports to ECOSOC, and through it, to the General Assembly. The UN Forum on Forests provides a forum for discussion of experiences as well as challenges related to sustainable forest management, including prevention of deforestation, and provides policy guidance for action at the international and national levels.

In 2006, the UNFF and ECOSOC agreed on four Global Objectives on Forests which aim to reverse the loss of forest cover, improve the contribution of forests to local livelihoods, increase protected areas, and enhance financial support for sustainable forest management.¹ The resolution also calls on the UNFF to complete negotiations of a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests at its seventh session in April 2007. Such an instrument would provide a framework for international and national action to achieve the agreed Global Objectives and, upon adoption by the General Assembly, provide for a strong political commitment to the reduction of deforestation and the enhancement of sustainable forest management world-wide. Deforestation thus continues to be an issue of high priority on the international political agenda.

¹ ECOSOC Resolution 2006/49

Global Objectives on Forests*Global Objective 1*

Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation;

Global Objective 2

Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest dependent people;

Global Objective 3

Increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests;

Global Objective 4

Reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management and mobilize significantly increased new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management;

The broad mandate of the UNFF and the forthcoming adoption of a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests is the culmination of a steadily growing and evolving negotiation process that is founded on the outcomes of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Chapter 11 of Agenda 21, entitled “Combating Deforestation” and the Forest Principles², adopted by Heads of State, represent the first global consensus on forests. Both Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles outline the ecological and socio-economic importance of forests, placing an emphasis on national sovereignty in decision making as well as the importance of public participation, capacity building, and creating a national and international enabling environment for management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. Together, these agreements represent the beginning of a more nuanced view of sustainability and environmental conservation at the global level, fully cognoscente of the tension between protection and development.

Though there was a proposal for a legally binding convention on forests as an outcome of the UNCED, member States decided to initiate an Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) under the auspices of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. The IPF had a two year mandate from 1995-1997. Upon review of progress made, member States agreed to raise the profile by creating the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), again under the auspices of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, with a mandate to function for two years. These processes provided a forum for member States to further discuss and build consensus around the critical

² Officially named Non-Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forest

components of sustainable forest management and reducing deforestation. During these years, member States agreed on 270 Proposals for Action for sustainable forest management which continue to function as the foundation of policy guidance for countries at both the international and national levels.

Increased consensus around forest-related issues as well as the recognition of a need to increase the political profile of forests led to the creation by ECOSOC in 2000 of the United Nations Forum on Forests as a full functional commission of ECOSOC with universal membership.

III. Inter-governmental Decisions Related to Deforestation

Intergovernmental Panel on Forests

The underlying causes of deforestation were a topic of extensive discussion during the IPF/IFF process. The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests considered the issue at its second, third and fourth sessions in 1996-1997. The IPF “noted the critical need to understand the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, which are often country-specific”.³ The fact that the causes of deforestation can come from both within and outside the forest sector was acknowledged as was the synergistic effect of these forces. Factors that have a strong influence on deforestation were identified as: production and consumption patterns; international trade; poorly regulated investment; market distortions, subsidies and relative prices, including those of agricultural commodities; undervaluation of wood and non-wood forest products; land tenure patterns; land speculation and land markets; illegal logging; illegal land occupation and illegal cultivation; grazing pressures; unsustainable agriculture; the demand for fuel-wood and charcoal to meet basic energy needs; refugee-related problems; mining and oil exploitation in forested countries not conducted in accordance with appropriate national legislation; and natural climatic events and forest fires.⁴

The importance of using national policy frameworks for sustainable forest management and land use plans was highlighted as a way of assessing whether changes in forest cover are needed and beneficial in providing required goods and services now and in the future. The increasing demands both for forest products and services as well as for competing land-use pointed toward a need for better inter-sectoral policy making. Member States also recognized that there are rational justifications for changes in forest cover that must be considered by countries in their land use planning.

A number of Proposals for Action were agreed in this regard, and the Panel:

a) urged countries to develop, test and implement appropriate participatory mechanisms for integrating timely and continuous multidisciplinary research into all stages of the planning cycle;⁵

³ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 18

⁴ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraphs 20 and 24

⁵ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 17e

b) encouraged countries to elaborate systems, including private and community forest management systems, for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating national forest programmes that identify and involve, where appropriate, a broad participation of indigenous people, forest dwellers, forest owners and local communities in meaningful decision-making regarding the management of state forest lands in their proximity, within the context of national laws and legislation;⁶

c) urged countries, as relevant and appropriate, with the support of international organizations and the participation of major groups, where relevant:

(i) to prepare in-depth studies of the underlying causes at the national and international levels of deforestation and forest degradation;

(ii) to analyze comprehensively the historical perspective of the causes of deforestation and forest degradation in the world, and other international underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, including trans-boundary economic forces;

(iii) to provide new factual information on the significance of trans-boundary pollution⁷

d) urged countries to assess long-term trends in their supply and demand for wood, and to consider actions to promote the sustainability of their wood supply and their means for meeting demand, with a special emphasis on investment in sustainable forest management and the strengthening of institutions for forest resource and forest plantations management;⁸

e) urged countries to recognize and enhance the role of forest plantations as an important element of sustainable forest management complementary to natural forests;⁹

f) encouraged countries to undertake, as needed, the following activities:

(i) to formulate and implement national strategies, through an open and participatory process, for addressing the underlying causes of deforestation, and, if appropriate, to define policy goals for national forest cover as inputs to the implementation of national forest programmes;

(ii) To develop mechanisms, such as environmental impact assessments, to improve policy formulation and coordination, through an open and participatory process;

⁶ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 17f

⁷ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 27

⁸ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 28 (a)

⁹ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 28 (b)

(iii) to formulate policies aiming at securing land tenure for local communities and indigenous people, including policies, as appropriate, aimed at the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of forests;¹⁰

g) encouraged countries and international organizations:

(i) to provide timely, reliable and accurate information on the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, where needed, as well as on the multiple roles of forests, as a foundation for public understanding and decision-making;

(ii) to assist developing countries in promoting an integrated approach towards the formulation and application of national policy frameworks, and in conducting strategic analyses of relevant political, legal and institutional policies that have contributed to deforestation and forest degradation, as well as of policies that have had a positive effect;¹¹

h) urged developed countries and multilateral and international organizations, including regional development banks, to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition in those activities;¹²

i) encouraged countries, within their respective legal frameworks, international organizations and financial institutions, to enhance, subject to national legislation, community financing as an important strategy to promote sustainable forest management, and to establish policy and programmatic mechanisms and instruments that facilitate local investments in sustainable forest management by, inter alia, indigenous groups and forest owners;¹³

Intergovernmental Forum on Forests

The issue was again addressed at the second, third and fourth session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests in 1998 and 1999¹⁴. The IFF stressed the importance of policy consistency inside and outside the forest sector and emphasized the need for effective policy coordination. Member States agreed that the underlying causes of deforestation are often socio-economic in character and could include poverty, lack of secure land tenure patterns, inadequate recognition of the rights and needs of forest-dependent indigenous and local communities within national laws and jurisdiction, inadequate cross-sectoral policies, undervaluation of forest products and services, lack of participation in decision making, issues of governance, absence of a supportive economic climate that supports sustainable forest management, lack of capacity, lack of an enabling environment, at both the national and international levels, and national policies that may distort markets and encourage forest land conversion. It was further reaffirmed that the

¹⁰ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 29

¹¹ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 30

¹² E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 31 (b)

¹³ E/CN.17/1997/12 paragraph 70 (c)

¹⁴ E/CN.17/IFF/1999/25, D/1 paragraphs 1-8

underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation as well as the approaches to deal with them are often country specific.

It was agreed that combating deforestation requires the involvement of many actors, including national and sub-national governments, civil society, forest owners, international organizations, the private sector, research organizations, and international and bilateral aid agencies as well as broad participation of indigenous and local communities.

A number of Proposals for Action were agreed in this regard. These include:

- (a) further study and take practical measures to address the chains of causality of the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation within each country, including the impact of poverty as well as the impact of processes outside the forest sector;
- (b) create appropriate procedures in order to promote effective participation of all interested parties in decision-making about forest management;
- (c) support appropriate land tenure law and/or arrangements as a means to define clearly land ownership, as well as the rights of indigenous and local communities and forest owners, for the sustainable use of forest resources, taking into account the sovereign right of each country and its legal framework;
- (d) develop mechanisms, as appropriate, to improve land access and use of forest resources on a sustainable basis;
- (e) support capacity-building in communities, in particular for those with responsibilities in forest management, including in low forest cover countries, and create awareness in the society at large on the importance of issues related to deforestation and forest degradation;
- (f) promote maintenance and enhancement of forest resources through sustainable forest management practices, and promote the creation of new forest resources through the establishment of planted forests and other means, such as rehabilitation of degraded forests, taking into consideration their social, cultural and environmental impacts, and economic costs and benefits;

The IFF further encouraged countries to recognize the actual and potential impacts of economic instruments and tax policies as a means of providing incentives to engage in activities that avoid deforestation and forest degradation and that support sustainable forest management practices; and to examine, in collaboration with international organizations, when requested, the role of forest policy failures and policies in other sectors as a contributing factor in deforestation, forest degradation or unsustainable forest management; and to collaborate with international organizations in developing mitigating policies.¹⁵

¹⁵ E/CN.17/IFF/1999/25, D/6 paragraph 8 (c)

United Nations Forum on Forests

Placing a strong emphasis on the political importance of the issue of deforestation and forest degradation, the United Nations Forum on Forests considered underlying causes of deforestation at its second session in 2002. This session also included a High Level Ministerial segment.

