Managing Forest Resources in Sub-Saharan Africa: Issues and Challenges

As Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) moves toward a free market system and political pluralism, high priority will need to be assigned to the management and sustainable use of natural resources. Forests and trees, in particular, are under pressure from unprecedented rates of deforestation and forest degradation. For individual African countries, a resource base which meets the basic needs (e.g., fuel, fodder, and fiber) of most of their people, and which contributes valuable environmental services (e.g., soil protection, biological diversity, and carbon sequestration) is at risk. For the world community, there is a vested interest in sharing the burden this resource need imposes on the region, because of the global benefits derived from SSA’s diverse forests.

The Africa Forest Strategy Paper (AFSP), *A Strategy for the Forest Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa*, represents the Bank’s response to the problems confronting forest resources in the region. This report:

- Provides a comprehensive overview and analysis of the forest sector in SSA;
- Maps out a corresponding set of actions for consideration by African countries; and

Identifies key areas in which the Bank has a comparative advantage, and can best assist and complement African efforts and other donor activity.

The AFSP’s main findings, which can be accommodated by the ongoing National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) process, are outlined below.

**Diagnosis**

On average, the annual rate of deforestation in SSA is still less than 1 percent. But some areas have lost nearly three-fourths of their original tropical moist forest (TMF). The situation in West Africa is
especially severe, at levels amongst the highest in the world. Much of the present deforestation is wasteful, such as the removal of forests essential for watershed protection and biodiversity, or the clearing of land unsuitable for sustainable agricultural production. Forest resources in SSA are under further pressure from degradation of woodlands and trees. These problems are often highly localized - there are many areas within individual African countries that already have a deficit in woody biomass, are under stress, or are reaching a threshold of crisis.

The "nexus" of interlinkages between rapid population growth, environmental degradation, and poor agricultural performance provides the basic context within which deforestation and forest degradation are taking place in SSA. The processes involved are complex and interrelated. At the local level, the direct agents of forest degradation and depletion include agricultural expansion, uncontrolled woodfuel and timber harvesting, infrastructure development, and overgrazing. Underlying these direct agents is a dynamic comprising driving forces such as growing and migrating populations, poverty, international trade, accessibility, and technology, as well as accelerating or trigger forces, namely, market, policy, and institutional failures. A good illustration of the synergies at work is the penetration of TMFs by logging roads, followed by selective felling of underpriced timber for export and domestic markets, and, finally, deforestation through agricultural settlement by migrants.

Fundamental Challenges

African countries must find solutions to promote sustainable forest resource use from a broad development perspective, recognizing the role of forests in economic development, conservation of biological resources, and maintenance of natural systems. The region, as a whole, faces three fundamental challenges:

- Prevention of wasteful deforestation and forest degradation of both TMFs and tropical dry forests through: (a) correction of distortionary policies; and (b) conservation and sustainable use.
- Augmentation of the resource base through tree planting and regeneration in a broader context of land use.
- Revitalization of the wood industry to enhance efficiency and competitiveness.

For SSA to meet these challenges, a working partnership needs to be established on two fronts. First, at the country level, the involvement of all the major stakeholders (e.g., public agencies, the private sector, NGOs, local communities, and informal local institutions) is essential for efficient management of forest resources. Second, the global community should develop a common agenda for internalizing the priorities and needs of countries in the region. The world community must also provide the strong financial and technical assistance which will be needed by African countries for improvements in forest resource management.

Strategic Implications for the African Response

The overall challenges mentioned here do not translate into a single prescription that can be applied uniformly. Rather, individual country circumstances should dictate the precise mix between measures aimed at forest preservation, conservation through improved management for different uses, conversion to other uses (e.g., agriculture), and reforestation. Although this allows for some flexibility, there are a number of themes which remain constant.

- The need to strike a balance between economic development and conservation aims.
The need to adopt a cross-sectoral approach to forest sector development, placing forestry firmly within a natural resource management framework, i.e., a "nexus" of interactions among forestry, agriculture, poverty, population, and technology.

The need for a new role for government, which limits public sector efforts to only those activities that cannot or will not be carried out by others.

The need for governments to form partnerships with other important stakeholders, such as farmers, local communities, NGOs, and private enterprises in forestry activities.

What then are the options available to African countries for improving their forest resource management? In the light of the cross-sectoral approach recommended, actions will be needed to address issues both within, as well as outside the forest sector.

In terms of necessary measures outside the forest sector, good macroeconomic policies are essential for a dynamic and efficient forest sector -- a stable political environment can also help in this regard. Given that an expanding agricultural frontier is the primary agent of deforestation in SSA, an improvement in the performance of agriculture is imperative. Increased agricultural production and productivity through improved inputs will be essential to relieving population pressure on forest lands intact. African countries must also give priority to integrating natural resource management issues into their land use policies and planning. Through improved land use zoning and judicious development of infrastructure, they can allocate forest lands for different purposes (conservation of biological diversity, wildlife protection, timber production, etc.). Population, energy, and industrial policies also have a strong influence on forest sector performance.

