

RESTORING THE COMMONWEALTH'S FORESTS: TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

Statement of the 18th Commonwealth Forestry Conference Edinburgh, Scotland, UK 28 June – 2 July 2010

Introduction

The 18th Commonwealth Forestry Conference with the theme of "Restoring the Commonwealth's Forests: Tackling Climate Change" took place in Edinburgh, UK from 28 June to 2 July 2010. The Conference was hosted by the Forestry Commission on behalf of the UK Government, and more than 400 people from more than 40 countries around the world gathered to consider how the restoration of the Commonwealth's forests could help tackle climate change. The Conference explored the numerous challenges facing forests and society, and this statement sets out these challenges together with some of the opportunities to address them.

The Conference showcased inspiring examples of how it is possible to put back some of the forests and their services that have been lost, and demonstrated how forest restoration can provide real, tangible and deliverable solutions for the world. One of the strengths of the Conference is that its foundation is based on the real experiences of real people, and on their shared values.

Global Challenges

Some degree of climate change is now inevitable, and this will shape our forests, and our societies. Even if the climate were not changing, action would still need to be taken to restore the world's lost and degraded forests. As had been already highlighted and recognised at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Port of Spain in 2009, sustainably managed forests can deliver on multiple objectives, including climate change goals.

The Conference identified a number of pressing challenges for the forest community globally:

- The challenge of communicating effectively with wider society to ensure that it understands how much society needs forests and what forests can do to mitigate climate change and help them adapt to it;
- The challenge of engaging with other sectors, especially agriculture, to ensure that all sectors are working in partnership for the common good of all. The forestry community must not see itself as a separate sector, but as closely related to other sectors such as finance, agriculture, tourism, health and education;

- The challenge of uncertainty. In a changing climate the only certainty will be uncertainty and foresters must learn to live with and to manage risk;
- The challenge of financial uncertainty. The world financial order is experiencing severe stress at the present time, which makes securing the necessary funding for protecting and restoring the Commonwealth's forests more challenging;
- The challenge of meeting the needs of many hundreds of millions of forest dependent people;
- The challenge of addressing the worrying scale of biodiversity loss around the world. Biodiversity is not just a luxury for the rich, but it is a necessity for the poor;
- The challenge of reversing the worrying decline in forestry training and of improving the image of forestry. Forestry expertise (as well as the forests themselves) is being lost, and we need to equip foresters with a wider skill set, including financial and communication skills;
- The challenge of ensuring that the Commonwealth's forests are resilient to the changes that are already happening, that forests are helping the Commonwealth's people develop resilience to climate change, and that the Commonwealth's forests are helping to mitigate climate change itself.

Tackling these challenges calls for leadership. One of the great benefits of the Commonwealth is that its institutions can speak for all its citizens, whatever their background or place of residence. There must be leadership at all levels of society to empower people to take the actions necessary to build strong, resilient communities. Action will require education, training and professionalism for the next generation, and there is a need for more collaboration and mutual support.

Alongside these challenges, there is a wealth of opportunity for forests to deliver for society.

A Wealth of Opportunity

The Conference identified the following key opportunities:

- There is increasing political awareness of the full value of forests and what they can provide;

- Evidence shows that there are more than a billion hectares around the world with the potential to be restored to forest;
- Forest restoration is not just a simple matter of planting trees. It is about restoring the functionality of ecosystem services and functions, restoring whole landscapes, improving lives and empowering people to shape a sustainable future for themselves;
- There is a wealth of scientific knowledge and practical expertise at our disposal, together with an effective network in the Commonwealth and its institutions for knowledge transfer and information sharing;
- Representatives of professional forestry associations in the Commonwealth have agreed to set up a working group to provide closer contacts and collaboration amongst themselves;
- The Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration has identified a huge potential for forests to restore degraded landscapes globally;
- Efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation are attracting ever-increasing global attention, support and political momentum. Once REDD+ mechanisms are agreed and an instrument with appropriate safeguards is in place, this will help reduce emissions from deforestation;
- New sources of finance are becoming available for forest protection and restoration. Although much has been achieved, there is still work to be done to refine the way in which REDD+ funding will be delivered for multiple benefits, including for livelihoods and biodiversity;
- The business world is adopting new approaches that recognise that long-term business sustainability is best built upon a foundation of environmental and community sustainability;
- The support and engagement of local people and communities is fundamental to success. They need to have a voice and a sense of ownership of their local environments and landscapes;
- Empowering currently disenfranchised and under-empowered groups must be part of any approach, so that they are able to take action and control over the things they can control and influence at the local level, such as land tenure, governance, and the management of local resources;
- The Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development has continued to show leadership, and offers a model

of a sustainable forest where conservation, environmental balance and economic use can be mutually reinforcing. The Centre is encouraged to publish its findings and to demonstrate how the wide range of environmental services can be marketed nationally and internationally;

- There are benefits in applying an integrated approach combining business, finance, forestry and community participation in new ways at national, regional and site levels;
- The Commonwealth can provide a critical focal point for sharing educational experiences, knowledge and expertise.

Delivering Change

The 18th Commonwealth Forestry Conference has helped make progress in addressing some of the challenges and realising the opportunities set out in this statement.

For many people, climate change is not something that is going to happen in the future. It is already affecting their water supplies and their ability to grow trees and crops. The pressure is on them now to cope with and adapt to significant changes in climate. They cannot wait until international institutions have concluded debates and decided approaches – they need help and action now.

Forests have a vital role to play in the future of the planet and in sustaining life on Earth. The crucial role of forests in providing ecosystem services is critical, and the need to both protect and restore them is urgent. To make the most of the increasing political awareness of the full value of forests and what they can provide, the Commonwealth is encouraged to share these messages widely both within and outwith the forestry sector, and people are encouraged to put actions into practice, to work together in partnerships, and to bring about change.