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EX POST EVALUATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PP-A/53-323 [ITTO-LSSC-Japan]

**CAPACITY BUILDING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGAL AND SUSTAINABLE
SUPPLY CHAINS (LSSC) IN THE CONGO BASIN COUNTRIES**

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ACRONYMS

AFD	France Development Agency (<i>Agence Française de Développement</i>)
ATIBT	International Tropical Timber Technical Association (<i>Association Technique Internationale des Bois Tropicaux</i>)
BMEL	Federal Ministry for Agriculture and Food, Germany
CAR	Central African Republic
COMIFAC	Central African Forest Commission (<i>Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale</i>)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EA	Executing Agency
ENEF	Water and Forestry National School (<i>École Nationale des Eaux et Forêts</i>)
ENSAF	National Agronomics and Forestry Graduate School (<i>École Nationale Supérieure d'Agronomie et de Foresterie</i>)
ERAIFT	Regional School for Integrated Development and Management of Forests and Land (<i>École Régionale d'Aménagement et de Gestion Intégrés des Forêts et Territoires</i>)
EUDR	European Union Deforestation Regulation
EUTR	European Union Timber Regulation
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
GFBC	Cameroon Timber Industry Organization (<i>Groupeement de la Filière Bois au Cameroun</i>)
GIZ	German for International Cooperation Agency
ISDR	Higher Institute of Rural Development (<i>Institut Supérieur de Développement Rural</i>)
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LSSC	Legal and Sustainable Supply Chains
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PCBF	Partnership for the Congo Basin
RIFFEAC	Network of Forestry and Environment Training Institutions in Central Africa (<i>Réseau des Institutions de Formation Forestière et Environnementale d'Afrique Centrale</i>)
SFM	Sustainable forest management
ToR	Terms of Reference
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT ID	PP-A/53-323 [ITTO-LSSC-Japan]
TITLE	Capacity Building for Implementing Legal and Sustainable Supply Chains (LSSC) in the Congo Basin countries
BENEFICIARY GOVERNMENTS	Cameroon, Central African Republic, Gabon, Republic Democratic of the Congo and Republic of the Congo
EXECUTING AGENCY	Network for Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions in Central Africa (RIFFEAC)
STARTING DATE	April 2020
DURATION	Planned: 12 months; Actual implementation: 28 months [due to COVID-19 restrictions]
BUDGET (ITTO)	US\$ 315 789

i) Objective, type of evaluation and basic project facts

The ultimate objective of Project PP-A/53-323 was to ensure that timber products from countries in the Congo Basin are in compliance with the requirements of key trade regulations in connection with legal and sustainable supply chains (LSSCs). It was identified that achieving this goal would require capacity building among key stakeholders (private sector forestry companies, relevant government institutions, forestry training entities, relevant civil society organizations, etc.). To this end, the single module appeared as a fundamental, key and relevant tool for capacity building among relevant stakeholders. The single module was developed from four basic modules covering the training needs of all LSSC stakeholders, namely: (i) Understanding the concept of ‘zero-deforestation’; (ii) Assessing legality and achieving accountability; (iii) Implementing sustainability; and (iv) Markets and access to markets.

The project was implemented in five target countries in the Congo Basin (Republic of Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Republic of Gabon). It was led by a team of four personnel from the Executing Agency, the RIFFEAC, namely the Project Coordinator, assisted by three colleagues responsible for project implementation, accounting, and logistics and administration, respectively. The initial planned duration was 12 months between March 2020 and March 2021, but the project was completed in July 2022 (28 months) due to travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This also explains the adjustment to the initial budget in March 2021. Three years after project completion, it was deemed necessary by the ITTO to conduct an ex-post evaluation, as contained in this report.

