ITTO Advisory Board Meeting Minutes 2026
Thursday, 22 October 2026

18:00-18:57 JST

PARTICIPANTS:

Members:

Advisory Board

Ms. Cassandra Price	Chairperson ITTC and Chairperson CFA
Mr. Muhammad Zahrul Muttaqin	Producer Caucus Spokesperson and Vice-Chairperson ITTC
Ms. Rata Muda	Consumer Caucus Spokesperson and Chairperson CEM & CFI
Ms. Christiane Epse Anzan	Chairperson CRF (absent)
Mr. Taisei Ikariya	Representative of the Government of Japan
Mr. Chen Hin Keong	Coordinator Civil Society Advisory Group, CSAG
Mr. Ivan Tomaselli	Coordinator Trade Advisory Group, TAG
Ms. Ashley Amidon	Coordinator Trade Advisory Group, TAG

ITTO Secretariat

Ms. Sheam Satkuru, Executive Director
Mr. Gerhard Breulmann, Director, Operations
Mr. Nurudeen Iddrisu, Director, Trade and Industry
Ms. Jennifer Conje, Director, Forest Management
Mr. Simon Kawaguchi, Finance & Administrative Officer

Observers

Ms. Yoko Yamoto, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan
Mr. Masatoshi Higuchi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan
Mr. Daiji Kawaguchi, Forestry Agency, Japan
Ms. Akiho Tsurugi, Forestry Agency, Japan

AGENDA

Advisory Board Meeting Agenda

1. Introduction by the Executive Director on the role of the Advisory Board established under Decision 8(LV)
2. Presentation and discussion on the progress of the Programmatic Approach under Decision 3(LX)
3. Other matters & closing

Agenda 1: Introduction by the Executive Director on the role of the Advisory Board established under Decision 8(LV)

1. The meeting was chaired by Ms Cassandra Price, Chairperson of the Council. The Chairperson welcomed participants and thanked them for their time.

2. The ED also welcomed participants and stressed the importance of holding both the AB and the IAG meetings well before Council, so that everyone is clear on what needs to be presented to Council. She explained that the Advisory Board (AB) was established in 2019 under operative paragraph 16 of Decision 8(LV). It is composed of the Informal Advisory Group (IAG), complemented by representatives of the Trade Advisory Group (TAG) and the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) or their designated alternates. It meets by conference call every four months to receive updates on the

implementation of the (then pilot) Programmatic Approach, (PA) including engagement with international bodies such as potential funding partners, and to advise the ED. The Decision also requested the ED to report on progress, including an assessment of fundraising potential.

3. The ED further explained that Decision 8(LV) had since been overtaken by Decision 3(LX), under which Council terminated the pilot phase and adopted the PA and its four Programme Lines (PLs) as ITTO's way forward. Operative paragraph 2 of Decision 3(LX) requests the Secretariat to continue to provide annual updates on the PA to the AB and to Council. The Secretariat runs one regular project cycle per year and the concept note approach in parallel. Concept Notes (CNs) can be submitted by eligible members at any time.

4. There were no questions on the introduction.

Agenda 2: Presentation and discussion on the progress of the Programmatic Approach under Decision 3(LX)

Engagement with other bodies called for by Decisions 8(LV) and 4(LVI)

1. The ED presented the progress report to the AB. On the GEF, she said that after eight years of engagement, ITTO is no closer to a partnership due to a difference in thinking. The GEF focuses more on environmental protection and primary forests than on production forests and sustainable forest management and works solely with its accredited entities (18 of them); efforts to work through another GEF-accredited body have not proven easy either. Most GEF projects are developed and funded before they are made public, leaving no room for ITTO inclusion. ITTO will continue its efforts, especially given that the GEF has appointed a new CEO, and attempt to make contact at the earliest opportunity.

