

INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL TIMBER ORGANIZATION



NEWS RELEASE

INTRA-AFRICAN TIMBER TRADE PROMOTED

ACCRA, GHANA, 2 July 2009: An international conference convened here by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) from 30 June to 2 July has resulted in a new Action Plan for the promotion of the intra-African trade in timber and timber products. The conference brought together over one hundred stakeholders, including several national forestry ministers, government representatives from all ten ITTO African member countries, senior executives from major forest products companies, private and public sector financial institutions, forest product market development agencies, customs authorities, chambers of commerce and leading forestry and conservation agencies from around the world to share ideas on expanding the regional timber trade.

ITTO is an intergovernmental organization with 60 members that develops and implements policies for sustainable tropical forest management and promotes the international trade of sustainably produced tropical timber. Since 1987 the Organization has provided grants worth over US\$330 million to fund over 700 projects designed to promote sustainable forest management, conservation and sustainable development.

In recent years, African countries have imported wood products averaging over US\$4 billion annually of which less than 10% originates from within the region. A huge opportunity for the development of intra-African trade therefore exists, particularly for the ITTO producing member countries in the region with significant forest development potential. The medium and long-term market outlook is positive driven by economic and population growth in the region but African producers need to improve competitiveness to increase their market shares. However most African countries are already net importers of timber products and the available regional supply will not be sufficient to meet regional demand without concerted efforts to achieve sustainable timber supplies from natural production forests and major investments in the establishment of planted forests.

The Accra Action Plan released today identifies the main constraints faced by African suppliers in regional markets and proposes steps to be taken by governments, the private sector and international/regional organizations to overcome them. Constraints identified include high tariff barriers for processed products, cumbersome/costly customs procedures (in both exporting and importing countries), corruption, inappropriate taxation and inadequate incentives, lack of harmonized regulatory frameworks, competition from illegal harvesting and trade, deficient statistics, lack of market information, weak marketing capability, limited access to trade finance, limited secondary processing capacity, low quality and design competitiveness of further processed products, intense competition from outside the region, limited knowledge of African timbers and suppliers among potential buyers and an unfavorable image of African suppliers as reliable trading partners. The Action Plan also proposes measures to implement and monitor the activities it recommends for overcoming these varied obstacles, proposing that ITTO act (in liaison with other international/regional organizations) as a coordinating body to oversee the Plan's implementation.

The ITTO Accra Action Plan can be downloaded here:

http://www.itto.int/en/news_releases/id=2071

For more information on the Accra Action Plan, ITTO and/or the projects it supports, visit www.itto.int or contact itto@itto.or.jp.