



Title: Forest research...

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IUFRO's special programme for developing countries

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The special programme run by the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) to assist developing country forest research institutes passes its tenth anniversary.

Forest research in context

The forests of the developing world are usually more complex than those in much of the developed world. They are at this moment subject to greater population pressures as well as lower levels of management and, therefore, of conservation. Deforestation and consequent forest environmental degradation are taking place at rates unmatched today in the developed world. These are the challenges to which forest research in developing countries must respond. Although notable examples of solid research activity can be cited, current levels of research are often insufficient to meet the challenge of providing the necessary information to support effective forest conservation through good management.

Origins of the SPDC

Throughout the 1970s, the lack of sufficient impact on the management of renewable natural resources in developing countries by forestry research was a topic of concern at various international fore, including the Seventh World Forestry Congress (held in Buenos Aires in 1972), the 16th Congress of IUFRO (in Oslo, 1976) and the Eighth World Forestry Congress (in Jakarta, 1978). The subject was brought into clear focus by a study commissioned by the World Bank and FAO (World Bank/FAO, 1981), the results of which were presented at the 17th Congress of IUFRO in Kyoto, Japan, in 1981.

The principal conclusion of the study was that "a small international forestry research secretariat should be funded to focus specifically on developing countries" research needs" (World Bank/FAO, 1981). More specifically, the study concluded that:

"... [the] first priority should be to strengthen national forestry research institutions or create them where none exist. The various reasons... can be briefly summarized. Firstly, biomass-based energy research is likely to be of far greater economic significance in many developing countries than for most developed countries.

Secondly, because of the wide diversity of climatic and ecological conditions and the large numbers of tree species used in developing countries, it is necessary that research be specific to site, particularly for species and provenance trials. Thirdly, research capacity built on a firm foundation at country level is likely to be more enduring than imported research. Fourthly, the alternative (i.e. too great a dependence on overseas resources) fails to recognize that, for some of the newer research topics of interest to developing countries, appropriate techniques and experiences are not available in the developed world. [There needs to be a] massive shift in the physical location of research to the developing countries themselves with emphasis on appropriate operational scale accompanied by closer direction, stricter monitoring and a firmer commitment to research related to forestry for people."

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The conclusions of the study were approved unanimously by the Kyoto congress and, with initial core funding from the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the SPDC was created in 1983. The SPDC serves as a focus for IUFRO in its relations with the developing countries and with many organizations and agencies of the developed world. The SPDC is located with the IUFRO secretariat in Vienna, Austria. It is administered by a coordinator who reports to IUFRO's president and executive board. According to its basic documentation, the mission of the SPDC is to provide assistance to developing and economically disadvantaged country institutions and scientists for the purpose of strengthening the international community's forestry (including agroforestry) research capability and, in consequence, the community's ability to undertake sustainable forest and related resource development."

One of the immediate tasks of the first SPDC coordinator was to evaluate the successes and failures in forestry and related research in developing countries by means of a desk study and a series of international consultations. Based on the study, the coordinator proposed a six-point activity plan (Fugalli, 1984) which was submitted to the IUFRO executive board in 1984:

- a series of regional forestry research planning workshops;
- training in the management of forestry research;
- training in the methods of forestry research;
- facilitating information flows to research staff in developing countries;
- fostering twinning arrangements between more and less advanced research institutes;
- creating an international fund to enable research staff from developing countries to participate more actively in IUFRO meetings.

Setting priorities - regional planning workshops

The review undertaken by the first coordinator also led to the conclusion that networking would enable research and institutional strengthening to take place simultaneously, making the best use of scarce and geographically scattered resources, including trained staff. Five regional workshops were held to allow the staff from developing countries to agree on their own priorities and commonalities.

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[The SPDC produces a variety of publications and materials](#)

The first of the regional research planning workshops was held for tropical Asia in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in July 1984 under the theme "Increasing productivity of multipurpose tree species". Parallel workshops were held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1986 and 1987 for, respectively, the Sahelian and northern Sudanese zones of Africa; in Huaraz, Peru, in 1987 for tropical and subtropical Latin America; and in Lilongwe, Malawi, in 1988 for eastern-central and southern Africa.

Beyond setting priorities for action, the regional workshops played an important role in establishing networking arrangements and attracting donor funding for regional and national projects. For example, the Kandy workshop was a catalyst for development of the Forestry/Fuelwood Research and Development (F/FRED) Project, its funding by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its management by Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development. The multipurpose tree species research network, created by F/FRED, subsequently set up regional and subregional networks focusing on several of the species identified during the Kandy workshop. The Nairobi workshops led to a subregional project for germplasm conservation and the distribution of multipurpose tree species in African countries of the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD). Funded by France and executed by FAO, this project has led to national projects in several African countries; e.g. an FAO-executed project in Senegal is under way with funding of US\$10 million from the Netherlands.

