Sustainability in the European forest-based sector

New pan-European project launched

Forestry, forest-based and related industries, including transport, and downstream stakeholders, comprise a major economic cluster in Europe, with an annual turnover of some €550 billion, which equates to about 8% of the total value added in manufacturing industry in the EU. Some 3 to 4 million people are directly employed in forest-based industries in Europe. Forests fulfil multiple functions and provide the raw material for a wide range of goods such as timber, fibre and bio-energy, as well as services such as protection of water, soil, biodiversity and recreation. Sustainability has been a leading principle in the sector for centuries, and the multi-dimensional aspects of sustainability have been an important consideration for policy makers in the sector for many years.

In November 2005 a new Integrated Project under the EU 6th Framework Programme was launched in Uppsala, Sweden. Called EFORWOOD, it is a four-year integrated project involving 38 organisations in 18 countries, with an estimated total budget of €20 million – of which the European Commission contribution is €13 million. The project is funded under the EU 'Global change and ecosystems' area in the Sixth Framework Programme.

EFORWOOD's aim is to produce what the team describes as a decision-support tool that can be used to evaluate the contribution made to sustainable economic, environmental and social development by and through the European forestry and forest-products sector.

This tool will measure the impact of the activities along the forestry-wood chain (FWC) from each of the three perspectives of sustainability. A user-friendly, web-based version will also be developed. It is intended that a number of existing tools, models and databases, identified as potentially useful for the integrated sustainability impact analysis of a forestry-wood chain, will be used and adapted for application in EFORWOOD.

As a Europe-wide effort to develop an assessment tool for sustainability impact of the forestry-wood chain, the EFORWOOD project is very significant. "For the first time ever, EFORWOOD will enable us to analyse the sustainability impact of the entire forestry-wood chain from a holistic perspective", says Professor Kaj Rosén, co-ordinator of the project.

The project will be developed in four phases. The first phase will focus on data collection and tool development for "Test Chains", i.e. simplified example value chains from the sector. Several test chains will be used in EFORWOOD (e.g. Norway spruce from Scandinavian clear-cut forestry ending up in construction timber in Western Europe or Eucalyptus wood produced in short rotation forest in Portugal, used for fine print and then after recycling ending in newsprint).

The second phase will include an assessment of a prototype tool with stakeholders. The tool will be extended to complete "regional cases", that are complete and real examples of FWCs. The regional cases will be selected in agreement with the European Commission during the first year of the project, based on three main criteria, (i) bio-geographical characteristics, (ii) regional characteristics of the FWC, and (iii) the expertise of the consortium. Again, a re-assessment will be made.

In the third phase the model will be tested on the current European FWC. It will also be used to study scenarios of future FWCs and allow identification of the most sustainable economic, social and environmental

options. The functioning of the tool for selected cases in the developing world will be tested. A user-friendly version will be made available for users representing industry and policy-making, and demonstration packages for the web will made available.

The final phase will include synthesis and reporting of the project outcomes.

InnovaWood, (http://www.innovawood.com/), an Irish-based organisation,, is the lead partner in the Knowledge Transfer module of the EFORWOOD project.

Additional information is available from http://www.eforwood.com/

For more information about the EU sixth Framework Programme: http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/fp6/