



A PLATFORM FOR STAKEHOLDERS IN AFRICAN FORESTRY

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POLICY BRIEF

FORESTRY ASSOCIATIONS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: TIME TO RISE TO NEW CHALLENGES

Harrison Kojwang and Yonas Yemshaw



The African Forest Forum (AFF) in a study on professional forestry associations in southern Africa found out that a majority of formerly active professional forestry associations have gone moribund for several reasons. However, South Africa is the exception in that it has a number of active forest related associations that are backed by a vigorous industrial base. They are well placed to influence public policies in support of the forestry sector. In addition, several countries including Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe have associations of producers, traders and manufacturers of forest products. Despite this, there is tremendous interest in virtually every country to strengthen, revive or establish new professional forestry associations; largely motivated by the income generation and poverty reduction 'policy push' in virtually every country; and more recently, the new opportunities in forestry to reduce CO₂ emissions under REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) and Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) schemes. The AFF considers it an opportune moment to strengthen, establish or revive both professional and industry associations in a continent that is increasingly becoming aware of the potential role of forests and trees, their contribution to national incomes, livelihoods, and stability of the environment.

THE CHALLENGE

The forest sectors of many African countries, except for a select few, have for a long time been in a general state of decline, caused by many factors, ranging from reduced public funding, shortage of appropriately qualified staff to meet new challenges, governance issues and a number of external drivers. These drivers or forces are responsible for massive rates of deforestation, forest degradation witnessed in some countries, and the conversion of forest land to other uses. Unfortunately, the general decline of the sector has been concurrent with the weakening of formerly active professional forestry associations. These associations would otherwise have stepped in to highlight these threats as well as opportunities in the sector, rally the various forestry stakeholders to uphold the ethos of professional practice, promote investment to the sector, provide an informed forum through which civil society

could make their inputs to the sector, and also influence government policies. And while the international dialogue on forests rages on, a number of countries and even inter-governmental organizations have not participated to their potential. Strong, visible and active professional associations can play a crucial role to help interpret and translate global policies into implementable national programmes, assist in monitoring and reporting on their implementation, as well as assist governments to negotiate their terms in these negotiations. The generally inactive status of these associations and what this means to Africa became a worrying issue which the AFF decided to take up in earnest through the study.

A POLICY SOLUTION

The report has suggested a number of mechanisms that the AFF and its partners could use to help strengthen, establish or revive these associations. In general, initial investments to strengthen or establish

professional forestry associations could be focused on countries with a number of attributes such as:

- relatively high forest cover;
- viable industrial plantations;
- commercially exploitable natural forests;
- existing or potential for substantial engagement in REDD+ ;
- substantial contribution to livelihoods and environmental protection;
- a formidable number of professional forestry practitioners.

As a special case the Island States, with limited forest cover except Madagascar, could form a joint professional body under the aegis of the Indian Ocean Commission. This would make for a unique multi-country professional association. For countries such as Botswana and Namibia, with dry savanna forests and woodlands, the formation of 'woodland management associations', with membership composed of forestry, range, and wildlife specialists is proposed.

EXISTING POLICIES

Of the 10 countries surveyed, South Africa has both active and highly influential associations namely, Forestry South Africa and the South African Institute of Forestry. Their structures, functions, action plans and experiences could be shared with aspiring countries such as Madagascar Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Madagascar has a professional association, but whose functions have been limited by their current economic and political situation. It would serve the AFF and its members well to enlist the support of the two major associations of South Africa to support developments in other countries; a role that it might be keen to play in view of its industry's interests in the rest of the region. For example it will not take much to revive an association in a country like Zimbabwe which had a well organized professional association, and which was affected by many years of economic and political turmoil. However, and like many countries that had no or had lost their professional associations, an industry based association, the Timber Producers Federation of Zimbabwe, has against all odds, survived the economic turmoil. Zambia and Mozambique have associations composed of timber concession holders and exporters.

The forest sectors of these countries supported by active, visible and professional associations are an imperative if Africa wants to claim its rightful share of responsibilities and of benefits from forest sector-based production, industrial outputs and the benefits accruing from carbon trading and ecosystem services. These associations have the potential to promote professionalism and ethics, thereby reducing substantially illegal activities and increasing productivity in the forestry sector.

The Call to Action

After so many years of public investment in forestry related education and research, as well as also investments in management of forest and tree resources, the governments and the peoples of southern Africa, should logically expect high standards of professional practice in the management of their forest and tree resources. By so doing, it will help turn around the generally poor image of the forestry profession and the forest sector.

A good image of the profession and the sector will, among other things, help rejuvenate investments into the sector, thereby enhancing its role in poverty reduction, valued added processing, and generally the provision of goods and services. This way, professional associations would become the 'voices' and 'faces' of sustainable forest management in the individual countries and the region. In this regard, the African continent, and this southern African region in particular, should take advantage of 2011 being the International Year on Forests, to support the development of strong professional associations that hold the potential to uphold the principles of sustainable forest management. This will no doubt attract more investments into the forestry sector.

Support by the AFF and partners to revive or establish new professional associations could include:

- holding in-country sensitization meetings;
- provision of 'seed funding' for initial activities towards their strengthening or establishment;
- facilitated regional meetings of key national association members for sharing experiences;
- creation of a regional working group or regional umbrella to facilitate sharing of experiences and maintain momentum of associations within the region;
- cultivation of 'champions' among members;
- sponsorship of selected members to regional and international meetings.

Contact us at

The Executive Secretary,
African Forest Forum (AFF)
United Nations Avenue, Gigiri,
P.O. Box 30677-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

Phone: +254 20 722 4203,
Fax: +254 20 722 4001

Email: exec.sec@afforum.org
Website: www.afforum.org

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