

# Out on a limb



**Emmanuel Ze Meka, recently appointed ITTO's next Executive Director, on his background and vision for the Organization**

**T**HE PROMOTION of sustainable forest management and timber use has been the main focus of my 30 years of professional life. After completing forestry and wood sciences degrees in Canada, I worked as an executive at the Wood Promotion Center of Cameroon. I then joined Cameroon's Forestry Administration, where I was quickly promoted through the ranks to become Director of the Forest Department, a position I held for more than six years.

As Director I was responsible for strategic planning in the development of the forestry sector and the preparation and enforcement of the various regulations and other legal texts pertinent to the forestry sector. Among my responsibilities was the coordination of the Tropical Forest Action Plan in Cameroon, one of the first in this process and acclaimed at that time as a model. In addition, I initiated the revision and modernization of the country's legal structure for forestry; this resulted in the 1994 Forestry Law, which is also considered a model and has inspired many of the subsequent forest laws in Central Africa.

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As Director I was responsible for more than 1200 employees, including office and field staff and professionals. During my tenure, I initiated a program with the assistance of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to improve the efficiency of forestry administration staff, which included redefining tasks and responsibilities and developing training programs. Also with the assistance of CIDA, I developed a system to improve the control of harvested timber and rationalize tax collection that remains in place to this day.

My international career began in 1991 with ITTO. I worked as Project Manager in the Division of Reforestation and Forest Management until, in 2000, I was promoted to Assistant Director for Forest Industry. In this position I took on responsibility for implementing the Organization's policy to promote value-added production and further and more efficient wood processing. I also managed the division's staff and supervised a number of ITTO projects in the three tropical regions.

Since 2004, I have been Assistant Director for Reforestation and Forest Management, responsible for implementing the Organization's policies on the management of natural and planted forests, the rehabilitation of degraded and secondary forests, and the conservation of biodiversity. I also supervise the Division's professional and secretarial staff and several ITTO field projects.

This, then, is my basic experience. I have worked in tropical forestry all my professional life. I have worked across the three tropical regions. I know ITTO intimately. This experience will serve me well in my new role as Executive Director.

## Areas of concern

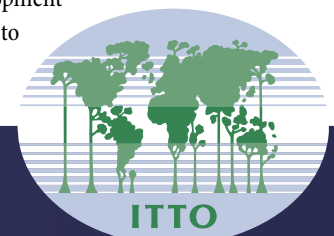
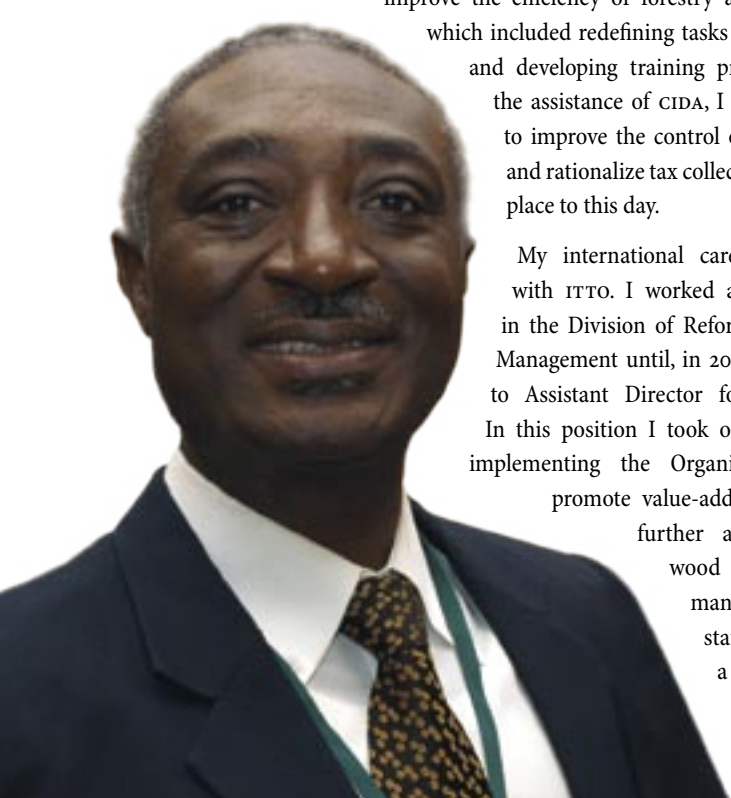
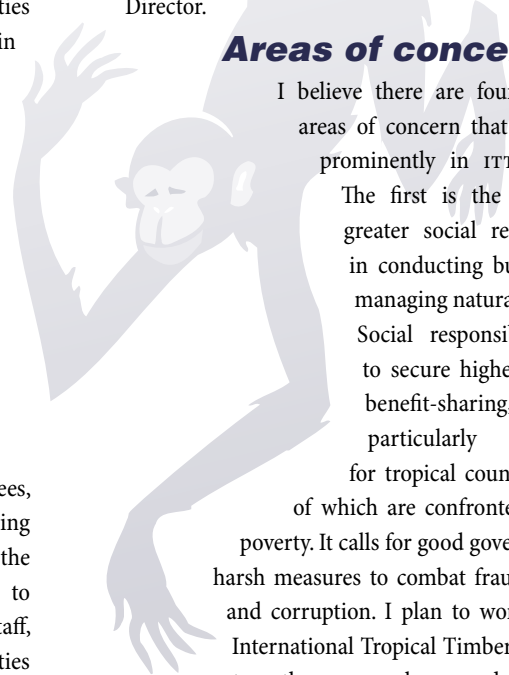
I believe there are four emerging areas of concern that will figure prominently in ITTO's future.

