

Out on a limb



Photo: I. Fernandez

Jose Carlos Fernandez, Head of International Affairs, Mexican National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR), provided the following comments at the launching ceremony for Status of Tropical Forest Management 2011 in Bern, Switzerland, 7 June 2011.

It is an honor for me to be here. On behalf of Mexico's Minister of the Environment I would like to express our gratitude to ITTO and the Government of Switzerland for providing us with the opportunity to join you in celebrating the launch of *Status of Tropical Forest Management 2011*.

We congratulate ITTO for this report and thank the Swiss government for taking such a strong leadership role in supporting this enterprise. In particular, we acknowledge the work of Jürgen Blaser, Alastair Sarre, Duncan Poore, Steve Johnson and all the contributors who helped to produce such a strong, sound and accessible report.

Like never before, there are two gaps that must be closed simultaneously to achieve SFM: poverty and environmental degradation. In Mexico, many of the poorest Mexicans live in forested areas, which provide a wealth of environmental goods and services but are still being lost and degraded. By ensuring that forests provide benefits to their inhabitants in ways that maintain them, we will close those two gaps simultaneously. This is why advancing the conservation and sustainable management of tropical forests is so important locally, nationally and globally. For addressing local subsistence, protecting biodiversity and assisting in the adaptation to and the mitigation of climate change, tropical forests remain key natural assets in need of adequate stewardship.

For Mexico, the report unveiled today represents a significant contribution to our understanding of the status and challenges around the management of tropical forests. You may wonder what the value of this report is to Mexico. There are a number of reasons why we consider it extremely valuable.

- **Accountability on progress on SFM:** Mexico believes that national progress towards SFM must be sound, demonstrable and comparable to ensure that we all do our share for global environmental stewardship. This report represents progress towards this end for the 33 countries included in it.
- **The need to stimulate collaboration:** While the report sets out the many challenges for SFM, some of which have been around for a while, it also portrays some of the lessons learned and innovative approaches being used. In this way, the report will help to trigger cooperation and stimulate policy innovation. Mexico, for instance, has a strong tradition in community forestry and the evolution of our program of payments for environmental services could and is being shared with other countries. This is an effort that can and must be expanded globally.

- **The promotion of common approaches:** We are excited, for example, that the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was held in 2010 in Cancún, set the basis for a REDD+ mechanism that will provide incentives to reduce deforestation and forest degradation and promote the enhancement of carbon stocks, including through the sustainable management of forests. But for this to work, we will need to develop common systems for the monitoring and reporting of safeguards, and common actions to halt and reverse forest loss and degradation. This report can help in the design of such systems and actions.

- **Incentives for improvement:** We are happy to see that the report reflects many improvements in the status of Mexico's forests, such as reduced deforestation, but we are equally motivated to address some of the remaining challenges, such as consolidating the areas under SFM and expanding competitive markets for certified forest products.

Just as Mexico has seen a significant strengthening of forest policies, especially in the last ten years, we believe that climate change may become the most significant trigger for the expansion of global efforts in favour of forests and their peoples. We must take advantage of this trigger fully and quickly. In our vision, REDD+ is about promoting sustainable rural development and aligning policies across sectors and across multiple levels of government in ways that get us closer to low-carbon development strategies. These are truly exciting times for forests.

I will close by saying that, as proud members of ITTO, we congratulate the Organization for its 25th anniversary and for this report, both of which are worthy milestones in this, the International Year of Forests.

To our Swiss colleagues I would also like to express our gratitude for their vision in supporting this work and the global forest agenda. We have been and will continue to be close allies in forest issues and we look forward to future joint initiatives.

Thank you.

