



# AFRICAN PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL FOREST PROCESSES



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## CONTEXT

One objective of the *Sustainable Forest Management in Africa (SFM)* project has been to identify urgent issues and concerns for Africa to give priority to in international forest processes (IFPs), and to promote an increased African participation in these, based on analyses of previous experiences and lessons learnt. Thus, one of the first studies to be commissioned by the project was entitled “Observations on participation by Africa in international forest processes”. The full report by Jones R. Kamugisha, Bai-Mass Taal and Reidar Persson is available on the web site [www.afornet.org](http://www.afornet.org).

Full account was taken of previous efforts to enhance African participation in international forest processes. For example, the authors reviewed key issues and lessons from the efforts by the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) and the African Ministerial Committee on Environment (AMCEN), who collaborated in preparing African delegations for the final session of the Inter-governmental Forum on Forests (IFF4) in New York in 2000. More recently (4–6 April, 2005), the project convened a preparatory meeting (see photo) of key members of selected African delegations to the 5th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF5). The meeting, which was convened in Nairobi and also benefited from the active participation of key African forestry experts, had the following main objectives:

- ✿ To provide a platform for African forest stakeholders – people who will represent their countries on official delegations as well as independent resource persons – to interact and to discuss the agenda of UNFF5 with the view to identify common African or sub-regional concerns and viewpoints.

- ✿ To discuss African views on suggested follow-ups of the UNFF process, both regarding the form of the continuation of the process itself, as well as all the concrete recommended proposals for action, use of criteria and indicators, and other developments coming out of UNFF and its precursors (IPF and IFF).

- ✿ To discuss and, if possible and relevant, agree on how Africa can ensure opportunities and develop mechanisms for being better prepared to participate and have a regional voice in international forest and related processes in the future.



*African participation in International Forest Processes and forums (here COFO 2005) has been low and inconsistent in the last decades.*

## SOME KEY ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

The commissioned study and the Nairobi meeting mentioned above have identified some key issues that need to be addressed in enhancing African participation in international forest processes:

1. There is a very low and inconsistent participation of African countries and regional organisations in the various international forest processes such as IPF, IFF, UNFF, etc.;

2. As a direct consequence of the above, African contributions and concerns are not influencing the outcomes of the processes;

3. Concerned national institutions in Africa face huge challenges in mainstreaming the outcomes of the international processes. For example, many countries have yet to review and fully address the UNCED/IPF/IFF recommendations on sustainable forest management;

4. The same African forestry institutions are often faced with many overlapping international and regional initiatives requiring substantial human and financial resources to be adequately covered; and,

5. There is inadequate participation by some important players in the forest sector, particularly the private forest industry, in addressing key issues affecting the sector.

## LESSONS LEARNT

### Addressing low and inconsistent participation

There are many reasons why so few Sub-Saharan Africa countries have been able to consistently participate in the international forest processes. The most common one is lack of funds to support delegations to the various discussion forums. In most cases, SSA countries rely on one country representative based in diplomatic missions in the cities where meetings are convened (normally New York, Geneva or Rome). Furthermore, countries nominate different individuals to successive forums resulting in lack of institutional memory and continuity. In extreme cases, this has resulted in countries taking contradictory positions on specific issues in successive sessions.

An even more serious deficiency is the fact that many countries send delegations to the various forums without adequate preparation on issues under discussion and/or negotiation. Delegations often lack technical capacity to meaningfully contribute to the debates. This sometimes has led to a lack of interest in and commitment to the issues discussed.

The weak and inconsistent participation is a very important area that needs improvement and it is being addressed by the SFM in Africa initiative. It is fully recognised that many SSA countries lack the capacity and resources to effectively participate in international forest processes. Some countries lack resource persons who are “on top” of issues under discussion. In some cases, there

is little understanding and dialogue, at the national level, on the issues under international debate.

The above lessons have prompted the SFM in Africa project to facilitate the setting up of a *Technical Support Team (TST)* of African experts to:

1. Assist countries with analyses of issues of common or sub-regional African concern in the international forest processes, and,

2. Mobilise and co-ordinate enhanced participation of SSA countries in the process.

For example, the initiative has taken concrete steps to strengthen SSA country participation at the fifth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests in May 2005. Furthermore, the project will sustain such support in subsequent international forest processes.