Within the forest sector itself, there is considerable scope for improvement. The limited success of past command-and-control policies in curtailing wasteful deforestation points to a greater reliance on market forces and pricing in the drive for more efficient use and conservation of the forest resource base. This implies a new role for government, as indicated earlier: governments should provide an enabling environment for economically efficient and environmentally sound forest sector activity, ensure better pricing to reflect the full scarcity of forest resources, and tax resource users accordingly to internalize externalities. The scaling down of government involvement in production will release scarce resources for those areas in which its intervention is more pertinent, e.g., environmental conservation (where the market often fails), research, human resources development, and donor coordination.

Key actions that African countries need to consider within the forest sector are as follows:

**Forest policy and legislative reform.** In many African countries, the existing policy environment encourages inappropriate forest use by undervaluing and underpricing forest resources. To change this situation, it is essential to make markets for forest products work better, and to take account of non-marketed benefits in decisions regarding forest utilization. Market and policy failures should be addressed through a process of dialogue among various stakeholders.

**Capacity building and human resources development.** Strengthening forestry institutions should be part of a systemic civil service reform process for improved governance, with emphasis on accountability and transparency, the rule of law, and improved financial management and budgetary process. The mandates of government forestry agencies should be reoriented by granting rights and devolving responsibilities for forest sector activity to farmers, local communities, and the private sector, as appropriate. State forestry departments will also need to fulfill some of the capacity building requirements of these important forest sector agents.
Involving farmers and local communities in forestry activities through policy and legal change. Training in participatory planning will also enable forestry agencies to develop partnerships for forest management and reforestation with local communities and NGOs. In addition, government support for participatory negotiation processes involving forest users will greatly facilitate sustainable forest management by local people and help resolve local conflicts.

Enhancing private sector involvement in forestry and forest industry. Governments must shift their role from direct involvement in production toward an enabling function, providing a policy and legal environment, and information services, that stimulate private investment in forestry as well as a more efficient wood industry. Private sector involvement in planning and policy making can help towards this end.

Improving and disseminating forest-related knowledge and technology. Governments need to conduct national forest inventories which will serve as a basic framework for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating forest sector activities. Lessons learned from pilot field activities need to be disseminated more widely, and the relevance and efficiency of forestry research needs to be improved by closer cooperation between researchers and the potential users of their results.

The Role Of the World Bank: A New Strategy for Lending in SSA

What role should the Bank play in the future development of the forest sector in SSA? Four key areas are identified for future Bank lending:

- Promotion of policy reforms.
- Support to capacity building and human resources development.
- Support to investments in critical areas.
- Promotion of better donor coordination in the forest sector.

What are the operational implications of this new Bank strategy? In order to achieve maximum development impact, forest sector operations in SSA should be part of an integrated, long-term program: one based on comprehensive sector work, which is closely attuned to country needs and priorities, existing institutional capacity, and to the Bank’s overall development objectives. This long-term program approach would embrace a broad range of lending instruments for improving forest sector performance, including Structural and Sectoral Adjustment Loans. Lending instruments should be designed on the basis of strong, multidisciplinary sector work, identifying policy reforms, capacity building requirements, and other priority investments necessary to achieve forest conservation and development objectives.

Major investments should be allied to borrower ownership and commitment, which is crucial to success. They should be preceded by policy reforms and country capacity building, particularly in countries where the policy framework is poor and institutions weak. It is also important for the Bank to design simpler projects within broad sectoral programs and priorities. Instead of a single project dealing with many components and tackling several major issues, the long-term program advocated should include a series of actions and investment operations extending over a longer time horizon. Pilot projects should be used to develop new approaches for stimulating private sector and local community involvement in forest resource management and conservation. In addition, new investments should, where necessary, incorporate appropriate financing mechanisms (e.g., forest
funds, revenue and cost sharing) to ensure sustainability.

The new lending strategy will require:

- Increased coordination within the Bank to integrate macroeconomic and sectoral agendas.
- Greater manpower allocations for sector work over the next two years for improvements in the forest-related project pipeline, and increased attention to project designs.
- Special efforts to improve the quality of Bank supervision to get better results on the ground.
- Better coordination with other donors.

Next Steps

The AFSP was discussed at two technical workshops, held in Nairobi and Abidjan in April, 1994. These workshops helped establish a common ground, and facilitated some consensus building on the salient issues among key players in the SSA forest sector, including government officials, the private sector, representatives from donor agencies, NGOs, and academia. An important outcome, initiated by Africans and donors alike, was the African Forest Policy Forum, which will meet every 18 to 24 months in the Africa region to discuss policy matters and topics of special interest.