

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Focusing on forests

On May 22, the United Nations spearheaded the celebration of the 2002 International Day for Biological Diversity by highlighting the importance of forest biodiversity to the global environment and to human wellbeing. Forests contain some of the most vibrant ecosystems on the planet, and provide homes to a variety of flora and fauna. They are also vital to people's health, particularly those who reside around forests and depend on the forest resources for survival. Forests also provide a wide range of economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits and services, including food, medicine and shelter.

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) states that from 50% some 8,000 years ago, forests now occupy about 27% of the Earth's ice-free surface. Forest destruction is attributed to housing and infrastructure development, desertification and land deg-

radation, and hundreds of years of large-scale conversion to agriculture and rangelands. Other factors include wasteful forest management and logging practices, over-exploitation, invasive alien species, pollution and climate change.

In his speech to commemorate the event, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan stressed the urgency of helping those who depend on illegal and unsustainable forest uses "to make a transition to more sustain-

able ways of earning their living". Around 450 million poor people all over the world live in and around forests and depend on them directly or indirectly. Some are wholly dependent on forest products on a daily basis while others may use these to ensure food security on a seasonal basis.

Further forest degradation could be arrested with the creation and effective management of networks of protected areas. Ecologically

viable areas of all forest ecosystem types must be preserved and forest restoration programmes should be set in place. Forest managers should have the training to implement management approaches appropriate for designated sites. At the same time, decision-making on forest management should be shared with indigenous peoples and local communities to ensure that their needs are taken into consideration. Indigenous and local expertise can also contribute to effective and sustainable forest management.

The CBD's work programme on forest biological diversity emphasizes the ecosystem approach, socioeconomic considerations, conservation and sustainable use. It promotes a scientific analysis of how human activities and forest practices influence biodiversity and how the resulting damages can be minimized. The most effective forest protection approaches are often those that can strike a balance between the needs of biodiversity and those of the local people. ■



Guidebook of Biodiversity Principles for Developers and Planners

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The rate of development in Southeast Asia has been both astonishing and frightening. Over three decades the landscape has been transformed by the development of roads, bridges and new towns and agricultural revolutions. The population has doubled and the area of forest halved. The impacts on our natural environment are great and not entirely predictable. Already the increasing rate of natural disasters in the form of floods, droughts, landslides, earthquakes and typhoons are causing billions of dollars of damage each year and leads one to question whether these are 'natural' or 'man induced'. Global warming brings new threats, and the acid rain of our polluted skies causes forests and fish to die and brings problems for human health.

Guidebook of Biodiversity Principles for Developers and Planners will not solve these problems but it may assist in reducing some of the damages. Many developments can be less

damaging to the environment and to human health and quality of life if we show a little more respect to biodiversity principles and the values of nature and scenic beauty.

The guidebook presents a multitude of ways in which careless development causes great damage to biodiversity. It pictures two scenarios: careless development, and the recommended alternative. The guidelines are arranged in a number of sections covering the major ecosystems of a country. In most cases, the improvements carry no extra cost; in some, they are cheaper; but in either case they will make a big difference to the local quality of life and quality of the environment.

For readers in ASEAN member countries, you may obtain free copies by writing to the addressee below:

The Distribution Manager

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