Funding and cash flows

Since it was initiated in 1983 with seed funding from the World Bank and the UNDP, the SPDC has operated on a limited budget, with relatively small contributions in cash from a large number of donors. The largest share of the funding has been provided by the World Bank, the UNDP, USAID and the [United Kingdom's] Overseas Development Administration. Funds have tended to be provided on an activity rather than an annual basis, making continuity problematic. Assistance in kind (especially from FAO, the Governments of Austria, Canada and Japan) has also been important. For example, FAO provided logistical assistance and resource staff for most of the regional planning workshops. In addition, the design phase as well as the eventual execution of the projects conceptualized at the Nairobi workshops have been provided by FAO.

Current SPDC activities

The SPDC's programme is aimed at strengthening the research capability of forest scientists and technicians in developing and economically disadvantaged countries and at increasing the quality of research results obtained. Achieving these goals should enhance the capabilities of forest research institutes in target countries and strengthen the research community's ability to have a positive impact on decision-making processes. The ultimate objective is, of course, to enhance forest conservation through improved management practices. The current activities of the SPDC fall into the following four categories:

Training and education

A lack of adequate training has been identified as an ongoing constraint to the capability of conducting research in the developing world. Needs range from basic education for those wishing to enter research to the provision of higher levels of education for those already undertaking research programmes. Training in research techniques is needed for technical staff who support trained scientists or who may even be undertaking research of their own. Training in specific subject areas is a constant requirement at both research and management or administrative levels.

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Early initiatives in training by the SPDC centred on formal, lecture-style courses. Although this remains an option, experience suggests that correspondence learning programmes, specifically self-teaching courses, are equally, if not more, effective and have the enormous advantage of reaching many more people at a fraction of the normal cost. The SPDC now emphasizes the latter approach in its training programmes.

As an example, the SPDC has recently completed development of a self-teaching course in basic statistics (FORSTAT) for forest research officers and managers in conjunction with the Applied Statistics Research Unit of the University of Kent, United Kingdom. This workbook-style course is equally suitable for use by persons trained in any of the biological sciences and thus has wide appeal within the global research community. To our surprise and gratification, interest in FORSTAT has been as high in the developed countries as in the developing world.

To ensure the relevance of FORSTAT and to develop the content and style of the package fully, in 1991 a pilot course was offered to 23 scientists and managers from developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Comments and critiques were freely given as the participants to the course worked their way through the materials. Their contribution materially assisted the development of the final product. In response to a recent questionnaire, virtually all of the participants have indicated that the new knowledge has been incorporated into their programmes and that, after two years of use, the course material has begun to have the desired effect of improving the quality of research undertaken.

FORSTAT is available in English while Spanish and French translations are in progress and Chinese and Russian versions are being considered. Because of the success of the basic statistics package, the SPDC is working to secure funding for the next phase, a similar, complementary course in intermediate-level statistics.

Continuing its interest in the self-teaching approach, the SPDC is at present collaborating with the University of Minnesota in the development of a forest research management course. Draft materials are in hand and will be critiqued in the near future at workshops in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Like FORSTAT, the English original will be translated into Spanish and French. The course materials will be available for distribution in the three languages by late 1994. They will be supplemented by extensive readings especially selected to enhance the various topics covered.

Information services

A lack of basic reference materials and inadequate access to current information flows are serious handicaps for any research programme. Both are common in many developing countries and are a significant cause of the inability to conduct innovative,

quality research or provide reliable research results of the kind needed to persuade decision-makers. A lack of information can also lead to the duplication of research efforts and to more costly and less efficient research programmes.

The SPDC supplies a broad range of information relevant to the work of forest scientists and managers through its biannual *Information Bulletin for Developing Countries*. Since its inception in 1986, a special feature of the bulletin has been excerpts from *Forestry Abstracts* and *Forest Products Abstracts* generously provided by CAB International (CABI). Efforts to improve the bulletin in recent years have resulted in increased content, photo covers and more pleasing page layouts. Upcoming training courses, meetings and events of importance are now routinely covered and supplemented by articles of scientific interest as well as news of recent or future activities in developing country forestry. The SPDC constantly strives to improve the publication and aims to ensure its continuing relevance.

[Studying tropical forest resource management options in Ecuador](#)

[SPDC workshop participants in Huaraz, Peru](#)

The *Information Bulletin for Developing Countries* is a keystone of the SPDC programme. It reaches about 1 200 addresses but, rather than institutions which may have established libraries, most recipients are individuals, many of whom would otherwise have difficulty in obtaining the information provided.

The establishment of information networks within regions and countries is critical to improved research capability, as is ready access to regular and inexpensive flows of current international research information. The SPDC is active in this area, playing a lead role in efforts to develop a forestry information network for Latin America and the Caribbean. A first step in this direction was taken in Madrid in late 1992 when 19 forestry and research communications specialists from Latin America and the Caribbean joined counterparts from Europe, North America and Australia at a workshop held to identify needs and consider ways of tackling the problem in the region. The workshop was convened with financial support from the SPDC and the Spanish hosts.

