

Following the fellows

An assessment of the ITTO Fellowship Program shows it has had far-reaching impacts

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Listening: Rina Susanti (right) from Indonesia interviews local people as part of her ITTO fellowship. *Photo: R. Susanti*

In 2010, in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Freezailah Fellowship Fund, ITTO undertook a survey to assess the impact of the ITTO Fellowship Program over the previous decade. The survey showed that the program has had a significant impact on capacity development in tropical forestry, timber industries and related disciplines in ITTO member countries. After the completion of their fellowships, ITTO fellows continued to promote sustainable forest management at the national and international levels and contributed more to biodiversity conservation, the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, and the improvement of local livelihoods. This article provides a brief sketch of the history of the ITTO Fellowship Program, presents the results of the impact assessment survey, and suggests future directions for and improvements that could be made to the program.

Two decades of support

The ITTO Fellowship Program began in 1989 as ITTO project PD 60/89 (M,F,I) under the Committee on Forest Industry with the aim of promoting human resource development and institutional strengthening in the forest sectors of ITTO member countries. Initially the program mainly supported participation in study tours, conferences and short training courses (including tailor-made institutional training), especially in forest industry operations and timber marketing.

In 1993, the Fellowship Program was renewed under ITTO project PD 1/93 (M,F,I), which expanded the program's scope, particularly to promote activities that would help in achieving the ITTO Year 2000 Objective. More people were trained in sustainable forest management and reforestation during this phase, which also supported an increasing

number of post-graduate studies although the focus remained on short-term activities.

In 2000, the Freezailah Fellowship Fund was created to honour the achievements of ITTO's first executive director and to expand funding opportunities. The objective of the ITTO Fellowship Program was restated as "to develop human resources and enhance professional expertise in member countries in tropical forestry, tropical timber industries and related disciplines, with a view to promoting sustainable management of tropical forests, efficient utilization and processing of tropical timber, and better economic information on the international trade in tropical timber". More detailed information about the three phases of the program can be found in Aoki (2006).

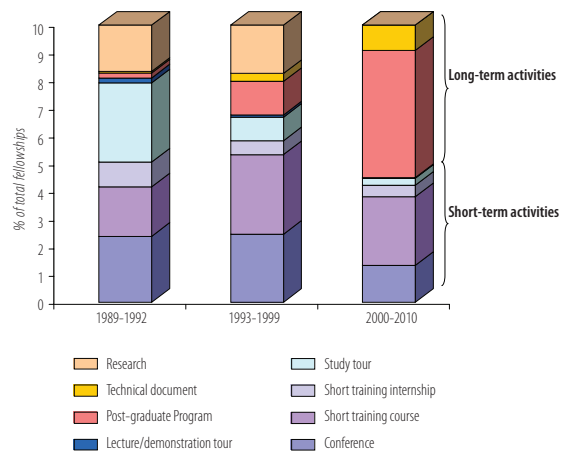
Over the past two decades (1989-2010), the ITTO Fellowship Program has awarded about US\$6.3 million to 1083 mostly young and mid-career individuals from research institutes (32% of all ITTO fellows), governments (28%), universities (17%), NGOs (12%), the private sector (5%) and others (6%) in 44 ITTO member countries. About 30% of all fellowships have been won by women. Fellowships have been distributed to applicants from producer member countries in Asia-Pacific (32%), Africa (30%) and Latin America and Caribbean (23%), from developing consumer countries such as Nepal and China (11%), and from developed consumer countries (4%). In the last decade there were about 3200 applications for fellowships, of which about 540 (17%) were successful, showing the strong demand (and competition) for support under the program.

The program continues to fund short-term activities such as short training courses and internship programs (30%), conference participation (19%) and study and/or

demonstration tours (9%). However, the program has increased its support for post-graduate studies: about half of all fellows since 2000 have obtained master's or PhD degrees in forestry or related disciplines, and the proportion of fellows pursuing post-graduate studies continues to increase (Figure 1).

The rise of post-graduates

Figure 1 Fellowship activities, by phase (1083 fellows)



Of all fellowships awarded, 70% have been for activities related to reforestation and forest management, 21% have been for activities related to forest industry, and 9% have been for activities in the field of economic information and market intelligence. Popular fellowship topics include sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, forest rehabilitation and restoration, and community or participatory forestry. The role of forests in the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, particularly REDD, is a fast-growing subject for fellowship applications.