ii) Evaluation scope and approach

Following a desk review of the project's technical and financial documents, interviews were conducted during a field visit with approximately 100 people in the five target countries. In addition, around 60 people responded to questionnaires aimed at decision makers, direct beneficiaries and trainers from the **Network of Forestry and Environment Training Institutions in Central Africa (RIFFEAC)**, the **Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC)**, forestry and environmental administrations, RIFFEAC member training institutions, forestry operators, forestry research consultancies, civil society organizations, etc. The questions focused on project awareness of and relevance; effective participation and contribution to the workshops; quality of training; observed impact and effects; project sustainability; and suggestions and recommendations, if any.

iii) Project implementation and impact

The project was relatively successful. An excellent and relevant training module for all LSSC stakeholder groups was developed with their active involvement. However, the training module was not effectively used by all LSSC stakeholders in the target countries. The multiplier effect following the training-of-trainers workshops held in the five countries using the single module was not triggered. A monitoring mechanism after the training phase had not been planned or budgeted for when the project was designed. The search for funding after the national workshops proved ineffective and unsuccessful. As a result, the single module, while very detailed and diverse, and highly regarded, was not sufficiently disseminated among LSSC stakeholders.

Of the two expected outputs, the project achieved the first in full (100%) and the second partially (75%). With regard to the first output, a single training module was developed based on a compilation of the contents of the four training programmes developed in connection with ITTO Activity 5. The single training module was subsequently validated during a regional workshop attended by representatives of groups operating throughout LSSCs in the Congo Basin. The second output, a key output, aimed to strengthen the capacity and expertise of key stakeholders in the Congo Basin countries for ensuring compliance with LSSC-related requirements. This was to be achieved using the single training module. Five national training-of-trainers workshops, bringing together representatives of groups of stakeholders involved in LSSCs, were held in the target countries. The vast majority of direct participants in training workshops considered the training to be highly relevant to their daily work, and many of them were able to make use of acquired knowledge. Changes included better integration of 'deforestation-free' practices; improved planning; and increased awareness among communities. The results show that the training had a concrete and positive impact on the participants' working methods.

However, some workshop participants reported encountering obstacles when applying learned concepts. These difficulties were mainly related to a lack of financial and material resources; limited access to information; and inconsistent political decisions. Local resistance also posed a challenge, highlighting the need for institutional and financial support to sustain the gains made. In addition, during the national workshops, the module was only shared in electronic format and not in printed format as recommended during the validation workshop. This limited its use to only a few of workshop participants. It was also noted that the vast majority, if not all, of the participants in the national workshops did not share the training with their respective administrations, resulting in blocking the chain of progressive knowledge transfer. It is important to be aware that this second output was very important in order for the project to contribute to the overall objective and to the development objective. The reports of the five training workshops held in the target countries were produced, including key and relevant elements taking into account the context and specific challenges of LSSCs in each of the five target countries. Unfortunately, the reports were not shared with the workshop participants.

Project impact and effects on stakeholders are difficult to assess. The chain of knowledge transfer resulting from the single module came to a halt after the national training workshops for trainers in the five target countries. No multiplier effect was recorded. The contribution of RIFFEAC member training institutions would have been crucial in this regard. Efforts are therefore needed to improve collaboration between these institutions themselves and with the National Coordinating Committees of the COMIFAC in the respective countries. It is also difficult to assess the project specific direct contribution towards promoting and implementing good practices for sustainable forest management in the countries of the Congo Basin. However, the capacities of around 80 people from all LSSC groups in the five target countries were strengthened through the single module. Nevertheless, after three years, the vast majority have only a vague memory of the training content, even though they do remember having used it.

No post-project strategy had been considered during the project design phase. There was only an initiative aimed at securing funding from RIFFEAC for the printing, reproduction and dissemination of the single module. A post-project follow-up strategy would have been all the more crucial given the nature of the project, which focused on the gradual capacity building of LSSC stakeholders. A single workshop per country would not have been sufficient to achieve this objective, let alone the development objective aimed to stabilizing or even expanding the market in the Congo Basin countries by building expertise to facilitate compliance with international requirements. Specific workshops for each group of LSSC stakeholders would have been necessary, and synergies with projects such as the project “Support for Ongoing Training Development in the Forestry Industry in Central Africa (*Appui au développement de la formation continue dans la filière forêt-bois en Afrique Centrale*—ADEFAC) would have been appropriate to this end.

