



NEWS FLASH

**FORUM ON FORESTS AND ENERGY -
BALANCING RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Buenos Aires, 22 October 2009

14:00 - 18:30 hours

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND

Interest in bioenergy has increased over the last decade, due to factors such as high oil prices concerns about energy security and commitments to reduce carbon emissions. The use of wood for energy is an important component of the bioenergy sector and includes both the use of wood for heat and power production and the use of wood to produce liquid biofuels.

In many developed countries, advanced bioenergy production systems have been used for many years to produce heat and power from wood. In most developing countries, the use of wood for energy is very important, but is currently dominated by traditional uses of fuelwood and charcoal. However, some of the larger developing countries also have ambitions to increase bioenergy production using modern technologies.

Most recently, the production of liquid biofuels has rapidly increased. Almost all of this production is currently derived from agricultural crops, but the technology to produce liquid biofuels from wood is improving and production is expected to increase greatly in the future.

The above developments present both opportunities and challenges for the forestry sector. For example, liquid biofuel production will increase the demand to convert forest land to biofuel crops. However, the use of wood for energy production will also increase demand for roundwood and wood residues. These new demands will not only affect the forestry sector, but will have a wider impact on the environment and the people living in and around forests.

The impacts of increased bioenergy production on forests are complicated and will be strongly affected by the policies and mechanisms used in countries to influence these developments. These policies are currently at an early stage of development in many countries and forestry policy makers may not at present have a good understanding of many of the issues. Therefore, a Forum on Forests and Energy will be organized during the XIII World Forestry Congress, with the following objectives:

- to assess and share the current state of knowledge about the risks and opportunities for forestry in future bioenergy markets; and
- to assist forestry policy makers to provide informed inputs into national and international policy discussions on bioenergy.

The outcome of the forum will be a better understanding of the issues and impacts related to forests and bioenergy development so that policy makers can identify suitable policies and measures that will balance the risks and opportunities in the sector.

TENTATIVE AGENDA

14:00 - 14:10 Opening of Roundtable

Cancillería de la República Argentina

14:10 - 14:15 Quick vote: will bioenergy development be good or bad for the world?

Quick vote by show of hands: yes, no or don't know.

14:15 -14:30 Keynote address

The keynote address will provide a quick overview of the trends, current status and outlook for bioenergy markets. This will include issues such as the contribution of wood to energy markets and the main factors affecting the economic feasibility of wood energy systems. It will also introduce the main issues related to the sector that will be discussed in the programme (the environmental and social impacts of bioenergy development, current and emerging technologies). It will finish by highlighting a few of the most critical choices that policy makers have to make with respect to bioenergy development.

Bioenergy development: issues and impacts for the forestry sector

14:30 - 15:15 Presentations and discussion

Current status of markets and technology for wood energy production

The feasibility of using wood for energy production is partly determined by the technologies available to grow, harvest, transport and convert wood into energy and biofuel. Many national and international agencies are currently investing in research and technology on all aspects of the wood energy supply chain to bring down production costs and improve the economic viability of bioenergy production. This session will briefly review the current status of such technologies as well as the emerging markets for wood energy. (Speakers will each present for 10 minutes, with 15 minutes for panel discussion)

Cost-effective wood supply for energy uses

Technology perspectives on production of energy and liquid biofuels from cellulose

Sustainable international bioenergy trade: securing international supply and demand

15:15 - 15:45 Coffee break

15:45 - 16:30 Presentations and discussion

The environmental impact of bioenergy production systems: how good is wood?

The environmental benefits of bioenergy are a major driving force behind the greater interest in this subject in recent years. However, initial optimism about these benefits has been replaced by more caution as research has shown that the benefits can vary greatly depending on the types of bioenergy produced and the land use changes associated with bioenergy production. The net impact of bioenergy use on greenhouse gas emissions is a major focus of this debate, but other issues such as water use and biodiversity are gaining attention. This session will review some of these issues and assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of wood as a source of bioenergy compared to other feedstocks. (Speakers will each present for 10 minutes, with 15 minutes for panel discussion).

Greenhouse gas balances of biomass and bioenergy systems

Implications of biofuels for water availability and use

Biofuels and biodiversity: impacts and appropriate policy responses

Bioenergy development and poverty alleviation

Bioenergy developments are likely to result in some profound changes in rural economies due to increased competition for resources and new market opportunities. Depending on how these changes are managed, they have the potential to improve local livelihoods or they may increase conflict and marginalise the rural poor even further. Key issues are likely to be competition for land and the expansion or diversion of outputs (wood and crops) towards bioenergy production. In addition to modern systems for bioenergy production, there remains considerable scope to enhance local livelihoods through improvement of traditional wood fuel production systems and introduction of modern technologies at the small-scale. This session will examine some of the risks and opportunities of bioenergy development for the rural poor. (Speakers will each present for 10 minutes, with 15 minutes for panel discussion).

Bioenergy and food security

Bioenergy and access to land

Improving rural livelihoods through bioenergy investments

17:15 - 17:30 Quick vote: will bioenergy development be good or bad for the world?

and for forests?

and for the environment?

and for people?

Where should development efforts be focused (technology, environmental performance, bioenergy and poverty)?

17:30 - 18:30 Panel discussion

Bioenergy policies and measures: how to plot a course for sustainable outcomes

The technical sessions are likely to highlight the complexity of issues surrounding the development of bioenergy and the potential role of wood in future developments. The “quick vote” should also indicate what the audience thinks are the most important issues that remain to be addressed. This session will be used to discuss policy options either currently in place or being considered by some of the major countries interested in bioenergy development. (Possible formats are questions from the floor, written questions collected from participants, or questions developed by FAO in advance). The purpose of this will be to share experiences and develop ideas that can be considered in countries or at the international level.