Survey method and responses

In order to assess the impact of the ITTO Fellowship Program on capacity development in ITTO member countries, a questionnaire was prepared based on the contribution analysis approach recommended and adapted by the 17th Meeting of the Senior Fellowship Officers of the United Nations System (United Nations 2009; Rotem et al. 2010). The questionnaire contained eleven personal questions and 33 questions about the fellowship activity and its impacts. It was sent by email in March and April 2010 to 376 ITTO fellows who completed their fellowships between 2000 and 2009. Due largely to the difficulty of contacting fellows who completed their fellowships in the early years of this period, the overall response rate was 55%.

Responses were received from 206 fellows in 34 ITTO member countries: 86% were from producer countries (Africa—30%, Asia Pacific—30% and Latin America/Caribbean—26%), 12% were from developing consumer countries such as Nepal and China, and 2% were from

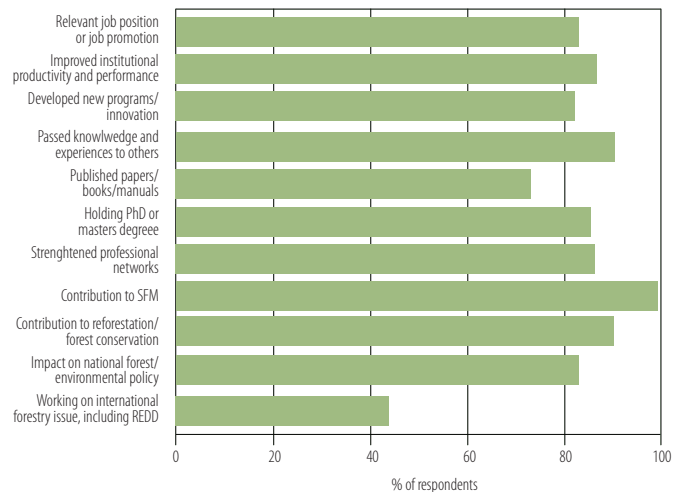
developed consumer countries. Thirty-five percent of respondents were women. Five percent of fellows were aged 20–29 years, 44% were aged 30–39 years, 33% were aged 40–49 years, 16% were aged 50–59 years and 2% were aged 60 years or more. The respondents currently work at universities (27%), research institutes (24%), governments (17%), NGOs (10%), intergovernmental organizations (6%), consulting companies (3%), industry or trading companies (2%) and others (11%). For their fellowships, 41% of respondents undertook post-graduate degree programs, 32% participated in short training courses or internship programs, 12% attended international conferences, 10% published technical documents and 5% undertook study or demonstration tours.

Findings

All respondents gave positive feedback about the benefits of the ITTO Fellowship Program. Figure 2 shows that the program has had significant impacts on careers. Some of these impacts are discussed below.

Great benefits

Figure 2 Impacts of fellowships (206 respondents)



Return home to relevant position

The fellowship awards have clearly benefited fellows' professional development and improved their career prospects. More than half (59%) of respondents obtained a relevant job position or job promotion after completing their fellowship activities. A majority (83%) attributed their promotion or new job position to the skills and knowledge they gained through the fellowship. Seventy-four percent of respondents who undertook a post-graduate degree obtained a relevant job or promotion, compared with 71% of those who completed training internships, 67% of those who used their fellowships to publish a manual or monographs, 47% of those whose awards facilitated participation in short-term training course participation and 42% of those who attended a conference.

Most respondents (89%) returned home immediately on completion of their fellowship activities, 6% continued advanced study (master's or PhD programs) abroad and 2% took a job in a country other than their own. Currently 10% of respondents are undertaking PhD programs abroad and 6% are working outside their home countries for international organizations or global consulting companies related to tropical forestry and sustainable development. Therefore, most ITTO fellows have remained in or returned to their home countries, indicating that the ITTO Fellowship Program—which mainly funds citizens of tropical countries—is contributing to the development of human capacity where it is needed most.



Tracking upwards: Abraham Baffoe (left) from Ghana studies a log-tracking system as part of his ITTO fellowship. *Photo: A. Baffoe*

Positive contribution to work

A majority of respondents (86%) reported that they have improved their productivity and performance in the institution in which they work. More than half (52%) indicated that their fellowships had enabled them to improve institutional capacity, resulting in their achieving a relevant job position or promotion.

Many respondents (82%) stated that they had developed new programs or innovative ways of working that have helped to improve work performance at their institutions. For instance, an ITTO fellow from India developed techniques to process satellite images and light detection and ranging (LIDAR) data for monitoring and assessing forest cover, growing stock and biomass. An ITTO fellow from Ghana developed a smoke dryer to replace conventional kilns, thereby improving timber-processing efficiency. Many university teachers replied that they had improved their teaching and research skills and developed new courses, curricula and research proposals in tropical forestry and related disciplines.

