Improving outcomes for biodiversity and people

Achievements, challenges and ways forward for the ITTO–CBD Collaborative Initiative for Tropical Forest Biodiversity

POLICY BRIEF

ITTO

Convention on Biological Diversity

This policy brief is based on a technical review by Ian Thompson, Jürgen Blaser and Mélanie Feurer, with editing by Alastair Sarre

The ITTO–CBD Collaborative Initiative for Tropical Forest Biodiversity

Forests are vital for people because of the many goods and services they provide, such as wood products, water supplies, foods, medicines, cultural values, climate regulation, increased crop yields through pollination, and opportunities for recreation.

All these goods and services—and more—rely on biodiversity. With the human population still growing, the sustainable use of biodiversity is more important than ever. Forests support a large proportion of global biodiversity, and increasing their area and managing them better, therefore, is crucial. Nevertheless, the world's forest area is declining by more than 4.7 million hectares per year,[1] primarily in the tropics, and large areas of remaining forest are degraded.

The Collaborative Initiative

The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) was established in 1986 under the auspices of the United Nations. It has 74 member governments and a long history of promoting and managing projects and other activities to encourage sustainable forest management. ITTO supports biodiversity conservation in its projects in line with its various guidelines, which have been developed and improved over time by biodiversity and forest management experts and endorsed by governments.[2]

Signed by 150 government leaders at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognizes that biodiversity is about more than plants, animals and microorganisms and their ecosystems—it is also about people and the need for food security, medicines, fresh air and water, shelter, and a clean, healthy environment. The CBD has three main goals: the conservation of biodiversity; the sustainable use of its components; and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources.

In the lead-up to the CBD's Conference of the Parties (COP) in Nagoya, Japan, in 2010, ITTO and the CBD signed a memorandum of understanding designed to encourage joint activities promoting the conservation and sustainable use of tropical forest biodiversity. The governing bodies of both the CBD and ITTO adopted decisions welcoming collaboration between the two institutions.[3] Based on these decisions, ITTO and the CBD launched the ITTO–CBD Collaborative Initiative for Tropical Forest Biodiversity in 2011, with four objectives:

1) Enhance the local capacity for biodiversity conservation in production forests and for the rehabilitation of degraded and secondary forests.
2) Improve the conservation and management of protected areas, especially in association with buffering protected areas, and transboundary conservation.
3) Safeguard tropical forest biodiversity in forestry interventions, including in REDD+-related projects.
4) Improve the welfare of local communities and indigenous groups through biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Supported by donors and in close collaboration with partners in ITTO producer member countries, the Collaborative Initiative identifies, develops and implements projects to achieve these objectives.[4] This report summarizes the outcomes of a technical review of the Collaborative Initiative conducted in 2020 and offers recommendations for building on its achievements.

1 FAO (2020). Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020. Main report. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.

2 E.g. *ITTO/IUCN Guidelines for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Tropical Timber Production Forests; Guidelines for Forest Landscape Restoration in the Tropics;* and *Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests*.

3 CBD COP Decision X/36 and International Tropical Timber Council Decision 6 (XLVI).

4 The ITTO–CBD Collaborative Initiative has received a range of financial contributions, with Japan the primary donor. Other donors to projects under the initiative are the governments of Belgium, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland and the USA, as well as the CBD Secretariat and the Japan Lumber Importers Association.

A demonstration of forest-measuring equipment and techniques to a group of students under ITTO project 456/07. Photo: Mamonékéné

Extraordinary results

Between its creation in 2011 and the latter part of 2020, the Collaborative Initiative encompassed 16 projects (Figure 1 and Table 1). These projects were conducted in 23 tropical countries, all of which have experienced declines in forest area and losses of biodiversity and have large numbers of forest-dependent people.

At USD 13 million, the total budget of the 16 projects was modest, but the technical review found that they achieved extraordinary success in improving local livelihoods and forest management, restoring degraded forests and conserving biodiversity. The projects contributed to the main global processes with forest implications—the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Forest Goals and the objectives of the International Tropical Timber Agreement (Figure 2).

Of the 16 projects:[5]

- Five were in transboundary areas (e.g. the Emerald Triangle area shared by Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand).
- Four worked to improve forest management in various types of reserve (e.g. a biosphere reserve in Benin).
- Five improved management in production forests (e.g. mangrove forests in Fiji).
- Two improved education on biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest management designed for forest managers in countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the upper Amazon Basin.

