



International  
Labour  
Organization

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# International Year of Forests 2011: **What about the labour aspects of forestry?**



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Sectoral Activities Department • International Labour Office  
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# Forestry Work

Forestry sector embraces all the fieldwork required to establish, regenerate, manage, and protect forests and harvest their products. It employs 13.7 million formal workers globally and its commercial output represents about 0.4 percent of world GDP. Forestry work is often characterized by high degrees of informality, illegal logging, low productivity and wages, and hazardous working conditions. Ensuring adequate protection, training and education of the workforce and facilitating social dialogue among employers, workers, and the government can help tackle these deficits and realize the potential for sustainable employment and decent work conditions within the industry.

## ***Why this leaflet?***

*This is an informational leaflet, produced to serve as a reference for interested groups including the forestry workforce, various stakeholders, and interested individuals. Its main purpose is to shed light on the labour aspects of forestry work— as part of ILO's awareness raising activities during the International Year of Forests 2011.*

## **Facts and Figures**

- Forestry employs 13.7 million formal workers, about 1% of total world employment, although its workforce is probably much larger due to widespread informality, especially in developing countries
- Commercial forestry represents about 0.4% of world GDP, but the value of non-commercial goods and services provided by forests may well exceed the commercial output
- Forestry is expanding in Latin America and Asia while it has been continually declining in Europe and North America
- Depending on the definitions involved and the data available, informal workers have been estimated to represent between 66% and 72% of formal employment
- With 3.5 billion m<sup>3</sup> harvested annually, wood is by far the most important forest product
- Ten countries concentrate over 60 percent of total forestry employment. China, with 3.5 million formal jobs in the sector, accounts for 26 percent.
- Women are strongly under-represented in management and decision-making and tend to be trapped in low-status, low-paid work.







# Why action is needed

Forests are important sources of energy and employment/livelihoods for local communities, providing food, medicine, and materials for shelter. They provide jobs in logging and conservation, and support important sectors such as agriculture and wood processing—while offering cultural, spiritual, touristic, and recreational values. Forests provide indispensable environmental services (including water sources and catchments, maintenance of the hydrological balance, soil protection, and recycling of atmospheric gases) and have considerable potential for creating green jobs, particularly through activities such as reforestation, afforestation, agroforestry, and sustainable forest management.

However, oftentimes debates over forests tend to focus on biodiversity and ecological issues and neglect the human and labour dimensions, including the function of forests for society and the role and conditions of forestry workers. In these regards, forestry is characterized by a high degree of informality (especially the expansion of illegal logging practices, a major cause of deforestation), poor working conditions, low pay, lack of job security, and inadequate occupational safety and health conditions. Worksites are usually temporary and scattered, and widespread informality makes labour inspection particularly difficult.

Forestry in general and logging in particular continue to be among the most dangerous occupations. Accidents are normally caused by poor organization and supervision, inadequate tools and equipment, poor planning, and lack of skills and competency among workers,

supervisors, and managers. Although mechanization in timber harvesting has led to increased productivity, it has also caused job losses and radical changes in the working methods (while mechanization often reduces the danger and stress of forestry work, it may

*Oftentimes debates over forests tend to focus on biodiversity and ecological issues and neglect the human and labour dimensions.*

cause psychological and musculoskeletal problems of a different kind). Additionally, subcontracting practices in forestry have led to precarious and unstable employment practices in many countries.

In terms of wages, forestry workers generally earn below the average of other industries, including wood processing and pulp and paper. In this regard, women especially face challenges as they are strongly underrepresented in management and decision making, receive comparably lower wages, and are often more exposed to significant health and safety risks than men.

Training of forest workers is another challenge in the industry, since it is rudimentary or non-existent in most tropical countries, and is combined with low rate of unionization, particularly in developing countries.







# Policy options

In ILO's perspective, there are a number of policy areas that can be prioritized in order to address some of the labour challenges that the forestry sector currently faces. These policy areas may range from skills development and training to promotion of better working conditions and protection of fundamental rights at work to promotion of effective social dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders at all levels.

