

IUFRO and UNFF: The Role of Science in Global Forest Policy Development

By Andre Purrett, IUFRO-GFEP Project Manager, and Gerda Wolfrum, IUFRO Communications and PR

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) was established in 2002 as a subsidiary body under the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is composed of all Member States of the United Nations and specialized agencies. As an intergovernmental policy forum on forest issues, its main objective has been the promotion of the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests.

IUFRO is an accredited observer organization in the UNFF. Through a number of joint initiatives in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)¹, IUFRO supports the work of the UNFF and provides thematic contributions to the Forum's sessions.

In 2015, during the 11th session of the UNFF, the Forum decided on its future sessions and activities for the post-2015 agenda. As a result, it was agreed that the sessions of the Forum would take place every year, last for one week and would be thematically guided by the review cycle of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) of the United Nations.

Over the years, IUFRO has had a significant impact also on UNFF by producing global scientific assessment reports on forest-related issues in the frame of the Global Forest Expert Panels, a joint initiative of the CPF that is led and coordinated by IUFRO. Assessment reports on key topics have informed policy- and decision-makers of the interconnections between forests and climate and food security, for example.



*IUFRO Vice-President John Parrotta at UNFF 12
(Photo A. Purrett/IUFRO)*

The next global thematic assessment report will look at the interactions between forests and water, illustrating the cross-sectoral contributions of forests (SDG 15) on water (SDG 6). The ultimate goal of the new assessment is to contribute to the 2030 Agenda, to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF 2018) as well as to the UNFF 13 in May 2018. Find more information on GFEP here: <http://www.iufro.org/science/gfep/>

IUFRO at UNFF 12

The 12th session of the UNFF was held from 1-5 May 2017 in New York at the UN Headquarters. Over 300 participants gathered to discuss the implementation of the recently adopted United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (2017-2030); means of implementation for sustainable forest management; monitoring, assessment and reporting; and emerging issues and challenges.

IUFRO was very well represented in UNFF 12 both in means of numbers as well as visibility – the IUFRO delegation comprised 15 persons including many scientists from various IUFRO units. Throughout the week, IUFRO successfully engaged in the discussions of the UNFF by delivering statements, organizing scientific side events on topics of high concern and showcasing the effective impacts of IUFRO's work at the science-policy interface. During the statements, IUFRO informed the attending Member States about the importance of science in the development and implementation of forest policies.

¹ CPF is an informal, voluntary arrangement among 14 international organizations and secretariats with substantial programmes on forests. Members of the CPF are: CIFOR, CBD Secretariat, FAO, GEF, ICRAF, ITTO, IUCN, IUFRO, UNCCD Secretariat, UNFCCC Secretariat, UNDP, UNEP, UNFF Secretariat and the World Bank.

IUFRO also highlighted the opportunities related to the vast network of forest science worldwide, as most of the Member States attending UNFF sessions have research and education institutions that are members of IUFRO. Through these institutions, existing scientific expertise in these countries could be mobilized to support the effective attainment of the Global Forest Goals and targets set out in the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (2017-2030).

The 2017 session of UNFF focused on the contributions of forests to SDG 1 (poverty eradication), SDG 2 (food security) and SDG 5 (gender equality). Panel discussions during the main plenary sessions took place on each of the selected SDGs.

Panel discussion on contributions of forests to the achievement of SDG 2: Forests and Food Security

IUFRO was invited to contribute and take part in the panel discussion on the "Contributions of forests to the achievement of SDG 2: Forests and Food Security", on 3 May 2017. Three of the five panellists were connected to IUFRO and the previous Global Forest Expert Panel on Forests and Food Security. Mr Bhaskar Vira from the University of Cambridge (Chair of the previous IUFRO-GFEP), opened the session with a keynote presentation. Panellists included Mr John Parrotta (US Forest Service, IUFRO Vice-President) and Ms Bronwen Powell (Pennsylvania State University, US); both of them were authors of the GFEP report on "Forests, Trees and Landscapes for Food Security and Nutrition" launched in May 2015 during the 11th session of the UNFF. (For download: <http://www.iufro.org/science/gfep/forests-and-food-security-panel/report/>)



Panel discussion on forests and food security at UNFF 12 (Photo A. Purret/IUFRO)

IUFRO scientific side events

During the week, IUFRO organized two scientific side events between the main plenary sessions of the UNFF 12. Both side events were fortunately located in the main plenary room and were attended by a fair number of UNFF 12 delegates who were also actively engaged in the discussions.

