

Kerala conference calls for action on teak

The International Conference on Quality Timber Products of Teak from Sustainable Forest Management, held in Peechi, Kerala, India, on 2–5 December 2003, made wide-ranging recommendations to the teak-growing community and its supporters

THIS conference, hosted by the Kerala Forest Research Institute under the auspices of ITTO, was attended by 175 participants representing 14 teak-producing countries and twelve teak-consuming countries. A total of 69 oral presentations and 26 poster presentations were made on various conference themes. Among other things, the conference established a set of goals for teak development. These are to:

- regain the pre-eminence of teak in view of its sterling properties;
- reduce production cost and improve the quality of teakwood and adjust to changing market requirements and specifications;
- meet the existing and emerging demand for teakwood at prices fair to the consumer and remunerative to the producer;
- keep forest land under appropriate use 'where it will produce most and deteriorate least' by adopting species/provenances/varieties for their productivity, socioeconomic benefits and utility;
- install equity (social/gender) and sustainability as prime considerations without compromising the imperative of efficiency (ie input-output relationship);
- facilitate the involvement of different categories of investors for mobilising resources and ensure adequate returns on investment;
- involve people, communities, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders in the process of planning and development of teak;
- continuously enhance technology, management, value adding, marketing systems and institutional support;
- add incremental doses of competitive advantage (eg reflected in the efficiency of technology, human resources and governance) to the natural comparative advantage of teak, and guide the dynamism of the situation in positive and appropriate directions; and
- benefit from the valuable experience of other countries and institutions with the aim of avoiding duplication and supporting sustainable forestry development.

The Kerala Call for Action

The conference also strongly urged and called upon national governments, research institutions and agencies, international assistance and donor organisations, investors and other funding agencies to strive, collectively and collaboratively, to address the following 13 actions aimed at promoting a tropical timber development program for meeting societal needs for quality timber products.

Policy

- Formulate and enforce appropriate (sub-)policies on teak within national forest, land-use and economic policies ensuring sustainability and the long-term security of investments.

Research and technology

- Evaluate and document the present condition of the teak crop/resource and critically appraise the technology in use in the context of new developments in research and linkages of research findings on teak with field practices.
- Undertake appropriate steps to refine and package up-to-date technology for application in realistic field conditions involving,

for example, seed technology, plant genetics, silvicultural practices, agroforestry systems, protection, harvesting, product development, processing and value adding.

- Direct research efforts towards improving productivity with fast-grown and quality timber and designing new products for new markets. Address technology-transfer issues and the commercialisation of innovative and new products and services in the context of intellectual property, patents and licensing practices for better encouragement and support.
- Recognising the need for new teak-producer countries to be aware of the dangers posed by potential outbreaks of the teak defoliator, *Hyblaea puera*, implement appropriate pest monitoring systems (teak-growers), and support basic research and work towards preventing outbreaks and developing suitable non-chemical methods for controlling the pest by taking advantage of research already carried out in Asia (national and international organisations).
- Conduct comprehensive studies on the socioeconomics of teak under different technological systems (monoculture, mixed planting, agroforestry, etc) in comparison to other forest crops/products to demonstrate teak's economic viability/superiority and potential (in terms of competitive and comparative advantages) as a means of attracting increased investment.

Sustainable management of the timber resource

- Design and disseminate guidelines and codes of best-practice relating to various steps and stages of teakwood production and utilisation through adequate extension mechanisms.
- Develop integrated research and education—and the link between education and sustainable forest management (SFM)—with multidisciplinary and multifaceted approaches that establish SFM and build partnerships for training and evaluation.
- Identify and analyse unsolved and emerging problems (both technical and non-technical) and initiate and implement measures to address them adequately in a coordinated and collaborative manner.
- Collect, develop and disseminate trade/market information to promote and facilitate market access and success for teak products.
- Establish and implement a comprehensive system of planning (involving long-, medium- and short-term plans, and a range of sites/locations, systems, markets and so on) to avoid arbitrariness and ad hoc-ism in teak resource development.
- Promote/facilitate establishment of targeted financing (in terms of adequacy and timeliness) to ensure that plans on teak development are supported financially.

Networking

- Strengthen the system of regional and international collaboration, coordination and networking to promote the exchange of research results and experiences, training and human resource development between countries of tropical Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, supported by the private sector, including communities and relevant international agencies.