## ❖ **Focus on creating better jobs and working conditions, and protecting fundamental rights at work**

- Strengthen and promote small and medium size enterprises at local level to promote jobs and livelihoods
- Promote rights of women in the industry; fight gender-related stereotypes, provide women training, and help them secure management and decision making positions
- Promote the rights of indigenous people and include them in the decision making process
- Strive to eliminate forced and child labour in the industry
- Create an enabling environment for labour unions and collective bargaining practices
- Promote better quality, formal employment, and better working conditions by enforcing adequate contracting standards (e.g., make sure the contractor firm is formally established with competent management and skilled personnel; there is meaningful partnership

rather than a contractor-employee dependency relationship)

- Raise awareness about the role of forest work in protecting the environment and develop national policies targeting green job creation

## ❖ **Focus on training and skills development**

- Prioritize training, capacity building, and skills development to ensure and maintain a competitive and sustainable forestry workforce and boost productivity
- Promote, and mainstream safety and health training practices for workers, in both public and private sectors
- Focus on developing specific tools such as handbooks and training modules, and make them available to contractors, workers, and independent training institutions
- Develop training materials on technical as well as policy and management issues (e.g., management of forests, fire management, awareness raising about the role of forests in protection of the environment and biodiversity, the role of forests in reducing poverty, gender equality, afforestation, forest conservation, deforestation, etc)
- Strengthen and support relevant formal and informal academic and training institutions which focus on forestry education and research
- Enhance the capacity of relevant government staff dealing with forestry work



❖ **Promote social dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders at all levels**

- Develop and mainstream national codes of practice in occupational safety and health using participatory mechanisms, involving stakeholders at all levels, including workers, employers, contractors, government representatives, environment groups and representatives of indigenous people, and technical experts
- Work with international institutions in adopting forest work certification mechanisms in ensuring sustainable forest management
- Develop, mainstream, and ensure enforcement of labour inspection practices in the industry
- Establish health and safety policy and management system that systematically identify hazards and preventive measures
- Ensure continuous implementation and follow up on established, long term objective in forest operations
- Promote health and safety requirements in all stages of forest work, from planning to implementation
- Ensure that relations between workers and management are based on regular consultation and fairness on both sides
- Promote transparent multi stakeholder verification of compliance with forestry management standards to protect

the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable groups

- Share knowledge with stakeholders about how to best link forestry management with development assistance, when appropriate

*Some of the key policy areas that can help ensure better labour conditions—and help mitigate decent work deficits—in forestry sector may range from skills development and training to promotion of better working conditions and protection of fundamental rights at work to promotion of effective social dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders at all levels.*



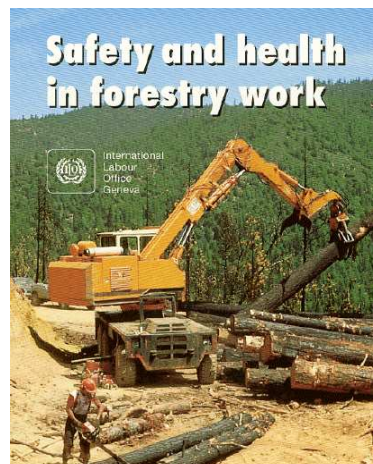




# ILO's role & resources

- The ILO has been working jointly with FAO and UNECE for many years (through Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training, 1954-2004) to develop manuals and codes of practice in forestry, and other related documents
- ILO has held/participated international meetings and workshops in the fields of vocational training, applied ergonomics and other aspects of forestry (e.g., Asia Forestry Week 2008; International Conference on Safety and Health in Forestry, Annecy, 2007; Impact of Climate Change on Forestry Work, Geneva, 2011; etc)
- Although the ILO does not have a specific Convention on forestry many of its Recommendations and Conventions and all of its Fundamental Principles apply to the forestry sector
- ILO has specifically developed a Code of Practice on Safety and Health in Forestry Work (1998), and a Guidelines for Labour Inspection in Forestry (2005)
- A large part of ILO's work in the forestry sector has been dedicated to facilitation and strengthening of social dialogue through holding meetings among its tripartite constituents in over 70 countries
- ILO has worked toward the implementation of country activities (Malaysia, Indonesia, and Peru) to deal with illegal logging and decent work deficits

## Box 1. ILO Code of Practice on Safety and Health in Forestry Work



The ILO code of practice *Safety and health in forestry*, published in 1998, is not legally binding but provides guidance that may well be used as a benchmark for good practice. The Code is widely available and has

now been translated into at least eight languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, Polish, Serbo-Croat, Czech and Albanian).

