

A new strategy for a new era

CIFOR's vision is of a world in which forests remain high on the political agenda, and where people recognise the real value of forests for maintaining livelihoods and ecosystems. Decision-making which affects forests should be based on solid science and the principles of good governance, and reflect the perspectives of developing countries and forest-dependent people.

Since the launch of CIFOR's first research strategy in 1996, the state of the world's forests, and the way we perceive them, has changed. They have taken centre stage in the international debate on climate change, and curbing forest loss is now seen as key way of tackling global warming. Concerns about global warming have encouraged governments to promote biofuels made from crops like oil palm, corn and sugar. This will almost certainly lead to increased rates of forest clearance. The nature of global trade is also changing, with China's rapid economic growth, in particular, having a profound impact on the way forests are used. And, of course, the world's population continues to rise, and this will affect forests in various ways.

To respond to these and other challenges, CIFOR has developed a new research strategy, in line with the recommendations of the second External Programme and Management Review (EPMR), whose findings were summarised in last year's annual report. The process, which ran for most of 2007, was based on the strategy framework for non-profit organisations developed by Stanford University's Business School, and it involved a range of activities.

Five task forces – one each for mission, external environment, priority research topics, competitive advantage and 'making it happen' – conducted their own analyses and held extensive discussions with staff. The annual staff meeting in August focused largely on the strategy, as did several smaller meetings in CIFOR's headquarters and in the regions. There were also consultations with external stakeholders. In short, the process was wide-ranging and democratic. "The process was costly in terms of both time and energy, and at times there was a lot of frustration," recalls Markku Kanninen, director of the Environmental Services programme. "But we eventually came up with the strategy that will radically change how we work. In future we will be much more impact-oriented."

One of the main objectives was to establish precisely what sort of research CIFOR should undertake. A preliminary list of 13 research topics – or domains – was drawn up by CIFOR scientists, and small teams were assigned to develop a narrative for each. These were then shared with staff, both individually and at the annual staff meeting, and prioritised using the Delphi technique, a process commonly used in business to reach a consensus. Three panels – two consisting of CIFOR scientists, the other of senior management and two members of the Board of Trustees – scored the 13 research domains, and they came up with six which were considered a priority. This is where CIFOR will concentrate its efforts over the next decade. The new research domains are:

- Enhancing the role of forests in climate mitigation;
- Enhancing the role of forests in adaptation to climate change;
- Increasing rural income generation through small-scale and community forestry;
- Achieving conservation and development in integrated landscape management;
- Managing the impact of globalised trade and investment on forests;
- Shifting the paradigm for the management of tropical production forests.

Approved by the Board of Trustees in December 2007, the new strategy describes how CIFOR will put its research into practice to influence global forest policy.

Within five years, CIFOR aims to become a leading source of information and analysis on the role of forests in climate change mitigation and adaptation, on the relationship between forests and poverty, and on the impact on forests of globalised trade and investment. CIFOR also wants to become known for analysing issues in ways that include the perspectives of less powerful stakeholders, such as indigenous people and women.