

Forests play key role in helping countries achieve sustainable development – UN official



FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva addresses the opening of the Committee on Forestry. Photo: FAO/Giulio Napolitano

24 September 2012 – From soil and water preservation to conserving biodiversity, forests play a crucial role in helping countries achieve sustainable development, a senior United Nations official stressed today at the opening of a key gathering on forestry.

“The success of FAO’s work in improving lives will depend very much on how we balance the use and preservation of natural resources. This includes forests, which play an important role in environmental factors like carbon sequestration, soil and water quality preservation and conserving biodiversity,” said the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization

(FAO), José Graziano da Silva, at the [opening](#) of the agency's [Committee on Forestry](#) in Rome, Italy.

The Committee is the highest FAO statutory body on forestry, bringing together heads of forest services and other senior government officials to identify emerging policy and technical issues, to seek solutions and to advise FAO and others on appropriate action.

During the five-day meeting, the Committee will discuss how to build on the commitments made at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development ([Rio+20](#)) regarding the protection and sustainable use of forests. Among the issues to be addressed are rural development, the integration of forests with environmental and land use policies, and improving the management of forestry resources, including wood and non-wood products.

Some 100 Heads of State and government, along with thousands of representatives from non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society attended Rio+20, all seeking to help shape new policies to promote global prosperity, reduce poverty and advance social equity and environmental protection.

In his remarks, Mr. Graziano da Silva noted how some 350 million of the world's poorest people, including 60 million indigenous people, depend on forests for their daily subsistence and long-term survival. However, deforestation and forest degradation are contributing to significant losses of soil each year, putting the lives of many in peril.

“Preserving our soil is necessary to sustain life on the planet and yet the slow process of desertification has not captured as much attention as it merits,” the FAO chief said, adding that sustainable agriculture and forestry can reverse soil degradation and help combat desertification, noting that, “we need to make sure that soil protection and the fight against desertification are placed high on the international agenda.”

“We will need to work together with governments, civil society and the private sector to maximize the role that forests and wooded land will play in food security in the future,” Mr. Graziano da Silva said. “It will take a collective effort, including of all our partners within and beyond the UN system, to manage the world's forests in a sustainable way.”

The [2012 State of the World's Forests](#) report – which focuses on how sustainable use of forestry resources can help reduce poverty, hunger and climate change – will also be released during the Committee on Forestry meeting.

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