

Interview with José Trinidad Suazo Bulnes

José Trinidad Suazo Bulnes has attended sessions of the International Tropical Timber Council since 2010 as a member of the Honduran delegation. He was Council chair in 2013



Photo: Earth Negotiations Bulletin

What were the major challenges the Council dealt with during your term as chair?

Our major challenge was reaching consensus on the selection process for a new ITTO executive director. Another major challenge was the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests.

Describe the atmosphere of the Council at the 49th session.

At the beginning the atmosphere was a bit tense; debate was exhaustive, often impassioned and not at all easy, but in general we were effective in bringing about agreement on a number of significant issues. Later, as the session proceeded, the atmosphere became more collaborative as members put aside their particular interests and participated in a positive and constructive manner. I am grateful to all parties in the negotiations for their flexibility and spirit of commitment.

What do you see as some of the major achievements of the Council?

Various decisions by the Council over the years to promote trade in tropical timber from sustainably managed and legally harvested forests have paved the way for the development of innovative timber traceability systems in many countries, as well as for the monitoring of forest and timber certification processes. Recently, the Council has made strong moves to promote efficient wood-processing technologies by financing training programmes as a way of strengthening the capacity of timber-producing countries.

Cooperation between ITTO and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora has become stronger in recent years, and this is important. The ITTO–Convention on Biological Diversity Collaborative Initiative also continues to

strengthen, with the overall objective of enhancing biodiversity conservation in tropical forests with the direct participation of local stakeholders and addressing the main drivers of biodiversity loss in tropical forests. At the 49th session, one of the Council's important financing decisions was the awarding of ITTO Fellowships valued at US\$151 445.

What do you see as ITTO's impacts?

Since it became operational in 1987, ITTO has funded more than 1000 projects, pre-projects and activities valued at more than US\$400 million. The area of tropical forest under sustainable management in ITTO producer member countries has grown significantly since the Organization came into being.

ITTO has developed many internationally agreed policy documents to promote forest law enforcement, sustainable forest management and forest conservation. The Council provides great assistance to tropical member countries to enable them to adapt such policies to their local circumstances and to implement them in the field through projects. On the down side, the Council's main weakness is related to its limited capacity to fund the full implementation of its mandate, as embodied in the Strategic Action Plan 2013–2018.

What do you see as the future role of the Council?

Following the entry into force of the ITTA 2006, which includes ambitious social, economic and environmental goals, and the adoption of the ITTO Strategic Action Plan 2013–2018, ITTO has a great opportunity to enhance the contribution of tropical forests to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Council should further strengthen its policy work to encourage sustainable forest management and promote trade in legal, sustainably produced timber and timber products. It should also focus on promoting non-timber forest products and environmental services in the sustainable management of tropical forests; encouraging the restoration of degraded tropical forests and the rehabilitation of degraded forest lands; further enhancing public relations, education and outreach activities to best convey the Organization's objectives and achievements; and strengthening the use of efficient wood-processing technologies in tropical timber-producing countries.