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Meeting the Growing Demand for Wood: Sustainable Plantations and Commercial Harvesting Operations in Transition Countries

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Abstract

In 2002, world wood-production was estimated to be 2,971 million m^3 plus 510 million tonnes pulp produced from the forests covering 3,868 million ha of which 187 million ha are from the plantation forest. Tropical timber accounts only for a small portion of the world trade and world timber production; however, the economies of many developing countries in the tropics rely heavily on it. Likely, roundwood production in tropical countries will increase. A significant contributor to such increase is woodfuel consumption and it is expected that the global woodfuel production increases moderately as dependency of woodfuel in developing countries is still high; most households in these countries resort to using wood as main energy source. Particularly during the last decades, the Asia-Pacific region has undergone drastic changes in wood supply and demand as emerging economies consume huge amounts of natural resources including timber while at the same time most countries experience severe forest losses and forest degradation. The major role in the region consuming vast amounts of forest resources, still originating to about two third from the Asia-Pacific region, plays China, which became and will keep it's position as the leading nation in forest products demand. China's spectacular economic growth over the last decade is having a dramatic impact on the global wood and timber market and affects are not restricted to the Asian region, but have impact in Latin America and Africa as well. From 1997 to 2005, China's total forest products imports have risen from 40 to almost 150 million m^3.

Plantation forestry plays a significant role for wood production in tropical countries because of its several important characteristics such as high yield per unit area, very short rotations, good accessibility, etc. Over the past 15 years, the share of industrial fibre from plantations has grown from 5 to 30 percent against native forests, for which as a whole the productivity is likely to decline. There is no doubt that the importance of plantation forestry is increasing to meet the future demands, which especially holds for many developing and transition countries. This paper elaborates on how the growing demand for wood and timber products can be met in the future in a sustainable manner. In this regard, the role of plantation forestry and commercial harvesting operations is emphasised and good practise examples are discussed such as the promising Forestry Sector Development Project for Viet Nam involving small farmers. Collaborative forest management systems are seen very promising with the aim that local communities can manage their own resources, rehabilitate and protect forests, market forest products, and benefit from security of tenure.

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