

GUEST EDITORIAL

PROFESSIONALISM AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN FORESTRY

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A continuing professional education (CPE) programme—usually taken up by a working professional for many reasons but not for obtaining an academic degree—consists of academic course work, training courses, conferences, seminars, workshops, etc. One reason for taking up CPE activities is to update oneself with current knowledge and to advance skills in order to remain relevant, effective and to increase professionalism in the profession. If one has left classrooms many years ago and many changes have taken place in the profession since then, CPE is the way forward.

Historically, forestry CPE in Malaysia was initiated in November 1999. The Asia Pacific Association of Forestry Research Institutions (APAFRI), through the support of the Canadian International Development Agency's TREE-LINK Project, organised a national workshop to identify training needs for forestry professionals in the country. This event culminated in a Memorandum of Understanding on CPE signed by three institutions, namely, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Institute of Foresters Malaysia (IRIM) and APAFRI. Later, a Joint National Committee on Forestry CPE, comprising representatives from UPM, APAFRI, TREE-LINK Project, Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM), IRIM and Forestry Department Malaysia, was formed to facilitate the implementation of forestry CPE activities. This national committee was chaired by the President of IRIM at that time. Until today, only two training courses were organised in the years 2000 and 2001 since the initiation of CPE. Recognising the importance of forestry CPE today, it is in the interest of forestry professionals in Malaysia that the initiative be continued. For almost a decade now, forestry CPE has never been instituted in Malaysia. As the national committee is now defunct, a fresh mandate is urgently needed to lead, develop and enhance the CPE in Malaysia.

First and foremost, there are enough justifications, arising from the challenges of the forestry profession today, to bring back the CPE initiative. The social, economic, political, technological, ecological and environmental scenarios within which the forestry profession operates are changing rapidly. These changes have a profound influence on the way that forestry professionals conduct their behaviour and make decisions towards the forests. It is incumbent upon the professionals to prepare themselves in the best possible way to manage impacts of the changing scenario. One of the changes in the scenario is in the resource base and the demand placed upon it. While the size of forest area and the quantity of forest resources are decreasing, demands on forest lands and forest resources are increasing as a consequent of the increase in population as well as the changes in their values towards the forests. As society becomes more modern and wealthy, more demand is placed on services of the forests especially for recreation and ecotourism.

Forest is in demand for its timber and other intangible services. Strong demand is also placed on non-wood timber resources, such as rattan, bamboo and medicinal plants and other potential biodiversity resources. If some herbal discoveries such as white willow (for aspirin), periwinkle (for anticancer), *Digitalis* and willow bark (for fever), *Rauwolfia* (for antihypertension), *Artemisia* (for anti-malaria) and *Ephedra* (for bronchodilator) have revolutionised the healthcare industries, there is no reason why tropical forests cannot provide further impetus to other discoveries in phytopharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals, herbal drugs and medicinal plants. Forest management system should give due emphasis to these products.

The forestry sectors everywhere are being pressured by consumers and the international community to practise sustainable forest

management in line with the principle of sustainable development, especially after signing and ratifying important international conventions. The demands placed by these conventions expand the scope of forest management as well as the responsibilities of forestry professionals. They also demand forest practices and forest products to be certified according to universally accepted principles, criteria and indicators that place strong emphasis on socio-economics, environment and ecology. They also demand transparency in forest law, enforcement, governance and trade. The public, working independently or through partnership with environmental groups, has become more vocal in voicing their concerns on the environmental impacts of forestry activities. Forestry professionals can no longer ignore public opinions in their forest management decisions.

In short, the philosophy of the 20th century forest harvesting must be replaced by a 21st century conservation and protection of forests with a view towards biological sustainability. Forestry as a profession must be founded on documented ecological truth, new forestry science, progressive forestry or scientific forestry as envisaged by people in the profession today. A 21st century forestry will criss-cross institutions, disciplines, organisations, specialisations, roles and identities. Forestry professionals will enter debates on when, where, why and how forests should be managed, including for what purpose and by whom. No longer are forestry professionals be specially authorised to determine how forests are managed.

Now let us look at some steps that need to be taken so that the CPE initiative gets back in motion. As formal forestry CPE is a relatively new practice in Malaysia, one must also take cognisance of and incorporate into the CPE measures that are effective in promoting the conduct of forestry elsewhere in the world, e.g. Australia, India, USA, Canada and the Philippines. With the internet, we can examine records on previous CPE initiative on its strengths and limitations or constraints, networking and communicating with officials of the various forestry institutions and academics, and gathering information from experiences outside the country. Therefore, a CPE programme for forestry professionals is a feasible and worthy undertaking and can leave a long-lasting impact on forestry profession in the country. The participation of the various

institutions in the CPE would help to boost their image in the eyes of the regional and international forestry community.

Why do we need to institutionalise CPE initiative in Malaysia? First and foremost, we need an independent institution, among others, to maintain and improve the standard of practice and professional status of foresters, promote and advance the science and practices of forestry, and keep under continual review the status of forestry profession and the professional conduct of its members by maintaining a code of conduct and practice. The institution will be able to represent the views of the forestry profession and offer and conduct such examinations as prescribed by an institute for professional qualifications of the members.

IRIM fits the bill quite correctly for this responsibility. IRIM was formed in 1982 and is the only body representing professional foresters in Malaysia today, after the Malaysian Forestry Society became defunct. It is one of the independent institutions that work closely with other forestry institutions in the country as mentioned before. In particular IRIM also spearheads the move to enact the Foresters Bill to be tabled and passed by the Parliament as an Act. The idea of having a forestry act was first mooted by IRIM Council in 1989 with the main objective of providing protection, governance and sanction of foresters in the practice of forestry. The first draft of the Bill was completed soon after the idea was mooted. However, it then went through difficult times. It has been debated, redrafted, amended, modified, and at times shelved, but definitely not forgotten by IRIM members. Now the effort to introduce the Bill has been revived and the final draft is now ready to be submitted to and approved by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Malaysia before it goes to the Parliament for final approval as an Act. Among others, the Act calls for the establishment of the Board of Foresters, charged with the overall responsibility of implementing the Act, and the registration of foresters. The Act specifies that practising foresters must register with the Board to enable them to carry out specified activities, such as management of forests, directing or undertaking forest inventory, preparing forest management plans, conducting forest management certification and preparing environment impact assessments. The Act further specifies conditions for the renewability

of certificate of registration of foresters and, in this context, it reinforces the importance of CPE. It specifies that the certificate may be renewed subject to conditions that, among others, the Registered Forester has acquired sufficient credit points, as may be determined by the Board, which are derived from attendance or participation in training courses, conferences, seminars, workshops, or other activities organised or approved by IRIM.

Next, we need to identify areas where training is required (CPE Needs Assessment). Such areas include, but not limited to, criteria and indicator of professional practice, system of forest audit or certification, economic valuation of biodiversity, timber valuation, environmental audit, entrepreneurial skills, negotiation and conflict management, management of biodiversity, assessing market intelligence, public relations and mediation, extension services, forest law and governance, and information technology. The training involves designing of modules and estimating costs, and hence we need institutions, e.g. Faculty of Forestry—UPM, the School of International Tropical Forestry—Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Forestry Departments (including Sabah and Sarawak) and/or FRIM to develop such modules, while IRIM is still charged with the overall coordination of the CPE via its CPE accreditation procedures.

Overall, a major objective of forestry CPE is to give recognition to professionals following the programme. This would allow one to renew his/her certificate as a Registered Forester as per requirement of the intended Foresters Act once sufficient credit points are derived from the participation in any approved CPE programme. Finally, it is recommended that the CPE programme merits the support of all in the forestry profession. All the more important, the Government must pave the way for the approval of the Foresters Act which is a prerequisite to the much needed professionalism in the field of forestry. Currently, Malaysia has several professional bodies that have their own Acts including the Institute of Engineers, Institute of Quantity Surveyor and Institute of Architects.

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