



**Training Course for Instructors in Community Based Forest Fire Management (CBFiM)**  
Nelspruit, South Africa, 30 October - 12 November 2004

**Background**

Nearly half of the global area affected by wildland fires burn in sub-Saharan Africa each year and affect approximately 170 million hectares. While some of this burning is ecologically sound and ecologically useful, a large share of this burning is harmful and damaging to the environment. It is estimated that 95% of all these fires are human in origin whereas the remaining 5% are natural caused e.g. by lightning. For the sustainability of the forestry environment in Africa there is a need to reduce area of unnecessary or harmful burning.

Due to the fact that 95% of all fires are caused by human activities it is necessary to address the reasons for these fires; rather than only trying to increase the suppression capacity or by tightening fire legislation. Proactive fire management approaches are needed to establish data on the underlying causes these fires; only then is it possible to develop national strategies in the appropriate use of fire as a management tool.

Fortunately, however, long-term fire management programmes in Africa have been able to achieve substantial decrease in the numbers and extent of unnecessary burning. This has been achieved by raising the awareness of local people and providing training to multiple level stakeholders in the proper use of fire as a management tool in rural activities at landscape level. By managing fires at local level, resources, including forestry can be managed sustainably.

The aim of the training course was to collate all information about community based forest fire management (CBFiM) in the region and analyse the experiences gained since the first landscape level projects were started in 1996.

Earlier fire management approaches in Africa (since the 1940s) have been purely conventional (copies of European approaches) in nature and had never involved local population or communities in a participatory manner.

The recent African experiences gained in the involvement of government, local communities (under conventional and traditional leadership), NGOs and other stakeholders in integrated forest fire management approaches need to be highlighted; including the obstacles encountered in the process.

There is also a need to highlight the present legislative and policy constraints in involving and transferring fire management responsibilities from government to local communities, including the need to present positive solutions to these legislative constraints; by highlighting experiences from Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. There is also a need to reform and focus on policies, mechanisms and institutions that can support sustainable forest management by converting present wildfires into controlled fires.

Equal gender participation is one of the prerequisites for obtaining sustainable results in participatory fire management; means and ways of how this can be achieved need to be elaborated further i.e. by including components of fire management in national Gender Action Plans.



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The responsibility of national awareness rising in forest fire management need to be distributed beyond forestry and agriculture to the national network of local schools, health clinics, local communities and NGOs etc. For achieving efficient information dissemination outside forestry, agriculture, education and health, there is a need to expand this capacity by making the awareness rising a task and duty of the national network of local artist; including all the people involved in producing handicrafts of a multitude of forest products, grass, reeds etc. All these co players have a vested interest in the sustainable use of forest resources, including the need to use fire as a management tool for various purposes.



## Rationale

Several reasons supported the idea to conduct this regional Workshop. Half of the global wildfires are burning annually in Africa; therefore the forestry professionals in this region, need to be looking for solutions to this problem beyond conventional fire management approaches, which only work in private plantations. To achieve sustainable management of fires in areas outside plantation forests, other solutions need to be sought; solutions that transfer the fire management responsibility to local communities and NGOs, women groups etc. There is a need to apply an ecosystem approach wherein all fires; regardless of its purpose (agriculture, land clearing, beekeeping, hunting, cooking, heating) are managed by the local people. With the national forestry departments as lead agency, all use of fire should be coordinated by a community level fire management unit.

The FAO and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) through the Regional Sub Sahara Africa Wildland Fire Network (AFRIFIRENET), which facilitates cooperation of fire management work in Africa, involved the international community of forest fire scientists, managers, policy makers and NGOs in this workshop.

The aim is to develop viable fire management options for the present socio-cultural conditions in rural Africa.



### **Objectives of the Training Course**

The overall objectives of the Workshop included:

1. Provide (a) a forum on CBFiM in Africa, (b) prepare mechanisms for information and resources exchange in forest and other wildland fire management within the region, including the establishment of partnerships for joint activities in fire research, training and policy development, and (c) prepare proposals to governments and international organizations of the region to establish mechanisms for sharing resources in fire management and in large fire emergencies in accordance with existing international procedures.
2. Compile a CBFiM database on regional fire management capabilities in order to support the overall objectives of the Course to facilitate international cooperation and exchange in developing appropriate technologies and knowledge base on CBFiM; transfer of technologies and capacity building by creating an enabling environment.

The Workshop was being organized by FAO and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) through the ISDR Regional Sub-Sahara Wildland Fire Network (AFRIFIRENET) and the GFMC Wildland Fire Training Center Africa (WFTCA), which facilitates cooperation in fire management in Africa. The workshop was primarily financed by the FAO, supported by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), funded by the German Foreign Office, Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance.





Participants of the CBFiM Training Course