The project was designed following a relatively well-structured vertical logic, including two clear outputs and relevant objectives and activities towards output achievement. However, the horizontal logic was not established. The project did not include any objectively verifiable indicators, any sources of verification, and even less so the potential risks jeopardizing its smooth implementation. All of these key elements for project development should have been specified, as should the assumptions highlighting, for example, the risks associated with the effective participation of key actors in the workshops, their ability to report back to their respective organizations, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which arose during project implementation and undoubtedly had an impact, including postponing activities and affecting the initial budget.

iv) Financial situation

The project had a budget of USD 315 789, divided into four instalments based on achieved outputs. The amount covered the executing agency's personnel allowances (9.5%); travel expenses (4.75%); miscellaneous expenses (6.95%); monitoring and administration (by ITTO, 10.71%); subcontracting (consultant); and workshop holding (68%). It is important to note that this amount was adjusted to cover five national workshops instead of the three initially planned. The ITTO followed the payment schedule and all instalments were disbursed after outputs were achieved in accordance with the operational plan. The project extension granted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic did not have any significant impact on the project budget. The Executing Agency reimbursed a balance of USD 1 678.21 to ITTO after project completion, representing an implementation rate of 99.47%. Financial management was generally effective, with limited deviations from the budget, mainly due to savings on logistics costs. The RIFFEAC submitted all required technical reports to the ITTO Secretariat and the donor on time. A final financial statement was also submitted on 31 May 2022 in accordance with the donor's requirements, together with original supporting documents. The project financial audit was conducted by MAZARS-Japan in January 2023 under the supervision of the ITTO Secretariat's Division of Operations.

v) Project learning, conclusions and recommendations

The ex-post evaluation provided an opportunity to relaunch the dissemination of the module, which was highly appreciated in terms of content despite a few elements requiring updating. In particular, adjustments were made to regulations in the Congo Basin countries and at the international level. For example, the European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR) has now become the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). There was real enthusiasm for updating the module, especially among students and teachers in the target countries.

Project learning highlight the importance of post-training support; the need to adapt tools to the local circumstances; and the need to train a variety of stakeholders with differing levels. Modules should incorporate more practical examples; use a diversity of teaching tools; promote interactive approaches; and adjust content to the level of participants. The design of training modules should include a strategy for their dissemination to the target audience in the planning and budgeting stages. The strategy should be supported by a monitoring and evaluation plan with objectively verifiable progress indicators to ensure its effective

implementation and lasting impact. Making the modules available in training institutions can contribute to the sustainability and durability of knowledge sharing. The modules can be used as technical tools for seminars and initial and ongoing training courses. Aiming to strengthen the capacities of stakeholders throughout a supply chain and in several countries requires proper identification of the target audience in each context/country and their training needs. It is also important that the content of the modules be regularly updated in view of the dynamics at the level of administrations, regulatory frameworks and market challenges.

Recommendations were made in light of the project ex-post evaluation findings, as follows:

To ITTO:

1. Provide financial support to the RIFFEAC to ensure the module is not lost, but reactivated, updated, disseminated and built upon.

To RIFFEAC:

2. Plan the module updating to restore its relevance and make it operational in the context of each country and for each group of stakeholders in collaboration with member training institutions;
3. Strengthen the project horizontal logic with objectively verifiable indicators showing progress in knowledge acquisition and knowledge impact;
4. Revitalize relations with training institutions and establish a training institution exchange platform to align and facilitate partnerships;
5. Implement modules throughout Phase II of the ADEFAC project, building on the existing network of trainers.

To COMIFAC Executive Secretariat:

6. Revitalize the relationship between RIFFEAC member training institutions and the COMIFAC national coordination bodies in target countries;
7. Promote trade facilitation between the Congo Basin countries to harness existing potential demand for timber.

