

International Workshop on Fire Management as a Tool for Wildfire Prevention

Workshop Internacional:

O manejo do fogo como ferramenta para a prevenção de incêndios florestais

12 a 14 de março de 2012 - Brasília, Brasil



Workshop Report

Background

The International Workshop on Fire Management as a Tool for Wildfire Prevention held from 12 to 14 March 2012, was fruit of a collaboration between JICA Brasil, a former JICA trainee Edite Mesquita and the National Center for Wild Fire Prevention and Combat — Prevfogo, under the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Natural Renewable Resources — Ibama. The workshop was proposed as a follow up seminar with the goal to discuss a major hot topic in Brazilian forest conservation management — the relationship between forest fire prevention and the use of prescribed fire as an integrated tool of fire management.

The main objectives of this workshop were to provide a forum for international exchange on a somewhat controversial topic in Brazil — the use of prescribed fire— as well as to obtain a picture of what African countries with similar geography and challenges with wildland fires may be able to gain from cooperating with Brazil in the area of fire management. The workshop was also viewed as an opportunity to collect data on target countries for the proposed project of an international training course offered within the Third Country Training Program (TCTP) framework. The TCTP project was requested to the government of Japan in FY 2011. That is, the implementing institution IBAMA-Prevfogo found it important to have primary contact with representatives from target countries in order to better understand their demands and better inform the development of the proposed course. Also important was the chance to begin to foster relationships with possible beneficiaries and thus strengthen international relationships and inter-regional cooperation within the Global Wildland Fire Network, notably between the Regional Wildland Fire Networks of Sub-Saharan Africa (AfriFireNet) and South America.

The use of prescribed fire as a tool of integrated fire management is a controversial topic in many countries due to a tendency dictated by the wider environmentalist movement to adopt a zero fire policy that prohibits the use of fire in most cases. This implicates that those trying to prevent forest fires are often unable to use fire as a tool in the form of prescribed burning, teaching of proper controlled burning for agricultural purposes, etc. Research in Brazil has demonstrated that in some biomes such as the Cerrado, utilizing tested fire management measures such as firebreaks can prevent larger forest fires from occurring during drought season. Researchers also indicate that the criminalization of fire use by the population actually causes conflict with governmental actors who are trying to manage conservation areas. Indigenous or rural people that have always used fire for agriculture, livestock, hunting, etc., resist abandoning such practices and persist in continuing to engage in unregulated fire use in a clandestine way. Thus, participatory methodologies and conflict resolution techniques are being successfully disseminated in Brazil to deal with the delicate interface between forest conservation, community intervention and fire utilization.

Target Country Demands

During the conference, African participants reported that the greatest challenges/needs in their countries regarding wildfire prevention and fire management include:

- Lack of a clear and specific fire management policy
- Inadequate fire monitoring and surveillance capabilities
- Lack of government funding
- Little research, particularly research on participatory forest fire management
- Un-coordinated response to forest fires by different sectors in the country as well as across borders
- Lack of skills in modern methods of forest fire management
- Lack of environmental education and awareness amongst population regarding fire
- Lack of formal coordination and communication between stakeholders

Participants of larger countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) highlighted the difficulty in managing large territories which demand the installation of fire brigades in the remote provinces in a country where the north and south biomes differ greatly and would require distinct training. The participants all reported on the existence of some legislation regarding fire, usually related to forest management and conservation and in some cases climate change policy, but indicated that there is much difficulty in enforcing legislation and implementing policies due to lack of resources, clarity and political will. However, they also described some initiatives such as cooperation with JICA in Mozambique, cooperation with GIZ in Tanzania and horizontal regional cooperation such as within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to address these weaknesses. They also expressed a dire need for outreach to the population, especially to communities living in and around forests and national parks, such as traditional rural communities or bushmen, in order to change misperceptions and prejudicial practices.

Comparative Advantages Offered by Brazil

African participants identified key areas presented in the workshop that could be useful to attend to their manifested demands regarding training in the area of fire management issues. They were especially impressed by the conceptualization and defense of the use of fire as a fire prevention tool since in their countries it is also difficult to apply fire in the context of environmental conservation. They agreed that it would be beneficial to engage trainees in a debate of zero fire policies and how they may be modified to allow for fire use in specific cases based on well-founded research and best practices.

The participants believe that Brazil has much to offer as far as its experience and capacity in fire management. From the presentations in the workshop the disparity in capacities between Brazil and the African states was revealed in the areas of forest fires management in terms of human resource capabilities, research, monitoring and response capabilities.

The topics that would add value include:

- Forest Fire risk assessments
- Surveillance and monitoring techniques
- Preventive measures
- Introduction of the Incident Command System
- Training of trainers in fire management
- Participatory and collaborative approaches to forest fire management
- Methodologies for research on the use and impact of fire

Thus training should cover aspects such as policy frameworks for integrated fire management, governmental structures for management and capacity building, formation of fire brigades, community participation in fire suppression, education on fire use and alternatives to fire and integration of indigenous knowledge in fire prevention and suppression, directions for localized research.

Conclusions

African participants found that the geographic and climatic similarities of the Cerrado and Savanna woodlands and grasslands as well as cultural compatibility felt with Brazilian professionals at the workshop offer an excellent starting point to exchange experience and research in the area of fire management. In addition the Africans felt that Brazil presents various comparative advantages in terms of sharing knowledge, techniques and solutions to problems faced on both continents. The cultural and socioeconomic reality of communities and stakeholders which need to become involved is also very similar. Thus, a cooperation with Brazil, which is developing pioneering policies and more efficient integrated efforts, could foster a fruitful network across continents and forge new more effective approaches to this global problem.

Annex I: Audio-visual links

Audio-visual Reports:

- [Radio report](#)
- [TV report](#)

Network websites:

- [Ibama / Prevfogo](#)
- [Global Wildland Fire Network](#)
- [Regional South America Wildland Fire Network](#)
- [Regional Sub-Sahara Wildland Fire Network](#)
- [Global Fire Monitoring Center \(GFMC\)](#)

Annex II: Photographs (next page)

Annex II: Photographs



Opening Ceremony of the Workshop



Discussions



Closing Ceremony