

# ITTO Tropical Forest UPDATE

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



## Owning Africa's forests

In West and Central Africa, forest ownership is a source of many problems. Disputes over it cause conflict; among other things, a lack of it causes poverty. In most countries the state has claimed legal title since the colonial period. Yet the customary ownership of the same areas dates back centuries, perhaps millennia. The disconnection between the legal and customary systems results in confusion, misery and lost opportunity.

In May 2009, ITTO, the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), and the Cameroon Government combined to host, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the *International Conference on Forest Tenure, Governance and Enterprise: New Opportunities*

for Central and West Africa. The aim was to catalyze new, wide-ranging actions by governments and civil-society organizations towards securing land and forest tenure in Central and West Africa. This special edition of the *TFU* reports on the conference: its key messages, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations. All conference presentations and working-group notes are available at [www.rightsandresources.org](http://www.rightsandresources.org).

The conference was organized in response to a request by the African participants of the

**Special edition ► International Conference on Forest Tenure, Governance and Enterprise: New Opportunities for Central and West Africa**







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*International Conference on Community Forest Management and Enterprise*, which was convened in Acre, Brazil, in July 2007 by ITTO, RRI, IUCN, the Global Alliance of Forest Communities (GAFC), and the Government of Brazil (as reported in *TFU* 17/4). In that meeting, African delegates proposed a follow-up conference that would set out a time-bound plan for systematically expanding community forest tenure, management and enterprise in Africa to agreed, achievable targets by 2015.

At the Yaoundé conference, participants agreed that, in Central and West Africa, weak governance and insecure tenure rights, inequity in allocation, overlapping or conflicting claims, and a lack of recognition of customary ownership undermine the contributions of forestry to local, national and regional livelihoods and economies and to the health of the global environment. Moreover, in most of Central and West Africa, national policies and laws limit the development of community forest enterprises (CFEs). Even where CFEs are permitted, neither the public nor private sectors are equipped to provide the support that CFEs need to develop and thrive.

Clarifying and recognizing tenure rights and access will open up many opportunities for forest communities to invest in and strive for the sustainable use of forests. Across the world, communities have demonstrated an ability to develop globally competitive enterprises that provide creative and dignified employment in ecological services, the extraction of timber and non-timber forest products, and value addition. Moreover, unlike the dominant forest management and industry models, CFEs tend to reinvest locally generated wealth into productive and social infrastructure.

Climate change presents all countries with an enormous additional challenge. Forests are both a source of emissions and a biome affected by climate change; they are therefore important to both mitigation and adaptation strategies. Clear and secure forest tenure is needed to ensure equity and the effectiveness of adaptation efforts and to reduce new emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

The Yaoundé conference was attended by about 250 people from Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Togo, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Zimbabwe as well as from Europe, Asia, and North and

Latin America. Participants included representatives of governments, civil society, local communities, traditional authorities, regional and other international organizations, and donors. They were able to draw on a background paper prepared by ITTO and RRI that explored the global forest-tenure situation (see article next page), and they heard presentations from a wide range of people, including community leaders in Africa, Latin America and Asia; academics; and representatives of ministries in charge of land and forestry matters and of civil-society and international organizations. Through panels and working groups, participants shared experiences in the struggle for tenure rights and explored the relationship between tenure rights and other goals such as improving livelihoods, securing investment, spurring small-scale enterprises, and addressing climate change.

Participants concluded the conference by discussing and agreeing on a time-bound set of activities. This 'Objective 2015' is presented towards the end of this special edition of the *TFU*.

This report of the Yaoundé conference is timely given that ITTO recently launched a new thematic program on Community Forest Management and Enterprises (CFME) which received initial funding of US\$1 million at the International Tropical Timber Council's session in November 2009. The first call for proposals to be funded under this thematic program will be announced soon on [www.ito.int](http://www.ito.int). It is hoped that communities, countries and donors will combine efforts under ITTO's CFME program to address many of the challenges facing community forestry in Africa and elsewhere.

**Alastair Sarre, Steve Johnson  
and Eduardo Mansur  
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### Common acronyms

CFE	community forest enterprise
COMIFAC	Central African Forests Commission
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GAFC	Global Alliance of Forest Communities
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
PES	payment(s) for environmental services
REDD	reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation
RRI	Rights and Resources Initiative

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