

ITTO Tropical Forest

UPDATE

Volume 18 Number 1 2008

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



African Promise

AFRICA has long languished at the bottom of most global league tables of economic, social and environmental development. The reasons for this are many and inter-related but include poor governance, instability and civil strife, inadequate public health and education, undiversified and poorly managed economies and a lack of public and private investment in all kinds of infrastructure. Forest management is no exception to this bleak trend: of the three tropical regions, Africa was found to have the smallest overall area of sustainably managed forests in ITTO's 2005 *Status of Tropical Forest Management* report, at only 6 million ha (around 5% of its permanent forest estate), compared with 19.8 million

ha in Asia and 12.5 million ha in Latin America. Recent FAO estimates show that Africa accounts for over one-third of global deforestation with only around 15% of global forest cover.

However, there are signs that Africa may be on the verge of significant improvements in forest management. As identified in this issue (p23), several countries are undertaking regulatory reforms that, if fully implemented and maintained, should lead to improved and sustainable management. Forest cer-



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Printed on paper produced with a minimum of 50% recycled fibre and a minimum of 15% post-consumer waste and without the use of chlorine gas.

The *TFU* is distributed **free of charge** to over 15 000 individuals and organizations in more than 160 countries. To receive it, send your full address to the editor. Please notify us if you change address. The *TFU* is also available on-line at www.itto.or.jp

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tification is gaining a foothold on the continent, with the granting of the first Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) approved certificates in the Congo basin in 2006 to a large (nearly 300 000 ha) concession managed by Congolaise Industrielle du Bois (CIB) in the Republic of Congo. Certified sustainable timber from that concession is now flowing into Europe, attracting the attention of other operators seeking to cope with increasing scrutiny on tropical hardwoods in such markets, including increasingly demanding public procurement policies in some countries.

Undertaking the transition to sustainability (and, if desired, seeking certification for it) is not easy in the tropics, as ITTO has documented in many studies over the years. In Africa, ITTO has focused its assistance to countries trying to make this transition through a large regional project implemented jointly with the African Timber Organization (ATO). This project, the first phase of which has just ended (p3), has assisted ten west and central African countries to implement the ATO/ITTO Principles, Criteria and Indicators (PCI) for Sustainable Forest Management at the national level and to develop the capacity to audit the performance of forest managers against the PCI. This has allowed some countries (e.g. Cameroon, Republic of Congo) to move to the next step of seeking independent auditing of forest management performance through third parties such as FSC. Subsequent phases of the project aim to move more countries to this stage.

Because of its large number of forest dependent and indigenous people, Africa is also playing a leading role in the transition to community-based management of its forests (see *TFU* 17/4). While the degree of involvement varies by country, almost all countries have some provisions for community forestry. Countries like Cameroon are increasingly involving communities in the management of both production and protection forests, and are making efforts to ensure equitable benefit sharing with them (p6 and 23). While community forestry is generally lauded as an important step to achieving sustainability, very few such communities, which are often small and remote, have the means to seek certification (and thus unfettered market

access) for their forests and forest products. ITTO is undertaking activities to assist communities in Africa and elsewhere to achieve certification (see p16).

For historical and geographical reasons, African countries have traditionally been more reliant on European markets for their forest products than other tropical exporters. Partly for this reason, they are in the vanguard of negotiating voluntary partnership agreements (VPAs) with the European Union under its forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT) initiative. Cameroon and Ghana are expected to complete VPAs this year, while Republic of Congo, Gabon and Liberia are expected to start negotiations soon. Liberia has made a noteworthy transition from chaos to a model forest management regime, awarding its first forest concessions this year following the lifting of a multi-year embargo on timber imports from the country imposed by the UN during the country's civil war. All timber from Liberia's new concessions will be strictly controlled through independently monitored log tracking and chain of custody systems. ITTO has assisted several African countries to improve governance of their forest sectors, especially in the Congo Basin (p10) and looks forward to continuing work within the region to help more countries achieve legality and sustainability.

Many problems remain, however, not least the always vexing question of funding improved forest management practices in the region. Several important meetings (details on p30) will help to address this issue. At the end of April, as the *TFU* went to press, ITTO was convening an expert meeting to consider the role of tropical forests in mitigating climate change and the role of the Organization in assisting member countries to benefit from any funding arising from forest-related provisions in any new global climate change convention. While several African countries have high deforestation rates and could therefore benefit under schemes currently being proposed for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), several others (including some of the largest) have low deforestation rates that, perversely, would exclude them from assistance under REDD

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Cover image Children in Congolese forest village. Photo: CIB

Promoting SFM in Africa

An ITTO project develops C&I and manuals for the management of African tropical forests

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By the book: Auditing conformity with ATO/ITTO PCI in Ghana. *Photo: M. Mbolo (University of Yaoundé)*

CENTRAL AND WEST AFRICAN countries are globally important suppliers of tropical timber and timber products to Asian and European markets. Natural tropical forests are the major sources of timber designated for export markets or domestic use. In 2004 the ten major timber producing countries in the region¹ produced 436 million cubic meters of timber, veneer, panels and wood fuel. Cameroon, Gabon and Ghana are the most important exporters of timber and timber products. The total value of tropical timber exports from the ITTO producer countries of Africa was estimated to be close to 1.9 billion US dollars in 2005.

Forest degradation and the related adverse impacts on living conditions for forest dependent people and for species

¹Cameroon, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo.

► ... continued from page 2

schemes as currently envisioned. ITTO will be working with member countries and partners to ensure that sustainable forest management (including sustainable timber production) is an eligible activity for any assistance to be offered under an eventual climate agreement. Such topics will no doubt also be raised at a meeting to be hosted in June by the government of Japan on technologies required to implement any eventual REDD scheme.

In May, ITTO's host city, Yokohama, will welcome the fourth meeting of the Tokyo International Conference on African

Development (TICAD IV). Many heads of state are expected to attend this high-profile meeting, where environmental issues (including forests and climate change) will feature prominently. Because of its wealth of natural resources, including timber, Africa is experiencing an unprecedented wave of investor interest from a range of developed and developing countries. While TICAD IV will focus on general issues of development, ITTO will be highlighting its role in sustainable forest development on the continent during the meeting.

It would not be realistic to predict a rapid transition to forest sustainability in all

diversity in general can result from commercial harvesting operations or from forest clearance for agriculture. ITTO recognized early the importance of linking environmental protection and social justice to the commercial use of tropical timber and took the first initiatives to draft Criteria and Indicators (C&I) for sustainable management of tropical forests already in the early 1990's.

During the 1990s the African Timber Organization (ATO) commenced, with the support of Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and the European Union, a regional process to draft a set of Principles, Criteria and Indicators (PCI) for the sustainable management of tropical African forests with a focus on Western and Central Africa.

ATO and ITTO recognized the need to strengthen and harmonize the two sets of C&I and provide their member countries with a unique set applicable to African tropical

African countries given the level from which most are starting and the problems that still afflict many. However, increased political will in almost all countries coupled with investor enthusiasm and prospects for forest management funding under a new climate change regime provide grounds for optimism. ITTO will be working with its member countries and partners in the region over the coming years to help realize Africa's promise.

Steve Johnson