

## **Applying the ITTO-IUCN Guidelines for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Tropical Production Forests**

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**Fertile ground:** Production forests offer significant potential for the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity. Photo: CIB

ITTO has an important role in negotiating 'normative' guidelines that establish best practice in different domains of forestry. In 1993, a set of *Guidelines for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Tropical Production Forests* was published. These were informally reviewed by ITTO and its partner the International Union for Conservation of Nature – IUCN – in 2004 and it was decided that although the Guidelines were technically correct they did not address a lot of the policy issues that were fundamental to achieving better conservation outcomes – in addition they were not being widely applied. ITTO and IUCN therefore decided to embark upon a more inclusive process of developing a new set of Guidelines. Workshops were convened with representatives of major international organizations concerned with forest conservation, international conservation NGOs, research scientists working on forest biodiversity and forest managers from the private sector.

A first draft of the Guidelines was developed at a workshop in Switzerland in 2005. The Guidelines were subsequently subject to field testing in forest harvesting operations in Indonesia, Cameroon and Brazil. An expert panel was then convened in Thailand in 2007 and the Guidelines were prepared for submission to the ITTC later that year. Members of the ITTC were then given the opportunity to examine the text and propose modifications and the Guidelines were finally approved by the Council at the end of 2008. They were launched at the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) meeting in April 2009 in Rome.

### **Progress in implementation**

A year has now elapsed since the ITTO/IUCN *Guidelines for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Tropical Production Forests* were distributed to timber producers, governments and conservation NGOs in the ITTO producer member

countries. The Guidelines argue powerfully that small changes to management of production forests could provide a very cost-effective way of meeting biodiversity conservation goals. The message was picked up in the CBD Programme of Work on Forest Biodiversity as a priority. So now it is time to take a look at what has already been achieved and what additional measures are needed to ensure the wider application of the Guidelines.

An initial examination of the evidence is encouraging. Although we do not have examples of companies who have followed the Guidelines to the letter there are many examples of their having influenced national policies and industrial practices. The economic downturn in 2008 made things difficult for industries working in remote areas and may have made some companies reluctant to take on new measures. However several of the companies who collaborated in the development and field testing of the Guidelines have now moved on towards certification and the Guidelines have helped in this.

Many timber companies in South-east Asia and the Congo Basin are now certified and this suggests that they have met high standards for conserving biodiversity in their operations. While there is no current evidence that certification companies make use of the Guidelines, we would hope that certifiers might use them to inform their assessment of logging operations. In general certifiers are more knowledgeable about silviculture, logging roads, labour issues etc than they are about biodiversity. Most certifiers seem to have taken the position that if good old-fashioned forest management is applied then biodiversity will be able to fend for itself. Perhaps more needs to be done to encourage the certifying bodies to make their staff familiar with the Guidelines and use them in their field assessments.

## **NGOs lagging**

Much of the movement for certification has been driven by pressure from conservation NGOs. They might have been expected to use the Guidelines to inform their efforts. However there is again not much evidence of this. The biodiversity focus of the activist NGOs during the past few years has concentrated on only two issues. First illegal hunting of bushmeat, and second the existence of High Conservation Value – HCV - areas within land destined for forestry. The bushmeat and HCV issues are fully addressed in the Guidelines and are ranked as of high importance in them. However they are only two amongst numerous issues that foresters should be aware of. The Guidelines emphasise the reality that what you do for biodiversity in a given forest will depend very much upon local circumstances. An overall assessment of the situation is needed first before deciding which measures will produce the biggest bang for the buck in any given situation. It is disappointing that few of the activist NGOs or the certifiers have the technical competence to make such judgements. The information required is in the Guidelines but it is not, in general, being exploited. So more needs to be done to make sure that activist NGOs are familiar with the Guidelines and support their application.

Perhaps ITTO and IUCN were not sufficiently pro-active in disseminating the Guidelines. Seminars with forest companies and government officials were held and events organized at international conferences of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) and at IUCN's own World Conservation Congress - but that was clearly not enough. We did not really look at what sorts of pressures and incentives cause forest companies to change their practices. It now appears that we should have targeted certification companies and NGOs and provided them with practical training in the field to ensure that they fully understood the Guidelines and could draw upon them in their day to day activities. Maybe by doing this we could have made allies of these important drivers of change in forestry and we might have equipped them to be able to make better technical judgements on biodiversity issues.

Notwithstanding this there is still plenty of good news. There are examples emerging where at least some elements of the Guidelines have clearly had an impact on forestry operations in the field. New forest management regulations that have emerged in Brazil in the recent past picked up on some of the best practice suggestions in the Guidelines. A major plantation company in Sumatra has used the Guidelines in setting its strategy for situating its plantations in the landscape. WWF has been working with concessionaires in south-east Cameroon and using the Guidelines to help them address biodiversity issues in planning their operations. ITTO is seeking funding to allow more targeted activities like these to implement the Guidelines.

## **REDD ready**

The Guidelines emphasized the logic that if a commercial forest company was going to incur costs to favour biodiversity – a public good – then those costs ought to be met by the people who benefit from that biodiversity – the global public. The argument ran that if society wants to conserve biodiversity in production forests then it should make payments for this environmental service to the company. This has never yet happened but there is now some hope. Vast sums are being made available for REDD+ and most concepts of REDD+ require that the forests are maintained or managed not just for carbon sequestration and storage but also for their other environmental values – notably biodiversity. The difficulty has always been to know how to measure those biodiversity benefits. The ITTO/IUCN Guidelines provide exactly the information that is required if REDD+ is to pay for the conservation of broader forest values. So perhaps here again lies a neglected audience for the Guidelines. Should IUCN and ITTO be promoting the Guidelines amongst those who are planning REDD+ investments? Should it be obligatory that those receiving REDD+ payments for conserving or managing forests agree to apply the Guidelines or at least an agreed subset of them?

It is increasingly recognised that well managed forests provide an excellent compromise between the need to create jobs and drive economies and the need to conserve environmental services. The fact that the '+' was added to REDD is evidence of this. The biggest challenge facing tropical developing countries is to maintain their forests for their global values whilst allowing their use for local development. All of the ITTO Guidelines are excellent sources of information on how this can be achieved and the Biodiversity Guidelines are especially pertinent. 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity and 2011 is going to be the International Year of Forests. Forest biodiversity and sustainable forest management will be on the agenda of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan in October. This provides an excellent opportunity to further push the case for managed forests providing a real resource for biodiversity conservation and for these forests to be seen as a major part of the solution to the biodiversity crisis and not as one of its causes. ITTO and IUCN members need to mobilise resources to ensure that more efforts are made to disseminate the messages in the Guidelines to all parties who make decisions on how and when forests are managed for timber.