

Implementing ramin's CITES listing

An ITTO expert meeting helps to plot the way forward

by
Chen Hin Keong

TRAFFIC Southeast Asia
hkchen@pc.jaring.my



Non-detrimental: tagged ramin log in the Rimbaka forest concession, near Kuantan, Peninsular Malaysia. *Photo: A. Sarre*

RAMIN IS A TIMBER trade name encompassing 31 species of the genus *Gonystylus* (Thymelaeaceae). The genus occurs in the tropical forests of Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands and it produces a whitish timber which is highly prized and popular for decorative uses. The most valuable species, *Gonystylus bancanus*, is found in the peat swamp forests of the region. Due to the timber's wide acceptability and use, ramin has been heavily exploited in the countries of origin. In the attempt to curb detrimental population loss, Indonesia included the genus *Gonystylus* in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) Appendix III with annotation #1 with effect from 6 April 2001. Annotation #1 states that all trade in ramin parts and derivatives, with a few exceptions like seeds, seedlings and tissue culture, have to be accompanied by a CITES permit or certificate. At the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 2 to 14 October 2004, the genus was uplisted to Appendix II, with the listing entering into force on 12 January 2005.

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In an effort to address several persisting issues, particularly in trade and enforcement, an Expert Meeting on the Effective Implementation of the Inclusion of Ramin (*Gonystylus* spp) in Appendix II of CITES was convened from 16 to 19 May 2006 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Convened by ITTO pursuant to ITTC Decision 2(XXXVII) on

'Enhanced Cooperation between ITTO and CITES for Ramin and Mahogany', the meeting was hosted by the Malaysian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) and organized jointly by the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM), the Forestry Department Peninsular Malaysia (FDPM), and the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB) in collaboration with TRAFFIC. Some 50 participants from 15 countries representing forestry, customs, timber trade organizations, regulating agencies, civil society and international organizations attended.

The meeting had four objectives:

- to exchange experiences in the implementation of the inclusion of ramin in Appendix II of CITES including undertaking non-detriment findings (NDF) as well as training on identification and relevant CITES procedures;
- to review recent trade figures and data submitted to CITES, experiences in tracking a full range of products and measurement and reporting issues;
- to identify and examine problems and issues relating to the implementation of the inclusion of ramin in Appendix II of CITES; and
- to recommend follow-up actions for countries, CITES and ITTO to improve the implementation of the inclusion of ramin in Appendix II of CITES.

The meeting was officiated by His Excellency Dato' Suboh Mohd. Yassin, Secretary-General of NRE, Malaysia. It included 18 presentations, working group discussions and a field trip to a local timber factory that uses ramin and FRIM where participants were briefed on the UNDP/GEF funded Peat Swamp Forest Project. Topics that were covered in the presentation sessions were:

- promoting a better understanding of CITES implementation issues for ramin;
- sharing knowledge about current ramin forest management, enforcement and governance in range countries;
- identifying current challenges for increasing the effectiveness of implementation of CITES for ramin in importing countries; and
- understanding and promoting private sector and civil society roles and support to implement CITES.

Presentations by the CITES Secretariat and TRAFFIC were complemented by reports from the key range countries, Malaysia and Indonesia, and importing countries such as Canada, the US, the Netherlands, China and Hong Kong SAR. These presentations, including those made by private sector and civil society representatives, provided background information, illustrated case studies and initiated points for discussion and deliberation.

The working groups deliberated on the following topics:

- ecological and management status of ramin (*Gonystylus* spp);
- review of the market and international trade in ramin;
- capacity building for meeting the requirements of CITES Appendix II listing of ramin; and
- coordination and cooperation for the effective implementation of the inclusion of ramin in Appendix II of CITES.

There appears to be a lack of research and thus a lack of information on the biological characteristics, ecology and regeneration patterns of ramin in its natural habitats. Ecological and botanical information is required to form the basis for silvicultural treatments as well as logging techniques that could reduce the impact on the peat swamps.

Ecological and management status

There appears to be a lack of research and thus a lack of information on the biological characteristics, ecology and regeneration patterns of ramin in its natural habitats. Ecological and botanical information is required to form the basis for silvicultural treatments as well as logging techniques that could reduce the impact on the peat swamps. This information, together with trade, legal and management data, is required to determine the NDF for ramin. The issue is compounded by the lack of funding and skilled human resources which in turn affects research, particularly ecological research on regeneration patterns, mortality, growth and yield, etc and the development of new technologies for reducing the impact of logging practices.