Ministers, in their Declaration, expressed their concern about the continuing high rate of worldwide deforestation, as well as forest and land degradation, and committed themselves to work to reverse these trends¹⁶.

Through its resolution 2/2¹⁷, the UNFF:

- a) urges Governments and encourages initiatives by Governments and interested stakeholders to address domestic forest law enforcement and illegal international trade in forest products, including in forest biological resources, with the support of the international community;
- b) urges countries to promote trade policies and practices to support sustainable forest management, including in the World Trade Organization (WTO), and encourages countries to participate in the negotiations of WTO in the context of the work programme adopted at Doha in order to implement, inter alia, relevant IPF/IFF proposals for action related to trade;
- c) invites countries and the members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to review and report on the state of knowledge on subsidies that may result in deforestation and forest degradation;
- d) urges countries to strengthen international cooperation on finance, trade, transfer of environmentally sound technology and capacity-building in order to combat deforestation and forest degradation, taking into account the importance of that issue for sustainable forest management in developing countries.

Though subsequent sessions of the UNFF do not explicitly address the issue of combating deforestation and forest degradation, the policy guidance provided to further promote and enhance sustainable forest management at all levels also contributes to a better understanding of how deforestation and forest degradation can be prevented.

¹⁶ E/CN.18/2002/14, Ministerial Declaration, paragraph 3

¹⁷ E/CN.18/2002/14, Resolution 2/2, paragraphs 4-7

IV. Implementing Decisions

National Policy Measures

Apart from explicit policy guidance, the United Nations Forum on Forests has also supported a number of other means of ensuring sustainable forest management. National Forest Programs (NFP) were conceived as a tool for policy implementation in the context of the UNCED. They have proven quite effective in facilitating cross-sectoral analysis and a participatory approach to identifying problems as well as formulating, implementing and monitoring policies, strategies and actions. The consultation required to create such a framework for national level policy can be helpful in aligning forests with the wider national development goals and ensuring financial commitments. It is hoped that they would also contribute to and be in line with national Poverty Reduction Strategies.

Substantial efforts have also been made to create criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management through nine regional processes involving more than 140 countries. Such processes are useful in helping to create region specific conceptualizations of what it means for a forest management system to be sustainable as well as in monitoring and assessing changes in the forests as well as effectiveness of policy interventions.

Means of Implementation

Agenda 21 and the decisions of the IPF/IFF and UNFF place strong importance of the means of implementation for ensuring that inter-governmental decisions are translated into action on the ground. The three primary means of implementation are financing, transfer of environmentally sound technology and capacity building. Many countries report difficulties in implementing the agreed decisions of UNFF because of a lack of such means.

At its sixth session, the UNFF identified a comprehensive, but not exhaustive, assessment of the means required to help implement the Global Objectives on Forests and to further promote sustainable forest management¹⁸. Member States highlighted the importance of further developing national forest programmes, increasing efforts at capacity building, expanding research and improving transfer of environmentally sound technology.

Member States agreed to reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management; strengthen existing forest-related funds including the National Forest Programme facility (hosted by the FAO), the Programme on Forests (hosted by the World Bank) and the Bali Partnership Fund (hosted by the ITTO); mobilize and provide significant new and additional resources for sustainable forest management; and develop innovative financial mechanisms for generating revenue to support sustainable forest management. The creation of a funding mechanism for reducing deforestation in developing countries could be one way of fulfilling this commitment.

¹⁸ E/CN.18/2006/18, paragraphs 5-6

Conclusions

The current discussion on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries is a welcome and potentially important contribution to the ongoing efforts by member States to combat deforestation and forest degradation. Since the adoption of Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, member States have been deliberating on how best to achieve the objective of reducing the loss of forest cover while recognizing the particular social and economic needs of countries. The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests and now the United Nations Forum on Forests have consistently provided policy guidance to countries on strategies to achieve this objective. With the four new Global Objectives on Forests adopted by ECOSOC in 2006 and the potential adoption of a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests that further supports these Objectives, member States have maintained the need to address the loss of forest cover as a high priority on the political agenda. Member States of the United Nations Forum on Forests will thus continue to address the issue of the loss of forest cover in its forthcoming sessions as they seek to further promote the implementation of the Global Objectives.

The possibility of creating a financial mechanism by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change that would support efforts by developing countries in combating deforestation and reducing emissions would thus provide a unique opportunity to address the issues of concern of both political processes. By providing such financial support, Parties would be helping to implement both the goals of the Framework Convention as well as the intention of Agenda 21 and the Global Objectives on Forests. It should be noted that the Climate Change Secretariat and the UNFF Secretariat are among the members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), which was formed in 2001 to support the work of the UNFF and to enhance coordination among the forest-related international organizations, instruments and institutions. Because of its mandate to address deforestation and sustainable forest management issues in a comprehensive and holistic manner, the United Nations Forum on Forests would be a strong and effective partner to the UNFCCC in ensuring further policy guidance that may be required in this regard.