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“Forest Plantations for Sustainable Society and Environment”

S. Appanah
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Bangkok
Simmathiri.Appanah@fao.org

Abstract:

In recent decades, the world has become embroiled in a polarizing debate on how forests, especially tropical forests, are being managed. Within that landscape, the timber plantations too have received their share of proponents and detractors. In the past, the science of plantations laid emphasis on injecting sophisticated quantitative approaches for maximizing production of wood. As a result, a few of the fast-growing, short rotation tree species, mainly originating from Australia, tended to dominate in the tropical and subtropical zones worldwide. They were generally grown as monocultures. However, concerns over the environmental consequences of intensively managed forest plantations are rising. This has been capped by the unprecedented attention being paid to landuse changes and its impact on global warming. This aside, management decisions on the design of plantations have equally strong implications on our economy, ecology, and quality of life. Diverse outputs and expectations are sought from plantations: besides being sustainable ecosystems, they are required to continue producing high quality wood products, clean water, conserve biodiversity and environmental health, act as carbon sinks, and pleasant to the aesthetics. With the rapid increase in price of fossil fuels, plantations are also being sought as another source of renewable energy. In addition, development theories are forcing management to take a broader look at the social and economic consequences of forest plantations and their implications to stability of human communities. These various roles conferred to forest plantations would certainly require drastic rethinking of their silviculture and management. Innovative schemes ranging from traditional practices, mosaic planting, multiple uneven-aged species management with a mix of end products and a host of other approaches are being investigated. The future may be with plantations that resemble somewhat the “natural” forests.

No extended abstract received yet