

Out on a limb

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The world's forests are facing immense pressures and societies are racing against time to find ways of conserving and sustainably using forest biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations. Key findings from FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010 show that while deforestation has slowed somewhat in recent years as compared to the 1990s, it is still alarmingly high. Four million hectares (40 000 km²) of highly diverse primary forests, an area the size of the Netherlands, are lost every year. Continued deforestation is resulting in carbon emissions, shortages in water and food supply, and in an unprecedented loss of biological diversity.

The third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, launched in May 2010, demonstrates that the Johannesburg biodiversity target to significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2010 has not been met. Each day, up to 150 species disappear from the face of the Earth, many of them from tropical forests, where the vast majority of terrestrial biodiversity is located. This unprecedented rate of extinction undermines globally important ecosystem goods and services, such as carbon sequestration, clean water supplies, and well over 5000 commercial forest products.

Recognizing the importance of tropical forest biodiversity, the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Tokyo on 2 March this year to strengthen collaboration in the pursuit of their common objective of conserving and sustainably managing tropical forest biodiversity. The collaboration foresees, inter alia, the development of a support programme for implementation of the CBD programme of work on forests in ITTO producer countries.



Teamwork: CBD Executive Secretary Djoghlaflaf and ITTO Executive Director Ze Meka (right) sign MOU in Tokyo.
Photo: K.Sato/ITTO

Adopted in 2002, the CBD programme of work on forests contains a comprehensive list of 130 national level activities, covering all types of forests. The CBD/ITTO support programme will carry out activities to assist countries that are both party to the CBD and signatories of the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) to meet objectives established by CBD and shared by ITTO member countries. This will include activities to address major human-induced threats to forest biodiversity, including climate change, unregulated and unsustainable use of forest products and resources (including unsustainable hunting and trade of bushmeat), illegal land conversion, habitat fragmentation, environmental degradation, forest fires and invasive alien species.

In this way, the CBD/ITTO support programme will contribute to the achievement of the forest-related targets in the CBD post-2010 Strategic Plan, and address ITTO's goal contained in its 2010-2011 Biennial Work Programme, and programmes thereafter, to ensure that the ITTO-IUCN Guidelines for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in tropical timber production forests are effectively implemented in the management of timber production forests in all ITTO member countries.

ITTO is uniquely placed to make this programme a success. Its members represent about 80% of the world's tropical forests and over 90% of the global tropical timber trade. The Organization has over 20 years of experience implementing biodiversity conservation projects throughout the tropics. It has assisted in establishing an extensive network of protected areas (most notably providing funding for over 10 million ha of trans-boundary conservation areas in the tropics), and has been active in promoting the conservation of biodiversity in tropical timber production forests.

With CBD and ITTO joining forces, two strong partners have come together through a shared vision to collaborate in conserving and sustainably managing tropical forest biodiversity. We look forward to working with the international community to ensure that our constituencies are fully empowered to put this vision into practice.