5 Most projects contributed to more than one of these achievements and the tally therefore exceeds 16.

Figure 1: Locations of projects conducted under the ITTO–CBD Collaborative Initiative

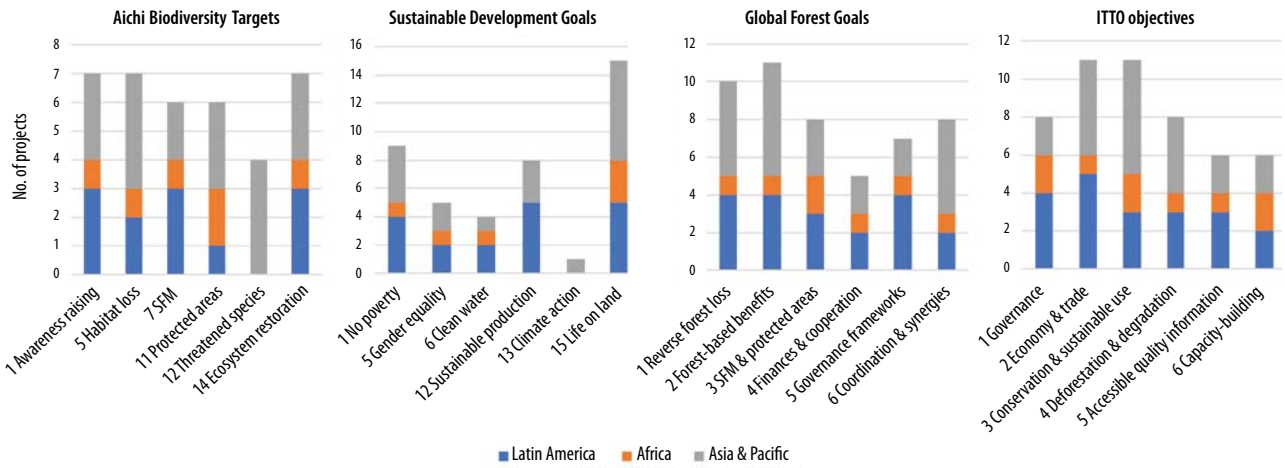
Local government authorities should be involved in projects to the greatest extent possible, and regular communication should be maintained.

- Eleven contributed to the livelihoods of communities living in or near protected areas (e.g. in the Tacaná Volcano area of influence on the border between Guatemala and Mexico).
- Six engaged local communities in sustainable forest management (e.g. buffer-zone management near the Pulong Tau National Park, Malaysia).

Specific achievements included increasing the size of a mangrove protected area in Peru by more than 700 000 ha; providing more than 400 foresters and technicians in Central Africa with forestry education; enabling previously difficult transboundary cooperation on the management of the Emerald Triangle between Cambodia and Thailand; and restoring 130 ha of mangroves in Fiji.

A researcher assesses a macaw as part of a conservation project in Tambopata, Peru. *Photo: T. Lostaunau (ITTO Fellow)*

Figure 2: The number of Collaborative Initiative projects contributing to global forest processes



Key lessons learned

The important lessons learned in the implementation of the Collaborative Initiative's 16 projects, outlined below, can readily be applied to future projects.

Working with local communities

- All projects addressing conservation and sustainable forest management—especially in protected areas and their buffer zones—should consult regularly with, and enable the involvement of, local communities and indigenous groups in the area of influence. Indigenous and other local communities must derive benefits from such projects, and traditional land rights and practices must be enabled to continue.
- Projects designed to improve livelihoods can have beneficial impacts on local incomes if planned in consultation with the communities concerned. Clear indicators should be established to measure the effectiveness of such projects in addressing long-term livelihoods, sustainability and biodiversity conservation.
- Capacity building and awareness-raising among local communities and government staff is essential for improving forest and landscape management. The existing capacities of such stakeholders should be assessed before the development of training programmes and convening of workshops.

Indigenous and other local communities must derive benefits from such projects, and traditional land rights and practices must be enabled to continue.

- The establishment of community forests is a promising land management approach in the buffer zones of protected areas. Such forests should be established in suitable locations to increase their chances of success. For example, community forests established in degraded forests are less likely to provide financial rewards in the medium term, thus reducing community interest in managing such forests.

Working with government

- Local government authorities at all levels (e.g. municipal, district and provincial) should be involved in projects to the greatest extent possible, and regular communication should be maintained. One means for doing this is by including representatives of all levels of government in project steering committees.
- Political support at high levels of government in participant countries is essential for the success of transboundary conservation and restoration projects and for sustaining outcomes over time.
- The membership of steering committees for transboundary conservation and restoration projects should include all relevant agencies at the highest possible level of government. This is necessary to ensure that participating countries clearly understand the commitments needed for the implementation of project activities and achievement of desired outcomes.

