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International Council of Forest and Paper Associations – Policy Statement

Climate Smart Forestry and Forest Products

Climate Smart Forestry Leads to Climate Positive Products

Sustainably managed forests and forest products can play a critical role in helping achieve the global commitment reached at the United Nations COP-21 climate conference in Paris to limit global warming well below 2°C by the end of the century.

Mirroring this, a number of forest products industry and forestry associations around the globe have publicized their intentions to support the transition to a low- to net-zero carbon economy. In some cases going beyond, that is, committing to be climate positive.

The reduction or stabilization of the concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere can be achieved through the reduction of emissions of such gases and/or the increase of removals (e.g. through photosynthesis) and maintenance or increase of carbon stocks.

Sustainable forestry practices and forest products can contribute in both ways. As such, forestry in a broad sense is included in most countries' Nationally Determined Contributions.

Five Key Climate Smart Forestry and Forest Products Solutions

1. Responsibly managed forests absorb and durably sequester carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Forest Resource Assessment 2015, forests in the world were sequestering close to 300 Gigatonnes of carbon[1]. As with any mitigation action, carbon sequestration by forests should not be a substitute or silver bullet for action to reduce emissions but can ease achieving even the minimum Paris commitments and facilitate the transition to a lower carbon world.

2. Products made of wood and wood fibre store carbon and contribute to the reduction of concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

3. A circular approach (use of renewable materials, reuse, and recycling) can enhance not only the storage of carbon but also reducing process emissions. The 2021 ICFPA Sustainability Progress Report shows a 12.6 percentage points (compared to 2000) increase in the global paper recycling rate, reaching 59.1%.[2] Moreover, minimizing landfilling of valuable resources through improved recycling reduces methane emissions. In addition to its renewable nature, the forest industry is recycling its products at high rates and aims at recycling more.

[1] FAO, Global Forest Resource Assessment, 2015. The exact figure is 296 Gt.
[2] International Council of Forest and Paper Associations. ICFPA 2020-2021 Sustainability Progress Report. https://icfpa.org/download/1182/

4. Using wood and renewable raw materials for construction, products and energy replaces the use of fossil fuel or non-renewable materials and energy throughout multiple supply chains.

5. In the global forest products industry, 64.1% of on-site energy needs of the pulp and paper manufacturing industry are met by biomass and renewable energy, thus avoiding the release of additional CO_2 in the atmosphere. A large share of the biomass used by the forest products industry derives from manufacturing residuals that would otherwise be discarded and produce methane or be combusted without energy recovery[3].

Enhancing and reaping forestry and forests products climate benefits

Ahead of the critical COP-26 climate conference in Glasgow, the ICFPA reiterated its call for proper and holistic recognition of the positive role of sustainable forestry and forest products in the global climate challenge, and especially:

- The carbon removal and storage potential of all types of forests, therefore asking for ambitious measures to promote active forest management, afforestation, reforestation and actively combat deforestation.
- The carbon storage potential of wood products, therefore urging to promote the use of wood as a natural, renewable and recyclable raw material. In that context, the ICFPA members invite the negotiators to consider a revision of the list of products considered as "harvested wood products" under the land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) activities to reflect on the constant development of new categories of long-life wood products (e.g. textile produced from wood fibre).
- The avoided emissions thanks to the use of wood as raw material instead of fossil resources for products and fuel for energy. In that respect, the forest-based bioeconomy has the potential to enhance such substitution benefits and should be promoted.

Achieving this would also require commitments from governments and public authorities in support of private sector actions

- Establish afforestation and reforestation programmes, where possible, to enhance carbon stocks and availability of wood for several purposes.
- Promote a more circular economy, based on reuse, recovery, and recycling of regenerative products.
- Support research and innovation to boost the development of renewable alternatives to fossil fuels or other non-renewable resources.
- Combat deforestation (especially from non-sustainable operations and illegal logging activities as well as from unsustainable practices in value chains outside the forest sector), which is recognized as being due to causes that are unrelated to sustainable forest management**.**
- Secure a concept of carbon neutrality of sustainably grown and harvested biomass.

[3] National Council for Air and Stream Improvement. "Greenhouse Gas and Fossil Fuel Reduction Benefits of Using Biomass Manufacturing Residuals for Energy Production in Forest Products Facilities." (Rev. August 2014). http://ncasi.org/Downloads/Download.ashx?id=9603.