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Going downstream

Over the years, ITTO has funded many projects and activities aimed at supporting the development of sustainable, value-added timber-based industries in tropical countries. The establishment of local timber-processing ("downstream") industries can benefit countries in many ways, such as by providing employment, contributing to government revenues and encouraging sustainable forest management and the development of timber plantations. In this edition of the *Tropical Forest Update*, we examine some of ITTO's efforts to assist its member countries in going downstream.

Pradeepa Bholanath (p. 3) reports on an ITTO project that aimed to promote a number of lesser-used species in Guyana's natural tropical forests. The

Inside: lesser-used species; genetic conservation for plantations; hands-on training; Council outcomes

ITTO

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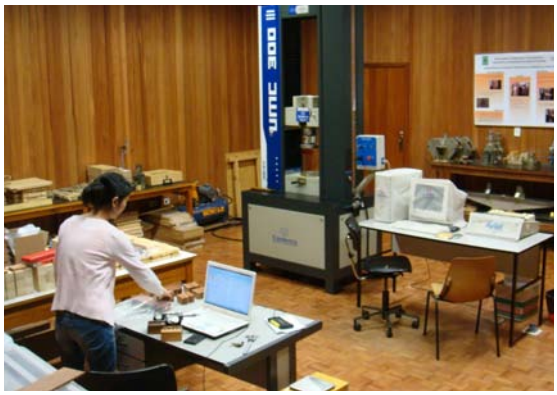

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Images: Boards harvested and milled in a community forest in Marraganti, Peru, are floated downriver to processing facilities. "Downstream" (or further) processing adds value to the forest, as long as the benefits accrue to the forest owners (cover). *Photo: Carlos Espinoza*; a researcher tests wood qualities in a laboratory at the University of São Paulo, Brazil, as part of a wood-performance trial on tree species harvested in secondary forests (above). *Photo: R. Carrillo, ITTO*

... Editorial continued

outcomes of that project, which finished six years ago, are bearing fruit today in the increased use of several of those species, the properties of which rival some of Guyana's more renowned timber species. Increasing the value of previously lesser-used species is one way of increasing the value of natural forests and financing their sustainable management.

Amha bin Buang (p. 6) reports on his ex-post evaluation of an ITTO project designed to encourage the greater use of Indonesia's rubber-tree plantations for timber production. Indonesia's vast rubber estate could produce a sustainable supply of rubberwood of about 13.5 million m^3 per year, but less than one-quarter of this potential is being used. The ITTO project made important contributions to increasing the use of this vast resource, but much more needs to be done.

Sukiman Sae Yung Kim and Tetra Yanuariadi report on an ITTO activity aimed at increasing the efficiency of 40 existing timber-processing facilities in various countries in the three tropical regions. This model of in-house training has proved capable of improving processing efficiency, and it is popular with factory workers; it could be scaled up to reach many more timber-processing facilities in the tropics.

Another ITTO project, described by Nalvarte and co-authors (p. 12), conducted technical studies on ten timber species that are abundant in secondary and residual primary Amazon forests with the aim of increasing the range of timber that could be harvested in such forests and thereby increasing their economic value. The project demonstrated a range of uses for various abundant species, such as furniture manufacturing, packaging, flooring and decking, which, in the long run, is expected to increase interest in the sustainable management of secondary and residual primary forests and improve the livelihoods of local people.

Also in the Amazon, Paula Gabriella Surdi (p. 15) evaluated the use of wood residues in the wood flooring industry from six tropical hardwood species in the production of particleboard, as part of an ongoing ITTO project. She found that three of the species showed considerable potential for this use.

Developing timber plantations to replace the dwindling supply of hardwood species from natural tropical forests is an ongoing task in many tropical countries. In Indonesia, despite past over-harvesting of ramin and a consequent reduction in supply, there has been little private-sector interest in commercial plantations of this species. A lack of planting material is one of the factors holding back such plantations, and Tajudin Edy Komar (p. 16) reports on an ITTO project that has developed vegetative propagation methods for the production of high-quality ramin planting materials and established ramin hedge orchards in Sumatra and Kalimantan.

A similar project in Côte d'Ivoire, reported by Kouablan Adou and Bafitini Ouattara (p. 19), explored the genetic conservation of iroko and the production of planting materials. Iroko is a high-value timber that was once common in West Africa but is now under threat.

These ITTO-funded projects have helped make headway in the development of viable timber industries in tropical countries that are underpinned by a sustainable resource base. Such projects will not be transformative in isolation, however; ultimately, a vibrant timber industry requires conducive government policies, a motivated private sector, and the willing involvement of landowners and local communities. Some countries are making more progress than others. The voyage downstream can be long and difficult, but it's likely to be a trip worth making.