An ITTO project gives new hope to the populations of Haho-Baloé in Togo

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Green fingers: Workers admire their handiwork in one of several nurseries that produce seedlings for sale to the project and other buyers.

IN 1907, the High Chief of Notsé donated an area of about 4000 hectares to Togo's German colonial administration for the purpose of establishing forest plantations. Later, in 1947, this area was declared a 'gazetted area' according to a flexible procedure that implied negotiations with the populations and their departure with compensation, thus giving the area the character of a reserved forest. However, subsequent plantation activities within the site were only minimal and various settlers gradually moved into the forest. An inventory carried out in the Haho-Baloé forest in 1995 showed that about 400 hectares were planted with various species—mostly teak (*Tectona grandis*), *Gmelina* and *Cassia*—during the period between the colonial administration and ITTO's intervention in 1995. These plantations were between 30 and 78 years old and silvicultural follow-up operations had never been carried out.

About 1400 people now live in the 4000-hectare Haho-Baloé forest and another 3800 live in the immediate vicinity. They are grouped into eight villages, or enclaves. To survive, these people rely mainly on shifting subsistence agriculture (maize, manioc, niébé), and some cash crops (cotton and oil palm), and practice small-animal breeding, charcoal production and firewood trade. Household incomes are very low, at around 225 000 Central African francs (CFAF; about US$300) per year, all activities included, and cotton accounts for about 64% of this revenue. The population is mainly young, nearly 50% being under 15 years of age, and basic infrastructure such as schools, medical clinics, drinking water and roads are sorely lacking.

In 1991, the Government of Togo requested ITTO to undertake a feasibility study for the establishment of a 2500-hectare plantation in the reserved forest. A financing agreement was signed to that effect in 1993 (ITTO PROJECT PD 204/91 REV.1 (F)) and various studies initiated, including:

- a socio-economic study in the project area;
- an environmental impact study;
- forestry studies relating in particular to the planning and evaluation of afforestation operations, forest management and the institutional framework to be set up;
- a study of associated social measures to be taken;
- a land tenure study;
- a review and analysis of Togo's existing forestry projects;
- a study on the selection of planting stock; and
- a technical-financial analysis of the plantation project.

All these studies, carried out within the general framework of the project feasibility study, led to the formulation of ITTO PROJECT PD 30/96 REV.3 (F): *Project for a 2500-hectare timber production plantation in the reserved forest of Haho-Baloé (Plateaux Region)*, for which a financing agreement was signed in 1998. This project represents a total investment of US$1 255 336, financed partly by ITTO and partly by the revenues generated by the sale of products from the established teak plantations. The project includes the conduct of various forestry activities, such as the harvesting and re-establishment of the plantations, the production of seedlings, the establishment of new plantations, and the protection, restoration and management of residual natural forests. Moreover, the project is also repairing and developing the social infrastructure (roads, dispensaries, schools, water points, etc) and supporting the creation of other income-generating activities by the local communities.

Life-blood: A woman pumps water from a newly rehabilitated well in the village of Tsinigan.

The project strategy is to enable the participation of the local communities in the various activities of the project, whether they are in forestry or of social interest. To that end, a major effort is being devoted to organising the community through a local steering committee comprising village leaders and other interested people from the community and outside agencies. The mandate of this steering committee is to: organise the populations of the project area; plan the management of the enclaved villages (660 hectares); oversee the management of the natural forest stands (940 hectares); and oversee and monitor the social measures to be taken.

The steering committee follows the day-to-day activities of the communities, in particular as regards such sensitive activities as the demarcation of enclaves, the removal of crops established by villagers outside the enclaves, the management of community infrastructure, the relocation of some houses to inside enclave boundaries, and so on.

The participative management of the Haho-Baloé reserved forest is supported by INADES-Formation Togo, a local NGO, and is strengthened through the training of project managers in participative methods by an international specialist in community forestry recruited by the project and funded by ITTO.

The other strategic element of the project is its role in attracting other investments, in particular from official agencies represented within the local steering committee. It does this by improving communication on investment opportunities and, where necessary, by carrying out small studies. Lastly, project activities are sub-contracted as far as possible to local enterprises in order to ensure that maximum economic benefits are enjoyed locally.

Afforestation and harvesting

The northern part of the reserve comprises degraded forest land; land preparation for plantation establishment on this land is mostly sub-contracted out to a local company. In the southern part, the harvesting of the old teak plantations, the yarding, cross-cutting and stacking of timber, and the regeneration of the plantation by coppicing are all sub-contracted to local operators using local labour. Windrowing is sub-contracted to villagers according to fixed agreed rates, as are the breaking up of stumps and incineration of residues.

The timber (logs and utility timber) extracted from the old plantations is sold into local timber markets. Other wood harvested from the sites is carbonised by the villagers; the project provides them with packaging material, buys the charcoal from them at 800 CFAF per 39-kg bag and re-sells it on the markets of Notsé and Lome. The villagers also produce and re-sell fuelwood from species that are not used to produce charcoal. Since the beginning of the project, 9400 bags of charcoal have been purchased from the community at a total value of 7 520 000 CFAF (about US$10 000), and villagers have sold 14 664 steres of fuelwood worth 9 666 667 CFAF, or US$12 900.

