



measuring up

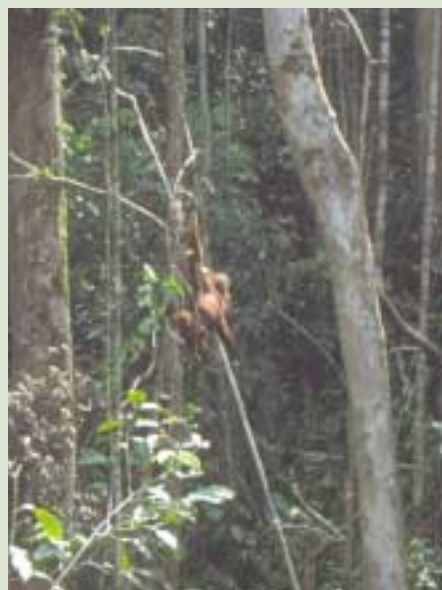


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Assessing progress towards sustainable forest management in the tropics

High in the tropical rainforests of western Borneo, the future is assured for 3 000 orangutan, perhaps 10% of the world's remaining wild population of the species.

These gentle members of the great ape family inhabit a million-hectare conservation reserve spanning the rugged hills of Lanjak-Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary in southern Sarawak, Malaysia, and Betung Kerihun National Park in the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan. The creation of this trans-boundary reserve owes much to the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), a body dedicated to the sustainable development and conservation of the world's tropical forests.



What is ITTO?

From its base in Yokohama, Japan, ITTO brings together 56 member nations with interests in the trade of tropical timber and the management of tropical forests. Each is represented on the International Tropical Timber Council, which meets twice annually to plan and finance new initiatives. The Organization's task is daunting: to foster a tropical timber trade that simultaneously contributes to development in tropical countries and conserves the tropical forest resource on which the trade is based.



What ITTO does

ITTO works with its members to develop policies for sustainable tropical forest use and conservation. These include guidelines, or blueprints, on different aspects of sustainable forest management. Such policies are promoted through field projects, studies, workshops and other activities run by ITTO and local agencies in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Asia-Pacific. More than 500 projects have been funded, valued at more than US\$200 million. Importantly, these funds are distributed as grants, not loans, so they don't add to the debt of poor countries.

The problem and the response

In 1989, ITTO published the report 'No timber without trees'. Its finding was that virtually none of the world's productive tropical forests was being managed sustainably. Urgent action was needed to save them from destruction.

The Organization responded with the Year 2000 Objective, a declaration that its members should strive to achieve an international trade of tropical timber from sustainably managed forests by the century's end. This was an ambitious undertaking, but it served to stimulate urgent action through policy initiatives, field projects and the development of partnerships at all levels.

A decade on, an independent review of the Organization's performance, 'Review of progress towards the Year 2000 Objective', notes signs of progress towards sustainable tropical forest management. But it warns that the journey is just beginning.



C. Prebble

The progress made

Policy success

According to the review, the Organization's greatest success lies in the field of policy and law reform. Governments in countries across the tropics have woven principles of sustainable forestry into administrative structures, environmental legislation and land-use planning. In doing so, they have provided the foundation for further advances towards sustainable forest management.

Many countries have designated areas of permanent forest, and some have guaranteed the tenure of forest-dependent communities. This, combined with the increased local-level implementation of forest policies, is enabling greater community involvement in public forest management.



ITTO: bringing countries together in partnership

ITTO has been directly involved in fostering in-country policy development. For example, an ITTO mission to Sarawak and the projects it recommended have led to far-reaching changes in the administration of forestry in that Malaysian state and a drastic reduction in the allowable timber harvest to sustainable levels.

ITTO also pioneered the development of criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests. These are designed to assist tropical countries in assessing and reporting on compliance with forest management standards; such reporting is essential if we are to measure progress towards sustainable forest management. The incorporation of ITTO's criteria and indicators in the policies of many member countries is a major achievement, but implementing them at the forest level remains an enormous challenge.

Field implementation lacking

Indeed, while policy successes have been many and awareness among policy-makers, industry and the general public of the need for sustainable forest management is growing, the review of



progress reports far less evidence of the implementation of good management in the forest itself. It found, for example, that only six producer countries have the on-the-ground capacity to manage their forests sustainably. Many forests, from montane to mangroves, remain at risk.

ITTO's role in sustainable development

The imperative to address basic human needs resonates across the tropical forests, most of which occur in poor



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countries. ITTO has always recognised that one of the main causes of forest destruction is poverty.

Many people in developed nations would like to see tropical forests locked up to store carbon, conserve biological diversity, protect the environment and preserve indigenous cultures. But although people in tropical nations share with the global community the benefits of forest protection, they also have the right to use their forests directly to improve their lives. If they cannot, the forests may be converted to agriculture, pastures and other uses that generate more immediate income.

