



## Spotlight on forestry research

Every year the Crawford Fund holds an annual conference in Canberra to discuss and debate an important research and development issue related to agriculture and natural resource management. The Fund was established in 1987 in memory of Sir John Crawford, one of the pioneers of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

In 2005, the theme was 'Forests, Wood and Livelihoods: Finding a Future for All'. You can gauge just how important these events are by the list of those who attend them. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Forestry, the Shadow Minister of Forestry, several heads of industry and 30 Australian parliamentarians joined key thinkers in the world of forestry research for the one-day event at New Parliament House. The conference was widely reported in the media.

Australia has made a significant contribution to forestry research, as Alexander Downer, Australia's Foreign Affairs Minister, stressed when he opened the conference. 'Australia contributes to international sustainable forestry efforts because we recognise the critical and multidimensional role forests play in developing countries, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region,' he said. He pointed out that for many people in developing countries, forests provide life's essentials: food, shelter, fuel, medicines and a source of income.

The keynote speech was delivered by David Kaimowitz, CIFOR's Director General. 'When it comes to forests and forestry, the

region needs Australia, and Australia needs the peace and prosperity that good forest management can bring,' said Kaimowitz. Another CIFOR scientist to contribute to the meeting was Brian Belcher, who urged policy-makers to include forests in their global efforts to reduce poverty. 'Government and donor budgets are increasingly targeted at poverty alleviation,' he said, 'and yet forestry and forestry resources have received very little attention in most poverty-reduction strategy papers.'

Kaimowitz praised the work of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), an organisation which played a key role in the founding of CIFOR in 1993. 'Their researchers have had great successes with eucalyptus plantations in southern China, and they are tackling crucial issues such as how to make decentralisation work in Indonesia, and how to get farmers more money from timber in Papua New Guinea,' he explained.

Before the conference, Neil Andrew, chairman of Crawford Fund, pointed out that the debate about how to use the world's forests is often highly emotional. 'I hope that this year's annual conference will get beyond the emotion by highlighting the significant role of international forestry research in finding a balance between the competing demands for forest products and services, and the ability of natural and plantation forests to supply them,' he said. Judged by these terms, the conference was undoubtedly a success.

Forests provide numerous goods and services on which the rural poor depend. A farmer in Jharkland, India, transports grass harvested from forest land to the market. (Photo by Brian Belcher)