West African scientists on a field visit during the savanna productivity workshop in Mali. (Photo by Daniel Tiveau)

CIFOR at the Researchers' World Congress

If you want to know what's happening to the world's forests, and you'd like an insight into the latest thinking in forestry research, then you could do no better than consult *Forests in the Global Balance – Changing Paradigms*, one of whose editors was Markku Kanninen, director of CIFOR's Environmental Services programme. The book was launched at the 12th World Congress of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), held in Brisbane in August 2005. Over 20 CIFOR scientists attended the Congress, and many had contributed to the book. The book launch was just one of many activities to which CIFOR scientists contributed, or organized, at Brisbane.

Forest in the Global Balance is the main output of IUFRO's Special Project on World Forests, Society and Environment (WSFE), whose mission is to provide a critical analysis of existing knowledge about the state of the world's forests and the way they are used. The project is supported by a core group of ten organisations, including CIFOR. The book is already being used as a reference work at Yale University, the Australian National University, CATIE in Costa Rica, the University of Helsinki and other academic and research institutes.

'The book is mainly addressed to researchers and specialists in forestry and related fields,' explains Gerardo Mery, the IUFRO-WFSE coordinator, 'but we were also determined to get the messages across to policy-makers.' The same editorial team launched a policy brief, *Forests for the New Millennium – Making Forests Work for People and Nature*, at the 5th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, held in New York in May 2005. Written in plain, jargon-free language, the policy brief provides a consensual view of the sort of policies which are needed if forested land is to be managed more sustainably, for the benefit of both people and nature.

Networking in the Sahel

For people who live in the dry savannas of west Africa, firewood and charcoal are among life's essentials. They supply about 80 per cent of domestic energy requirements in Burkina Faso and Mali. Such is the demand that many people are forced to travel long distances in search of wood fuel. If the resource is to be managed sustainably, there needs to be a balance between supply and demand. And if that's to happen, we need to know precisely how much wood the savannas produce, and how much people use.

Right now, there is much uncertainty about savanna productivity, which is why CIFOR, the Centre International de Recherches Agronomiques pour le Développement (CIRAD) and Mali's Institut d'Economie Rurale brought together about two dozen researchers to explore the subject in Bamako in October 2005. The workshop gave the researchers the opportunity to present their work and share their data with representatives of organisations concerned with conservation, forest management and energy production.

'There have been plenty of inventories measuring biomass productivity in arid areas in the Sahel,' explains CIFOR's Daniel Tiveau, 'but the data has often been inconsistently analysed, which makes comparative studies difficult.' At the workshop, CIRAD statistician Nicolas Picard provided the researchers with guidance. In future, this should lead to greater consistency of data collection and analysis.

According to CIRAD scientist Denis Gautier, the workshop provided some important guidance for policy-makers. 'The bad news for them is that a lot more research is needed before we have a clear understanding about the productivity of the savannas,' he says. 'But the good news is that the workshop has shown precisely what kind of research should be supported in future.'

Gautier believes the workshop, which led to the creation of a savanna productivity network, Savafor, provides an excellent example of regional collaboration between different research institutes. 'In the past, researchers in the region have worked very much in isolation,' he says. 'The workshop helped to bring them together, and provided us with common aims for future research.'