### Addressing the low influence of SSA countries

As a direct consequence of the undesirable situation described above, SSA countries have had very limited influence on decisions and recommendations coming out of the international forest processes. Yet, any resulting legally or non-legally binding international arrangements will also affect SSA countries. There is a need to mobilise contributions from SSA countries in the international forest processes to enhance their influence on the outcomes. There is also a need to move away from “lone ranger” type of contributions by individual countries, which rarely have any significant impact, towards regional consultations for a common voice of African countries. This can be achieved through mechanisms such as the preparatory meeting in Nairobi and the Technical Support Team mentioned above.

### Mainstreaming the process outcomes

Often, delegates who have participated in the process forums do not effectively communicate key outcomes to relevant national agencies and interest groups back home. In some cases, therefore, lead national implementing agencies are not updated on process outcomes and these do not feed into national plans and legislation. There is little policy advocacy at national and regional levels to ensure that process outcomes are mainstreamed into national forest programmes.

This has been identified as a high priority intervention area for the current project. For example, there are plans to sustain a group or network of forestry experts, which will, among other things, spearhead policy advocacy for mainstreaming process outcomes in national forest programmes. The project will also support capacity building for national forest programmes in SSA countries.

### Making the right choices from among process proposals for action

Many SSA countries find difficulties in coping with the many proposals coming out of the international processes. The IPF/IFF processes, for example, resulted in 135 specific proposals for action towards



*In April 2005, the SFM in Africa project organised an informal preparatory meeting for the UNFF 5 meeting in New York in May. The picture shows participants in Nairobi.*

sustainable forest management. In addition, most SSA countries are also signatories to related Rio conventions – UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD – all of which have their own specific and often related and overlapping sets of proposals for action. Given their limited financial and human resources, the countries have to prioritise what outcomes to adopt and implement. They also need to streamline their implementation to avoid duplication in national programmes.

There is an urgent need to help the countries analyse the proposals and to make the right choices on the most appropriate actions to be taken at the national and field levels. This remains a big challenge for most countries and will be a key area of focus for the continued work of this project.

### Increasing private sector participation

Many SSA countries have already adopted national forest programmes (nfps) as frameworks for actions towards sustainable forest management. Through nfps, there is supposed to be enhanced participation of the private sector in national processes. However, to date there is very little private sector participation in SSA delegations to international processes. Within countries, this deficiency could be addressed through prior consultations between delegations and the private sector, but rarely is.

The SFM in Africa project will therefore also address this issue by ensuring that the private sector is represented in its team of experts, which will mobilise and co-ordinate an enhanced and comprehensive African voice in the international forest processes.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The Nairobi meeting of April 2005 in preparation for the fifth session of UNFF discussed and made specific recommendations on the way forward in addressing the question of how to achieve an increased African voice in international forest processes. For example, the meeting identified a Technical Support

Team (TST), which will assist African delegations at the forthcoming UNFF5 (in May 2005). Other recommendations included:

- ✿ Adopting a common statement of the Nairobi preparatory meeting on a strategy for consultation among African delegations at UNFF5;

- ✿ Circulating the statement to other African delegations to UNFF5 both directly and through the African Union Secretariat;

- ✿ Agreeing on tentative membership and modus operandi for the Technical Support Team (TST) to provide assistance/advice to African delegations during UNFF5 negotiations;

- ✿ Soliciting nominations for TST membership

taking into account, among others, representation of the recognised sub-regional groupings of the African continent, language diversity, expertise in and experience with the UNFF process; legal expertise, relevant communication skills and knowledge of relevant financing issues and mechanisms;

- ✿ Securing UNFF accreditation for TST under the aegis of the African Union (AU); and,

- ✿ Beyond UNFF 5, an appropriate mechanism to continue with continent-wide dialogue on forest issues should be put in place. In this particular regard, it was suggested that the SFM in Africa project, which will be hosted at AFORNET in Nairobi from 1 July 2005, could take on the responsibility for facilitating such a dialogue.

The project, "SFM in Africa" for short, has been jointly managed by the African Forest Research Network (AFORNET) at the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry (KSLA) and the Forest Department of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

The policy briefs are based on commissioned reports which are available in full at the web site [www.afornet.org](http://www.afornet.org). The reports contain all relevant references to information sources used.

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