

How forests

can reduce
poverty



DFID Department for
International
Development

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The international community is committed to eliminating poverty. International development targets to that end include

a reduction by half in the number of people who are food insecure and a similar reduction in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by the year 2015.

The Forestry Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with the support of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), held an interagency Forum on the Role of Forestry in Poverty Alleviation in September 2001. Analysts from developing countries, representatives of multi- and bilateral agencies, international research organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) came together to share their experiences.

This policy brief is the result of the joint efforts of the 60 participants in the Forum, with a significant contribution by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). It highlights the findings of the Forum to help further the understanding of the ways in which trees, forests and forestry can contribute towards increasing food security and reducing poverty.

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STRENGTHENING RIGHTS, CAPABILITIES AND GOVERNANCE

Support the poor's own decision-making power

Strengthen forest rights of the poor and the means to claim them

Recognize links between forestry and local governance

1

Agenda



REDUCING VULNERABILITY

Make safety nets not poverty traps

Support tree planting outside forests

Cut the regulatory burden on the poor and
make regulation affordable

Reduce unfair obligations in forest management

2



CAPTURING EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

Remove the barriers to market entry

Base land use decisions on true value of forests

Ensure that markets for environmental services benefit the poor

Support associations and financing for local forest businesses

3

for action



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Simplify policies and support participatory processes

Promote multisectoral learning and action

Enhance interagency collaboration

Make NGOs and the private sector partners in poverty reduction

4

Action

is needed now to take advantage of the ways that forestry can help reduce poverty. Without action – without investment in **people-centred forestry** – other measures to tackle poverty and improve poor people's livelihoods will be undermined.

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Forests and trees can help. Forest resources contribute to food security. They can provide commercial opportunities and employment for the poor. They are often central to the development of good local governance.

A people-centred approach can further increase the impact of forests and trees in reducing poverty. What is needed is the removal of barriers that prevent forests and trees from contributing to the livelihoods of the poor as well as support for emerging opportunities.



What do poor people get from trees and forests?

- Subsistence goods such as fuelwood, medicines, wood for building, rope, bushmeat, fodder, mushrooms, honey, edible leaves, roots, fruits
- Goods for sale such as all of the above goods, arts and crafts, timber and other wood products
- Indirect benefits such as land for other uses, social and spiritual sites, environmental services, including watershed protection and biodiversity conservation



About **1.6** billion
people

in the world rely heavily
on forest resources for
their livelihoods.

Opportunities in a fast changing world

AS THE WORLD'S POPULATION GROWS, few people, urban or rural, remain isolated from the global economy. But while trade, technology and information systems, and even human aspirations become more global, **the world's natural forests are declining**. Global climate changes are expected to have drastic impacts on forests and agricultural systems. **This will have major implications for strategies aimed at poverty alleviation.**

With economic inequity increasing, the poor need safeguards more than ever. Demands on forests and trees are increasing, with about 1.6 billion people relying heavily on forest resources for their livelihoods. The world's rapid pace of change means increased challenges for the poor, but also can provide new opportunities for improved livelihoods based on sustainable use of natural resources. If key actions are taken, even the poorest forest producers, traders and workers can participate in local initiatives that offer commercial prospects.

Forest resources contribute directly to livelihoods, and can complement other key components of poverty reduction through food production, education and primary health care. **The challenge is to support specific changes that will lead to a greater role for forest and tree resources in the livelihoods of the poor.**

This challenge requires immediate action.

Dependence on forests*

60 million indigenous people living in the rainforests of Latin America, Southeast Asia and West Africa depend heavily on forests.

350 million people living in, or next to, dense forests rely on them for subsistence or income.

1.2 billion people in developing countries use trees on farms to generate food and cash.

Benefits to local livelihoods from people-centred forestry

- Rights to access, control and use of forest and tree resources
- More say in decisions over use and management of forest resources
- Reduced vulnerability, not only through secure forest resources but also political empowerment
- Income from forest goods and services
- Improved governance through more effective local institutions
- Partnership to enhance capacities
- Direct benefits from environmental services
- Increased powers of negotiation

* World Bank, 2001. A Revised Forest Strategy for the World Bank Group. Draft 30 July 2001, World Bank, Washington, DC