The timber trade and the industry on which it is based can therefore play a positive role in forest conservation by adding value to the forest resource. The trade provides tropical countries with export revenue. The processing of timber into value-added products such as furniture greatly boosts such revenue while offering employment to many people.

Numerous ITTO projects aim to promote timber processing as a key to development. Some have assessed the status of value-added processing in various countries, while others are supporting the development of forest-based industries by promoting improved wood utilisation and processing techniques, and by identifying markets for non-wood forest products and services.

Market transparency

Important for a flourishing and sustainable trade is a free flow of up-to-date market information. ITTO provides information on tropical timber trade flows and market trends, investigates issues such as product competitiveness, the trade of lesser-used species and timber certification, and helps improve the capacity of countries to collect and analyse tropical timber statistics.

The Organization also provides a forum for the vigorous debate of market access and trade barriers. Such barriers are steadily being removed, but the issue remains critically important to the timber trade.





Building capacity

At any one time the Organization employs, through its projects, around 500 forestry and conservation professionals, almost all from developing countries. This builds capacity in the formulation and implementation of projects, which in turn helps develop within-country know-how.



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As part of capacity-building, ITTO has provided training for more than 5 000 professionals. For example, just one project in Indonesia has funded 30 Indonesians to obtain higher degrees in forestry and related disciplines: highly qualified professionals such as these will play an important part in the push towards sustainable forest management.

Other projects aim to build capacity at the local scale. For example, an ITTO project in the small African nation of Togo is helping villagers in the Haho-Baloe region to acquire skills for creating and managing teak plantations, to establish a reliable supply of fresh water, to build a school and health centre, and to construct and run a nursery to raise teak seedlings and fruit trees.

Improving management

Is sustainable forest management technically and financially feasible? ITTO has funded some 35 'demonstration' forest projects in its tropical member countries to help answer this crucial question. In the Acre region of Brazil, for example, an ITTO project has been investigating approaches to the sustainable use of tropical forests since the early 1990s. This project has developed an integrated land use management plan, conducted training and promoted timber processing.

A program of demonstration forests, though worthwhile, is still insubstantial in the face of the enormous technical, social, economic and political barriers to sustainable forest management in many countries. Much more needs to be done: as the review of progress notes, many countries still do not have enough information to provide a sound basis for



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sustainable forest management. Nor do they have sufficient technology and technical support, qualified and trained people, or funding.

Transboundary cooperation

It seems clear that despite efforts to add value to the timber resource through downstream processing, timber alone will not provide sufficient revenue to save all the tropical forest estate from destruction. Payment for non-timber forest services such as biodiversity conservation will need to be shared by the global community.



ITTO's influence with national governments is playing a positive role in this regard. The Organization has catalysed the establishment of several trans-boundary conservation reserves by bringing governments together to develop proposals and by providing funds from donor countries to support action. These projects are not only concerned with biodiversity conservation; they work with local people to improve livelihoods while maintaining the integrity of the reserve in question.

ITTO is now financing the protection of more than 8 million hectares of trans-boundary conservation reserves spanning 9 tropical countries in the three tropical regions. These include reserves bordering Peru and Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, and Indonesia and Malaysia, and others are under development. As well as protecting genetic resources, such reserves can act as 'peace parks' and as barriers to illegal logging and smuggling, which are major problems in many countries.

Beyond 2000

The review of progress concludes that ITTO has done more in the 15 years of its existence than any other organization to advance the idea of sustainable tropical forest management. Nevertheless, it stresses the urgent need to translate policies into field implementation. The Organization is developing a new action plan with which to face this challenge and is enacting a number of key initiatives (see 'The way ahead').

It is clear that ITTO's task is far from done. It is also apparent that no one institution will solve the problem on its own. As noted in the review, partnerships at all levels must be further strengthened if the world community is to get the measure of sustainability.

The way ahead

ITTO remains committed to moving as rapidly as possible towards achieving exports of tropical timber and timber products from sustainably managed sources.

A new vision for the work of the Organization is being developed by member nations. Some of the initiatives already on the table – and, in many cases, under implementation – are:

building partnerships

- strengthening the partnerships between governments, non-governmental organizations, the tropical timber trade, forest managers, local communities and international agencies

raising awareness

- informing civil society about the benefits of tropical forests and the role of forest management and trade in conservation and sustainable development

safeguarding biodiversity

- increasing the transboundary conservation reserve network and ensuring its lasting protection

training in low impact logging

- establishing low impact logging training schools to spread know-how on best-practice harvesting

combating illegal logging

- providing assistance to help prevent illegal logging and illegal trade in tropical timber

mangrove protection

- strengthening efforts to conserve, rehabilitate and utilise mangrove forests

demonstrating sustainable forest management

- expanding the demonstration forest program based on the experiences and lessons learned in earlier projects

criteria and indicators

- increasing, through training, the application of ITTO's criteria and indicators at the forest level



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