



**ITTO-JICA SIDE EVENT IN CONJUNCTION WITH RIO+20
HARNESSING TROPICAL FORESTS FOR THE TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY
Japan Pavilion, Athletes' Park, Rio de Janeiro
18 June 2012**

**Address by
Emmanuel Ze Meka, Executive Director
International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)**

Dr. Manoel Sobral Filho, Moderator of this Side Event,
Distinguished Speakers, Presenters and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I begin by extending to you all a very warm welcome to the ITTO-JICA Side Event on Harnessing Tropical Forests for the Transition to a Green Economy. This side event is yet another concrete example of the continuing and strengthening cooperation between ITTO and JICA based on our MOU signed on 3 September 2010.

Like many others, this ITTO-JICA Side Event relates specifically to theme (a) of Rio+20, a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Indeed, in the run up to the approaching Earth Summit 2012, the global community is abuzz over the term green economy which can be regarded as the prevailing characterization of the overarching principle of sustainable development. Unfortunately, the term green economy as a thematic goal of Rio+20 is subject to a bewildering range of definitions and interpretations which have given rise to much contention and controversy in the on-going deliberations and negotiations on 'The Future We Want' as the principal outcome document of the Summit.

Be that as it may, we are quite certain that a green economy as a thematic goal of Rio+20 will involve a transition from the existing conventional economy to one that is predicated on

the principles of sustainable development, encompassing in a holistic and balanced manner, the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainability. In this respect, the green economy will, *inter alia*, be characterized by healthy economic growth and development to pay for the essential and developmental needs of the population, including the creation of wealth and employment opportunities; enhanced quality and protection of the environment from pollution, emissions, climate change and disasters; conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems; sustainable production and consumption of energy, water, natural resources, goods and services; enhanced use and development of environmentally friendly and renewable (green) products and services; as well as improved human well-being and equity across the social spectrum.

What ITTO is much more certain of is the crucial role that the world's tropical forests can play in the transition to a green economy and the achievement of sustainable development. Tropical forests account for just six per cent of the Earth's land surface. Yet, given their wide range of productive and protective functions, these forests can actually be made to contribute much more economically, environmentally and socially through full commitment as well as sound planning and implementation of sustainable forest management (SFM).

From the economic perspective, we are all familiar with the productive functions of tropical forests in relation to the production, processing and trade in timber, fibre, fuelwood and non-timber products. Despite mounting challenges from competing products, relentless criticisms and campaigns over the impact of these functions on the future and existence of tropical forests, the fact remains that the bulk of the tangible and monetary benefits from tropical forests are generated from these productive activities that contribute directly to the process of national socio-economic development in many tropical countries. Accordingly, without being oblivious to the essential and immediate need of securing the legality and sustainability of these productive functions of tropical forests, we should avoid resorting to actions that will be tantamount to killing the goose which lays the golden eggs. Indeed, in the context of the transition to a green economy, we should redouble our efforts towards placing these productive activities on a firm footing of legality and sustainability to ensure continued market acceptance of tropical timber and forest products. With these in place, we have every confidence that being natural, renewable, environmentally friendly, biodegradable, energy-efficient, versatile and highly aesthetic, tropical timber and forest

products will not only be able to defend existing market positions but will also be able to vouch for their green credentials and make significant gains in the growing niche markets for green building materials as one of the cornerstones of the green economy.

With regards to environmental aspects, the protective functions of tropical forests are well recognized. In fact, in the context of the on-going climate change negotiations under UNFCCC, the role of tropical forests in climate change mitigation and adaptation is increasingly being acknowledged, judging by the tangible progress being made in REDD+ compared with the protracted and non-conclusive negotiations on the overarching issue of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. On the same token, being by far the most important habitat which accounts for more than half of the Earth's total number of species, tropical forests have invariably become the focus of renewed efforts toward the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the attainment of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets by 2020 under the CBD. The main obstacle to achieving such goals is that the full value of protected forest areas and the environmental services they provide have not been adequately captured, internalized and remunerated in the market. For tropical forests to perform their protective functions under a green economy, arrangements must be in place for the full valuation of the environmental services provided by these forests through market remuneration, payments and even compensation.

Turning to the social pillar of sustainability, out of some 1.6 billion people who are directly dependent on forests, more than 800 million of them are to be found in and around tropical forests. With most of those indigenous people and local communities living in poverty and on subsistence, the challenge of empowering them through greater involvement and participation in decision-making, land and forest tenure reform, more productive community and agroforestry, and development of small and medium enterprises can assist in a meaningful way in alleviating poverty as well as enhancing social equity and well being for the mutual benefit of these peoples and the tropical forests which they are dependent on.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although tropical forests are now increasingly being recognized as invaluable for the survival of our planet, the full commitment of the governments and stakeholders in tropical countries coupled with sound planning and implementation of SFM are essential for these forests to be well conserved, sustainably managed and effectively harnessed to assist these countries in the transition to a green economy.

Since its establishment in 1986, ITTO had dedicated itself to assisting its producer and developing member countries to this end through its overarching objectives of promoting the expansion and diversification of international trade in tropical timber from sustainably managed and legally harvested forests and promoting the sustainable management of timber producing forests. In reality, this translates into ITTO policy work and project activities on the ground covering practically all the three pillars of sustainability and seven internationally agreed elements of SFM. At this ITTO-JICA Side Event, we are showcasing three ITTO success stories in the fields of conservation and sustainable management, sustainable utilization, and trade in legal timber implemented in the three tropical forest regions.

The impact of ITTO policy work and project activities has been salutary in many ITTO producer and developing member countries. Indeed, there has been encouraging progress made particularly in forest policy and legislation reform, forest law governance and enforcement, increased forest area under management plans and under SFM, expanded area of certified forests, recognition of the rights of indigenous people and local communities, as well as greater awareness and participation in REDD+ and forest-based carbon capture and storage.

Yet the challenges remain formidable and wide ranging. ITTO is privileged to have witnessed and experienced the two previous Earth Summits in 1992 and 2002. We are, therefore, honored to be participating in this Third Earth Summit, Rio+20, at a time when we have begun to operate under the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), 2006. The provisions of our new governing agreement will enable ITTO to respond more proactively to the outcomes of Rio+20 on the transition to a green economy and strengthen the institutional framework for sustainable development.

There are now 63 countries which have become parties to ITTA, 2006, two more than the membership under the previous ITTA, 1994. However, there are still a number of ITTO member countries under the previous Agreement which have not completed their internal processes to become parties to ITTA, 2006. I would like to take this opportunity to renew the call for these countries to expedite their actions towards becoming members of our Organization under ITTA, 2006. With a strong membership, coupled with deeper and broader cooperation and collaboration with other like-minded organizations, processes and stakeholders, we can all move forward together in our quest to conserve as well as sustainably manage and develop the tropical forests of the world.

I thank you all for your kind attention.