

Action is needed to speed up the implementation of SFM principles, criteria and indicators in Gabonese forests

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Ms Nkoulou received an ITTO fellowship in 2007 to undertake a master's program in economics and SFM at the Institut National des Sciences de Gestion in Libreville, Gabon. This article is based on her master's thesis titled The operationalization of principles, criteria and indicators of sustainable management of forests in Gabon.



Outreach: The author in a biodiversity reserve near Libreville, Gabon. Photo: P. Nkoulou

Principles, criteria and indicators (PCI) for sustainable forest management (SFM) are a planning framework for the sustainable management of production forests and a tool for operationalizing SFM. Gabon, which is a member of both ITTO and the African Timber Organization (ATO), has developed a harmonized, national set of PCI based on ATO/ITTO PCI (hereafter referred to as the Gabon PCI) to conserve and sustainably manage its forests. It is dismaying to note, however, that the Gabon PCI have been largely unimplemented since they were validated in 2004.

To determine the reasons why this tool is not being used by forest stakeholders and to propose solutions to optimize its use, I conducted master's research in Libreville and surrounds. The study was supervised by Dr François Hiol Hiol, coordinator of ITTO project PD 124/01 Rev.2 (M), and Dr Rose Ondo Ntsame, chair of the Pan African Forest Certification (PAFC) program in Gabon.

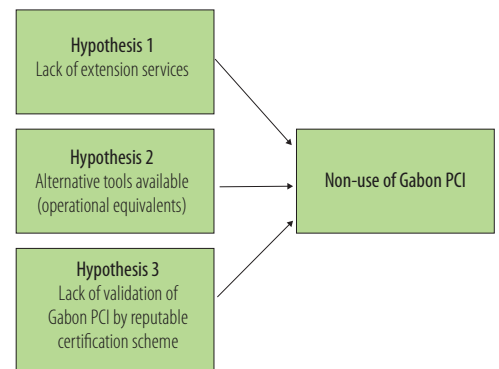
We conducted a survey of potential Gabon PCI users in the forest administration, the private sector and civil society, in order to test the three (not mutually exclusive) hypotheses shown in Figure 1.

Table 1 shows that a majority of stakeholders are aware of the Gabon PCI and Table 2 shows that only about 12% of stakeholders are using them. Table 3 suggests the reasons behind the lack of use.

The majority of stakeholders know of the Gabon PCI. However, only a minority has a copy of the Gabon PCI document that was validated during a national workshop conducted in July 2004. More than half of respondents

Testing ideas

Figure 1: Hypotheses for the lack of implementation of the Gabon PCI



confessed that they were not aware of its contents or relevance.

More than half of respondents indicated a lack of outreach, dissemination, training and extension work as a reason for the non-use of the Gabon PCI. The lack of dissemination is partly because the PCI are unofficial, despite their 2004 endorsement. Their non-binding nature is another reason for their current low use in Gabon.

Solutions

To better promote the effective use of the Gabon PCI, the following actions should be pursued:

- Conduct extension work on Gabon PCI among potential users.
- Make the use of the Gabon PCI binding by making forest audits based on them mandatory in production forests.

Know about them ...

Table 1 Awareness of the Gabon PCI among stakeholders

Response	Respondents			Total	%
	Forest administration	Private sector	NGOs		
Yes	14	14	10	38	68
No	5	11	2	18	32
Total	19	25	12	56	100

Source: Survey conducted in January–March 2009.

... Don't use them

Table 2 Use of Gabon PCI by Gabonese forest stakeholders

Response	Respondents			Total	%
	Forest Administration	Private sector	NGOs		
Yes	5	2	0	7	12.5
No	14	23	12	49	87.5
Total	19	25	12	56	100

Source: Survey conducted in January–March 2009.

The reasons why

Table 3 Reasons for the non-use of Gabon PCI

Reasons	Stakeholders			Total	%
	Forest Administration	Private sector	NGOs		
Lack of outreach, dissemination, training and extension work	15	16	12	43	58
Unofficial status	0	13	0	13	18
Non-binding status	1	8	0	9	12
Lack of linkage to certification	0	6	0	6	8
No response	3	0	0	3	4
Total	19	43	12	74*	100

* The total number of responses exceeds the number of respondents because some respondents selected more than one reason.

Source: Survey conducted in January–March 2009.

- Consider the regional-scale development of an audit manual adapted to Gabonese forests by drawing on the audit manual produced by the regional ATO/ITTO project.
- Facilitate the operationalization of the national PAFC system for Gabon.
- Promote the use of the Gabon PCI through legal compliance initiatives, such as the voluntary partnership agreement, the Forest Concession Monitoring System in Central Africa and other schemes (e.g. the Forest Stewardship Council).
- Build the capacity of Gabonese forestry stakeholders through appropriate training programs.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations are directed at specific stakeholders.

To the Government of Gabon:

- Prioritize the promotion of the Gabon PCI.
- Ensure the consistency of various tools used in forest management in Gabon with the Gabon PCI.
- In the development and implementation of its forest policy, impose, through its Ministry of Water and Forest Resources, the national PAFC scheme for Gabon.

To the ATO/ITTO regional project:

- Develop a joint action plan with the forestry administration to build capacity in the use of the Gabon PCI and a regulatory framework for internal audits of forest concessions based on the Gabon PCI.
- Continue to provide all stakeholders with training on the role, importance, benefits and use of the Gabon PCI.

To ATO:

- Raise awareness in Gabon of the importance of the ATO/ITTO PCI and the Gabon PCI and the need to use them.
- Revive and support Gabon's National Working Group, which is a key actor in the SFM process at the national level.
- Encourage member countries, including Gabon, to promote pan-African certification.

To ITTO:

- Continue providing technical and financial support to Gabon in its efforts to honour its policy commitments to adapt the ATO/ITTO PCI to the local context and to use them effectively.