

# ITTO Tropical Forest

## UPDATE

A newsletter from the International Tropical Timber Organization to promote the conservation and sustainable development of tropical forests



## The future of forestry

“THE ability of a country to follow sustainable development paths is determined to a large extent by the capacity of its people and its institutions ...”

This statement is taken from Chapter 37 of Agenda 21, the blueprint for a sustainable future produced by the Earth Summit in 1992. It might seem blindingly obvious, even tautological. But more than a decade on, the international community continues to grapple with the theory and practice of capacity-building in sustainable development, and how it can best assist countries to do it.

The better definitions of capacity-building contain three elements: the creation of an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal frameworks; organisational development, including within communities; and human resources development. Where should a capacity-building program start? Training the individual is certainly important, and a sizeable share of overseas development assistance has been deployed to provide higher-education opportunities. ITTO is no exception to this: in



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**Cover image** Young Indonesian foresters learn about ITTO's criteria and indicators (see article page 6). *Photo: Rukmantara*

this edition we present examples of the Organization's training outreach to forestry professionals and timber-sector workers. For example, ITTO has formed a partnership with Fundação Floresta Tropical to train mainly Amazonian forest-sector workers in reduced impact logging (RIL; page 3). ITTO also recently convened three regional training workshops aimed at developing the cadres of forest-auditing specialists that will be needed if forest certification is to expand in the tropics (page 14). In another training program, ITTO worked with the Association of Indonesian Forest Concession Holders to introduce ITTO's *Criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests* to 230 forest concession workers. Yet another project is assisting in the development and delivery of an education package in Bolivia aimed at forestry professionals wishing to improve their skills and qualifications.

These training efforts have achieved considerable success but they can't do the job on their own. The successful sustainable forest management (SFM) graduate of today will join the ranks of the unemployed tomorrow if the country is in political turmoil, or its institutions are dysfunctional, or the prices of forest goods and services are so low that the forests are converted to agriculture.

Several authors refer to the context within which capacity-building takes place. Rukmantara, for example, writes that: "abrupt changes in national government policies [in Indonesia] have ... increased the uncertainties faced by forest-based industries, with the effect of reducing the commitment of such industries to SFM". The decentralisation of government there has also had an impact, because regional institutions don't yet have the capacity to oversee the sector effectively. In Bolivia, Achà and Guevara interpret a recent fall-off in demand for the forest specialisation course being offered by San Simón University's School of Forest Sciences as a consequence of increased economic uncertainty in the forest sector. On the other hand, Dykstra and Elias write that conditions seem right for greater uptake of RIL in the Brazilian Amazon; companies are placing a premium on holders of RIL certificates and the Brazilian government

is also taking advantage of the training to ensure that its officers have the necessary skills to monitor forest operations.

Ngantou and his co-authors (page 11) and Mimbimi (page 32) address the need for more capacity-building in civil-society groups in Africa. Mimbimi, for example, laments that: "few efforts are being made to train marginalised minorities such as pygmies, women and youth in the complexities of modern forest resource management, even though these are just the sorts of people who need the training most". Ngantou et al. recommend, among other things, "the strengthening of the role of the private sector and civil society in partnerships for the sustainable management of forest ecosystems".

One thing about capacity-building is that it requires commitment. People are great learners, but we can still take years to master a new skill. Graduate trainees—whether in government, the private sector or civil society—must be encouraged to continually improve. For this they need the active support of their institutions and peers, the opportunity to make (and correct) mistakes, the power to effect change, and the prospect of fair reward for honest work.

For the modern tropical SFM trainee, this sort of environment is probably quite rare; with a few notable exceptions, the tropical forest sectors have not yet matured sufficiently to create it and, in some countries, political, economic and market uncertainties may delay the coming-of-age for a long time. There's a sort of circularity in this: without the human and institutional resources the sector won't develop, but the human and institutional resources may not be available until it does.

Fortunately for the forests, this hasn't deterred the emergence of committed foresters: SFM remains the goal of the enlightened in the private sector, in governments and in community groups. Such people are the sector's greatest hope for the future: the international community should support them by providing more opportunities for self-improvement, and by shaping the international policy environment so they can do their jobs.

**Alastair Sarre**