

International Union of Forest Research Organizations

IUFRO Meeting Report Form

Organizers of IUFRO meetings and IUFRO focal persons at IUFRO co-sponsored meetings, respectively, are kindly requested to fill in and return this form within two weeks after the meeting or by a given deadline by email (wolfrum@iufro.org). This information will be posted on the relevant IUFRO web pages and may be used for IUFRO News and the IUFRO Annual Report.

(Note: Save this file under a new name and write directly into the form.)

1) IUFRO focal person/meeting organizer:

Name: Janice Burns

Function in IUFRO: Thematic Networking Manager, Deputy Coordinator of IUFRO's Special Programme for Development of Capacities (SPDC), and project coordinator of the project "Wood for Globe".

Email: *burns@iufro.org*

2) Meeting data:

Full title of the meeting: Fast-Growing Trees to Advance Wood in the Bioeconomy in Africa, Side-event to the 27th Session of the International Commission on Poplars and Other Fast-Growing Trees Sustaining People and the Environment (IPC)

Date and venue: 22 October 2024, 16:15-17:45 (CEST), Palais des Congrès, Av. Jean Gabriel Domergue, 33300 Bordeaux, France

Meeting website: <https://www.plantedforests.org/ipc27/>

Number of participants: 50 in person approximately

Countries represented: African Countries

3) Organization of the meeting:

All IUFRO Units involved:

Host organization(s) and sponsor(s): The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Study tour(s) to:

4) Meeting report (*max. 100 words per paragraph*)

a) Background information (meeting context)

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines bioeconomy as the production, utilization, conservation, and regeneration of biological resources, including related knowledge and technology, to provide sustainable solutions across economic sectors and enable a transformation to a sustainable economy (Global Bioeconomy Summit Communiqué, 2020).

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Forests play a crucial role in the bioeconomy through wood, fiber, energy, and other products. With 40% of global GHG emissions coming from the built environment, wood can sustainably replace fossil fuel-based products in construction, textiles, and energy sectors. Fast-growing trees (FGTs) are particularly important, as they can meet increasing wood demand while contributing to climate change mitigation and improving rural livelihoods.

The International Commission on Poplars and Other Fast-Growing Trees Sustaining People and the Environment (IPC), placed within the FAO framework, help countries grow sustainable wood, ensure plant and environmental protection, and improve livelihoods. The Commission brings together policy and science to support FAO Member Countries in responsibly and sustainably expanding the management of fast-growing forests and trees.

This collaboration is further enhanced by interdisciplinary networks like IUFRO, which facilitate knowledge sharing and cooperation among scientists, practitioners, and stakeholders worldwide. Through these efforts, sustainable management practices are being developed that balance productivity with environmental and social concerns in planted forests.

In Africa, where population growth and urbanization are rapidly increasing the demand for wood products, FGTs can play a crucial role in developing a sustainable, forest-based bioeconomy. By focusing on appropriate species selection, improved genetics, and sustainable management practices, African countries can leverage FGTs to meet their wood product needs while addressing concerns about biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The main objective of the dialogue was to assess policy and science guiding the expansion of sustainable wood use as part of the bioeconomy. This was to be achieved by facilitating exchange of perspectives and lessons learned about opportunities, challenges, and pathways to increase access to and benefits from FGTs in the context of Africa's transition to the bioeconomy.

b) Key issues discussed/latest findings in the field (bullet points or text)

The implementation of bioeconomy in Africa, with particular emphasis on forestry development, represents a key opportunity for the continent's sustainable growth. This integrated approach combines sustainable resource management, innovation, and ecological transition, specifically incorporating agricultural and forestry sectors within a broader development framework. The African context presents both extraordinary potential and significant challenges: while the continent hosts vast natural resources, including 1.60 million hectares of natural forests with the Congo Basin accounting for 210 million hectares and 35 million hectares of planted forests, this natural wealth exists alongside mounting demographic pressure, with a current population of 1.4 billion projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050.

Within this context, research findings highlight promising growth potential for fast-growing tree plantations. Eucalyptus can achieve 15-25 cubic meters per hectare annually in tropical Africa, while Pines and Cypress species reach 12-17 cubic meters, and Teak approximately 10 cubic meters.

H.E. Rosalie Matondo, Ministry of Forest Economy of Republic of Congo, Issa Katwesige, Assistant Commissioner, Planning and Development, Forest Sector Support Department, Ministry of Water and Environment, Mr. Gordon Kofi Sarfo-Adu, Corporate Planning Manager, Forestry Commission, George Muthike (PhD), Deputy Director, Forest Products and Entrepreneurship Development, Kenya Forestry Research Institute, and Joris Van Acker, Professor of Wood Science at Ghent University, Belgium,

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discussed the national programs supporting fast growing trees in the bioeconomy. The participating countries highlighted the use of fast-growing trees for forest management and restoration, and the creation of biodiversity buffers. Among the most relevant species, they mentioned teak, eucalyptus, pinus, acacia, gmelina and cypress. However, capitalizing on these opportunities requires addressing substantial challenges: the continent currently struggles with overexploitation of natural resources, insufficient research and development infrastructure, and limited technology transfer capabilities. Sustainable fast-growing tree planting to advance the bioeconomy depends on Knowledge exchange and technical cooperation on seeds, pests and diseases, tree nursery management and certification, multiple tree uses, and efficient industrial processing. These structural issues, combined with a lack of skilled workforce and restricted access to global supply chains, demand a comprehensive approach to bioeconomy implementation that addresses both environmental sustainability and capacity building.

c) Conclusions (if possible, summarize key conclusions across presentations):

The discussions concluded that bioeconomy represents a transformative opportunity for African development, offering a pathway to economic growth while preserving natural resources. Success depends on several interconnected factors: strong political and institutional support working in concert with public-private partnerships, participatory governance ensuring community involvement, and the integration of smallholder farmers into commercial forestry operations.

Environmental benefits emerged as a cornerstone of bioeconomy's potential. When properly managed, Fast-Growing Trees (FGTs) reduce pressure on natural forests while providing essential ecosystem services, ranging from direct provisioning to regulatory functions and cultural benefits. The role of planted forests in climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration proved particularly significant.

The implementation pathway requires careful attention to local value addition and processing capabilities, underpinned by coherent policy frameworks that attract investment. Technology transfer and modernization must advance alongside youth entrepreneurship and green job creation, while robust research and development capabilities need to pair with sustainable resource management practices and internationally recognized certification standards.

The economic impact of bioeconomy extends beyond direct financial returns, creating opportunities for rural development, supporting the transition to renewable energy, and promoting circular economy development. The Uganda example demonstrates this potential through successful import substitution and export growth, while supporting local industry development through value addition.

Overall, while bioeconomy, particularly through forestry initiatives, offers a viable path for sustainable development in Africa, its success requires careful planning, strong institutional support, and balanced consideration of environmental and social factors.

d) Outlook to future activities (proceedings, future meetings, other):

The participating countries manifested interest in continuing exchanges and cooperation to advance the bioeconomy, including through dedicated platforms.

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4) Photos

Caption:

Credit (not protected by copyright):

5) Other information:

Communication activities (dissemination of information about the meeting; promotion of IUFRO)

a) Related publications /websites

- <https://www.fao.org/forestry/our-focus/forest-products/sustainable-wood-for-a-sustainable-world/en>
- <https://www.plantedforests.org/ipc27/>

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