A majority of respondents (90%) passed to others the knowledge and experiences they acquired during their fellowships. For example, many fellows conducted workshops and seminars where they work, trained community members, gave lectures at universities and post-graduate schools, and/or presented the results of the fellowships at national or international conferences. Seventy-three percent of respondents published scientific papers, books, field manuals or national language reports based on the results of their fellowships. Some of the publications produced by fellows during the period are listed in the box on page xx.

Continuing development

Most fellows have continued their professional and personal development. Eighty-five percent of respondents now hold an advanced degree in forestry and related disciplines at the PhD (39%) or master's (46%) level. Among them, 45% of fellows responded that they had received their qualification as

a direct result of their fellowships, while others have continued their higher education inspired by their fellowships.

The fellowships helped fellows to strengthen their professional networks. A majority of respondents (86%) reported that the contacts they developed through their fellowships strengthened their professional networks and enhanced their work performance and productivity; some felt they had succeeded in fostering international collaboration through their work.

Contribution to SFM and conservation

Almost all respondents (99%) reported that they were promoting SFM in their countries and about 90% were also contributing to reforestation and forest conservation. For example, a Cameroonian ITTO fellow became a focal point for mangrove conservation in his country under the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife as a result of his fellowship research. A Philippine ITTO fellow developed a strategy at the local level for the conservation of Philippine tropical timber species. The top five current interests of ITTO fellows are: sustainable forest management (35%), biodiversity conservation (11%), mitigation of and adaptation to climate change (11%), reforestation and forest conservation (10%) and efficient utilization and processing of tropical timber (8%).

Impact on policy

A majority of respondents (83%) reported that the knowledge, skills and networks they gained from the fellowships helped them to influence national forestry and environmental policy in their home countries. Half said that

they have had a significant impact on policymaking. For example, an ITTO fellow from the Democratic Republic of the Congo led an initiative to improve the legal framework for small-scale logging in the country's Orientale province, contributing to the national effort to combat illegal logging by small-scale loggers. Ghanaian ITTO fellows contributed to an ongoing forest policy review program in their country and played key roles in national policymaking as members of several national committees. An ITTO fellow from Venezuela was commissioned to work with the legal adviser to the Forestry Department's Director General to draft a management plan for Ticoporo Forest Reserve, developing a new management model based on shared responsibility between local communities and the state government which became fully effective in 2008. An Indian ITTO fellow has been requested by the country's federal Ministry of Environment and Forests to investigate diseases affecting teak and to propose appropriate management strategies for the country.

Just under half (44%) of respondents are currently working on international forestry issues. Consistent with global trends, many are working on issues related to climate change, especially REDD.

Host institution and country

A majority of respondents (81%) undertook their activities at either universities or research institutes. The remaining respondents carried out their activities within NGOs (5%), governments (4%), intergovernmental organizations (4%), industries (1%) or other (4%). Almost all respondents (99%) were satisfied with the quality of their host institutions and felt that they provided relevant expertise and adequate resources for their fellowships.

About 80% of the host institutions were located in ITTO member countries. The most popular ITTO host countries accounted for half of all fellows: United States (11%), Nepal (7%), Philippines (7%), Indonesia (4%), Ghana (4%), France (4%), Canada (3%), Germany (3%), Netherlands (3%), Australia (2%) and Gabon (2%). Among non-member countries, Costa Rica was very popular among fellows from Latin America and the Caribbean, accounting for about 40% of the fellowships awarded in that region.

South-south cooperation has gained increasing expression in the ITTO Fellowship Program over the last decade. About two-thirds (64%) of respondents conducted their activities in ITTO developing member countries (45%) or in non-member developing countries (19%). Thirty-six percent of fellows conducted their activities in their own countries—mainly master's or PhD research or the preparation of technical documents. This proportion includes people who enrolled in universities abroad but undertook their thesis research on an issue related to tropical forests, tropical forest industry or community livelihood improvement in their own countries. This phenomenon is at least partly due to the ceiling on the fellowship value (US\$10 000), which is usually



Humming along: Peruvian Constantino Aucca's fellowship promoted community conservation of spatuletail hummingbird habitat. *Photo: ECOAN*

insufficient to support graduate programs in developed countries. On the other hand, most short-course participants took courses abroad, particularly in developed countries such as the United States, the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom and Australia, since the fellowships are usually sufficient to cover the full cost of such courses.

Towards a third decade

The results of the impact assessment survey show that the ITTO Fellowship Program is having a significant impact on the development of professional capacity in ITTO producer member countries. Admittedly the survey reflects the views of ITTO fellows only; soliciting the views of employers and host institutions as well would provide a more holistic assessment. Nevertheless, based on the findings of the survey it is possible to discern ways in which the program can be improved as it enters its third decade.