The workshop produced a series of recommendations that will be annexed to the proceedings, now being finalized. A steering committee has been set up to develop the next phases of the initiative in which both IUFRO and its SPDC will be heavily involved, together with designates from the Latin America and Caribbean region. Its purpose is to ensure the establishment of a workable network for the interchange of forestry information that will facilitate the improvement of forest science and management in the region.

Interagency collaboration

The developed world has a wealth of forest science knowledge and assistance potential. Its hundreds of well-managed institutions and trained research scientists and technicians are an invaluable source of information for disadvantaged countries. Interchanges between developed country institutions and their developing country counterparts are common but frequently ad hoc and generally uncoordinated, even within the donor country.

Many institutions in developing and disadvantaged countries are lacking in the basic tools for research, including research expertise, equipment, access to scientific literature, and the ability of research personnel to experience practical training at

international centres of excellence. A major contribution to alleviating this problem would be a coordinated programme of exchange and assistance between developed countries and developing and economically disadvantaged countries.

The SPDC is developing a proposal to promote the establishment of a network of institutions in which collaboration and assistance could be implemented. A principal focus of the activity would see the pairing of institutions in the developed world with sister institutions in developing countries. Such a network would open new vistas to developing country scientists and would materially enhance the ability of both individuals and institutions to conduct quality research. We shall expect real progress in this area during 1994 and in the future.

International interaction

Of critical importance to forest scientists and technicians is the ability to interact directly with counterparts in their own and related disciplines. The ability to do so, however, is seriously hindered much of the time by a lack of necessary support funding.

IUFRO represents not only the largest forest science network in the world but also the single greatest opportunity for forest scientists to take part in international gatherings such as the numerous meetings held each year by the many research groups of the Union. By offering increased access to its technical programme and to its network of member institutions and scientists, IUFRO, together with its research groups and newly evolving chapters, has the potential to contribute even more meaningfully than at present to the development of research capabilities in the developing world.

An important initiative, therefore, is the IUFRO Development Fund, to be implemented through the SPDC. The fund, established in late 1992, is expected to become operational during 1994. Its main thrust will be to enhance interaction between disadvantaged country scientists and the IUFRO technical programme through the provision of assistance funding. Assistance opportunities will include participation in meetings, the development of education extension opportunities and the organization of research meetings in developing countries.

In addition to its involvement in the development fund initiative, the SPDC actively promotes interaction between developing country research staff and institutions and the mainstream activities of IUFRO. Of particular importance are mechanisms to put developing country research personnel in contact with IUFRO counterparts for the provision of technical information and peer consultation. The SPDC responds each year to numerous requests for technical information and advice by carefully relating the needs of the correspondent to expertise available within IUFRO and then advising the correspondent of contact opportunities. Since such services are not limited to members, this serves not only to satisfy correspondent needs but also to increase contacts within IUFRO and to extend the union to those outside.

The SPDC continues to emphasize collaborative interaction with prominent international forestry research organizations such as the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Center for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), the European Tropical Forestry Research Network and other forestry agencies such as FAO, the Forestry Research Support Programme for Asia and the Pacific (FORSPA) and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) in order that the most effective and efficient delivery of programmes may be realized.

Concluding comments

Initially, the SPDC was intended to be a bridging mechanism until such time as a formal international institution, i.e. CIFOR, was established. In the meantime, however, the SPDC has been recognized as being important in its own right and has expanded IUFRO's presence in the developing world while attracting support from a good cross-section of the forestry donor community. Although the programme has not been a large one, it has been effective and has provided valued service to the developing world.

Over the past decade, international concern and action with regard to forestry research in the developing countries has been stepped up and new mechanisms have come into being. But even with these initiatives, several of which are mentioned above, the demand for assistance will not be fully served. Thus, assuming continued support and contributions from the international donor community, the SPDC will continue to serve the needs and interests of the developing and economically disadvantaged countries through the delivery of relevant programmes and increased integration, of its activities with IUFRO's traditional programme.

Given the limited global resources available for forest research assistance to the developing world, it behoves all involved to conduct the most effective, complementary effort possible. It is essential that meaningful dialogue take place on a regular basis among the various agencies involved and that the development and implementation of activities be appropriately coordinated to avoid duplication and splinter efforts.

The SPDC will seek appropriate collaboration with and representation on various organs of the forestry research assistance agencies, and to integrate its programme planning with these agencies. The SPDC will seek to develop further interaction with the international community as may be useful and appropriate.

Perhaps most important, the SPDC will continue to maintain a dialogue with representatives of its constituency, the developing and economically disadvantaged countries of the world. A key feature of future programmes must be a sincere effort to address these countries' real needs and priorities in a better way.

For additional information on the SPDC, its activities and publications, please contact: The Coordinator, IUFRO Special Programme for Developing Countries, Seckendorff-Gudent-Weg 8, A-1131 Vienna, Austria.

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