Nursery work

The project maintains a central nursery close to the water supply at the village of Fawukpé, but most of the seedlings are produced by villagers trained and organised into groups of nursery workers. During 2000, two such groups produced a total of 168 000 teak seedlings in containers under the coordination of an association of nursery worker groups for the production of forest seedlings (AGPPPF). The project provided nursery equipment, a motor-driven pump and fuel. The seedlings were sold to the project at a price of 20 CFAF/seedling, giving a total revenue to the nurseries of 3 360 000 CFAF (US$6109). During 2001, AGPPPF was able to operate independently of the project. Its 297 400 seedlings were sold to the project for a total of 10 409 000 CFAF (US$18 925). AGPPPF also produced 255 000 teak stumps sold to private clients and NGOs at a price of 15 CFAF a piece, earning it 3 825 000 CFAF (US$5100). Its members are also engaged in market gardening to supply the market of the Notsé urban centre 15 km away and, potentially, Lome.

Plantation and maintenance work

The establishment of new plantations and maintenance work is carried out by the Office de Developpement et d'Exploitation des Forêts (ODEF), which recruits and employs local labour directly. Part of the work is carried out by the taungya method, under which the villagers grow crops between the forest seedlings, which thus benefit from regular tending. To encourage the survival of seedlings, the project negotiated and signed contracts with villagers whereby the project paid 15 000–20 000 CFAF per hectare in cases where at least 90% of seedlings survived the first year of growth undamaged.

Management of natural stands

A total of 940 hectares of natural forest in forest reserve have been earmarked for management. Some of this forest is degraded; one of the key tasks of the project is to initiate a process of restoration to ensure that the forest is able to provide the protective functions desired of it, such as the production of clean water. All restoration and management activities are being carried out by and for the local populations under the guidance of the project's management staff. A list of the indigenous species to be re-

introduced has been drawn up through a consultative process; seeds are collected by villagers and entrusted to the nursery worker groups for the production of seedlings. To date, some 13 000 seedlings have been produced and planted in about 30 hectares of natural forest.

Management of the Fawukpé Water Reserve

A 70 000-cubic metre water reservoir has been built close to Fawukpé under the project and filled from the Haho River during periods of high water; one objective is to provide a permanent water supply for the project's central nursery. This development has been vitally important to the people of Fawukpé, who have suffered from chronic water shortages in the past. In addition to supplying the nursery, reservoir water is being used for the full range of domestic purposes, including consumption. ITTO has requested that health authorities closely monitor the water level and quality so as to detect and prevent disease, and laboratory technicians at the Notsé hospital have recommended the construction of a filter bed downstream of the reservoir. A reservoir management committee has been set up, the tasks of which include the maintenance of the reservoir and the use of its water to promote fish-farming.

One of the problems facing the project is how to manage the success enjoyed by the people in Fawukpé, where life has been totally transformed by the existence of a reliable water supply. Understandably, other villages wish to benefit from similar initiatives. Indeed, the lack of reliable, safe drinking water is a major problem in the project area. In the Tsinigan enclave, the project has assisted villagers to restore two wells that had been abandoned due to mismanagement; a village-level management committee has been created to manage and maintain the wells. In the Yokou village, onchocerciasis—a disease that can paralyse—is prevalent; the project is assisting the construction of two large-diameter wells to help overcome this problem.

Other related measures

The project is implementing other improvements. For example, trails are being established and upgraded to improve communication between the various villages in the project area, and access roads are being built to the various parts of the plantations. By the end of a three-year period, 20 km of old tracks had been repaired and 30 km of new tracks built. Other project work includes the construction and equipping of a village school at Fawukpé where the many children living in the project area can now take lessons in an environment conducive to learning.

Before commencement of the project, the medical clinic in the village of Tsinigan—the only medical facility in the project area—had virtually closed down due to a lack of funds. Under the project it has now been restored and supplied and a nurse has been recruited; the first baby delivered at the restored clinic was born in January 2000. A management committee has been set up to ensure the clinic's maintenance, continued upgrading and eventual self-financing.

The project has organised 63 volunteers from villages in the project area into five groups of beekeepers and helped equip them with 50 hives installed in the forest. The main objective of this work is to establish honey production as a natural-forest-dependent income-generating activity.

The future

The ITTO project has brought a new dynamism and much hope to the populations of the project area. Not only does it bring tangible solutions to some of the problems undermining them, it also offers development opportunities.

Patients are a virtue: The first baby born at Tsinigan's medical clinic since its restoration by the project takes a well-earned rest.

The creation of the project steering committee acting in conjunction with the people and with the assistance of specialised NGOs is an important project outcome and the committee has become a significant agent of change, adding capacity to the community in the analysis of problems and the search for solutions. It has also increased the ability of the community to organise itself and to implement such solutions.

The question remains as to whether the hope thus created will be sustained; it depends very much on the sustainability of the activities initiated by the project. As far as the community is concerned, the continued development of the area is predicated on the continuation of the project, and they have expressed a strong wish for a second phase of the project, which will establish 600 hectares of new plantations, harvest 150 hectares of mature trees and initiate a second rotation at the same site. Under a third phase, 700 hectares of new plantations would be created and another 100 hectares of mature teak plantation harvested and replaced. Thus, should phases II and III be financed and implemented, the activities carried out by the populations during the first phase should be able to continue for a few more years, probably with even more success because they would build on the knowledge and experiences gained during Phase I.

However, beyond these different phases, questions of long-term sustainability remain unanswered. What happens to local development initiatives once the expansion of teak plantations is complete and before the new plantations mature? What other development alternatives are open to the populations? What contribution should the products of the plantations make to the development of the communities concerned, and to finance which activities? Such are the many questions that all the partners in the project should start to address, so that the hope raised by the project does not wither away.