To RIFFEAC member training institutions

8. Integrate the module into initial and ongoing academic and vocational training programmes;
9. Make the module available in digital and printed formats in the libraries of educational institutions;
10. Hold seminars specific to each group of stakeholders identified in the module for greater impact among beneficiaries;
11. Hold seminars to familiarize teachers with the module and enable its use to enhance teaching content.

Response from Management to ITTO Ex Post Evaluation	
Project title: “Capacity Building for the Implementation of Legal and Sustainable Supply Chains (LSSC) in the Congo Basin Countries”	
Project ID: PP-A/53-323	
A) Response summary to ex-post evaluation:	
<i>(Please insert your overall opinion on the ex-post evaluation report, e.g. its structure, the method used and its conclusions)</i>	
The ex-post evaluation report followed the usual structure for a project evaluation. After reviewing project objectives and project implementation outcomes, the consultant presented the methodology used for the ex-post evaluation. The ex-post evaluation showed that a single module compiled from four previously developed modules was developed, and that workshops for disseminating the single module were held for the target training stakeholders. Although the single module was well structured, its dissemination to RIFFEAC Member Institutions (MIs) was not effective. Some MIs were able to partially integrate this module into their training curricula. One of the difficulties in evaluating this project was the lack of objective and quantifiable indicators, as the Consultant pointed out. In general, RIFFEAC welcomes the ex post evaluation report on the abovementioned project.	
Recommendations made in the ex-post evaluation report*	B) Responses to recommendations <i>(for ex. Accept, Accept in part or Reject – Brief explanation)</i>
To ITTO	
Recommendation 1 <i>Provide financial support to RIFFEAC to ensure the module is not lost, but reactivated, updated, disseminated and built upon.</i>	The recommendation is well-founded and will enable RIFFEAC to provide member institutions with a single, updated and consolidated module.
To RIFFEAC	
Recommendation 2 <i>Plan the module updating to restore its relevance and make it operational in the context of each country and for each group of stakeholders in collaboration with member training institutions</i>	Accept—As the first forest development rotation cycles will come to an end, log production will vary from country to country. A module update will prove to be necessary.
Recommendation 3 <i>Strengthen the project horizontal logic with objectively verifiable indicators showing progress in knowledge acquisition and knowledge impact</i>	The recommendation is of interest as it will contribute to improving the project evaluation in its second phase.
Recommendation 4 <i>Revitalize relations with training institutions and establish a training institution exchange platform to align and facilitate partnerships</i>	Accept
Recommendation 5 <i>Implement modules throughout Phase II of the ADEFAC project, building on the existing network of trainers</i>	Additional funding from the ITTO, in synergy with funding from the France Development Agency (AFD) for the ADEFAC 2 project, might enable RIFFEAC to promote the single module through ongoing vocational training and distance learning

	through e-learning.
To COMIFAC Executive Secretariat	
<i>Recommendation 6</i> <i>Revitalize the relationship between RIFFEAC member training institutions and the COMIFAC national coordination bodies in target countries</i>	
Promote trade facilitation between the Congo Basin countries to harness existing potential demand for timber	
To RIFFEAC member training institutions	
<i>Recommendation 8</i> Integrate the module into initial and ongoing academic and vocational training programmes	Member institutions will be encouraged to gradually integrate the module into their training curricula.
<i>Recommendation 9</i> Make the module available in digital and printed formats in the libraries of educational institutions	Module availability will only be made possible with ITTO support for printing and rebinding the single module document, including related documents.
<i>Recommendation 10</i> Hold seminars specific to each group of stakeholders identified in the module for greater impact among beneficiaries	In connection with the ADEFAC project.
<i>Recommendation 11</i> Hold seminars to familiarize teachers with the module and enable its use to enhance teaching content	The recommendation addresses the training-of trainers, which will need to be held.

**Add or delete rows as necessary.*

Name, Title and Institution of signatory: Pr. Félix KOUBOUANA, RIFFEAC

Regional Coordinator

Date, Signature: 10/09/2025:

