

A six-year project designed to promote sustainable forest management in Africa through the use of criteria and indicators has taken some important first steps towards field implementation

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IN THOSE AFRICAN countries that still possess important forest resources, such as the countries of the Congo Basin, timber harvesting constitutes one of the most important economic activities. Forests in these countries, though, are often threatened by factors outside the forestry sector such as deforestation and encroachment and, within the permanent forest estates, by poor forest management practices.

Establishing the basis of sustainable forest management (SFM) in Africa is a long and difficult process. Substantial efforts have been made over the last decade at the national, regional and international levels and the beginnings of an SFM regime can now be seen.

One starting point has been the creation of a set of principles, criteria and indicators (PCI) for SFM. PCI are designed to improve the understanding of SFM in specific local conditions and provide performance standards and tools for the monitoring, control and enforcement of existing regulations. ITTO published its first set of criteria and indicators (C&I) for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests in 1992 and, since then, C&I have gained worldwide recognition as a tool for promoting SFM. ITTO has revised its C&I twice (in 1998 and 2004) to reflect progress made in tropical countries towards SFM and the experiences of many countries in implementing the C&I.

Complementarity of ATO and ITTO

The 15 member countries of the African Timber Organization (ATO) contain almost all the natural tropical forest of Africa, with most of its largest members also being members of ITTO. In the 1990s ATO worked with several institutions to produce a set of PCI designed for conditions in the region. Thus, at the start of the present decade the African member countries of ATO and ITTO found themselves with two sets of C&I; it made sense to build on these to develop a unique and harmonised set applicable to African tropical forests. The net result was the *ATO/ITTO principles, criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of African natural forests (ATO/ITTO PCI)*, published in 2003 and widely distributed.

Joint regional project

Collaboration between ATO and ITTO on the subject was further strengthened by the



Before: trainees inspect an unlogged site during an auditing exercise in the Green Valley concession, Cameroon. *Photo: R. Eba'a*

formulation of a regional project, ITTO PROJECT PD 124/01 REV.2 (M). This project, which was launched in August 2003, aims to promote the sustainable management of African forests through the application and implementation of the ATO/ITTO PCI with the support and participation of all stakeholder groups. The two specific objectives of the project are to:

- establish key elements of an adequate capacity to implement the ATO/ITTO PCI at the national level in the African member countries of ITTO. These include nationally applicable PCI, effective consultative mechanisms, awareness, knowledge and skills among decision-makers and stakeholders on SFM, and monitoring/auditing arrangements; and
- establish key elements of an adequate capacity for effective regional-level cooperation through ATO to support individual member countries to implement the ATO/ITTO PCI. These include common instruments to develop and implement PCI and verifiers for SFM

What are C&I?

C&I are tools that help identify trends in the forest sector, determine the effects of forest management interventions over time, and facilitate decision-making in national forest policy processes. The ultimate aim of these tools is to promote improved forest management practices and to further the development of a healthier and more productive forest estate (FAO 2000).

at the national and forest management unit (FMU) levels, effective consultative and dissemination mechanisms for sharing knowledge and coordinating efforts, and a pool of regionally trained trainers.

The project is designed to make use of and strengthen ATO as a regional institution capable of providing mechanisms for the sharing of experiences and facilitating the development of harmonised/coordinated approaches to implementing the ATO/ITTO PCI. It has ten planned outputs, five of which are expected to be achieved at the national level in participating countries and the other five at the regional level. The ten countries participating in the project are: Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Côte d'Ivoire, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo. Expected outputs have been tailored for each country depending on the progress towards SFM made in the country prior to the launching of the project.

The project was planned for a total duration of six years divided into Phase I (three years), Phase II (one year) and Phase III (two years). Phase I was subdivided into two stages of 18 months each. The first stage of Phase I was completed in mid 2005.

Preliminary results

In individual participating countries

Establishment of an open, participatory and representative forum/consultative mechanism on SFM in participating countries for monitoring progress towards SFM and for consultation on policy issues: the project has helped to establish national forums for consultation on issues related to SFM in CAR, DRC and Togo. In each of these countries the first meeting of the forum has been held, in which participants decided on its terms of reference. In four other countries (Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana and Republic of Congo) such forums existed prior to the start of the project, but the project nonetheless contributed to their functioning, especially by allowing the participation of more representatives from outside the forestry administrations.

Development of national PCI through a broad-based participatory process within the framework of the ATO/ITTO PCI at national and FMU levels as well as other relevant forest-related initiatives: before the beginning of the project, three participating countries (Cameroon, Ghana and Gabon) had been developing their own national sets of PCI with the support of several organisations and donors including ITTO, the European Union, the Worldwide Fund for Nature and the Center for International Forestry Research. Each of these countries had also established a national working group (NWG) on SFM and certification, but none had finalised its national set. The project has enabled each of the three countries to finalise national PCI within the framework of the regional ATO/ITTO PCI. In two other countries (Republic of Congo and Côte d'Ivoire) the project supported the development of national PCI through newly established NWGs, which include representatives of all stakeholder groups involved in forest management (about 20 members in each country). Both countries have developed advanced national PCI drafts ready for field-testing.