Improving monitoring and outcomes

- Data produced by a project should be subject to scrutiny by a technical committee established for this purpose.
- Projects that develop baseline biodiversity information through monitoring, or conduct forest research, benefit substantially from the incorporation of local knowledge in their design.
- All projects need to clearly state their biodiversity objectives and contributions to the CBD's post-2020 strategic plan for biodiversity, including expected outcomes, using biodiversity indicators.
- Projects should include measurable indicators for monitoring progress towards objectives, such as: area of forest sustainably managed; area of forest restored; area of forest planted or enriched; area of improved habitat for focal species; and area surveyed or monitored.

Asian elephants are on the move near the Preah Vihear Protected Forest in Cambodia. Photo: Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre/ Forestry Authority/Wildlife Alliance

Table 1. The 16 projects conducted under the Collaborative Initiative, 2011–2020

Project identifier		Short title	Country	Relevant Collaborative Initiative objectives[b]
1	PD 456/07	Capacity-building for sustainable forest management and conservation in the Congo Basin	Cameroon, Central African Republic, the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon	1
2	PD 577/10	Management of the Emerald Triangle Protected Forests Complex	Cambodia, Thailand	2, 4
3	PD 601/11	Mangrove ecosystem conservation in the northwestern Peru biosphere reserve	Peru	1, 4
4	PD 617/11	Transboundary biodiversity conservation in the Betung Kerihun National Park	Indonesia, Malaysia	1, 2, 3, 4
5	PD 635/12	Buffer zone management of the Pulong Tau National Park with local communities	Malaysia	2, 4
6	PD 668/12	Integrated natural resource management in the Tacaná Volcano range	Guatemala, Mexico	1, 2, 4
7	PD 710/13	The conservation of selected high-value indigenous species in Sumatra	Indonesia	1
8	PPD 165/12	The rehabilitation and sustainable forest management of sacred forests at Ramsar sites 1017 and 1018	Benin	3, 4
9	PP-A/50-296	Capacity-building in the Congo Basin for sustainable forest management and use of satellite imagery	Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda	2
10	PP-A/47-266	Capacity building of Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization member countries in managing Amazonian forests	Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela	1, 3
11	PD 723/13	Transboundary biodiversity conservation in the Tanintharyi Range	Myanmar	2, 4
12	PD 696/13	Community-based restoration and sustainable forest management in mangrove forests of the Rewa Delta	Fiji	1, 3, 4
13	PD 741/14	Capacity-building for sustainable forest management in tropical dry forests on the north coast of Peru	Peru	1, 4
14	PD 754/14	Restoration and sustainable forest management of sacred forests at Ramsar sites 1017 and 1018[a]	Benin	3
15	PD 765/14	Developing a forest landscape restoration programme based on ITTO guidelines	Guatemala	1
16	PD 777/15	Restoration of Cibodas Biosphere Reserve involving local stakeholders	Indonesia	1, 4

[a] Following on from PPD 165/12. [b] See page 2 for the list of objectives.

Fostering change—renewing the Collaborative Initiative

In 2021, the CBD renewed its strategic plan for sustaining and conserving global biodiversity in its post-2020 biodiversity framework and ITTO adopted its new Strategic Action Plan 2022–2026. The work of both institutions contributes to the achievements of the SDGs, particularly SDG 15 on preventing the degradation of terrestrial resources and loss of biodiversity. Both institutions also support the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, which recognizes the global need to restore degraded landscapes for, among other reasons, the mitigation of climate change and the conservation of biodiversity.

In February 2021, ITTO and the CBD formally extended their joint work to 2025 in a new memorandum of understanding. The Collaborative Initiative will be revised in light of this with the aim of continuing its long-term commitment to enhancing biodiversity conservation in tropical forests with the direct participation of local stakeholders. The revised Collaborative Initiative will also contribute to the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030 and assist in the uptake of ITTO's *Guidelines for Forest Landscape Restoration in the Tropics*, the ITTO/IUCN *Guidelines for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Tropical Timber Production Forests* and ITTO's *Voluntary Guidelines on the Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests*.[6]

The following are proposals for the goal, objectives and focal landscapes of the renewed ITTO–CBD Collaborative Initiative:

6 Available at www.itto.int/guidelines

Proposed overall goal

- To enhance biodiversity conservation in tropical forests with the direct participation of local stakeholders, addressing the two main drivers of biodiversity loss in tropical forests—deforestation and forest degradation.

Proposed objectives

1) Enhance the national and local capacity for biodiversity conservation in production forest landscapes.
2) Improve the conservation and management of protected areas, especially in buffer zones and transboundary areas.
3) Restore and rehabilitate degraded and deforested landscapes to increase biodiversity and improve forest production.

