

ITTO Tropical Forest

UPDATE

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



Assessing achievements

Evaluating progress towards an organization's goals or objectives is not easy. It requires a clear baseline to start such an analysis from, a good understanding of how outputs contribute to objectives and a willingness to examine faults and weaknesses as rigorously as positive achievements. Despite the difficulty, such evaluations are essential to growth and improvement as they are the best way to learn from successes and mistakes, and to make necessary changes so that the prospect of attainment of goals and objectives is enhanced.

ITTO has undertaken several evaluation exercises in recent years to assess attainment of its goals and objectives. One of the most notable of these was a recent evaluation of a series of diagnostic missions dispatched to countries to identify key constraints to the implementation of sustainable forest management (SFM). Since the promotion of SFM is part of ITTO's core mandate, this evaluation was undertaken to provide important inputs on how the diagnostic missions were helping to



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Cover image Monitoring mission members studying forest census map in Diversoria community, Peru (PD 14/98).

Photo: R. Guevara/ITTO

meet this goal. As the article by Dourojeanni (p. 3) points out, the impact of these missions has been at best mixed. While their cost-benefit ratio was deemed to be broadly positive (due mainly to the low cost of the missions), many weaknesses were pointed out. ITTO is now reformulating the terms of reference for any future diagnostic missions to ensure that the findings of this evaluation of their effectiveness are taken into account. While another ITTO evaluation exercise (the Status of Tropical Forest Management reports, the 2010 version of which is currently being prepared) has found that progress towards SFM is being made, there is no doubt that a more intelligent targeting of resources and technical assistance (as recommended in the review of the diagnostic missions) could speed this progress in many countries.

One of the weaknesses found by the evaluation of the diagnostic missions was the relatively low number of projects arising from the mission recommendations that were submitted and subsequently funded by ITTO. Projects have always formed a key plank in ITTO's assistance to member countries, providing the means to implement policies at the field level. During the 1990s, external evaluation (in contrast to the regular monitoring of project progress undertaken by the Secretariat) of project achievements by ITTO was somewhat haphazard. However, in 2000, the International Tropical Timber Council established a fund for ex-post evaluation of projects and provided guidance on the types of projects that should undergo mid-term or ex-post evaluation, including providing for thematic evaluations of similar projects and grouping of regional/country project evaluations. This issue of the *TFU* highlights the findings of several such evaluations carried out in recent years, including a themed evaluation of community involvement in forest restoration (p. 7), reviews of projects to promote development of rubberwood and rattan in Thailand (p. 11 and p. 17, respectively), community forestry in Brazil (p. 15) and reduced impact logging training in Guyana (p. 20).

Reports of ex-post evaluations of projects have recently been given a higher profile in ITTC sessions, where they are now considered at a joint Committee session

with the participation of all key stakeholders, reflecting the importance Council attaches to this important topic. ITTO is also in the process of undertaking a meta-evaluation of ex-post evaluations of projects, to improve the consistency of evaluations in terms of both quality of analysis and methodology, so that the Organization and its member countries continue to learn and benefit from project evaluations.

While the regular project cycle implemented by ITTO over the past two decades will continue, the approval of five thematic programs on a pilot basis by the ITTC in 2008 and the looming entry into force of the ITTA 2006 (under which the thematic programs will become a permanent feature of ITTO's work) has shifted the focus of ITTO's assistance towards activities and projects consistent with the approved themes. The thematic programs will benefit from the project evaluation experience ITTO has garnered to date but will also require new approaches. The ITTO Secretariat will implement the thematic programs, and monitoring and evaluation of activities carried out under them by countries and other stakeholders will be guided by monitoring protocols that seek to ensure that the overall objectives, outputs and output indicators of each thematic program are being attained. The on-going review of ITTO's experiences in the evaluation of projects, together with the evolving system of monitoring and evaluation of the thematic programs, will serve to strengthen the impacts of projects and ensure that scarce funds are being used most effectively to achieve the shared goals of the Organization and its member countries.

Steve Johnson
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