



Regional Session VI: Africa (Sub-Sahara)

“Effective fire management in Africa through Strengthened Networking System”

11 May 2011, 15:50 – 18:10

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In Africa, south of the Sahara desert, more vegetation fires burn and in higher frequency than on any other continent. Earth observation data reveal that more than 200 million of hectares of vegetated lands may burn every year, strongly impacting ecosystems and landscapes and thereby threatening livelihoods support systems and sustainable land and forest management in the region.

A greater occurrence of wildfires is caused by human activities primarily through uncontrolled use of fire for farming, hunting, maintaining grassland for livestock management, honey and charcoal production etc. It has therefore become imperative that contemporary fire management strategies take into account and adopt integrated, multi-sectoral, inter-sectoral and holistic approaches.

It is on the basis of the above principles that the African Session resolved to enhance effective fire management capabilities in the region through a strengthened networking system with the following objectives:

1. To give opportunity for presentations and discussions on a common platform towards fire management in Africa
2. To discuss various networking strategies that will enhance good fire management dispensation and the way forward
3. To discuss and finalise Sub-Sahara Africa's recommendations for the Conference Statement

The Session began a review of regional activities that took place after the 4th Wildfire Conference in Sevilla, Spain. A number of presentations highlighted current research findings within the region.

Africa south of the Sahara and especially the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region started a political process to support integrated fire management in the region. SADC held a meeting in January 2010 in Maputo to elaborate requirements and inputs of a SADC Regional Fire Management Program. Countries were represented by government officials as well as a representative from the private / NGO sector, which were providing a very good balance. As a result, SADC produced with the workshop recommendations the SADC Regional fire management program document, which was duly approved by the SADC ministers responsible for Natural Resources and Environment in July 2010. This document is providing a very clear mandate for the member states to support initiatives that come out of this program. This approved document is putting the region far ahead of many other developing regions and is an immense opportunity. The challenge is now for the member states to implement the program document and support it through budget and actions. The Session participants expressed the hope that the conference statement will assist in this process and provide political weight.

Subsequently, the delegates consolidated and finalized that the key components of the SADC Regional Fire Management Program document to be included in the Wildfire 2011 conference by the following five recommendations:

- Support the establishment of a Regional Fire Management Coordination Centre
- Reform and harmonization of policies and procedures
- Community-Based Fire Management (CBFiM)
- Fire information
- Capacity building

Key Activities

Component 1: Regional Fire Management Coordination Centre

- Lobby SADC governments to establish a regional fire management centre
- Develop vision, mission, objectives and operational plan for a regional fire management centre
- Facilitate the establishment of national focal points for fire management in Member States (MS)

The Centre will be the regional leader of wildland fire management through resource sharing, coordination, prevention and mutual aid, and

- Provide fire management guidelines and information to member agencies and partners
- Enhance the vision for unified wildland fire cooperation in Africa
- Provide coordinated standards, specifications and competencies
- Ensure efficient and safe mutual aid
- Provide leadership to a regional wildland fire training program
- Provide expertise in incident management through our member countries and agencies

Component 2: Reform and Harmonization of Policies and Procedures

- To secure essential policy harmonisation at national and regional level to provide the basis for controlling harmful fires and promoting the safe use of beneficial fires within SADC
- Commission review of policies, laws and regulations in Member States
- Compile results with recommendations and policy options for policymakers of Member States
- Present and disseminate findings to relevant fora for awareness creation and decision making processes

Component 3: Community-Based Fire Management (CBFiM)

- To promote integration of CBFiM into Member States' fire and natural resources management systems/programmes
- Identify and document successful and implemented CBFiM strategies in the SADC region through a set of workshops
- Compile and synthesize results into regional guidelines and implementation framework
- Produce recommendations and policy options for policymakers of Member States
- Present findings at relevant fora

Component 4: Fire Information

- To improve production, access, dissemination and application of fire information within the region
- Facilitate establishment of a "clearing house" for fire information
- Facilitate design of a communication and dissemination strategy of fire information within the region
- Identify, design and implement targeted awareness raising, information dissemination and advocacy strategies
- Produce target group specific regional fire and fire management info-briefs that explain and clarify fire management topics

Component 5: Capacity Development

- To increase awareness of and knowledge in balanced and integrated fire management and its elements
- Regional study tours to existing institutions of fire information and management
- Regional education workshops, seminars and training for senior managers and decision makers about fire and fire management systems including CBFiM and natural resources management; as well as related data management.

It was furthermore expressed in the Regional Session that the Member States, as well as the SADC secretariat, may consider the appointment of external expert organizations who may act as Implementing Agents (IA) to catalyze the programme recommendations. IA's would then act on behalf of the respective governments / SADC. Existing networks with willing partners in the region could act as IA's and this practical step may shorten the process of attaining the objectives.