Variety of activities

The ITTO Fellowship Program is unique, differing from other programs in the variety of activities it supports and as the only specialized intergovernmental funding source for increasing capacity in the tropical forest sector. Many fellows appreciated the wide range of activities supported by the program because it can meet the needs of diverse applicants at differing stages of their professional careers. For example, a small grant for post-graduate study helps young and mid-career professionals to advance their knowledge and expertise and widen their career prospects. Short-term training courses, internships and study tours help young and mid-career professionals to fill gaps in knowledge and skills and have an immediate impact on improving work performance and efficiency. Conference participation enables young, mid-career and senior professionals to share their knowledge and experiences and to develop international networks for future collaboration. The publication of manuals and books gives recognition to the work achieved by mid-career and senior fellows and helps field workers and other professionals by providing them with up-to-date, practical information. All types of activity had positive effects on career development and work performance. The ITTO Fellowship Program, therefore, should continue to support a broad range of activities.

In the past decade there has been a preponderance of fellowship applications for the activities related to reforestation and forest management (82%) over forest industry (11%) and economic information and market intelligence (7%). To achieve the objective of the program in a balanced manner, more applications to promote the efficient use and processing of tropical timber and improved information on the international trade of tropical forest products should be encouraged.

Increase in the number of host institutions

Fellowship applications are currently concentrated on certain training programs and post-graduate programs in a relatively small number of renowned institutions with excellent training capacities and facilities. Exploring partnerships with other training institutions and universities specialized in tropical forestry, sustainable forest management, wood science and industry and climate change could open new avenues for capacity-building, especially in light of the new objectives set out in the International Tropical Timber Agreement, 2006.

Opportunities for a wider range of nationalities

Another challenge is to expand the benefits of the ITTO Fellowship Program to nationals of a wider range of countries. In the decade to 2010, more than half the fellowships have been granted to nationals of seven countries—Ghana (10%), Nepal (9%), Cameroon (9%), India (8%), Colombia (7%), Indonesia (7%) and Peru (5%)—mainly because many good applications have been received from those countries. The program needs to be better promoted in other ITTO member countries through such avenues as ITTO contact points, forestry schools, research institutes, course and conference organizers and forestry journals.

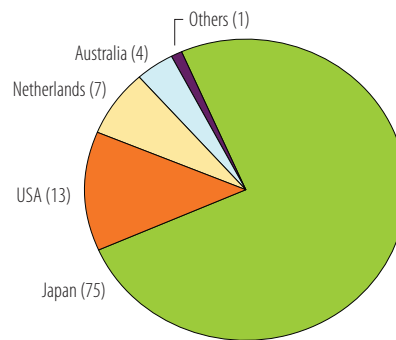
Funding

The ITTO Fellowship Program has received a total voluntary contribution of about US\$7.9 million, three-quarters of which was provided by the Government of Japan (75%), with significant contributions from the governments of the United States, the Netherlands, Australia and others (Figure 3). Eighty percent of these funds have been expended on fellowship awards and the remainder to meet administrative and operational costs.

Annual funding was stable in the last decade at about US\$400 000 thanks mainly to the regular contributions of the governments of Japan and the United States. However, due to increasing demand for support under the program and a gradual increase in the cost of fellowship activities (including administration costs), the program now faces a fundraising challenge. Stephanie Caswell proposes a potential solution in *Out on a limb* in this edition (page 24): that is, the ITTO Fellowship Program could be included as one of the core ITTO activities to be funded under the administrative budget, thereby shifting the allocation of at least the operational costs of the program from voluntary to mandatory contributions. Contributions from other

Contributors

Figure 3 Fellowship voluntary contributions by governments (percentage of US\$7.9 million)



governments, foundations and the private sector should also be sought to ensure that the program continues its important role in building capacity in tropical forestry.

Alumni network

ITTO fellows are important assets for their countries and ITTO and their increasing knowledge and experiences should be shared with others. A majority (93%) of fellows surveyed showed interest in joining an ITTO fellowship alumni network, should one be created, to share their experiences and ideas. Many issues concerning tropical forests are not just local, national or regional but also global, which require collaborative solutions. A web-based discussion group for ITTO fellowship alumni could serve as a platform for innovative ideas on tropical SFM, including the role of tropical forests in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Two decades of the ITTO Fellowship Program have shown it to be effective in developing capacity in the tropical forest sector. In its third decade, the ITTO Fellowship Program needs to review its scope and objectives in accordance with the ITTA 2006, which will come into force soon, to ensure that it contributes efficiently to meeting ITTO's new objectives and priorities and the demands of its member countries.

A detailed report of the survey (Aoki 2010) is available on request from the ITTO secretariat.

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