The improvement of information through national-level periodic reporting on progress towards SFM in each of the participating countries: during the first stage of the project, three countries (Cameroon, Gabon and Ghana) drafted their first national-level periodic reports based on Principle 1 of the ATO/ITTO PCI and in compatibility with the ITTO C&I reporting format at the national level. The final drafts of the reports will be widely distributed before the end of 2005.



After: trainees measure the diameter of a tree in a logging coupe during a training exercise in the Green Valley concession, Cameroon. *Photo: R. Eba'a*

At the regional level

Draft harmonised ATO/ITTO PCI formally presented to the Ministerial Conference of the ATO: in October 2002—during the ATO Ministerial Conference held in Kinshasa, DRC—the ATO/ITTO PCI were presented to the ministers in charge of forestry of the member countries, who officially endorsed the document and committed their respective countries to apply it.

Establishment of a regional-level consultative forum for the promotion of SFM: one of the most important obstacles to progress towards SFM in Africa is the low level of cooperation and exchange of experiences between countries on issues faced by the forestry sector. The project is helping to address the problem by supporting the establishment of a regional consultative forum to exchange strategic information related to SFM. The project has organised a regional workshop in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, with the participation of government agencies, NGOs, regional development agencies/projects and civil society. Participants proposed measures to ensure the continuation of the consultative process between forest-management actors at the regional level.

Development and testing of an auditing framework for African forests including guidelines and checklists for the ATO/ITTO PCI: an auditing manual for the ATO/ITTO PCI was developed during Stage 1 of Phase I. This manual facilitates understanding of the requirements of the PCI, guides their implementation in practice and provides tools to verify how forest



Certifiable? A log is dragged from the forest at the Green Valley concession, Cameroon. Photo: R. Eba'a

management conforms to them. The auditing manual will be used in all project activities related to capacity-building.

Stakeholder participation and preliminary impacts of the project

During the first 18 months of its implementation, the project has attracted a great deal of interest from stakeholders in the African region. This interest is shown not only through the participation of stakeholders' representatives in various workshops and meetings organised within the framework of the project at the regional and the national levels but also by the first steps taken to apply the ATO/ITTO PCI in the field. All the intended beneficiaries, including forest concession managers, government forestry administrators, forest communities, local NGOs, development agencies/projects and regional organisations, have been actively involved in project activities and some have taken initiatives to apply or facilitate application of the ATO/ITTO PCI.

In Gabon, for example, the national initiative on forest certification, Pan-African Forest Certification Gabon (PAFC-Gabon), has based its technical standards on the ATO/ITTO PCI adapted to the specific characteristics of forest management in Gabon; PAFC-Gabon is now endorsed by the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification initiatives (PEFC). In the countries of Central Africa (Gabon, Cameroon, CAR, Congo and DRC) the Central Africa Regional Programme of WWF (WWF-CARPO) has been using the ATO/ITTO PCI to evaluate the progress of its partners in the forest industry towards SFM. Moreover, WWF-CARPO has agreed to a partnership with ATO to promote the ATO/ITTO PCI and has contributed to the financing of some project activities in Congo, CAR and DRC. Also in Gabon, the French Agency for Development (AFD) is using the ATO/ITTO PCI to evaluate the progress being made towards SFM by forest concessionaires that have received its financial support. Finally, IUCN—The World Conservation Union,

in collaboration with the forest industry and other NGOs, has developed an initiative for the independent monitoring of forest concessions in Central Africa which is partially based on the ATO/ITTO PCI.

Lessons learned from Stage 1

The first stage of this ambitious project has been implemented successfully, but improvements can certainly be made to ensure that later stages have even more impact. For example:

- in Africa the ATO/ITTO PCI have been harmonised with the ITTO C&I and the two sets are therefore compatible. Since the development of the ATO/ITTO PCI, however, the ITTO C&I have been revised (see page 11), and some agencies wonder if these revised C&I should now be adopted in Africa. To avoid confusion ITTO should continue to encourage its member countries in Africa to use the ATO/ITTO PCI and other donors to support this. In the meantime the project will take steps to update the ATO/ITTO PCI to ensure they reflect improvements in the revised ITTO C&I;
- the project should seek involvement in all existing regional initiatives related to SFM and biodiversity conservation. This is particularly important for countries within the Congo Basin, which are attracting significant interest from the international community and where political leaders have shown a high level of commitment to both SFM and biodiversity conservation. The project can provide a tool for communication and evaluation;
- all participating countries should establish NWGs and adapt the regional PCI to their own national forest-management environment. The NWGs already established and/or supported by the project appear to form one of the best approaches for promoting the application of PCI in the field; and
- communication between ATO headquarters (in Libreville, Gabon) and participating countries is essential. It is therefore important that the project improves its communications technology.

Future activities

During the next 18 months the focus of the project will be on capacity-building through the training of forest-management auditing specialists; the first step will be the training of a minimum of 60 trainers who will later be involved in training activities in each of the participating countries. Among other things the project will also investigate a regional set of PCI for forest plantations before moving on to phases II and III, in which training in SFM will be undertaken on a scale not previously attempted in Central and West Africa.

References

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Copies of the ATO/ITTO PCI are available on request from ATO through the first-named author.