

What next for Asia-Pacific?

An FAO study has been launched to help understand the changes taking place in the Asia-Pacific forestry sector and the options available for the future

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THE ASIA-PACIFIC forest sector is undergoing unprecedented change, as economies grow rapidly and the demands on forests for goods and services accelerate. Already the impact of this change is being felt within and outside the region, undermining long-term sustainability. A better understanding of what is likely to happen in the sector in the face of larger societal changes is imperative to identify the options available to it. The future is arriving more quickly than ever, and the decisions and compromises we make during the next decade will determine the course of forestry in the coming century.

Likely paths of development

The key question facing forestry stakeholders in the region is how to steer the sector along a path that is relevant and appropriate to emerging needs. It was a question that was much discussed at the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission meeting held at Dehradun, India, in April 2006. There, the Commission endorsed a proposal to undertake a second Asia-Pacific Forestry Sector Outlook Study (APFSOS II), with the aim of updating and expanding work done in a 1998 assessment. The main objectives of the study are to:

- identify the emerging social changes and trends that are driving people's demands and expectations of forestry, and the ways they interact with forests;
- assess changes in the state of forests and forestry in Asia and the Pacific since the earlier outlook study, and analyse actual developments in comparison with what was predicted;
- analyse probable scenarios for developments in the forestry sector in the region to the year 2020, specifically taking into account overall changes in the global forestry situation; and
- identify priorities and strategies for the forest sector, and improve the strategic planning capacity at various levels, in order to respond effectively to emerging opportunities and challenges.

APFSOS II is intended to strengthen national forest programs by providing a larger picture of forestry development in the region. It will considerably increase the knowledge base on forestry and sharpen the process of prioritizing interventions in the sector. The box lists some of the key questions that need to be answered.

The process

The outlook study will be implemented through a highly participative approach involving all the countries of the region and other stakeholders, especially bilateral and multilateral development agencies, international organizations, civil-society organizations, industry, and academic and research institutions. Already, several key institutions are supporting the study, including FAO (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), ITTO, the Asian Development Bank and the United Kingdom Department for International Development. The process will involve the preparation of country outlook papers and thematic studies on cross-cutting topical issues. Workshops will be organized to facilitate the exchange of information and to develop coherent scenarios of forestry development. An expert advisory committee will be established to provide guidance and technical oversight. Special emphasis will be placed on:

- drawing on expertise in forestry and social and economic development through networks of institutions and experts;
- synthesizing the wealth of information in the region; and
- strengthening capacities within countries for analysing future scenarios and strategic planning for addressing anticipated challenges.

Outputs

The major outputs of the outlook study will be:

- a regional report that provides a systematic assessment of the current situation of forests and forestry, the key drivers of change to the year 2020, the probable paths of forestry development in the region, and the options available to the various stakeholders in improving the situation;
- sub-regional reports that capture the specificities of sub-regions or clusters of countries;
- a series of policy briefs indicating priorities and strategies that may be pursued at different levels;
- working papers analysing the current status of and trends in key issues; and
- a major international conference to discuss perspectives, outcomes and strategies.

The study is expected to be completed by December 2008.

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Some key questions on the future of Asia-Pacific forests

How are people's demands on forests, and expectations of forestry, changing?
What will be the future role of forests and forestry in the rapidly changing Asia-Pacific region?
What will be the progress towards accomplishing sustainable forest management?
How will forestry respond to increasing affluence in Asia-Pacific populations—and associated changes in demands on forests?
How will future demands for wood and other forest products be met?
How will relationships between forestry and other sectors of the economy change?
What will be the role of forests and forestry in improving social and economic conditions, especially in alleviating poverty?
What is the future of the forest industry in the region?
How can forestry respond most effectively to environmental concerns, including those related to climate change?
How will forestry be affected by increasing concern for protection of the environment?
How will the forest sector address the potential conflicts in dealing with multiple objectives?