2. On Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), work is in progress on the MoUs with JICA and UNCCD. The MoU with UNFF has been operational since it was signed at ITTC59 in Pattaya. Renewal of the MoU with IGES (Institute for Global Environmental Strategies) is in progress. ITTO is working on a joint programme of work with AFoCO (Asian Forest Cooperation Organization) and hopes to conclude an MoU or a Letter of Agreement at ITTC62. COMIFAC (Central African Forest Commission) has expressed interest to renew its MoU with ITTO, a matter that ITTO raised with it more than four years ago; contact was re-established at the recent Global Legal and Sustainable Timber Forum (GLSTF) in Macao, and the Secretariat will follow up by email. The renewed MoU with IUCN will be signed at CBD COP17. The new MoU with the CBD, signed at UNFF21, has already been operationalized through ITTO's participation in a CBD webinar series. ITTO will also participate at the CBD COP17 in Yerevan, Armenia.

Ongoing Engagement with other bodies called for by Decisions 8(LVII) and 4(LVI)

3. The AB is updated three times a year, and Council at every session. ITTO works closely with members of the CPF individually and collectively. A joint CPF statement will be presented at CBD COP17; ITTO will participate in the high-level segment of a CPF joint activity, and a joint statement will also be delivered at COP31. Side events with CPF partners are being planned, particularly for COP31.

4. The Secretariat continues its efforts to grow TAG and CSAG participation in ITTO's work, both of which need continuous funding contributions. ITTO is engaging with a number of potential new partners and will brief the AB once arrangements take shape.

Implementation of Decision 3(LX)

5. The PA and the PLs are adopted until a review is called for. An annual update is presented to the AB and to Council.

Implementation of other Decisions

6. Under Decision 4(LXI) on matters pertaining to Article 44 of the ITTA, the mandate of the Preparatory Working Group (PWG) was extended through Decision 4(LXI) until the 62nd Session of Council. As discussed at PWG II on 15 September 2026, the mandate ends on the last day of Council, Thursday 12 November 2026. It is being recommended to Council that the work of the PWG graduate into the Preparatory Committee. (Prep Com) being held immediately after Council on 13-14 November 2026.

7. Two PWG meetings were held, in February and September 2026, and the caucuses held their own meetings during the year. Regional consultations were held with Asia-Pacific on 30 January and with Latin America on 3 February. The consultation with Africa was scheduled twice in March but cancelled both times for poor attendance (one member on the first occasion and three on the second). Instead, on request of the Executive Director, the Embassy of Cameroon hosted a meeting of the African Ambassadors in Tokyo on 9 July 2026, attended by representatives of nine ITTO member countries. The discussion was very productive, and one member, Mali, has since paid its arrears in full.

8. The PWG report, with recommendations on the tentative Roadmap for 2027 to ITTC62 and the Prep Com, was being finalized for circulation the following day. It will include the updated Co-Chairs' discussion paper as an annex, the minutes of both PWG meetings (Annex 2), the minutes of the regional consultations (Annex 3) and, once discussed with the IAG, a draft decision for Council's consideration (Annex 4).

9. Under Article 15 of the ITTA and Decision 7(LVII), the ED will continue, on her own initiative, to report to ITTC62 on collaboration with international and regional organizations, as this reporting is much appreciated by members. On the Green Climate Fund (GCF), ITTO is getting slightly closer: a couple of members are preparing proposals that will go to the GCF for screening before formal submission. The status remains ongoing.

Call for Concept Notes (CNs) under funding scenario 4 of Decision 4(LVI)

10. In the six years since the call was operationalized, 79 CNs have been submitted, 18 of them since ITTC61. Of the 79, 53 were eligible and published for donor consideration, and only 18 received donor interest (about one third); all 18 are to be developed into projects. Of the 18 submissions since ITTC61, only 3 have progressed through the subsequent steps. The Secretariat expressed its gratitude to the donors who continue to fund proposals submitted by members.

