

Small-scale Rural Forest Use and Management: Global Policies vs. Local Knowledge

Gerard Buttoud, Coordinator of IUFRO 6.12.01 Analysis and evaluation of forest policies and programmes

The IUFRO International Symposium on "Small-scale Rural Forest Use and Management: Global Policies versus Local Knowledge", held in Gérardmer, France, from June 23 to 27, 2008, explored the important role of local knowledge in managing small-scale rural forests and the impacts or implications of broader 'global' policies on small-scale rural forestry.

Local Knowledge

In many regions of the world, forest activities are carried out by the rural population on collective lands and by individual farmers on agroforestry or farm forestry plots. These types of forest activities play an important role in sustaining rural communities. The management of the related wooded areas is usually based on traditional local knowledge which is particularly adapted to the ecological and socio-economic conditions of the area. The common feature of all these different practices is that they are carried out at a small-scale level, with adaptive management.

Global Policies

The management of forests is, however, also influenced by broader regional, national and international policies, which are almost always developed remote from the local areas in which they are to be implemented. These 'global' policies often present an abstract and even sometimes idealistic vision of the role of the forests in rural development, and may propose means and mechanisms which are not fitting to the real issues faced by rural communities in managing their forests. In addition, despite a rich heritage of traditional or local forest knowledge in many regions, forest administrators, managers and policy makers are often not aware of this knowledge base and do not consider it in their decisions.

During the symposium week, more than 100 specialists from almost 30 countries in the world exchanged their experiences and visions on this complex issue. The papers presented generated a long and rich discussion which gives a clear illustration of the challenges ahead for scientists, managers and policy makers alike.

As a satellite meeting, a Pre-conference Research Training Workshop devoted to « **Systems Analysis as Applied to Forest Policy and Management Issues** », was organized in Nancy, France, from June 19 to 21, 2008, by AgroParisTech-ENGREF and the University of Queensland,



Photo of rural landscape in Austria,
by Judith Stoeger, IUFRO Headquarters

with an additional concrete support from UNESCO and the Regional Government (*Conseil Régional*) of Lorraine. This initiative provides a good example of the relevance of the science-policy interface on concrete topics such as the one addressed by the conference. It also shows the interest to hold inter-division meetings devoted to specific scientific topics, which can enhance multi-disciplinary approaches.

In order to support the discussion during the symposium, specific **Pre-Conference Proceedings** (Buttoud, G., Ed., AgroParisTech-ENGREF, Nancy, 280 p.), including the full papers discussed in plenary sessions, and summaries for the other ones, were made available to participants at the beginning of the meeting.

For further information, please, contact:

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The symposium was organized by [IUFRO 3.08.00 Small-scale forest management](#), co-ordinated by J. Herbohn, in co-operation with [IUFRO 6.12.01 Analysis and evaluation of forest policies and programmes](#), co-ordinated by G. Buttoud, and the IUFRO Task Force on [Traditional Forest Knowledge](#), co-ordinated by J. Parrotta.

This conference was strongly supported by the Local Government (*Conseil Général*) of the Vosges, which promotes applied research development through a special contract with AgroParisTech-ENGREF Nancy. Assistance was also received by the State Forest Agency (*Office National des Forêts*), the Vosges Agriculture Chamber (*Chambre d'Agriculture*), and the Regional Natural Park of the Central and South-Vosges (*Parc Naturel Régional des Ballons des Vosges*).