In the context of Europe, the Code has supplemented national efforts—involving government and stakeholders—in tackling safety and health challenges within the industry, improvement of which is increasingly seen as an important contributor to productivity, profitability and employability.

*Source: ILO's Sectoral Activities Programme, 2009*



## FORWORKNET FORESTRY EXPERTS NETWORK

ILO SECTORAL ACTIVITIES PROGRAMME - JOINT FAO/IECE/ILO EXPERTS NETWORK

### Box 2. Forestry Experts Network—FORWORKNET

Launched in September 1993 by the ILO, FORWORKNET is an international network of around 300 individuals and institutions in some 70 countries interested in forestry workforce issues. The primary functions of FORWORKNET are to enable its members to communicate directly with each other and to open new opportunities for international exchange and cooperation.

Specifically, the network endeavours to keep members abreast of new developments, new publications, data and research results, forthcoming events, new technologies affecting forest workers and other relevant news. These functions are mainly achieved by helping members to locate sources of information, advice or assistance. In addition, the network regularly issues an "update" (in the form of a newsletter published by the ILO and available on its website) on relevant news and information. Specific topics include human resource development, productivity, and social and labour issues in forestry.

*Source: ILO's Sectoral Activities Programme*  
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/sectors/forest/forwknet.htm>

### Box 3. Decent work and green jobs in the forestry sector in Indonesia

As a country with the largest forestry industries in the Asia Pacific Region, Indonesia plays an important role within the geo-political, economic and climate change context. The forestry industry has made significant contributions to the gross domestic product, foreign exchange, government revenue and employment over the last decades.

In 2010, an ILO regional workshop on "decent work in the Indonesian forestry industries" brought together government representatives including from the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration, the Ministry of Forestry, the National Development Planning Agency, Provincial Government East Java, Provincial Government East Kalimantan, as well as employers' and workers' representatives and donor agencies to highlight the importance of issues concerning illegal logging, green jobs and other labour-related matters in the forestry sector. Under the framework of the Green Economy, issues specifically related to declining growth and structural changes in the industry, productivity, and illegal logging and its impact on the environment were addressed.

*Source: ILO country office for Indonesia, 2010*

### Useful Links

- Department of Sectoral Activities Website:  
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/sectors/forest.htm>
- ILO's Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment (SafeWork):  
<http://www.ilo.org/safework/lang-en/index.htm>
- Database of International Labour Standards (ILOLEX):  
<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/index.htm>

# Interested in further reading?

FAO: State of the World's Forests (Rome: 2009)

FAO: Forest Finance, Contribution of Forestry Sector to National Economies, 1990-2006 (Rome: 2008)

ILO: Forestry Wood, Pulp and Paper, Website Available at:  
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/sectors/forest/emp-forestry.htm>  
 (Geneva:2008)

FAO: Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010. (Rome: 2010)

UNEP: Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low Carbon World. (Geneva:2008)

ILO: Employment in Forestry, Wood, Pulp and Paper: Social Protection and Social Dialogue (Geneva: 2010)

Peter Blomback and Peter Poschen: Decent Work in Forestry? Enhancing Forestry Work and Forest-Based Livelihoods (Quebec City: 2003)

Guertin, Carl-Eric: Illegal Logging and Illegal Activities in the Forestry Sector: Overview and Possible Issues for the UNECE Timber Committee and FAO European Forestry (Geneva: 2003)

FAO: "XIII World Forestry Congress", in Unasylva 234/235 Vol. 61 (2010)

ILO: Raising Awareness of Forest and Forestry, Building Bridges Between People, Forest, and Forestry (Geneva: 2003)

ILO: Safety and health in forestry work: An ILO code of practice. Available at:  
[http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS\\_PUBL\\_9221108260\\_EN/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_PUBL_9221108260_EN/lang--en/index.htm)  
 (Geneva: 1998)

Meshack Khosa: Forestry Contracting in South Africa (London and Pretoria: 2000)

FAO: Food, Agriculture & Decent Work; ILO & FAO Working Together. Available at:  
<http://www.fao-ilo.org/fao-ilo-forestry0/en/>

ILO: Safety and health in the European forestry sector– The impact of more open markets and of increased regulation. (Geneva: 2009)

ILO: Codes of forest practices—enhancing social dialogue and forestry work. (Geneva: 2003)

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