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Training and Research Capacities for Forestry Policy Development in Countries with Economies in Transition



Introduction

A number of newly independent states were added to the world community in the last decade of the twentieth century, following the split of the Soviet Union. Those countries with economies in transition occupy a large portion of the Eurasian continent, extending from Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Russia to the Baltic. Although the geographic and environmental conditions of the countries vary significantly, they all share similar problems of political, social, economic and cultural natures in the transition process from a centrally controlled economy to a market economy. Such a transformation process has inevitable impacts on their legal and social conditions as well as on their natural environment.

The negative legacy of the planned economy is evident in the field of natural resources management in those countries, and not least in terms of sustainable forest management. In most of the transition countries, the forestry sector faces difficulties with limited financial resources and other support from the current government. Consequently, the forest resources of many of those countries are not under proper and sustainable management practices. Meanwhile, pressures on the remaining forest resources are mounting in the course of economic development, as in the case with many other parts of the world.

National Forest Programmes

At the international level, there has been an initiative to build a solid institutional framework and guidelines for the forest-sector-based development in all countries that deal with forests directly or indirectly in various forms of protection and utilization. For this purpose, under the auspices of the United Nations Forum on

Forests (UNFF), the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IPF/IFF) drew up a set of proposals for action. In this, establishment, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national forest programmes (NFPs) are strongly encouraged for all countries as a framework for promoting sustainable forest management. A number of organizations acting in forest sector development in different parts of the world, including major international organizations such as FAO, ITTO, and the World Bank as well as major bilateral donor agencies, have spent some ten years in designing NFPs.

Today, NFPs are recognized as the major coordinating policy development framework to promote sustainable management and conservation of forests, under the auspices of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. One of the main principles of the NFP processes is to contribute not only to the forestry sector, but also to the overall sustainable development strategies. Therefore, it requires integration into each country's overall socio-economic development plans. In other words, by facilitating development of the intellectual, human and institutional capacity, NFPs aim to embody an enabling environment for sustainable forest management as well as for forest-based economic and social development. Thus, the IPF/IFF proposals urge countries - particularly developing states and countries with economies in transition - to include capacity building as an objective of their NFPs, with particular attention to training, extension services, technology transfer and financial assistance from developed countries.

It is now seen as an imminent task for the countries with economies in transition to establish appropriate NFPs under the initiative of their respective governments, in order to achieve sustainable management of their forest resources. Especially urgent and essential for establishing a sound basis for sustainable forest management is integration of research and education into the development of appropriate forest policies (NFPs) and practices, alongside the necessary institution building. In a transitional society facing numerous challenges related to prioritization in overall resources allocation and mobilization, there is a lack of crucial prerequisites for forest policy development processes, including the research and education capacity of the forestry sector. This means not only a shortage of financial and human resources, but also fundamental problems pertaining to the education and academic research systems and facilities. Therefore, capacity building in the interface of forest research and education is a serious challenge for forest policy development in countries with economies in transition.

However, only limited attention has thus far been paid to the need for establishing linkages between forest policy, research, and education. This is related to the lack of international coordination in developing forest research and academic education at the global level - a process which this project aims to facilitate.



Objectives

The current project, initiated by the United Nations University (UNU), European Forest Institute (EFI) and the University of Joensuu - SILVA Network, tries to open the way out of such a deadlocked situation. For this purpose, the project will first examine the state-of-the-art of and challenges for forest research and higher education in the countries with economies in transition, and analyze the possibilities of research and education to contribute to forest policy development processes in those countries. Based on the findings of the thorough evaluation and analysis of the current situation in the region and in each country, recommendations will be made regarding specific actions to be taken.

It is expected that the required actions will vary from one country to another, depending on the level of economic and social development, political and sectoral commitment, needs and conditions of forest resources, etc. In many cases, however, the problems and challenges would also have similar features, and it is expected that collective learning from each other's experience can lead to more efficient alleviation of the current situation. To enable those countries to share their experience and expertise, the project also aims to support development of forest-related regional networks and research projects in and among the 28 targeted countries with economies in transition.

Activities

To fulfill the above objectives, a series of joint conferences and seminars are planned that will bring together various stakeholders of the forestry sector in countries with economies in transition, including policy makers, public and private entities operating in the forestry sector, and forest-related university faculties, researchers and non-governmental organizations. International organizations, research institutions, donor agencies, and governmental and non-governmental organizations from outside the transition countries are also invited to strengthen the



networks and create partnership arrangements. The first of such conferences took place in July 2002 in Kaunas, Lithuania.



Kaunas conference with participants from transition countries



Field excursion into Lithuanian forests

Training workshops are also to be held for the purpose of capacity development of those actively engaged in forest management in the targeted countries. The project organizes "summer schools" to promote discussion on forest sciences in the context of national and international forest policy dialogue, and plans to develop M.Sc. courses on policy analysis and forest economics. Also in the project scope is further education for forestry administration and forest policy planning.

Information on the findings and outcomes of the above conferences, seminars and workshops will be disseminated to all those concerned and to the general public through publications and websites.

Project Target Countries





Collaborating Organizations

The project is run jointly by the following three core organizations in collaboration with national partners in the transition countries (see the map inside) :



Photos (from Slovakia, Poland and Lithuania) courtesy of Bohdan Konôpka, Jo van Brusselen, Josef Vladovič and Kumi Furuyashiki

United Nations University (UNU)

UNU is an organ of the United Nations established by the General Assembly in 1973. Its objective is to form an international community of scholars engaged in research, advanced training and the dissemination of knowledge related to the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare. Its activities focus mainly on peace and conflict resolution, environment and sustainable development in the changing world, and science and technology in relation to these issues. As a think-tank of the UN system, the University operates a worldwide network of research and post-graduate training centres, with its planning and coordinating headquarters in Tokyo, Japan. Since the mid-1990s, the Environment and Sustainable Development (ESD) Unit of UNU has been working actively on the issue of sustainable forest development within the framework of the World Forest, Society and Environment (WFSE) Research Programme. The mission of this programme is to conduct globally relevant research and human capacity building in forests, society and environment in support of sustainable forest management and the well-being of people.

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European Forest Institute (EFI)

EFI is a leading forest research network in Europe with its hub in Joensuu, Finland. It has currently 142 members from 39 countries, which are mostly forest research organizations, universities, and industry and non-governmental organizations. EFI's mission is to promote, conduct and cooperate in research of forestry and forest products at the pan-European level, and to make the results of the research known to all interested parties, notably in the areas of policy formulation and implementation. It thus aims to promote the conservation and sustainable management of forests for producing goods and services in a sustainable way. With its unique network of forest scientists and other professionals, EFI conducts and facilitates research in such priority areas as forest ecology and management, forest product markets and socio-economics, policy analysis, and forest resources and information.

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European Forest Science Academic Network - SILVA Network

Established in 1989, SILVA Network is an academic network comprising most of the universities involved in forestry education in the European Union. It currently gathers together 40 active member institutions in 22 European countries. Its objective is to stimulate and facilitate inter-university cooperation in the field of forestry education in Europe. It also aims to serve as a cooperative network between Western and Eastern European universities functioning in the forest sector; the participating institutions exchange students and staff members in order to improve their expertise. The current home institution of the SILVA Network is the University of Joensuu in Finland.

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