Recommendations with reference to the ecology and management of ramin are to:

- develop artificial regeneration techniques for *G. bancanus* in Indonesia to assist in the rehabilitation of degraded peat swamp forests, and to increase opportunity to develop ramin plantations for commercial production;
- introduce controls on the quantity of *G. bancanus* harvested for each forest management unit (FMU) based on appropriate inventory systems;
- seek funding for applied biological and ecological research to enhance the commercial aspects of ramin;
- share current methodologies for forest management and inventories used in Indonesia and Malaysia with other range states as appropriate;
- conduct an inventory of ramin in Sarawak, Malaysia (Sarawak has the largest area of peat swamp forests in the country);
- develop and introduce cost-effective reduced impact logging practices for peat swamp forests; and
- establish a standard methodology for NDF formulation for timber species which all relevant countries could use or refer to.

Markets and international trade

The working group noted that CITES trade report data often differed from customs statistics and that no standard conversion factors existed to assist in reconciling international statistical data sets between countries. Countries in general did not analyze data from the CITES annual reports including seizure information as there were no dedicated staff to undertake this. There is currently no system to assess whether ramin trade exceeds quotas. The potential threat to the enforcement of CITES regulations arising from barter trade, and problems related to the abuse of trans-shipment procedures and the use of the Free Trade Zone facilities were noted.

Recommendations related to markets and international trade in ramin were:

- range countries should formally notify the CITES Secretariat of annual export quotas for ramin beginning from 2006 together with an explanation on how the quotas were derived, including where possible the NDF methodology used, and details of standard conversion factors stipulated by the relevant authorities. Methods used should be transparent;
- re-exporting countries should, where necessary, establish and share information on procedures and methodologies (such as standard conversion factors) to check that the volumes re-exported do not exceed the volumes of legal ramin imported;
- management authorities (MAs) should monitor the quotas against export permits issued to date, using the same roundwood equivalent (RWE) conversion factor for

CITES and ITTO join forces to promote the conservation and sustainable harvest of tropical timbers

by Milena Sosa Schmidt (CITES Secretariat) and Steve Johnson (ITTO Secretariat)

The secretariats of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) have launched a four-year project aimed at ensuring that international trade in CITES-listed timber species is consistent with their sustainable management and conservation, with a budget of €3 million provided primarily through a grant from the European Commission.

Concerned that the long-term survival of commercially valuable timber species is being threatened by over-exploitation, afromosia, bigleaf mahogany and ramin were all relatively recently included in CITES Appendix II, which means that specimens of these species may only be traded if the exporting country has established that the export of the specimens will not be detrimental to the survival of the species (the so-called 'non-detriment findings' outlined in Article IV of CITES) and issued a CITES export permit.

The CITES and ITTO secretariats realize the challenges that range states of these timber species face to implement listing requirements and therefore decided to collaborate on this project to assist them in this task. The project's goals are to help countries strengthen their capacities to make non-detriment findings and to adopt national legislation that ensures the proper implementation of CITES. This, together with capacity-building and other related activities, allows the project to meet countries' needs with regard to CITES implementation for these species.

Both CITES and ITTO have been active in promoting sustainable management of tropical forests, which is why the partnership makes sense. CITES had been considering capacity building efforts for assisting countries to implement timber listings for some time and invited ITTO to collaborate on a joint project in 2005. The CITES and ITTO secretariats worked in close collaboration to develop and complete a project proposal and, in September 2006, the European Commission generously accepted to provide 80% funding for it through ITTO's 2006–2007 Work Program. Remaining funding will be provided by other donors to this Work Program activity, including the US.

The project will assist range states in building coherent policy frameworks that benefit the timber industry, local communities that depend on tropical forests, and the biodiversity-rich forests themselves. It will focus on the three internationally most traded tropical timber species currently listed in CITES Appendix II: afromosia, bigleaf mahogany and ramin.

Afromosia (*Pericopsis elata*) is native to the equatorial forests of west and central Africa. It is classified as 'Endangered' by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and has been hard hit by logging. The project will support the efforts of Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to enforce existing legislation and to strengthen the quality of non-detriment findings. Although

procedures are not yet fully in place to ensure full compliance with Article IV of CITES in these countries, their national authorities are increasingly collaborating at the regional level and their timber industry is undergoing a radical reform. The CITES and ITTO secretariats will support these efforts through this joint project.

Bigleaf mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) thrives in dry tropical forests ranging from southern Mexico to the Amazon basin. Although the species is not currently at risk of extinction, many populations are seriously threatened and their genetic variation has been depleted. The support to be given to the main exporting countries of bigleaf mahogany, Bolivia, Brazil and Peru, reflects the international interest in this resource. The project will strengthen the range states' capacities to comply with the implementation of CITES requirements for this and other timber species.

Ramin (*Gonystylus* spp.) has long been one of Southeast Asia's major export timbers. Native to swamp forests, many ramin species are now considered to be over-exploited and vulnerable owing to heavy logging (much of it illegal) and habitat destruction. The inclusion of ramin in CITES Appendix II requires in many cases that exporting countries put in place a different management system for this taxon. In particular they need to improve the coordination of the work of the national CITES Management Authorities, CITES Scientific Authorities and enforcement authorities, as well as of the 'Ramin Tri-National Task Force', so that CITES regulations may be implemented effectively. The range states of Malaysia and Indonesia will participate in the project.

