ITTO Advisory Board Meeting Minutes 2025

Thursday, 16 October 2025

20:00-21:00 JST

PARTICIPANTS:

Members:

Advisory Board/Informal Advisory Group

Mr. Carlos Espinosa Peña	Chairperson ITTC (absent)
Pending nomination	Vice-Chairperson ITTC
Mr. Muhammad Zahrul Muttaqin	Producer Caucus Spokesperson
Ms. Aysha Ghadiali	Consumer Caucus Spokesperson (absent)
Mr. Pyoabalo Alaba	Chairperson CFA (absent)
Mr. Ray Thomas Fernandez Kabigting	Chairperson CEM & CFI (Ms. Kenneth Tabliga attended on behalf)
Mr. Björn Merkell	Chairperson CRF
Ms. Masami Fukata	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 (absent)

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
Mr. Steven Johnson, Consultant
Ms. Naho Tamura, Programme Assistant
Mr. Wayne Koay, IT Coordinator
Mr. Tomiji Shudo, Consultant
Ms. Kosato Saito, Assistant, OED

Observers

Mr. Hiroyuki Saito, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan
Ms. Yoko Yamoto, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 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) – Decision 8(LV) attached

1. The Executive Director (ED) noted that the agenda for the Advisory Board had been sent out prior to the meeting. In the absence of the Chairperson it was suggested that she could guide the advisory board through the agenda items.
2. The ED explained that Decision 8(LV) had been taken as part of the implementation of ITTO's New Financing Architecture Phase 1 in 2019. Under operative paragraph 15, Council had requested the ED to convene an ad hoc working group in the first quarter of 2020, consisting of three experts nominated by consumer members, three experts nominated by producer members and one representative each from Civil Society Advisory Group and Trade Advisory Group to undertake select tasks.
3. The ED further explained that Decision 3(LX) had been taken in December 2024, recommending that the Advisory Board established under Decision 8(LV) with terms of reference established under Decision 8(LVII) and the progress report as contained in ITTC(LX)/10 and ITTC(LX)/11 terminate the pilot phase and continue with the programmatic approach and the four programme lines as agreed by Council in 2020. Operative paragraph 2 requested the Secretariat to continue to provide annual updates on the Programmatic Approach to the Advisory Board and to Council. In accordance with operative paragraph 3, the Secretariat is running one regular project cycle per year and the concept note approach in parallel.

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

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

1. The ED went through the presentation and discussion on the progress of the Programmatic Approach (as contained in ITTC(LXI)/10). Regarding engagements with other bodies called for by Decisions 8(LV) and 4(LVI), she stated that with GEF activities, although they had tried consistently since 2022 with select members implementing GEF projects to include ITTO as an implementing agency or partner agency, this had not yet materialised. She has always asked members to consider involving ITTO in implementing GEF or GCF projects but had not yet been invited to join any of these members in their country or region. They would continue to pursue these opportunities.
2. The next item was to have ITTO Secretariat obtain Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with several external bodies. ITTO already has some MoUs with international partners and is in the process of renewing some of these. At the same time ITTO is currently working to formalize new MoUs with select partners identified who could strengthen ITTO's work. Currently, they are working on attempts to operationalise MoUs with CBD, AFoCO, JICA, UNCCD and UNFF. In many respects, the MoU with UNFF was already being operationalised with ITTO's active participation in country-led initiatives (CLI) and country &organisational led initiatives (COLI). ITTO actively participates and contribute to such meetings depending on the relevance of the subject matter to ITTO's mandate and work.

3. New MoUs with UNU and RESTEC were signed last year. The UNU MoU was operational in terms of supporting each other in activities and networking. The MoU with RESTEC had commenced early this year and is work in progress.

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

4. Council had been informed annually since 2022 at the ITTC 58, 59 and 60 through various Agenda items and Updates that ITTO diligently continued its close collaboration with all partners, such as the members of the CPF, collectively and individually, and others.
5. Mr Merkell asked for clarification on the roles of RESTEC and IGES. The ED explained that IGES (Institute of Global Environmental Strategies) is a Japanese forestry related research unit who had worked with ITTO to implement projects funded by the Japanese Government, such as the implementation of the Clean Wood Act. Currently, they intend to be a partner in one of the ITTO projects in Vietnam. RESTEC is the Japanese national institute on remote sensing, where the ITTO-RESTEC MoU was signed in 2024. They are keen to implement a pilot project t with ITTO. She also reiterated that ITTO is obliged to consult with the Advisory Board prior to signing each MoU, a commitment made when the Advisory Board was established.
6. Work is ongoing with FAO, UNFF, CITES, CIFOR-ICRAF, AFoCO, IGES and many others.
7. Secretariat continues efforts to grow the participation of ITTO members in TAG and CSAG, where both need funding contributions to continue and advance their work.
8. Up until last year, the United States Government supported TAG and CSAG work. Owing to current circumstances, it was unclear whether this would continue.
9. ITTO are engaging with potential new partners, but the competitiveness on the global level is increasingly intense.
10. Mr Merkell asked if any information on engagement with new private sector partners could be shared. Ms Satkuru stated that they had had interest from private sector companies in Japan, two of which are financial institutions. ITTO is not able to participate in projects that include loans, so have not had a third round of discussions with these financial institutions. An energy company in Japan is also interested. Other examples were forestry companies in Japan (e.g. Sumitomo Forestry, APP) and the Japanese space agency, JAXA, which whom the Secretariat had just had a meeting regarding possible collaboration on the application of remote sensing technology in a member country. Funding still needs to be secured for this collaboration.

