



## Main Challenges and Opportunities in Commonwealth Forestry

By Jim Ball, Chair, Commonwealth Forestry Association

**T**he challenges facing Commonwealth foresters are largely the same as those faced by their colleagues worldwide, but the opportunities to resolve them may be greater due to the shared language of Commonwealth countries and their history of collaboration.

This chapter draws out some of the many challenges and opportunities facing the foresters of the Commonwealth. Doubtless readers will identify many more. While it may not be true that every challenge represents an opportunity, nevertheless it is apparent that there are many opportunities for Commonwealth foresters to work together on common problems.

### ■ Challenges

Two of the major challenges facing the world today are climate change and poverty. Forestry is related to both.

Forests and forestry practice may be affected by climate change, may contribute to it, or may mitigate it. The challenge is to reduce both the impact of climate change on forests and the contribution that deforestation makes and to promote the ameliorating role of

forests. The development of the means of implementing REDD+ will be a major challenge – and opportunity.

The rise in sea level associated with climate change will affect Commonwealth countries especially – not just the SIDS and low-lying countries such as Bangladesh but all countries. “We are all Maldivians now,” said the President of the Maldives during a BBC discussion at the Copenhagen COP-15 Summit in December 2009.

Poverty affects many countries in the Commonwealth. For foresters the task is to develop the potential contribution of forests to the alleviation of poverty. Directly, this contribution may consist of the provision of forest fruits or the grazing of livestock, or the collection of non-wood forest products for sale – all of which may be especially important for disadvantaged groups. In unforeseen crises or emergencies the resources of the forest may act as a “safety net” for families or communities. Payments for ecosystem services provided by forests may be important in the future, and it will be important to ensure that such payments reach the poorest and the disadvantaged. Indirectly, the involvement of people in community forestry may contribute to better governance. But forests (and woodlands, scrub and trees on farms) do not contribute solely to poverty amelioration but also to sustainable rural livelihoods in the form of daily household needs, or income from formal employment or informal trading. Such contributions are often seasonal.

The impact of poverty may be reinforced by climate change, for it is likely to affect the poor and disadvantaged the most, for example through drought, or flooding of the low-lying areas where they often live, or salinisation of the poor soils on which they rely for cultivation.

Forest landscape restoration is one way to mitigate climate change and to alleviate poverty. Forests restored in the landscape will provide a range of other environmental benefits, and will contribute to sustainable livelihoods in rural areas. There are several challenges to

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The southern slopes of the Meghalaya Hills in north-east India – forests have a major role to play in combating climate change.





the implementation of such restoration of forests, including political will, funding, the acquisition of suitable sites, the development of techniques and more.

The previous chapters have shown that the challenges facing those who manage the forest resources of the Commonwealth include the following:

Deforestation, where the rate of forest loss for the countries of the Commonwealth appears to have increased slightly since 2000-05. Certain African and South-east Asia-Pacific Commonwealth countries are particularly affected, although in the Americas, South Asia and Europe the loss of forest area has halted.

The high rate of deforestation is reflected also in the loss of primary forest types in Papua New Guinea and in certain African countries. The rate of loss elsewhere appears to have slowed or even stopped.

- Deforestation is matched to a certain extent by afforestation, and the rate of planting seems to be increasing slightly in recent years. Planted forests provide most of the world's industrial wood and fibre, and there is no reason to suppose that the situation is different in Commonwealth countries. Planted forests make up 3.9% of the area of Commonwealth forests in 2010, although much more in certain countries. The challenge will be to continue the rate of establishment, possibly through the encouragement of agro-forestry or innovative means such as outgrower schemes in the private sector.
- The protection of forests will continue to be a challenge. Natural forests must be protected against activities such as encroachment or illegal logging, and issues of forest law, enforcement and governance remain. Planted forests require protection from fire, pests, climate change and many other threats.
- Decentralisation of authority and the devolution of responsibility for people's involvement in the planning and management of the forest estate are challenges for several Commonwealth countries.

- It appears that more Commonwealth forests are covered by valid working plans than was the case 20 years ago; 41 Commonwealth countries are members of one or more of the C&I processes and about 21% of the area of Commonwealth forests is certified under one scheme or another – although most of the certified forests are in the developed economies. But evidence of support in terms of funds or staff for sustainable management of Commonwealth forests is still lacking.

