

ITTO Tropical Forest UPDATE

A newsletter from the International Tropical Timber Organization to promote the conservation and sustainable development of tropical forests



How to win their trust

TRUST is a rare and precious resource, tough to win, easy to lose and difficult to give. It has a pretty low currency in these restive times, many of us not daring to trust our politicians, our generals, our accountants or even, sometimes, our neighbours. Can we trust our foresters?

In this edition of the *TFU* we present several articles that show how to encourage an answer of yes to that question. Mario Loayza (page 3) describes in some detail the process by which an ITTO project is gaining trust among indigenous Ashaninka communities in the Peruvian Amazon.

The Ashaninka, he writes, "are a very peaceable but highly suspicious people; therefore, it is best to establish a horizontal or participatory relationship". Project officers are long-term residents in the communities, where they "have become friends and partners and a trusted link to the outside world".

The forests in which the Ashaninka live is subject to intense logging activity. In many cases, the loggers, known as *aguaneros*, have gained illegal access to the resource by developing



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▶ small-enterprise training ▶ ecosystem services ...

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Cover image Ashaninka villagers in the Peruvian Amazon.
Photo: R. Guevara

strong relationships with community leaders, and they too have viewed the project with suspicion. According to Loayza, “At the beginning the aguaneros believed the project was against them, even those who were dealing more openly with the communities. This was not true: the aguaneros provide a link to the market and are therefore an essential partner in the achievement of sustainable forest management”. The project has encouraged aguaneros to become involved in the process of legalising timber production in the region, which requires the development of management plans; this is being done, with assistance from the project, in a way that allows the communities themselves to take an increasingly central role.

Peltonen and Leppänen (page 7) bring to our attention another relationship where trust-building is often needed: that between forestry training institutions and small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In Honduras, such SMEs viewed the National School of Forestry Sciences (ESNACIFOR) as a competitor because it operates its own sawmills and carpentry shops and owns 4000 hectares of forest; in any case, its courses were insufficiently oriented to the needs of small business to be attractive to them. With the help of an ITTO project, ESNACIFOR has started to break down the barriers between it and small-scale entrepreneurs, offering training that is more relevant to the sector and more flexible in its structure, and facilitating the creation of a cooperative, among other things.

The project also helped a similar process of trust-building between the Wood Industries Training Centre and local entrepreneurs in Ghana. At the start of the project, entrepreneurs were distrustful of the centre and hesitant about formal training; by its completion, they were requesting a continuation of the program.

Trust is something that must be earned, and the best way to earn it is through consistent, honest and transparent behaviour. This is one reason why it is at such a premium in the forestry sector—transparency has rarely been a strong point—and also why it is so important. Forestry is a long process, which increasingly is conducted on the

basis of negotiations among a colourful crowd of stakeholders. Such negotiations will produce best results in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, which can take years to establish.

In addition to time and patience, agencies and development projects can try other things: Nguingiri (page 32), for example, recommends the use of a mediator during negotiations over forest management plans. Perhaps more importantly, he also suggests that local people be intimately involved in preparatory work (such as surveys, inventories, etc) for the development of management plans, because this will help prepare them for subsequent negotiations—and provide an opportunity for relationship-building.

Trust is needed at the international level as well. As this edition of the newsletter goes to press, the negotiations for a successor agreement to the International Tropical Timber Agreement, 1994 are about to get under way. A decade ago, at the completion of negotiations for the 1994 agreement, one delegate (the UK’s Andrew Bennett) remarked in the *TFU* (Vol 5 No 3) that the negotiation process had “opened some rifts and created some tensions in the Organization. The last session [of negotiations] was particularly bruising and left a lot of people feeling unhappy. We must rebuild some bridges; we’ve got to strengthen the consensus and learn to trust each other again”.

Most delegates would agree that this trust has indeed been rebuilt over the last few years; Council sessions are notable for both their harmony and the way they have carried forward the Organization’s bold agenda.

This bodes well for the negotiations, but it won’t be enough on its own. To meet the challenges of the future, ITTO will need to be stronger and more creative and dynamic than ever before. The negotiators face a tough job: to fashion such an agreement—which will require some innovative thinking—without destroying the bond of trust that its members have established.

Alastair Sarre