

Key policy issues for agroforestry

Presented by Sara Scherr, President, Ecoagriculture Partners

(<http://www.ecoagriculture.org/>)

During this afternoon's session on policy issues in agroforestry, Sara Scherr gave a broad introduction to the challenges in enhancing livelihoods, conserving biodiversity, and promoting productive and sustainable agriculture systems. She also explained the need for accurate and integrated data solutions and the need for that research to be communicated effectively to policymakers.

The organization where Scherr serves as President, Ecoagriculture Partners, strives for a world where current agricultural lands are increasingly managed as ecoagriculture landscapes to achieve three complementary goals: to enhance rural livelihoods; conserve biodiversity; and sustainably produce crops, livestock, fish, and forest products.

They believe in the need for a framework that seeks to simultaneously achieve improved livelihoods, conserve biodiversity (genetic resources, ecosystem services and wild flora and fauna), and promote sustainable production at a landscape scale. They and other like and unlike minded partners recognize that the production of food, forest and wetland products as it is often practiced--in both intensive and extensive systems-- is one of the chief challenges to improved livelihoods, biodiversity and sustainability.

From their site: "For example, over a third of the world's land area is heavily influenced by cropland or planted pastures; and more land is being deployed as part of the farming cycle in tree crops, grazing systems and production forestry. Similarly, biodiversity conservation efforts have been implemented without adequate recognition given to linkages and interactions with the production of food and forest products."

Scherr defined ecoagriculture and reviewed a series of steps that help to achieve the goals of ecoagriculture and related approaches such as sustainable agriculture, including:

- Selecting the right crops
- Diversifying the selection of crops
- Promoting a green revolution
- Reducing input solutions
- Supporting farmer innovation systems for diversified systems

She also explained where this approach is particularly important: areas where landscapes are highly degraded, and improved agriculture and livelihoods depend on a healthy ecosystem. Considering that two-thirds of the world's poor are dependant on subsistence agriculture for their survival and these people need the proper tools and opportunities afforded to them so that they may survive and sustain their livelihoods. There is also a divide between conservationists and agriculturalists that further challenges the situation. International partnerships and farmers and group organizations are also particularly important to improving the situation.

She lastly touched on the role of research and the need to have very accurate integrated data and the need to communicate the right stories to policy makers. Researchers also need to communicate the benefits and costs with different approaches to policymakers.

Few policy makers want to hear about things in scientific terms. They don't want to hear about the problems, they want to hear about clean water, more jobs, and other solutions. She explained that we need to translate the results of research into terms that policy makers want to understand while also recruiting agroforestry champions to serve at the table on all key policy dialogues. Research needs to be designed to specifically answer the questions policy makers have and to convey the information in a way that mobilizes policy makers. We must have the "details in our pocket" to forward these initiatives.

Definition

What is ecoagriculture?

"Ecoagriculture" is a term coined in 2000 (by Sara Scherr and Jeffrey McNeely, authors of the Future Harvest-commissioned report *Common Ground, Common Future: How Ecoagriculture Can Help Feed the World and Save Wild Biodiversity* - <http://www.ecoagriculture.org/documents/index.php?pubID=10>) to convey a vision of rural communities managing their resources to jointly achieve three broad goals at a landscape scale — what we refer to as the "three pillars" of ecoagriculture:

- * Enhance rural livelihoods;
- * Conserve or enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services; and
- * Develop more sustainable and productive agricultural systems.

Ecoagriculture is both a conservation strategy and a rural development strategy.

Ecoagriculture recognizes agricultural producers and communities as key stewards of ecosystems and biodiversity and enables them to play those roles effectively. Ecoagriculture applies an integrated ecosystem approach to agricultural landscapes to address all three pillars, drawing on diverse elements of production and conservation management systems. Meeting the goals of ecoagriculture usually requires collaboration or coordination between diverse stakeholders who are collectively responsible for managing key components of a landscape.

The goals of ecoagriculture are to maintain biodiversity and ecosystem services, manage agricultural production sustainably, and contribute to improved livelihoods among rural people – cannot be achieved at just a farm or plot level, but are linked at the landscape scale. Therefore, to make impact, we must consider all of the elements of a landscape as a whole.