4) Improve the welfare of local communities and indigenous groups through biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Proposed focal landscapes

1) Forest landscapes in transboundary areas for protection or production.
2) Managed forest landscapes, including those in buffer zones adjacent to protected areas.
3) Degraded forest landscapes and secondary forests that are important to local communities and Indigenous Peoples (or could be, if restored).
4) Forest areas identified as having significant conservation and cultural value but which lack full legal protection, such as certain Ramsar sites, biosphere reserves and World Heritage sites.

School children learn about the importance of biodiversity as part of activities supported by the ITTO–CBD Collaborative Initiative (ITTO project PD 577/10) to strengthen the transboundary management of the Emerald Triangle shared by Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand. Photo: ITTO/Royal Forest Department (Thailand)

Local people receive training on agroforestry practices on land adjoining the Zounkidjazoun sacred forest, Benin. Photo: B. Bossou/CESAREN

Policies for project funding, formulation, implementation and monitoring

Since the Collaborative Initiative began a decade ago, numerous advances have been made in understanding forests and their sustainable management at a landscape scale. Knowledge has increased, for example, on:

- The functional roles of biodiversity in the provision of forest ecosystem services, including those associated with climate change and human disease prevention.
- The importance of connectivity across landscapes for ensuring the persistence of populations of flora and fauna.
- The importance of managers thinking at a landscape scale.
- The potential for landscape change and biodiversity loss to increase the risk of zoonoses.

All these have implications for achieving the objectives of the Collaborative Initiative.

Funding

Projects implemented under the Collaborative Initiative can provide complementary approaches to other financial tools designed to turn policy decisions into action. The global environmental community and donors should be made aware of this potential.

Proponents of project proposals submitted for funding under the Collaborative Initiative should consider:

- Co-funding options such as associating directly with projects that are ongoing in the proposed project area but which are not part of the Collaborative Initiative.
- Developing proposals that can be submitted simultaneously to other funding bodies (e.g. the Global Environment Facility, the World Bank and the Green Climate Fund) for co-funding.
- Developing synergies with national funding opportunities (e.g. national forest funds).

Policy guidance

The technical review of the Collaborative Initiative made the following suggestions for the future development and implementation of projects under the initiative.

The Nasilai women's group planted 5000 mangrove propagules along the foreshores of their village in Fiji, under ITTO project PD 696/13. Photo: Aporosa Ramulo Livani/Ministry of Forestry

- All projects should:
  - Focus on forest landscape-based solutions, recognizing the importance of landscape intactness for biodiversity and ecosystem services.[7]
  - Be designed to function at multiple scales based on spatial planning, from influencing sustainable land-use decisions at a local level to reforming national and regional goals to achieve forest-based solutions.
  - Clearly show how proposed outcomes relate to some or all of the four objectives of the Collaborative Initiative.
  - Put in place a robust monitoring, evaluation and learning system with clear numerical and biodiversity indicators.
- Projects should be centred in landscapes in which implementation is feasible and where there is stakeholder buy-in on the project's objectives and methodology.
- Projects should be designed to be implemented according to the principles of sustainable forest management, as established in various ITTO guidelines.
- The equitable participation of local people should be a precondition for all projects initiated under the Collaborative Initiative.
- Local communities, Indigenous Peoples (where applicable) and women should be intimately involved in project development, implementation and outcomes, and the principle of free, prior and informed consent should be applied.
- Projects should include livelihood opportunities for local people that involve the sustainable use of biodiversity and green supply chains. They should also include formal plans for monitoring the impacts of such opportunities on stakeholders and provide mentoring during the project and for up to three years after project completion.
- Transboundary projects should have clear work-sharing and planning arrangements, high-level participation, and formal agreements among the national governments involved.

7 Forest landscape-based solutions address the role of forests in combating climate change (mitigation and adaptation) and achieving the SDGs. They might focus, for example, on the roles of green supply chains, biocorridor restoration, community-based REDD+ projects, innovative forest monitoring systems, and research and development. See: ITTO (2020). *Guidelines for Forest Landscape Restoration in the Tropics*. Policy Development Series No. 24. Yokohama, Japan.

Villagers receive training as birdwatching guides as part of efforts to ensure they benefit economically from biodiversity in the Tacaná Volcano area on the border between Guatemala and Mexico, under ITTO project PD 668/12. Photo: Edgar Pérez/HELVETAS

International Tropical Timber Organization
International Organizations Center, 5th Floor, Pacifico-Yokohama, 1-1-1, Minato-Mirai, Nishi-ku, Yokohama, 220-0012, Japan
Tel +81-45-223-1110 Fax +81-45-223-1111 Email itto@itto.int Web www.itto.int

Cover photo: A pale blue flycatcher (*Cyornis unicolor*) rests on a branch in the Cibodas Biosphere Reserve, Indonesia, the location of ITTO project 777/15. Photo: © Ida Rohaida