Healthy forests for a prosperous environment: the multi-faceted aspect of forest degradation

This side event on May 1 was organized by the IUFRO Task Force on Climate Change and Forest Health.

It discussed novel emergencies and global challenges such as air pollution and climate change impacts, and solutions, e.g. forest supersites and sustainable harvesting, and how to make forests more resilient against climate change, halt forest degradation and achieve healthy and functional forests. The list of speakers included J. Parrotta (IUFRO Vice President, US Forest Service), A. De Marco (ENEA, Italy), M. Kozlov (University of Turku, Finland), P. Sicard (ACRI, France), C. Branquinho (University of Lisbon, Portugal), A. Bytnerowicz (US Forest Service), E. Marchi (University of Florence, Italy) and E. Paoletti (Italian Society of Silviculture and Forest Ecology, SISEF) as the Chair of the IUFRO Task Force. More information on the Task Force can be found here: <http://www.iufro.org/science/task-forces/climate-change-forest-health/>



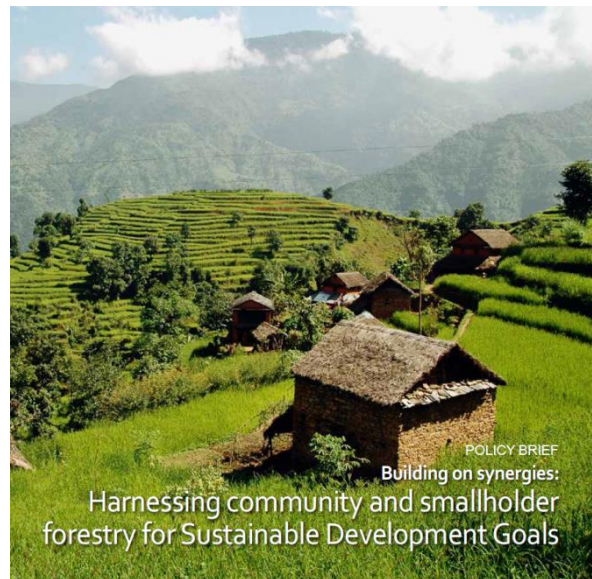
Side event of IUFRO TF on Climate Change and Forest Health (Photo A. Purret/IUFRO)

Harnessing the potential of community and small-holder forestry for SDGs

This side event on May 2 was organized by the IUFRO Special Project on World Forests, Society and Environment (IUFRO-WFSE). It focused on the significant interconnections between community and smallholder forestry and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The related WFSE Policy Brief *Building on synergies: Harnessing community and smallholder forestry for sustainable development goals* was launched at the event. (Download here:

<http://www.iufro.org/science/special/wfse/wfse-news/#c26245>)

The list of speakers included: J. Parrotta (IUFRO Vice President, US Forest Service), W. de Jong (Kyoto University), S. Lawry (CIFOR), G. Galloway (University of Florida, US) and P. Katila (Natural Resources Institute, Finland, LUKE) as the Coordinator of the IUFRO-WFSE. For information on IUFRO-WFSE, visit: <http://www.iufro.org/science/special/wfse/>



In conclusion, attending UNFF 12 was very successful for IUFRO and its delegation. As this session of the UNFF was devoted to the technical discussions and exchange of experiences, IUFRO clearly fulfilled its role to share scientific results to policy and decision-makers, thus enhancing the science-policy interface in the forest sector.

More information on IUFRO's participation in the UNFF 12 can be found here:

<http://www.iufro.org/events/other-major-events/iufro-at-unff12/>

Some of the sessions, especially the Panel discussion on Forests and Food Security was also live recorded and is available for re-visiting in the UN WebTV: <http://webtv.un.org/watch/6th-meeting-twelfth-session-of-the-united-nations-forum-on-forests-implementation-of-the-un-strategic-plan-for-forests-2017-2030/5420768109001>