



## Using public procurement policy (PPP) for forest products to secure livelihoods and natural resources

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Few recognise that biological diversity (which includes all living things) represents the natural wealth of the Earth. It provides the basis for life, economic development and prosperity for the whole of mankind.

But, biodiversity is currently vanishing at an alarming rate all over the world. According to Stavros Dimas, EU Commissioner for Environment, *“we are, so to speak, erasing nature’s hard drive without even knowing what data it contains.”*<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its 190 Contracting Parties, which includes Ireland, is to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2010. This is an ambitious goal which can only be achieved through the concerted efforts and combined strength of all sections of society. We therefore need alliances between policy makers, science, the public and business at international, national and local level.

Despite decades of concern, the world’s forest cover is more endangered than ever. Forests are disappearing rapidly in the tropics with about 13 million hectares – that’s an area the size of the Republic of Ireland felled every seven months or so. Between 1980 and 2000 tropical forest cover declined by up to 2.5 million square kilometres.

An EU-commissioned study entitled *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity* was published in October 2008. It concluded that annual cost of forest loss alone is running at \$2 - \$5 trillion. This is double the putative total losses to date on Wall Street, but the natural capital losses are occurring year after year.<sup>2</sup>

### **It’s time to act.**

The world's forests contain more carbon than the atmosphere – an estimated 638 billion tonnes. If this carbon were released, it would be equivalent to roughly 90 years of global carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels and cement production (based on the average yearly global emissions from 2000-2005). Much of the world's forest carbon is locked up in tropical forests, which contain 45% of all aboveground terrestrial biomass.<sup>3</sup>

Several EU member states and a number of other countries, now possess government procurement policies aimed at ensuring that public purchasers source only legal and/or sustainable timber and wood products. As of October 2008, these include Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the UK; a number of other countries, mostly EU member states, are considering adopting similar policies.<sup>4</sup>

### **Summary points**

- Tackling Climate Change is the biggest challenge of our age. Ireland has made commitments internationally which we have not lived up to, as the record shows. The Kyoto Protocol commits Ireland to remaining 13% above 1990 levels. Recent figures show we are currently 25.5% above 1990 levels.
- Good intentions are simply not enough. What we require is a robust framework which will translate aspirations into action. It needs to be driven from the very top in a coordinated integrated fashion and it needs to be grounded in legislation.



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- From the outset, it must be stated clearly that legal and illegal logging is often closely linked and that legal logging can also be highly destructive. The illegal aspect of the current timber trade is only part of the wider problem of a timber industry that has largely been unable to regulate itself and is destroying forests and peoples' livelihoods on a grand scale.
- Biological diversity represents the natural wealth of the Earth, and provides the basis for life and prosperity for the whole of mankind.
- The use of public procurement policy by a number of consumer states aimed at excluding illegal and unsustainable timber extraction from the world's forests is already in operation.
- The OECD has praised Ireland's overseas development programme as a "cutting edge" model for others to follow. (page 10, The Irish Times, Friday, May 8, 2009)
- A responsible National Timber Procurement Policy is a policy for *real change* and will greatly assist and enhance Ireland's overseas development programmes while supporting 'livelihoods' at home.
- The overall policy has been conceived and designed to highlight the established -but still not yet fully recognised and understood- role and significance of timber/forests in the overall debate on sustainable human development.
- The '*development*' rationale of this policy pivots around a number of key issues and challenges: *wood and poverty, wood and energy, wood and livelihoods/construction, wood and health, wood and education, wood and biodiversity, wood and sustainability, wood and climate-change, wood and conflict/war and wood and 'sustainable' economic development.*

1. The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity Report. European Communities, 2008.
2. Failing to address forest loss may prove catastrophic-John Gibbons writing in The Irish Times, Thursday, February 26, 2009.
3. Vested Interests – Industrial logging and carbon in tropical forests. Global Witness report-June 2009
4. Duncan Brack, associate fellow, Chatham House, London – UK Government Timber Procurement Policy- October 2008