

OPENING SPEECH

By

Yam Malla

Executive Director

Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC)

Delivered at the

Asia Pacific Forestry Week
Social Session

***People, Forests, and Human Well-being:
Managing Forests for People in a Period of Rapid Change***

22 April 2008

National Convention Center (NCC)
Me Tri, Tu Liem
Hanoi, Vietnam

1. Distinguished guests, the organizers and hosts of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Week, ladies and gentlemen.
2. I am honored to stand here today to open the first-ever Social Session at the first-ever Asia-Pacific Forestry Week.
3. This Session, entitled ***People, Forests, and Human Well-being: Managing Forests for People in a Period of Rapid Change*** is organized by RECOFTC with support from the Asia Forest Network; and with additional support from FAO and the Vietnam's Department of Forestry of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.
4. Preparing my brief opening address made me think of my own involvement in forestry and especially community forestry in the Asia-Pacific region. It also brought to mind the eminent forester Jack Westoby who reminded us, what seems a long time ago, that forestry is about people, which stresses the importance of the social pillar not only of forestry but of sustainable development in general.
5. I was tempted to share with you some of my thoughts related to Westoby's often used quote. A cursory look at the latest news however changed my mind. The price of rice is on the rise, as is the price for most commodities. This has not only triggered riots in several countries, it may also shape the future of our forests.
6. Forestry is becoming more complex, as a growing number of actors are confronted by fluid and interlinked developments, some of them threats to people and/or forests.

7. I would like to use the opportunity to remind all of us that we are living in a period of rapid change.
8. Two core drivers were stressed only this month by Alex Evans and David Steven in a paper presented to heads of state at the Progressive Governance Summit. These are scarcity and instability:
 - a. **Scarcity**, limits to the sustainable consumption of highly strategic commodities such as energy, land, water, food and ‘atmospheric space for emissions’; and
 - b. **Instability**, is the tendency for complex systems to experience unpredictable and unsettling shifts.
9. I would like to urge you to keep Scarcity and Instability in mind during this week as they have already affected hundreds of millions of people in our region.
10. This session will be the first of three sessions covering the three pillars of sustainable development: social, environmental, and economic. Whilst we will obviously touch on environmental and economic issues the prime focus is on the “social”.
11. This morning we will examine forest loss and degradation in the region and why they should be of concern to key decision makers and the public. Several initiatives have underlined the social importance of forests. Yet, why has progress with sustainable forest management been elusive?
12. We review how successful these initiatives have really been, and whether success stories can be replicated to bring forest conservation, management and development effectively to scale. This morning we will also flag emerging issues, in addition to Scarcity and Instability, and discuss their potential impacts on sustainable forest management, equitable forest-based development and poverty reduction.
13. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, forestry has come back to the centre stage of the global debate on environment and development due in large to the recognition that forest loss and degradation contribute more greenhouse gas emissions than the global transport sector. Given this renewed interest we need to ask:
 - a. How do we develop equitable multi-stakeholder decision-making approaches that can legitimately balance conflicting societal interests?
 - b. And how do we ensure that these developments contribute significantly to the rural poor living in and around forests? Although their numbers have declined in many countries in this region, this trend is expected to stagnate or reverse over the next several years.
14. Ultimately, the Social Session, intends to address the following critical question:

15. *Under present and foreseeable economic and social trends in the Asia-Pacific region, can we achieve sustainable forest management and better realize the potential of forests and forestry to contribute to improved human well-being?*
16. It is my hope that the presentations and ensuing debate will aid us in identifying realistic opportunities for helping people who continue to rely on forests and their products and services. I am not expecting or looking for a neat and tidy solution, which, as all of you know, does not exist. But what we should be striving for is serious progress and moving the agenda forward.
17. This Session will commence with 4 scene-setting presentations from 4 highly regarded practitioners in their own fields, the details of which you will find outlined in your Session Booklet.
18. Following this, the Moderator Mr. David Cassells, Director of the Nature Conservancy's Asia Pacific Region Forest Program and Chief of Party for the Responsible Asia Forestry and Trade Program, will initiate and open up the debate. The Debate is the principal part of this session and provides opportunity for you to get involved before we close.
19. Finally, we are extremely fortunate to have with us today Mr. Ken Piddington, who has accepted the tough job of preparing and presenting a final commentary. Ken has a wonderful depth of experience in issues related to people, forests and forestry and in his long career can claim such highlights as Directorship of the World Bank's Environment Department and the establishment of the Global Environment Facility.
20. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen; it is my great honour to declare this session open. I sincerely hope that you leave this room inspired and that this session paves the way for desperately needed progress and responses to emerging issues and rapid change, which will make a difference especially to poor people in our region.