

ITTO Tropical Forest UPDATE

Volume 18 Number 3

A newsletter from the International Tropical Timber Organization to promote the conservation and sustainable development of tropical forests



Climate changing for tropical forests

This issue of TFU is published as substantial levels of assistance start to flow to some tropical countries through various climate-related initiatives. This is indeed a welcome development for these countries. As ITTO and others have pointed out for many years, it was always unrealistic to expect one (usually under-valued) resource – timber – to fund the bulk of the costs tropical countries incur to sustainably manage tropical forests and maintain the myriad benefits they provide. Now that funds are starting to flow to tropical countries via international REDD initiatives and voluntary carbon offset projects, there is hope that the hitherto intractable problem of loss and degradation of tropical forests can at last begin to be stemmed and reversed.

In order for this hope to be realized, a lot still needs to happen. While voluntary carbon markets and bilateral initiatives will remain important, the billions of dollars that ITTO and others have estimated are required to safeguard and sustainably manage tropical forests will require a concerted effort from the entire global community. While negotiations underway in the UNFCCC (most recently in Poznan, Poland last December) are a cause for tempered optimism in this regard, the potential to channel resources to tropical forests under any successor



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to the UNFCCC's Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012, will have to be improved significantly over present arrangements in order to have any impact. As the first three articles in this issue make clear, the level of assistance provided to tropical forests through the Kyoto Protocol's existing Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) has so far been a bitter disappointment to many.

The need for sustainable forest management (SFM) to be part of any scheme to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in the tropics is becoming generally accepted. The role of conservation and forest management in reducing carbon emissions from tropical forests is now part of the negotiating text for UNFCCC delegates, and most people now agree that simply rewarding countries for reversing deforestation will probably displace the problem to other places in the tropics that have so far kept their forests relatively intact. A recently published paper¹ by several prominent foresters shows that improved management (including reduced impact logging – RIL) led to a drop in tropical forest carbon emissions of about 30% relative to conventional logging practices, leading to potential emission reductions of at least 10% of those possible from eliminating tropical deforestation at relatively low costs. ITTO continues to argue that SFM must be part of any scheme to reduce emissions from tropical forests and that its work to monitor and report on SFM in the tropics can play a key part in helping to implement any such scheme.

ITTO also sees a need for enhanced private sector engagement in global forest carbon initiatives. This includes companies from outside the forest sector seeking offsets, the market for which is growing rapidly (page 9), although the recent global economic turmoil has depressed carbon prices along with everything else. ITTO has recently signed an agreement to promote SFM and conservation for voluntary carbon offsets in three tropical pilot forests with 7&i, the Japanese parent company of the 7-11 convenience store chain, and other such agreements are in the works. However, the tropical forest industry should also become more engaged in international climate negotiations since they stand to gain from any agreements reached to promote SFM

and through other emerging opportunities like bio-energy (page 12). ITTO's close links to the forest sector in tropical countries can help to ensure their closer involvement in these processes.

At its November 2008 session, the International Tropical Timber Council approved a pilot thematic program on Reducing Deforestation and Forest Degradation and Enhancing Environmental Services in Tropical Forests (REDDES). This multi-year, multi-million dollar program, to be implemented in close collaboration with partners involved in related CPF (page 16) and UN-REDD (page 17) initiatives, will include activities focusing on SFM and private sector engagement, as well as assessment and monitoring work, capacity building and demonstration projects. Local communities and forest dwellers will also be targeted by REDDES, given their vital roles in contributing to sustainability in many tropical forests.

Initial funding for REDDES (\$3.5 million) has been provided by Norway, which has been a global leader in jump-starting many international and bilateral forest carbon initiatives (see *Out on a Limb*). ITTO looks forward to engaging with other donors, key partners and its member countries as it implements the REDDES program, thereby contributing to both SFM and the global fight against climate change.

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Co-editors**

¹Putz F.E., Zuidema P.A., Pinard M.A., Boot R.G.A., Sayer J.A., et al. 2008. *Improved Tropical Forest Management for Carbon Retention*. PLoS Biol 6(7): e166 doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.0060166

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Editor's note:

ITTO was saddened to learn of the death of Alf Leslie (an eminent international forester and close friend of the Organization) as this issue of *TFU* went to press at the end of January 2009. An obituary will appear in the next issue of *TFU*. Readers interested in contributing to a memorial fund established by Alf's family should refer to www.itto.or.jp.