Funding pledged or sought related to the programmatic approach

11. Funding in 2026 under the programme lines totals USD 2,192,387: PP-A/62-382, prevention and management of fire in tropical forests (PL4, USD 58,040); PD 947/25 (I), Benin (PL3, USD 82,794); PD 954/26 (M), Viet Nam (PL1, USD 200,000); PD 955/26 (F), Peru (PL2, USD 233,333); PP-A/56-341D, REFACOF Benin Phase II (PL3, USD 78,447, pending agreement); PP-A/62-385, Global Timber Index Phase V (PL1, USD 1,140,215); PP-A/62-386, Blockchain Timber Traceability System Phase V (PL1, USD 325,358); and PP-A/53-323K, GLSTF 2026 (PL1, USD 74,200). All except the REFACOF Benin Phase II are operational.

Programmatic Approach – Total Received

12. Funding under the PA has averaged about USD 2.4 million a year over eight years, peaking at USD 3.9 million in 2023, amounting to a total of USD 19.3 million over this period. The ED observed that this is not the level of project funding ITTO is accustomed to, and wished the total had been received over one or two years rather than spread so thinly over eight.

13. The PA contributions have overtaken non-programmatic funding. Members are fully behind the approach because it makes ITTO's approach to donors more streamlined and better packaged under each PL. The Secretariat hopes funding will improve in the next two years, but this is uncertain given the global situation and the weakness of multilateral funding.

Projects/activities/concept notes pending finance

14. 52 projects, BWP activities and CNs, totalling USD 17,797,746, are pending finance: 18 projects (USD 7,983,510), 17 BWP activities (USD 3,833,547) and 17 CNs (USD 5,980,689). The Secretariat is working to package them into baskets. Many proposals address several elements of sustainable forest management and trade, hence will take a few more months.

15. Projects and CNs valued at just over USD 6 million sunset in 2025, and another six valued at USD 2.7 million sunset in 2026. A further 35, valued at almost USD 14 million, will sunset after 1 January 2027 unless they are funded or re-submitted. The ED noted that projects and CNs of considerable value sunset every year for lack of donor uptake, which may explain why several members now submit fewer proposals or CNs for donor consideration.

Q&A

16. The Chairperson thanked the ED for the update, welcomed the interest the PA has attracted, and shared the wish that more funds were going into it.

17. Mr Muttaqin asked whether CNs and proposals were failing to attract donors because each came from a single country or organization, and suggested that proposals covering two or three countries might be more attractive to donors.

18. The ED replied that proposals were not left unfunded because of where they came from. Members submit very good proposals, and the problem is simply a lack of donor funding; what funding there is must also fit each donor's ministry or national priorities. The Secretariat has long advocated proposals covering two or three countries, and there were successful ones in past years, but they needed large funding that is no longer available. The GCF had welcomed a regional approach some years ago but last year switched to national priorities. ITTO is therefore talking to individual members, which is hard to justify to the wider membership. One member has approached ITTO, and the timing of sharing that proposal with the GCF for preliminary feedback is under discussion.

19. The ED added that ITTO had worked for months towards being a partner in a large GEF primary-forest project led by FAO and IUCN, but was informed in January 2026 that this would not go ahead because the GEF had reduced the project's funding. On a large GEF project in Papua New Guinea, the Secretariat has consulted the Embassy in Tokyo, and two delegates will attend Council with a donor's support, providing an opportunity to follow up. On the World Bank programme in the Congo Basin, a minister from the region had said he wanted ITTO involved, but ITTO had not been consulted when the programme was designed. The funding agreement has been finalized, and the status of the project agreement is unclear. ITTO had the same experience in Peru and Côte d'Ivoire, as examples.

20. ITTO is not able to be accredited to the GEF due to the GEF Council being unwilling to increase the number of its accredited entities. ITTO became accredited to the GCF in March 2024, but many proposals were already in preparation by then, and GCF proposals take three to four years to develop. The Secretariat is looking for quicker routes and better communication with those handling these processes.

