

Climate Change Adaptation is About People

*Excerpts from the draft report from the conference on “Adaptation of Forests and Forest Management to Changing Climate with Emphasis on Forest Health: A Review of Science, Policies and Practices” Umeå, Sweden, 25-28 August 2008**

The fourth scientific assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has recently concluded that global climate change is very likely to be happening, and to be caused by human activities. Forests are intricately tied to climate change as sources of greenhouse gases, when they are destroyed, and as sinks for carbon, when they grow or expand. As large, extensively managed, long-lived ecosystems on less favorable sites, they respond sensitively to climatic changes and may become its victims, together with the people that depend on them.

In fact, forests and people are already being affected by climate change and this impact is likely to accelerate, with local and global negative consequences. On all continents, increased incidence, duration or severity of abiotic extremes like fire, storms and drought, and of insect and disease outbreaks have significantly impacted local forests and, in many cases have also affected the livelihoods of local populations.

Against this background, about 330 forest researchers, managers and decision makers from over 50 countries convened in Umeå, Sweden, to present and discuss ideas and concepts, facts and figures relating to the adaptation of forests and forestry to climate change. Presentations and discussions emphasized current and projected impacts, as well as research, policies and practices that are needed to enable us to manage healthy, productive forests to meet future societal needs for the full range of forest goods and services.

One of the main messages of the conference is that adaptation of forests and forest management to changing climate is possible, but there is little time for planning and acting. It has also become obvious throughout the conference that adaptation needs and capacity differ dramatically between developed and developing countries. In developed countries, issues are of a more technical nature, and address concerns



*Photo: courtesy of Kathy Hopkins, RPF, Victoria, BC, Canada
Keynote panelists from left to right:
Abigail Kimbell, Chief of the USDA Forest Service;
Doug Konkin, Deputy Minister, British Columbia Ministry of Forests;
Balgis Osman Elasha, Higher Council for Environment and Natural Resources, Khartoum, Sudan*

raised with respect to the forest and the forest industry. In developing countries, issues are often more immediate, at the community level, and are fuelled by conflicts between environmental and economic objectives. Consequently, a strong need to support forest science and community forestry in developing countries has been identified.

Conference participants underlined that adaptation and mitigation research must include socio-economics because the root causes of climate change are linked to behavioral patterns of people and the impetus for change comes from socio-economic, not ecological crises. Therefore, it is only by linking the physical drivers to their socioeconomic impacts that scientists can fully inform policy makers. Bearing that in mind, adaptation and mitigation can be co-managed into win-win solutions, as mitigation programs can promote sustainable forestry which, in turn, should decrease the vulnerability of local populations to climate change.

**) The conference was organized by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and IUFRO. On three days prior to the conference, the IUFRO Special Programme for Developing Countries (SPDC) organized a sponsored workshop on the science-policy interface attended by 22 scientists and decision makers from 18 developing countries.*

The conference report has been compiled by Pierre Bernier (FOMR). The final conference report will be used, among other things, for the work of an Expert Panel of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests whose own report will help inform the United Nations Forum on Forests on the issues related to adaptation at its next meeting in the spring of 2009. Visit: www.forestadaptation2008.net