

Establishment of a forestry research network for ACP countries (FORENET)

Concept note for research programme

Research programme: Optimising income generation from forest goods and services

Context

Since time immemorial local people have depended on natural resources for their sustenance. They have developed unique and ingenious ways of adapting to their environment to provide for their needs while simultaneously supplying goods and services for their communities and the wider national and global populace. Inherent in the lifestyle of local peoples is the innate ability to guarantee that their activities ensure benefits for current generations and those yet unborn. Recently, the scale and scope of their activity have attained greater acknowledgement and importance on global environmental and socio-economic agendas.

At the regional level the countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific union are endowed with vast resources within their humid tropical forests but despite these natural riches, are hard-pressed to overcome the challenges which constrict their individual and collective development. In recent times the thrust of developmental and research activity has been strongly skewed towards determining and pursuing ways to enhance the socio-economic realities of the local people and their corresponding regions. Much has been achieved, yet much more is needed.

The global debate on providing fair compensation for the conservation of natural forests is hinged on the ability to identify, quantify and value the services these resources currently and potentially provide in a physical, chemical, social, economic and ecological context. Moreover, the region needs to gain greater benefit for its people whilst maintaining and ensuring the sustenance of its environment and associated biodiversity.

FORENET, through this research programme, will focus on the sustainable use of forest goods and services and will engage institutions and other partners to deliver data and other outputs, incorporating capacity building in their activity. The priority for this action will target optimising financial benefits through wise use of the natural resources from the forests of the participating nations and to provide the framework for policy measures to guide and monitor such use.

Given the geographic position of the Republics of Guyana and Suriname; forming part of the vital eco-region of the Guiana Shield and as an integral part of the Amazon – the bastion of tropical rainforests worldwide; their importance in being researched and promoted through the FORENET project and the global significance of such activity cannot be understated.

Conceptual framework and research themes

Research activity in optimising income generation from forest goods and services is hinged on the identification and exploration of opportunities through which resources can be properly used to provide and supplement the income of local communities while increasing the information databank on these resources.

The FORENET network would promote research activity and network linkages for each of the participating countries in the ACP region within the framework of the following general areas:

- Increase knowledge and use of environmental services and functions, and
- Promote broad-based initiatives which
 - Build local, national and regional capacity for research in local communities;
 - Generate research for information where there are gaps in data;
 - Enhance livelihoods in local communities;
 - Contribute to national data-bank on forest resources and services;
 - Improve information available on environmental services and lesser-known species;
 - Inform policy and the decision-making process;
 - Build capacity in local institutions responsible for resource protection and management, and at training institutions;
 - Share lessons learnt and network with ACP countries participating in the network.

Generally, the research themes for the FORENET activity would be geared towards maximising revenue generation from sustainable utilization of all forest values (including timber and non-timber products, ecotourism and ecosystem services) *and* building the capacity of forest communities to manage resources, incorporating traditional knowledge to ensure food security and sustainable livelihoods, while developing mechanisms of benefit sharing.

The technical areas of focus to be promoted in the forestry research network in the countries engaged through this ACP initiative would include:

- Examining and quantifying the extent (number/volume, commercial value and longevity/regenerative capacity) of goods and services which may be accrued from the forest;
- Identifying and defining credible and realistic measures to determine environmental services available from tropical forests;
- Categorizing the benefits and demerits of exploiting forest products and services;
- Estimating the role and impact of the use of such goods and services on the environment and on the socio-economic landscape;
- Determining and defining appropriate levels of use of forest goods and services to ensure sustainable forest management;
- Establishing (or suggesting) protocols for the sustainable use of forest products which would provide optimum benefits at community, national and regional (ACP) levels.