

ITTO Tropical Forest UPDATE

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

The road forks for tropical forests

TROPICAL FORESTS are approaching a fork in the road, both in the way they are managed and, more importantly, in the way that their management and conservation is funded. In terms of management, ever larger areas are being devolved to some form of community tenure. According to advocacy groups like Forest Trends and the Rights and Resources Initiative, policy shifts to recognize traditional and indigenous rights have resulted in a doubling of community-owned and administered forest lands in developing countries over the past two decades, to around 370 million hectares of natural forest (nearly one-quarter of all forests in these countries, three times the amount owned by individuals and firms).

Current trends indicate that community tenure will double again by 2020 to more than 700 million hectares.

As Cameroon's model forest experience (page 11) illustrates, there are many advantages to involving communities in forest management, including employment and protection of environmental services of forests. A recently concluded ITTO conference in Brazil (to be featured in a future *TFU*) found that community forestry enterprises employ more than 110 million people



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Cover image Logging roads in PNG. Photo: A. Sarre

worldwide, among them indigenous peoples and other forest dwellers. Such enterprises harvest wood and collect bamboo, rattan, fibers, nuts, resins, medicinal herbs, honey, wood for charcoal and other natural products to increase local wealth. Community forest managers also get high marks for ensuring that the environmental services important in combating climate change and protecting water sources, biodiversity and natural landscapes that are important both locally and internationally are not damaged or degraded by forest exploitation.

Communities, like most other forest managers in the tropics, however, face many challenges in managing forests sustainably, including a lack of financial, human and technical resources. Since all of these shortcomings can be addressed by more adequate and consistent financing of sustainable forest management (SFM) in the tropics, it is exciting that new options for this are appearing on the horizon.

At a recent meeting in Australia to establish the Global Initiative on Forests and Climate, participants were told that billions of dollars would be needed to stem tropical deforestation. Australia has pledged AUD\$200 million to this initiative, with part of the money to go to a World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) which is seeking to raise US\$250-300 million in initial funding to assist countries to avert deforestation (or reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation, REDD in the climate change vernacular). Depending on negotiations underway for a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, countries might then be eligible to sell credits for any emissions cuts due to such averted deforestation. While there are many issues to be resolved (including the crucial one of whether SFM will be included as an approved REDD activity), one of the keys to making such schemes work will be the monitoring mechanisms put in place. The World Bank has stated that countries desiring to participate in a pilot FCPF program, which is expected to start by the end of this year, would have to demonstrate that they are tackling illegal logging. Log tracking systems (eg, Guyana, page 16) and other forest monitoring mechanisms being supported by ITTO clearly have a role to

play in ensuring that these exciting new revenue streams, if and when they become available, find their way to community and other forest managers that are managing the resource sustainably.

Another climate change-related opportunity for increased tropical forest management funding comes from the biofuels boom. A recent ITTO conference (page 24) found that wood-based bioenergy offers tropical countries opportunities for improved energy security/reduced energy costs and the potential for income from carbon credits under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism. However, the development of wood-based bioenergy needs to be sustainable, again requiring careful monitoring of any schemes aiming to promote it.

This fork in the road for tropical forests comes at an opportune time for ITTO. The Organization should see the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), 2006 enter into force within the next year, and work is proceeding on defining the thematic programs called for in the new agreement. A new six-year action plan will be approved at the November 2007 International Tropical Timber Council session, as will a more detailed work program for 2008-09. In this issue's *Out on a limb*, Mr Emmanuel Ze Meka (recently appointed ITTO's third Executive Director in a transparent process that ITTO can be proud of) shows that he is ready to seize new opportunities for implementing and funding SFM in tropical forests as the Organization defines its strategic direction into the next decade.

Steve Johnson