

COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY (COFO)

FAO HEADQUARTERS, ROME

ADDRESS BY

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to address the Committee on Forestry for the first time as Director-General of FAO.

COFO provides a much-needed forum to discuss forestry-related matters at the highest level.

Forests, which cover at least 31 percent of our planet, play a fundamental role in global and national economies, and in FAO's mandate to eradicate hunger, malnutrition and extreme poverty.

Some 350 million of the world's poorest people, including 60 million indigenous people, depend on forests for their daily subsistence and long-term survival.

Agroforestry, or "on-farm" forestry, can contribute up to 40 percent of farm income through the harvesting of wood, fruits, oils and medicines.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger is FAO's mission. Today, although we have the means to ensure access to food for the entire world population, about 900 million people still suffer from hunger each day.

We need not only to end hunger, but we need to achieve this goal in a sustainable way.

The success of FAO's work in improving lives will depend, very much, on how we balance the use and preservation of natural resources. This includes forests, which play an important role in environmental factors like carbon sequestration, soil and water quality preservation, and conserving biodiversity.

When I took office in January of this year, FAO embarked on a strategic thinking process that is designed to help us make better use of our human and financial resources.

After identifying seven global challenges in the areas of food security and agriculture and looking, also, at our core functions and comparative advantages, we are proposing five cross-cutting strategic objectives to guide our work.

- First, to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition;
- Second, to increase production in agriculture, fisheries and forestry in an economic, social and environmentally sustainable manner;
- Third, to improve the livelihood of rural populations, in particular women and youth, through enhanced employment opportunities and increased access to production resources;
- Fourth, to enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national, regional and international levels;
- Fifth, to increase the resilience of rural livelihoods to threats and crises.

The ongoing process to prepare this Strategic Framework has received inputs from every FAO governing body that has met this year, including technical committees and the Regional Conferences. It has also received internal and external inputs from experts in the areas we work on and partner organizations.

The FAO Council held in June supported the strategic thinking process, welcomed the proposal to have fewer and cross-cutting strategic objectives and requested that more attention be given to sustainable management of natural resources.

We have continued to fine-tune the strategic objectives and have started work on the action plans we will follow to reach these strategic objectives.

In line with the request of the Council and our ongoing work, we are seeking COFO's comments and guidance on how FAO's support for sustainable management of natural resources can be strengthened in the current version of the strategic objectives.

We look forward to receiving your inputs.

In the following weeks and months we will continue this consultation process.

In December, the FAO Council will review the Strategic Framework for approval, and provide guidance on the Medium Term Plan.

We will also continue our work to streamline organizational processes and build on areas in which we already excel.

Within FAO, the on-going decentralization process will help us to link our normative work in forestry more closely with field projects and partnerships.

We also intend to strengthen the quality of normative products like the Global Forest Resources Assessment and other research.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Committee has a full and demanding agenda. I would like to briefly refer to some specific issues that will help to focus FAO's work on forestry.

One crucial factor in FAO's work on forestry is our network of partnerships.

Pooling our resources and know-how is especially important in a time of budget constraints and increasing demands.

Forestry at FAO has taken a forward-looking approach. Our partners are already helping to multiply the efficiency of FAO's resources and inputs.

I will name just a few:

- the National Forest Programme Facility,
- the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests;
- the solid cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe,
- the United Nations collaborative initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation in developing countries (UN-REDD),
- the United Nations Environmental Program, and
- the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

It will take a collective effort, including of all of our partners within and beyond the UN system, to manage the world's forests in a sustainable way.

In fact, the importance of forestry in sustainable development overall was one of the cross-cutting issues considered at the Rio+20 Conference in June.

The 2012 Edition of the State of the World Forests, which will be presented this week, is devoted precisely to the role of forests in sustainable development.

Our keynote speaker, His Excellency Hassan Mahmud, Minister for the Environment of Bangladesh, knows, from his own national experience, some of the challenges posed by deforestation and its wide-ranging impact on communities.

Your Excellency, you also have seen the benefits of reversing this trend.

Let me take the opportunity of the presence of Brazilian Minister for the Environment, Izabella Teixeira, to also recognize the advances that Brazil and other governments from the Amazon Region are achieving in reducing deforestation.

In many countries, deforestation, forest degradation and inadequate agricultural practices are contributing to significant losses of soil each year.

Sustainable agriculture and forestry can reverse soil degradation and help to combat desertification.

Let me take this opportunity to mention a proposal discussed yesterday at a meeting with the Minister for Environment of Brazil to have a more regular monitoring of forest cover. I call on this Commission to express support for this idea.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We share a common sense of what needs to be done. Now we need to mobilize resource partners, bilateral or multilateral, especially International Financial Institutions and the Global Environment Facility.

We also need to make sure that soil protection and the fight against desertification are placed high on the international agenda.

As you know, FAO is working with South Africa to organize the Fourteenth (XIV) edition of the World Forestry Congress in 2015. This will be an important opportunity to draw international attention to these issues.

An agreement paving the way for smooth preparation of the event in South Africa will be signed later today.

Distinguished Participants,

The work of COFO is highly appreciated within FAO for its technical commitment and cooperative spirit, and also for its integration of priorities from around the world, as shared through the Regional Forestry Commissions.

I close now with best wishes for an excellent session, and I thank you for doing your part to advance efforts to eradicate hunger and improve lives.

Thank you.