Whilst the main aim of the project is to ensure that international trade in these CITES-listed timber species is consistent with their sustainable management and conservation, the project should eventually help the countries concerned to develop robust forestry systems that will also benefit other timber species in trade.

The Conference of the Parties (i.e. member states) to CITES will meet in The Hague, the Netherlands, in June 2007, for its 14th meeting (CoP14), where it will discuss the issue of timber species, particularly proposals to include more such species in Appendix II. The Conference of the Parties will also adopt a new strategic plan until 2013 that is likely to give greater attention to international trade in timber species.

The CITES Plants Committee is also recommending the adoption of new decisions related to the development of guidelines implementing CITES for tree species. Should these decisions be adopted, cooperation with other international organizations such as ITTO will be certainly sought.

Finally, the possibility to formalize the cooperation between CITES and ITTO through a CoP resolution and/or establishment of an MoU will also be discussed at CoP14. This would allow strengthening the partnership between the two organizations and the support they provide to countries with regard to the responsible management of tropical forests and timber trade.

- specific products compared with ramin log production. MAS should take into account possible domestic use as a factor in determining export quotas;
- permits issued should be placed on MAS' websites so that the authenticity of the permits could be checked online by customs officials in importing countries;
- CITES provisions should be considered in the discussions of the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) initiative of the European Union (EU), particularly during the negotiations of Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) with Malaysia and Indonesia;
- MAS should submit CITES annual reports using actual export data and not data from permits issued;
- countries should work together to improve common reporting frameworks for international trade data to reconcile CITES and customs data sets;
- countries should enhance chain-of-custody mechanisms and link CITES export permits to the resource management and verification of origin of ramin timber; and
- countries should improve legislation and establish measures to address policy and management gaps in Free Trade Zone areas and transshipment procedures with a view to reducing the scope for illegal activities in these areas.

Capacity building

High-quality data on ramin distribution and growth are available from a handful of sample sites, which could provide the biological requirements to support the determination of quotas and exports. There are many publications available related to the identification of commercial timber species such as manuals, toolkits, etc which could be translated into local languages as appropriate.

The inability of enforcement officers to identify CITES specimens was noted, as was the lack of training at the enforcement level on the identification of ramin wood. In terms of cooperation, the Tri-National Task Force on Ramin, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) and other links between national and international stakeholders have been established. However, among the weaknesses recognized are an absence of a chain-of-custody monitoring from processing to export, lack of national legislation to implement the requirements of the Convention, and lack of communication and cooperation between exporting and importing countries.

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Recommendations on capacity building are to:

- translate and adapt, as appropriate, timber species identification manuals into various national languages;
- strengthen and coordinate the ability to translate policy into action including cultivating the political will to act and considering mechanisms for transparency and verification;
- make infractions records for ramin easily available;
- disseminate tools for identifying species included in the Appendices of CITES, especially the new staining technique from the US for ramin products, to all MAS and the CITES Plants Committee; and
- update existing CITES training and other materials, and develop new materials to increase awareness and capacity of staff and personnel of CITES Management and Scientific Authorities, and relevant enforcement agencies, emphasizing training of enforcement officers on identification of ramin, preferably through a hands-on approach.

Coordination and cooperation

Problems identified include: the lucrative nature of illegal trade; the lack of financial resources for law enforcement; the difficulty in obtaining timely information; problems with the use of the Harmonized System (HS) of customs classification; and difficulties in implementing measures at local levels.

Recommendations on coordination and cooperation are to:

- strengthen enforcement in Indonesia to prevent illegal logging of ramin in the country, particularly in national parks, forest concessions and peat swamp forests;
- enhance knowledge and awareness in range states of regulations, ramin trade and enforcement actions at the national, provincial and district levels, especially in border areas;
- improve inter-regional communication and cooperation between MAS through direct and regular communications;
- enhance inter-agency and inter-regional cooperation between stakeholders through better coordination of processes for the sharing of data and experiences and verification of information, including the possible use of pre-export notification protocols; and
- improve communication and exchange of intelligence between regional and inter-regional enforcement agencies.

Conclusion

The meeting recommendations will be followed up by countries as well as by ITTO, CITES and others. Many activities called for will be at least partially facilitated through activities planned in a large collaborative ITTO-CITES capacity building project (see Box on previous page). In addition, the Government of Malaysia has recently submitted a request to ITTO for support for the inventory of ramin in Sarawak called for by the meeting.

The full meeting report is available from the ITTO Secretariat (itto@itto.or.jp)