



The forest sector in the center of green economy

Forests are a source of income and employment.

Even though the forest sector was affected by the recent global economic recession, it has been on a slow path of recovery ever since.

In this context, the transition to a green economy offers great opportunities to develop the forest sector even further, as well as to foster the creation of new green jobs.

Green economy was recognised in the final document of the Rio+20 Conference, 'The future we want', as an important tool to achieve sustainable development. The call for green economy transformation will still be a basis on which to build the post 2015 sustainable development framework, since it encompasses the compatibility of economic growth with reducing environmental degradation.

Developing the forest sector in a green economy scenario would improve its competitiveness, and would integrate its environmental and socioeconomic value at the same time.

But, what is “green economy”?

According to the definition provided by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), green economy 'results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. In its simplest expression, a green economy is low carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive. In a green economy, growth in income and employment should be driven by public and private investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services'.

In short: green economy is about economic growth, but not at any cost. It is about economic development, while caring also about environmental sustainability and the social dimension linked to economic development.

... and why is the forest sector the perfect candidate to be developed within a green economy context?

In Europe the forest sector is working to develop according to the concept of sustainable forest management (SFM) promoted by FOREST EUROPE, and this concept is perfectly compatible with the essence of green economy.

Sustainable forest management, as defined in the 2nd Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Helsinki, 1993), is 'the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems'.

Sustainable forest management is about managing and using forests, caring about the maintenance and enhancement of the ecological, economic and social functions and services they provide.

The development of the forest sector in a green economy would combine measures related not only to protecting the environment and maintaining and enhancing the supply of forest ecosystem services, but also to providing sustainable and responsible productive activities and safeguarding the profitability of the forest sector.

In this sense, opportunities exist to diversify and develop the forest sector, new market niches and employment linked to non-wood forest resources and forest services, which are starting to attract more attention, and would respect the supply of the goods and services provided by these ecosystems. Among these possibilities are those linked to the increasing use of biomass for energy, the developing of markets linked to non-wood products (mushrooms, berries, cork, resins, etc.), ecotourism, and the promotion of the use of wood and other renewable forest resources.

Research into new, innovative technologies and products and identifying new demands from society that could be fulfilled by forest-origin products and services will be key for the development of the forest sector. Closely related to these, training and education will also be essential to make the forest sector more competitive. Only a competitive sector will assure its profitability.

FOREST EUROPE recognises opportunities that the green economy offers to develop further the forest sector, as well as to secure decent green jobs and increase social inclusion. This will be recognised by the ministers responsible for forests in Europe at the 7th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference. They will commit to enhance the role of sustainable forest management in a green economy, as well as to promote green jobs in forests and to incorporate the value of forest ecosystem services in a green economy.

Key messages

- Forests are a source of employment and income.
- Green economy offers important opportunities to the forest sector, in terms of further development, sustainable growth and creation of new green jobs.
- The transition to a green economy in the forest sector cannot be understood separately from its social dimension: green jobs are decent jobs.
- Social inclusion and gender equality should be promoted along the whole forest value chain.
- A qualified and safe workforce is one of the pillars of a more competitive forest sector. Education and training systems should be adapted to changing conditions, technologies and the new skills required in the forest sector.
- Innovation and research are key for the development and long term competitiveness of the whole forest sector.

Key facts

- The forest sector contributes around 1% (103 billion euros) to Gross Domestic Product in Europe as a whole.
- Europe has shifted from being a net-importer to being a net-exporter of primary wood and paper products.
- Europe is one of the largest producers of wood in the world. In 2010, 475 million m³ of wood were produced in Europe, and the overall value of marketed wood reached more than 18 billion euros.
- The total value of marketed forest non-wood goods reached almost 2.3 billion euros in 2010.
- Demand for wood fuel is increasing.
- Government revenue from forest products and services reached at least 1.8 billion euros in 2010, with an average of 40 euros per ha in Europe. Revenue steadily increased during the decade 2000-2010.
- At least three million people work in forestry, wood manufacturing and the paper industry in the whole of Europe.
- Around 30% of all people employed in forestry in Europe are 49 years old or over.
- Across Europe, women only account for 20% of the overall workforce in the forest sector.