

# Declaration of African women

**The African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests, formed during the conference, made this declaration on the conference's final day.**

Organized by the International Tropical Timber Organization and its partners, the conference took place under the auspices of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife of the Republic of Cameroon. The objective of the conference was to determine strategies for accelerating forest-tenure reforms while guaranteeing recognition of rights, sustainable forest management, and socioeconomic development.

Conference participants included 45 women hailing from Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal. These African women, gathered on this day, 27 May 2009, in the MEFOU Room in the Hotel Mont Fébé in Yaoundé,

#### *Recognized:*

- the essential and central role of women in development in general, and in the sustainable management of resources specifically; the discrimination against women in terms of access to land and forest property to develop economic activities; and
- the discrimination against women in terms of access to necessary capital for developing economic activities.

#### *Evaluated:*

The institutional, financial, legal and regulatory state of affairs with regard to forest tenure, governance and enterprise.

#### *Identified:*

The following problems:

- Women's rights to tenure, in both customary systems and in modern law, remain unrecognized; this persistent disregard for women impedes international policies, laws and programming from addressing women's tenure rights.
- Although women are leaders in generating income from non-timber forest products and agroforestry products, and despite women's participation in local economies, efforts to support women's roles in community forest management remain inadequate.
- Limited access to technology, capital, and national and international markets for non-timber forest products.
- In certain countries, regulations restrict the development of forest enterprises administered by women.

#### *Proposed:*

The following:

1. involving women in the forest and land reform processes underway in West and Central Africa;
2. advocating better access for women to forest lands and resources;
3. reforming customary systems that prevent women from owning customary lands and limit them to usufruct;
4. recognizing the role of women in the production, processing and commerce of non-timber forest products and agroforestry products;
5. encouraging and supporting women's forest enterprises, especially those focused on non-timber forest products;
6. strengthening support to the women's NGOs and women's development organizations working within community forest management to expand technical, technological, organizational, financial, economic, and institutional capacity;
7. mobilizing funding from governments and donors to help women develop community enterprises;

#### 8. that ITTO:

- incorporates into its agenda a thematic programme on gender equity, tenure, and recognizing women's rights
- develops funding mechanisms for women's community forest enterprises
- appeals to national governments to facilitate the effective participation of women in their countries' land-tenure and forest-tenure reform processes
- undertakes a global review of the contribution of women to the forestry sector, and organize an international conference to identify strategic courses of action for its involvement in development
- ensures women's representation in all of the International Tropical Timber Council summit meetings and all other decision-making bodies.

To redress the general lack of organization in women's forest management and in community forest enterprise development, and in the African context specifically, the African women meeting in the MEFOU room in the Hotel Mont Fébé,

#### *Are committed:*

- to acting collectively to confront the social, political, legislative and economic challenges surrounding forest management in Africa.

#### *Decided:*

- to create the African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests.

The specificity and distinctiveness of this network stems from the collective nature of its activities with regard to land-tenure and forest-tenure rights.

Given persistent gender inequality in legal, institutional and traditional spheres, in acting collectively women will gain more opportunities within the framework of community forestry and decentralization. Such collective action will enable women to access property and to focus on the promotion of NTFPs and agroforestry products.

The mission of the African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests is:

To lobby governments and international organizations to recognize, in their policy reforms and agendas, women's specific needs, interests, and constraints, as well as women's rights to own land and forest resources.

This network aims to gather together women managers of community forests and women interested in land and forest issues, along with women involved in the exploitation and trade of timber and non-timber forest products in Central and West Africa.

Therefore a provisional committee was established according to the following structure:

- **President:** Cécile Ndjébet, Cameroon
- **Vice President:** Marceline Ouedraogo, Burkina Faso
- **Secretary:** Solange Bandiak, Senegal
- **Focal points:**
  - Burkina Faso: Clarisse Honadia
  - Burundi: Liberate Nicayenzi
  - Cameroon: Antoinette Pa'ah
  - Central African Republic: Sylvie Chantal Sekola
  - Democratic Republic of the Congo: Jeanette Amanakou
  - Nigeria: Apeh Egbe.

The African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests calls on the Rights and Resources Initiative to strengthen the network's capacities, and seeks to be an independent member of ITTO's Civil Society Advisory Group.

Yaoundé, 27 May 2009