- There is even less information on the conservation of forests, but there are, however, examples of Commonwealth countries establishing forest conservation areas and of acting in partnership to establish cross-boundary protected areas.

- Urbanisation, along with the growth of slums, provides a challenge for tree planning in cities – including the establishment of peri-urban forests. Urban people are increasingly cut off from the countryside and from forests, and educating them in the issues concerning the conservation of the natural world will be an increasing challenge.

The continuing preponderance of fuelwood in Commonwealth wood consumption shows the need to develop sustainable supplies, especially in dry areas, as a contribution to poverty alleviation, sustainable livelihoods and zero carbon emissions.

The challenges facing Commonwealth forest researchers include:

- The need to develop mechanisms both to adapt forests to the effects of climate change, and to contribute to its amelioration through carbon sequestration. Among the mechanisms required will be the adaptation of forest systems (including plantations) to drought and to the increased risk of fire and pest attack, the maintenance of forest biological diversity, and the development of forest



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management practices to maintain or increase water catchment yields.

- Contributing more directly to informed public opinion and policymaking. To do this research programmes will increasingly need to move towards social, economic and political concerns in addition to their traditional strength in silviculture and ecology.
- Research into social and cultural, as well as technical aspects, of participatory forestry.
- But these challenges cannot be faced unless the funding of forest research in all Commonwealth countries improves, accompanied by the strengthening of human resources in terms both of staff numbers and training.

Those responsible for forestry education face the challenge of declining student numbers – especially in the developed economies and to some extent in Africa – and the adaptation of programmes to reflect changing requirements. The demand for graduates does not always match enrolments, nor does teaching capacity reflect teaching demands, nor does what is currently taught meet the skills needed by graduates. In several

Commonwealth universities forestry is seen as technical training for the academically less-gifted; changing this perception will not be easy.

#### ■ Opportunities

The common language of Commonwealth countries offers an overarching opportunity to Commonwealth foresters to work together to share experiences in solving common problems. There is a special opportunity to promote south-south cooperation and collaboration. The particular case of the Commonwealth Forestry Conference is worth noting, where foresters from the 54 countries of the Commonwealth (and others) have the opportunity to come together every four years to exchange experiences. Changes in the format of the Conference in recent years have increased the opportunity for foresters to contribute to the sessions and to meet informally.

The Commonwealth accounts for one-third of the world's people and one-fifth of its forests. It is thus entitled to play a major role in the global dialogue on forests and related issues. The Commonwealth also



includes 27 of the world's 39 SIDS, which are those most immediately threatened by rising sea levels due to global warming.

Specific opportunities to play a part in technical or policy-related forestry topics include areas where Commonwealth foresters have been leaders:

- Forest landscape restoration, a concept relevant to virtually all Commonwealth countries. There is an important opportunity to take part in the development of this new concept.
- Decentralisation, devolution of responsibility and the involvement of communities, and the privatisation of planted forests, where several Commonwealth countries have been pioneers. Others could learn from their experience.
- The Commonwealth includes several professional associations and institutes; although usually representing national interests, nevertheless they offer through their journals, newsletters and meetings excellent fora for networking.
- There is also the opportunity for the four countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK) with professional institutes which control the profession nationally to assist others to develop such institutes, thus strengthening the profession and enabling it to speak with one voice on national forestry issues.

There are two related opportunities in forestry education. The first is the under-utilised potential for networking, collaboration and cooperation among staff and students of Commonwealth universities. The second is that there is now no international body to bring together those involved in forestry education to exchange experiences in facing common challenges<sup>1</sup>; there is an excellent opportunity for the forestry faculties of Commonwealth universities to take the lead in instituting such a forum.

<sup>1</sup> The FAO Advisory Committee on Forestry Education held its last meeting in 1996.

Commonwealth-wide recognition of the imminent and usually negative impact of climate change on society, offers forest researchers a unique opportunity to emphasise the shared nature of the challenge and to work together to identify options for the adaptation of forests – and forest-related impacts on society – to the threat. Such research would contribute to the development of national plans for adaptation to changes in the climate.

