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From Development Discourses to Providing Data for Decision Making

Report from an international seminar in Helsinki, Finland, on 1 March 2016
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The international seminar organized jointly by IUFRO WFSE and FAO-Finland Forestry Programme presented results of both projects and showed how research and natural resource assessments and monitoring can provide important information for enhancing sustainable development.

The event discussed from different perspectives some of the important topics in forest-related development and the provision of forest data for advancing sustainable development. Discussions focused on topics such as implications of sustainable development goals for forests, environmental concerns in the bioeconomy discourse, perceptions of the problem of illegal logging and its solutions across the globe, equity discourses around REDD+ and the relationship between REDD+ and agricultural intensification as well as the implications of the climate agreement of COP21 in Paris.

Sustainable forest management (SFM) can be achieved only if forest policy and management decisions are based on a monitoring system which produces up-to-date and statistically robust evidence on forest resources and their changes. Integrated land use assessment in Zambia and national forest resources assessment and monitoring in Tanzania were presented as examples. Standardization and transparency of forestry data and information is paramount. A good example of how to achieve this is the Open Foris software developed within the FAO-Finland Forestry Programme.

Forests are essential for achieving the goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This has been widely acknowledged, but less attention has been placed on the possible implications of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) for forests. Goal 15 (Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss) explicitly addresses forests and stresses both forest protection and sustainable use. However, efforts to advance towards many of the other SDGs can also have implications for forests and for reaching Goal 15.

Based on the assumption that SDGs are implemented effectively and progress towards the different goals is attained, Dr Glenn Galloway (University of Florida, USA) explored the implications of some of the SDGs for both strict forest protection and for SFM. For example, Goal 1 (End poverty) could imply less emphasis on strict protection and more on SFM and development of forest-based activities to generate income and employment. However, efforts to create employment and income in other sectors could undermine SFM and increase pressure on forests. Goal 2 (End hunger) could favor forest protection and use rights to ensure sustainable access to food originating in forests, or land use change to convert productive land under forests into agricultural production. Goal 4 (Quality education) may lead to greater public concern for deforestation and loss of ecosystem services favoring public support for forest protection at the expense of management and use of forests. Goal 6 (Water and sanitation for all) would generally favor

The importance of forests to achieving the SDGs has been rather widely discussed, but less attention has been placed on the implications of the SDGs for forests. Dr Glenn Galloway from University of Florida, USA, explored this topic by discussing what the efforts to advance towards some of the SDGs could mean for forests. (Photo by Arttu Malkamäki)

forest protection in water catchment areas and in riparian zones, reducing forest areas for production. Goal 7 (Affordable and sustainable energy) could lead to pressure to convert forests to renewable energy plantations or lead to greater areas of tree plantations for energy production. Goal 10 (Reduce inequality) could reduce tenure insecurity perhaps leading to less strict protection and more sustainable management of forests, or more deforestation if lawful owners can convert their forest land to agriculture. Goal 13 (Climate action) could result in increasing rehabilitation and the area of protected forest for mitigation, but could undermine local benefits stemming from SFM, depending on tenure of carbon rights.

Dr Galloway concluded that the SDGs are interconnected, leading to interactions, synergies and trade-offs and to variable impacts on forests and their use. Both sustainable development and sustainable use and management of forest are complex and evolving, multi-scale and multi-stakeholder processes. Addressing the challenges in advancing them requires interdisciplinary and holistic research approaches. The efforts to progress towards SFM and related research offer important information and lessons learned for progressing towards the SDGs.

The seminar was held in Helsinki, Finland, and supported by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. Most of the presentations given in this event are available on the IUFRO WFSE www-pages: http://www.iufro.org/science/special/wfse/wfse-news/

A news article about the seminar with the title “Forest surveys in developing countries support climate change mitigation” has also been published on the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland website: http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=342657&nodeid=15148&contentlan=2&culture=en-US