

GFIS - AFRICA

EXPANDING PARTNERSHIP for GFIS in Africa

With the establishment of five regional GFIS¹ Service Centres, the GFIS Africa Project has created the foundation for the systematic mobilisation of forest-related scientific information in Africa. Over the past 4 ½ years and with generous support by the European Commission, these five centres, one each located in Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and Zimbabwe, have built the necessary capacities and the institutional network for further expanding the GFIS system to other African countries. In recent months efforts to increase awareness and encourage broader participation in GFIS, particularly mobilise more metadata have been stepped up. In-country workshops, one in Nigeria and one in Tanzania, were organised by the Coastal West Africa GFIS Service Centre (located at the Forest Research Institute of Ghana in Kumasi) and the East Africa GFIS Service Centres (located at the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, Nairobi).

In Nigeria, the workshop attracted sixteen participants representing seven forestry organisations, while in Tanzania ten persons representing four organisations joined the event. In both countries key forestry institutions such as the national research institutes, forestry faculties of the university, the forestry departments and some environmental NGOs were among the participating organisations.

The objectives of the workshops were:

- To present an overview of the GFIS Project, GFIS principles and benefits
- To demonstrate the GFIS website (<http://www.gfis.net>) and use of the search facilities
- To elaborate on the GFIS metadata elements and data entry protocol, *and*
- To conduct hands-on exercises in the use of GFIS.

All in all, there has been an excellent response by the participants about joining GFIS and using its facilities. As most forest-related information resources about these two countries are available in the forestry research institutes, universities and forestry departments they are the key players to act as information providers at the national level in close cooperation with the respective GFIS Service Centre.

Interactions with potential national and local information providers in both countries also revealed a number of constraints that need to be addressed in future efforts to strengthen GFIS in Africa. The following constraints have been identified and recommendations made to overcome them:

- Some institutions lack computers and internet access. Although GFIS does not have the resources to invest in large-scale upgrading schemes, partnership with more resourceful institutions may initially mitigate the lack of available infrastructure.
- As the number of potential information providers is much larger than could be convened in the workshops, further familiarisation and mobilisation campaigns in each country are needed. It would be most appropriate if the national forest research organisations would take the lead in this endeavour.
- In order to ensure that only relevant information is provided to GFIS, the national forest research organisations should support the regional service centres in the selection of new information providers and quality control of incoming reference material.
- Considerable efforts in future need to be directed towards training of staff members of information providing institutions in resource discovery and metadata formulation. In addition, potential users of GFIS such as scientists dealing with forest- and tree-related research, policy makers, forest managers and other interested forest stakeholders should be introduced to the various GFIS applications.

¹ The Global Forest Information Service (GFIS) is an internet-based system that aims at enhancing access to forest-related information from around the world. A search facility (<http://www.gfis.net>) has been developed on the internet that allows users to locate a wide array of different types of information resources such as reports, journal articles, maps, websites, and databases. Currently GFIS contains about 130,000 references contributed by 60 information providers. The database is continuously being expanded.

This article is based on the following two workshop reports:

Cobbinah, J., M. Sraku-Lartey and S. Britwum (Costal West Africa GFIS Service Centre). Report on the GFIS

Nigeria In-Country Training Workshop, Forestry Research Institute, Ibadan, Nigeria

Chikamai, B. and S. Mbiru (Eastern Africa GFIS Service Centre). Report

on a Training Workshop on the Global Forest Information Service (GFIS) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

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Research Proposal Writing Course in Sabah, Malaysia

In the East-Malaysian State of Sabah research activities in forestry are – to a large extent – conducted by scientists from the Sabah Forestry Department's Forest Research Centre (FRC) while forest education is the responsibility of the School of International Tropical Forestry (SITF) at the University Malaysia Sabah. Because forestry research and education in Sabah could not fully benefit from available national and international research funding, the Malaysian-German Forestry Education Project (MGFEP), a collaborative effort between SITF and the German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ), organised a training course for young research scientists in preparing and

writing research proposals. The course took place at the Campus of the University Malaysia Sabah in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, from 20-22 May, 2004. Seventeen lecturers of SITF and nine scientists from FRC participated in the 3-day course.

Dr. Michael Kleine, Coordinator of IUFRO-SPDC, Vienna, Austria, and Dr. Chan Hung Tuck, Director of Research Management, FRIM, Kepong, Malaysia, acted as workshop trainers and lecturers while Dr. Walter Kollert, Chief Technical Advisor of MGFEP and Prof. Aminuddin Mohamad, Dean of SITF, provided logistics and technical assistance.

The course contents is based on IUFRO-SPDC's training module on research proposal writing as well as input by FRIM on the Eighth Malaysia Plan IRPA Programme. During the first general day the participants were introduced to topics such as identifying and prioritising research needs, identifying sources for research funding and introduction to the research proposal process. The latter involves pre-planning and rules for writing the proposal including summary, problem statement, project description, budget and various appendices. On the second day, the Malaysian scheme for research funding was introduced providing an overview of the IRPA Programme (budget allo-