Implementation of Decision 3(LX)

11. On the implementation of Decision 3(LX), the Programmatic Approach and Programme Lines are permanent until Council decides they need revising. Secretariat runs one regular project cycle per year and the concept note approach in parallel. Annual updates on the Programmatic Approach are provided to the Advisory Board and Council.

Implementation of other Decisions

12. The Preparatory Working Group (PWG) for Decision 4(LX) was extended until the 61st Session of Council. Reports are available following the three PWG meetings in 2025, already circulated to all members. Additionally, regional consultations were held and the minutes are included in the PWG report (specifically at the end of the PWG 3 Report). The PWG's work is therefore complete for 2025.
13. Reporting under Decision 7(LVII) "Article 15 of the ITTA" was completed in 2023, but the ED had volunteered to continue updating the Advisory Board and Council on collaborative efforts and co-operation work being conducted. Secretariat is engaging with the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI) and the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC). A colleague from the CFC will be attending Council this year.
14. Mr Merkell asked about the ITTO's engagement with the CFC. The ED explained that they had wanted their own project proposal with CAFI focusing on sustainable forest management. At that point, ITTO had not yet been GCF accredited. CAFI suggested ITTO work with the CFC through their

already submitted proposal but in a forestry segment as part of that proposal. The CFC had already submitted a proposal on sustainable agricultural commodities to CAFI at this time without any significant forestry element. CAFI had then put ITTO in touch with the CFC and it was agreed that ITTO will be part of the same sustainable agricultural commodities proposal with a separate section on sustainable wood products and update of legality assurance systems and certification. Secretariat and CFC are waiting to hear from CAFI, hopefully after the next CAFI board meeting.

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

15. The call for concept notes under Funding Scenario 4 of Decision 4(LVI) had been ongoing since 2020. Out of 61 submissions, 39 had been published for donor consideration, of which 15 had received donor interest and had been or were to be developed into projects. Since ITTC 60, they had received 12 submissions, with 8 published for donor consideration. 2 had received donor interest and were to be developed into projects. Any project with partial funding could not proceed unless the concept note was amended to match the amount of funding available. Those funded had done good work and were being implemented well. Secretariat is part of that and do their best to ensure they are implemented on time.

Funding pledged or sought related to the programmatic approach

16. The funding pledged or sought related to the Programmatic Approach were listed for members. The CAFI proposal was for PP-A/61-378 Shaping Deforestation-Free Agricultural and Sustainable Forestry Value Chains in the Congo Basin Region. LSSC was the most popular programme line. The total funds received were USD$1,844,099.

Programmatic Approach – Total Received

17. The total received under the Programmatic Approach from 2019-25 was USD$17 million, averaging USD$2.5 million per year, a precarious level.
18. They had seen an increase in the Programmatic Approach voluntary contributions in earlier years, but it is lower in 2025.

Projects/activities/concept notes pending finance

19. Seven projects are pending finance, totalling USD$3 million, with 12 BWP Activities pending finance at USD$1,419,900, and 11 Concept Notes at USD$3.5 million. The total would be over USD$8million and 30 projects/activities/concept notes that are pending finance. Since October 2024, 5 projects and CNs valued at US$ 6 million were sunset and after 1 January 2026, another 17 projects and CNs valued at USD$6.6 million will be sunset.
20. Secretariat is doing everything it can to address the issue and also need to be included in efforts taking place in countries. They were grateful to Japan for the steady funding given over the years and were discussing how to better manage the amount of funding currently coming in.

Q&A

21. Mr Tomaselli noticed that the value of sunset projects was much larger than the value of projects funded and asked why projects that were proposed by member countries and selected as the best ones were not being funded. The ED explained that the donor community was withdrawing. In recent years, most donor governments preferred to provide bilateral assistance rather than through the multilateral route. This has been an issue since 2013. There are many organisations and governments who want to work with ITTO, but they need to bring their own funds as well. This is not about project quality; the ITTO assessment process is rigorous. ITTO no longer receives funds from many large donors.
22. Mr Tomaselli asked if they should present projects which are more attractive to donors. The ED explained that this is how they work with Japan, by consulting them and working on the proposals together. The Japanese government is willing to do that, but other donors, except the US, have not

been forthcoming. ITTO has been pitching in areas where they are strong such as forest fires, biodiversity conservation, mangrove conservation, legal and sustainable supply chains, tracking, traceability, etc but are yet to obtain sizeable funding.

23. Mr Merkell stated that they needed to change the direction of the current trend, though he did not have a solution. The ED explained that they are still working with the GCF and hope to submit a solid proposal in the next six months. This trend is partly down to perception of ITTO, where many donors are zoned in on total protection rather than conservation and /or sustainable use. Many who rely on forestry for income and food do not align with total protection. Agriculture is expanding, and at the cost of forests.
24. Mr Zahrul asked if ITTO could seek more funding from the private sector or philanthropic funding. The ED explained that they are looking into this but need the private sector in other parts of the world to also be interested in ITTO's work. Philanthropists are welcome at any point and urged the AB to advise if they had clear routes to offer. Secretariat would carry out due diligence on any funds from the private sector and also consult the Advisory Board and Council. Secretariat receives a small donation every year from a Japanese private sector company, which currently contributes to the Fellowship Fund. Secretariat has to be agile in adapting to companies who want to work with ITTO and is looking into philanthropy. Mr Zahrul proposed greater cooperation with exporters and importers. The ED stated they are trying to strengthen the participation of large active companies in the TAG.

Agenda 3: Other matters & closing

1. The ED thanked those present for their participation and, in the absence of any other comments, closed the Advisory Board meeting.