

ITTO Tropical Forest

UPDATE

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

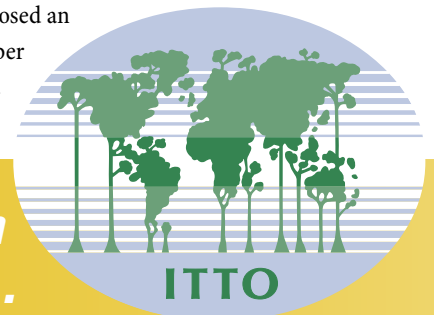


Liberia's great thirst

RECOVERING from two recent civil wars, Liberia is in tatters. One of the world's poorest countries, its people live an average of less than 50 years. Its unemployment rate of 85% is reportedly the highest in the world. Even in Monrovia, the capital, basic services such as electricity, clean drinking water and health care are scarce or non-existent; people have a daily struggle to survive. If ever a country needed development (preferably of the sustainable variety), Liberia is it.

Sustainable development doesn't just fall from the sky. It takes good governance, goodwill and good planning and quite often requires substantial financial investment. According to a recent ITTO diagnostic mission (page 3),

Liberian forestry is lacking all these ingredients, except perhaps some goodwill. Industrial capacity has been virtually wiped out, the system for the allocation of concessions is not transparent, and planning is hindered by a dearth of forest inventory data, lost or destroyed records, low capacity in the Forest Development Authority (FDA), and a general lack of political and social stability. Adding to the sector's woes, in 2003 the United Nations imposed an embargo on the export of timber from Liberia and hasn't lifted it yet. Community forestry



**Inside ▶ Liberia ▶ transboundary conservation
▶ criteria and indicators ▶ Italian timber market ...**

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Cover image A man tries to drink the rain during a presidential election rally in Monrovia, Liberia, in October 2005.
Photo: Chris Hondros/Getty Images

and traditional resource use and access rights exist only as concepts, and traditional governance in rural areas was corrupted and dismembered through the years of war and neglect.

Yet forests could still play a big role in the country's recovery. In 2002—before the embargo—the timber industry accounted for an estimated 25% of GDP and 65% of foreign exchange earnings and generated up to US\$20 million in government revenues. Perhaps half the country is forested, including 3.4 million hectares of dense forest that is rich in biodiversity.

There appears to be no shortage of helping hands from outside, either, with governments, NGOs and international organisations joining together in an informal arrangement called the Liberia Forest Initiative in an effort to boost conservation and management efforts there. But according to the ITTO mission it will take many millions of dollars over a sustained period to rebuild the Liberian forest sector to the point where it can play a positive role in the country's emergence from strife.

One of the problems is that capacity takes years to build, and participatory processes are inevitably slow and cumbersome, yet Liberia needs the economic activity now. The UN sanctions must be lifted before the (export) industry can restart; however, in his most recent report to the UN Security Council on this matter (June 2005) the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan found that the government “has not been able to establish full authority and control over the timber-producing areas nor to take all the steps necessary in order to ensure that Government revenues from the Liberian timber industry are not used to fuel conflict ... but are used rather for legitimate purposes for the benefit of the Liberian people”.

This is a Catch-22: income is needed to increase the capacity of the FDA and other actors to enforce the law, but such income is not possible until law-enforcement capacity is increased.

ITTO is one of the willing hands in Liberia. Its mission made a host of recommendations on how the Organization might best

contribute. As a first step (to make it easier to take bigger steps thereafter), a workshop is planned to introduce the revised ITTO criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of tropical forests (C&I, see page 11) to stakeholders. ITTO is convening a series of such workshops across the tropics designed to institutionalise the use of C&I in tropical forest management, and it has financed several projects (two of which are described in this edition—see pages 12 and 15) with the same aim. C&I are tools that help identify trends in the forest sector, determine the effects of forest management interventions over time, and facilitate decision-making in national forest policy processes. If they are used in all forest management units and by all governments within an international grouping (such as ITTO) they can form a common basis for reporting on the status of forest management.

ITTO is using its C&I for just this purpose: a major report on the status of forest management in the tropics, based on member-government C&I reports and other sources, will be the subject of a forthcoming special edition of the *TFU*. More than 15 years ago an ITTO survey found almost no production forest in the tropics under sustainable management; the present survey will find a substantial increase.

Unfortunately, Liberia is not a contributor to this increase. A country still suffering the repercussions of war has other things to attend to, and sustainable forest management is a long way off. But there is still hope: if the international community is willing to spend the time and money needed to rebuild the Liberian forest sector, perhaps by the time a third assessment is carried out the sector will at last be helping to slake Liberia's thirst for sustainable development.

Alastair Sarre