The first is the search for greater social responsibility in conducting business and managing natural resources. Social responsibility aims to secure higher equity in benefit-sharing, which is particularly important for tropical countries, many

of which are confronted by acute poverty. It calls for good governance and harsh measures to combat fraud, illegality and corruption. I plan to work with the International Tropical Timber Council to strengthen our work on good governance, law enforcement and the fight against illegal forest activities, including by increasing our engagement in relevant regional and global initiatives and processes.

The second area of great importance concerns key elements of the UN Millennium Development Goals: halving extreme poverty and reducing hunger, ensuring environmental sustainability, and promoting a global partnership for development. Forests represent vital opportunities for development in tropical countries. ITTO's role in contributing to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals, therefore, cannot be over-emphasized and should be a focus of our work in the years ahead.

The third area of concern to ITTO is globalization. No matter how one feels about this phenomenon, it is happening and is unlikely to be reversed. One of the key issues is competitiveness. If tropical forest industries are to be agents of sustainable development they must be able to compete in a global





environment. This implies value-adding and control of production costs, which in turn depend on technological advances and the availability of qualified personnel. Thus, capacity building and the transfer of technology are essential. But it is also essential that tariff and non-tariff barriers that hinder tropical timber trade are overcome.

The fourth area of growing concern is climate change and the impact of human activities in accelerating this phenomenon. As we know, forests, including tropical forests, are a key element in strategies aimed at combating climate change. ITTO must play its part by helping its members to reduce deforestation and forest degradation on the one hand and to increase the extent of forest cover on the other. As serious as climate change will be, it also represents an opportunity for tropical countries. ITTO can and should help its members to tap into global carbon markets and the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol, as well as tapping opportunities for the sustainable production of biofuels.

### Opportunities and challenges

ITTO offers unique opportunities through sustainable forest management and the promotion of the international tropical timber trade to address these pressing areas of concern. Over the last 20 years, it has achieved a great deal in terms of policies and guidelines and its substantial project portfolio. However, the rate of tropical deforestation and forest degradation is still high. Likewise, the contribution of forest resources to the development of countries and local communities remains, in many cases, marginal. ITTO can and must do more. And I see scope for this in the new International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA).

The ITTA, 2006 is an advanced instrument for promoting mutually beneficial relationships between the environment, trade and development. Important changes contained in the new agreement include:

- strong emphasis on the Organization's role in reducing poverty;
- the need to take into account all forest resources—an integrated forest management approach;
- the need to establish/strengthen active partnerships, in particular with the United Nations and its specialized organs and institutions, and also with other international and regional organizations/institutions, the private sector, civil society, NGOs and local and indigenous communities;
- an innovative and attractive financial scheme based on thematic programs of work which will encourage the contribution of additional resources for the organization's activities; and
- an agreement with a longer duration, which can allow the organization to formulate and implement long-term development strategies.

The objectives of the ITTA, 2006 cannot and should not be taken in isolation of each other. However, I believe that, in line with the areas of concern I outlined earlier, priority should be placed on the following:

- Objectives (c), (e) and (i), which particularly address sustainable development and poverty reduction;
- Objectives (j) and (m), which emphasize the protection of the environment;
- Objectives (d), (p) and (r), which are directed towards capacity building;

- Objectives (k), (n) and (o), which promote good governance and social responsibility; and
- Objective (g), which is about generating new and additional financial resources for capacity-building in producer member countries.

I would like to expand briefly on this last point because it is possibly the most important element in the Organization's future success. A comprehensive fundraising strategy must be developed and implemented, aimed not just at donor countries but also, importantly, the private sector. ITTO has not adequately targeted the private sector in past fundraising efforts. I think the time has come.

I have many ideas on what ITTO must do to continue its development as the pre-eminent tropical forest development institution. For example, we could, and should:

- identify the Organization's strategic priority actions in the light of the new Agreement and establish a process for their implementation and assessment;
- improve the system of monitoring and evaluation, not only for projects but also for other activities undertaken by the Organization;
- seek greater alignment between ITTO's work and international goals, such as the UN Millennium Development Goals, and continue to strengthen partnerships with the UN and other institutions, including the Collaborative Partnership on Forests;
- speed up capacity building in member countries by boosting training and skills-development programs;

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- strengthen the Organization's dialogue and partnership-building with civil society and the private sector;
- expand the Organization's public relations strategy with the specific aim of boosting fundraising in key sectors; and
- review the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation of the Secretariat and develop a plan of action to improve the management of ITTO's human and financial resources.

I look forward to working with Council, all member governments and other ITTO partners as we together face the opportunities and challenges I have identified. There will no doubt be others, since the future has a habit of surprising us, but I am sure that the adaptability of ITTO and the goodwill of its members and partners will serve us well as we move into the Organization's third decade.