21. Mr Tomaselli recalled that ITTO used to receive USD 10-12 million in project funding at each Council session, compared with about USD 2 million now. In 2026, about 70% of the USD 2.2 million from 2-3 donors went to the Macao-funded GTI and related activities. If the projects are good and in line with country and ITTO priorities, the problem lies on the funding side, so he asked whether ITTO knows its donors' priorities and, if not, what could be done to understand them.

22. The Chairperson, speaking from Australia's perspective as a donor, said that limited funding usually comes in buckets tied to specific, wider government priorities beyond the control of the officials involved. She suggested there might be space for donor members to share where they stand on available funding and priorities, to give producer members developing CNs and projects some direction, although that would not guarantee funding.

23. Mr Tomaselli summarised three points: the projects are good; the question is whether they are in line with country priorities; and whether tropical timber is still a key issue in the global environmental and sustainability discussion. Answering these might help find more donors in future, or otherwise members might just give up presenting projects.

24. The Chairperson said this was food for thought and suggested a discussion on how project development could be better directed in a changing landscape, including through regional approaches.

25. The ED replied that donor priorities are already set out in the four PLs, and every CN must be linked to at least one of them. At every Council session she asks donor members to state their priorities so that members are aware of what areas to focus on. With Japan, the Secretariat sometimes proposes projects that fit national priorities set by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There is no wiggle room in the funding available. ITTO used to receive around USD 12 million a year, once more than USD 13 million, and larger multi-year programmes worth USD 13-14 million, but those ended long ago. Even when a partner is keen to work with ITTO, co-funding is still needed, as she has told Council this every year since 2021; sometimes ITTO finds its share but the partner has no funds, so the work cannot proceed, and one large partner had recently worked with ITTO without any funding of its own. Meanwhile, some donor countries whose focal points attend Council fund other countries bilaterally to the tune of millions. Bilateral funding, with millions if not billions of dollars flowing through it, has simply overtaken the multilateral level despite countries' international obligations under international agreements such as the ITTA.

26. Ms Amidon asked whether the Secretariat had been able to ask donors, diplomatically, why they choose to give bilaterally rather than through ITTO, and whether any hurdles to giving through ITTO, such as accounting or ease of process, could be removed.

27. The ED replied that such conversations had taken place but had never produced a straight answer, and that ITTO's programme support costs are minimal. From observing funding patterns over the years, the Secretariat infers that donors seek national recognition and the recipient country's appreciation, and possibly political leverage.

28. Mr Tomaselli recalled that one of ITTO's advantages had been efficient, lower-cost project implementation compared with bilateral channels or other organizations such as FAO, and asked whether this had been made clear to donors.

29. The ED replied that the Secretariat asserts this at every Council session, but it is not acted upon. As an example, the Brazilian Forest Service had discussed the possibility of the ITTO being a partner in the Tropical Forest Forever Facility before its details were settled, but the World Bank was then given its management. She rejected the argument that ITTO could not manage larger funds: more project funding would mean more people on the ground, with management remaining between ITTO and the executing and implementing agencies, and ITTO's programme support costs are very low. Each year, she said, members are told this, and each year press releases announce new bilateral funding involving ITTO's areas of expertise with no consideration for international obligations under agreements such as the ITTA.

30. The Chairperson observed that much of this is beyond the AB's control, and that the proliferation of new initiatives adds to the pressure on limited resources, making it ever harder to know where to direct funding and to identify overlaps. When Australia is approached about an initiative, she asks whether it has engaged with ITTO. Australia's own smaller-scale bilateral funding is often driven by other portfolios or agencies, but where it can, Australia tries to route it through ITTO or loop ITTO in.

31. The ED said that unless member countries sitting on the boards and councils of the GEF, the GCF and other bodies speak up for ITTO, it cannot enter that inner circle. Despite good relations with four or five World Bank colleagues, nothing has yet come of them. At UNFF this year, only Japan and Australia mentioned ITTO, and she thanked both. She added that at COFO in September, only China spoke up for ITTO.

Agenda 3: Other matters & closing

32. No other matters were raised. The Chairperson thanked everyone for a fruitful discussion and closed the Advisory Board meeting.