The Commonwealth also offers the opportunity for researchers to exchange experience on contributing to forest and land-use policymaking and planning in other areas of global change, such as the loss of biological diversity, demographic changes and pollution. The challenge to forest managers and researchers of preventing forest fires offers an opportunity for collaboration in exchanging experience in programmes for public education.

Above all, the development of REDD+ is an important opportunity for Commonwealth researchers to collaborate in the development of the means for its implementation; for example, by sharing experience in drafting information for the public and policymakers, identifying the underlying causes of forest loss and forest degradation, developing methods for monitoring and reporting, and (eventually) ways of distributing any funds equitably and efficiently.

A final challenge facing all foresters, which has become apparent in preparing and then updating this review of forestry in the Commonwealth, is the lack of reliable and current data on forests and the forestry sector – and this is not only confined to countries with developing economies. All of the challenges described above are affected to a greater or lesser extent by lack of data and information, which seriously impairs the possibility of developing plans or policies to address a particular issue – and the development of systems for data collection could contribute to the valuation and marketing of intangible benefits.

# Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF)

The Congo Basin rainforest is the second largest tropical forest in the world, after the South American Amazon. The forest covers an area of over 200 million hectares, approximately twice the size of France. It is home to more than 100 million people, 10,000 plants species, 1,000 bird species and 400 species of mammals. It serves as a critical habitat for biodiversity conservation and home to three of the world's four great apes species. It also provides vital regional and global ecological services, representing about one-fifth of the world's remaining closed canopy tropical forest.

The Congo Basin forest is of local, regional, and global environmental significance. In addition, it is a vital ecosystem for the entire world, as it helps to regulate atmospheric oxygen and carbon, leading some to describe it as "the world's" second lung. The forest represents a rich resource in terms of food, shelter, and livelihoods for inhabitants of the region. It therefore



**The Congo Basin is as a critical habitat for biodiversity conservation.**

serves as an economic resource for ten of the basin's countries.

Over the years, the Congo Basin rainforest has been coming under pressure as a result of poverty, increased

logging and changing patterns of agriculture, population growth and activities by the oil and mining industry. This is resulting in increasing deforestation. Non-sustainable forest management practices have a negative impact on the inhabitants, the countless species that could be driven to extinction and on the climate.

Launched in June 2008 by the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom (UK) and Norway in conjunction with the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF) has US\$200 million, with the UK and Norway contributing US\$100 million each.

The Fund supports transformative and innovative initiatives by the region's governments, civil society and private sector with a view to slowing down the rate of deforestation by developing the capacity of the people and institutions in Congo basin countries. This is expected to enable them manage their forest more sustainably. This includes assisting local communities to find livelihoods that are consistent with



**The rainforest is coming under pressure as a result of increased logging and changing agricultural patterns in Cameroon.**



forest conservation and developing new approaches that will bring genuine change and ensure future sustainable forest management. The CBFF grant funding will be mainly used on activities that help to slow down the rate of deforestation and degradation, reduce poverty among forest dwellers and contribute to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, while maximizing carbon storage.

The Fund supports activities and projects which complement particular aspects of the Central Africa Forests Commission (COMIFAC) convergence plan. The CBFF works closely with Central African governments, regional institutions, COMIFAC, ECCAS, Congo

Basin technical partners, development finance institutions, NGOs and the private sector.

Although the CBFF is designed to directly benefit Congo Basin countries that protect the forest, it is considered as a global public good which will have continental, as well as global benefits. The Fund is administered by a governing council co-chaired by the 2004 Nobel Laureate and the Congo Basin Forest Ecosystem Goodwill Ambassador, Wangari Maathai, as well as the former Canadian Prime Minister, Paul Martin. The Fund's governing council is responsible for its strategic direction and it ensures broad

development partner and stakeholder participation in the Fund. The CBFF Secretariat is based in Tunis, Yaoundé and Kinshasa.

The CBFF applies two mechanisms to build up its project pipeline. These include: 1) a regular competitive call for proposals; and 2) projects initiated by the CBFF Governing Council, the Reference Group or other stakeholders in response to identified gaps and needs not addressed by submissions received under calls for proposals. The first competitive call for proposals has already been initiated and the Governing Council has approved ten projects for funding.



**The Congo Basin forest helps to regulate atmospheric oxygen and carbon.**