Lessons for working well together in African forests

A review of recent ITTO projects implemented in West and Central Africa relevant to collaboration with the Tokyo International Conference on African Development

POLICY BRIEF

Two members of the MALEBI women's group plant a tree seedling in the Ahua gazetted forest, Côte d'Ivoire (PD 725/13). Photo: Afrique Green Side

Collaborating on forests in Africa

Forests and trees provide many vital goods and ecosystem services—for example, they produce timber, woodfuel, clean water, foods and medicines; help regulate climate locally, regionally and globally; perform important cultural roles; support agricultural production by conserving soils, hosting biodiversity and providing habitat for pollinators; and are important for human health and well-being. They are also the basis for a significant share of gross domestic product in many countries and the employment of millions of people worldwide.

It is essential to use forests sustainably to ensure they continue providing these benefits. Nevertheless, the world's forest area is declining by more than 4.7 million hectares per year, primarily in the tropics, and large areas of remaining forest are degraded.

Nowhere is forest conservation and sustainable use more important than in Africa, where the human population is growing rapidly and net forest loss is alarmingly high, at 3.9 million ha per year in the decade to 2020.[1]
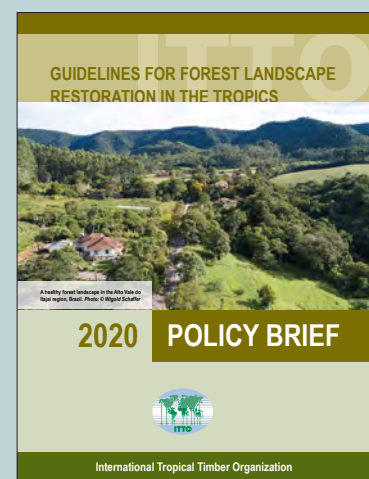
Headquartered in Yokohama, Japan, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) promotes the conservation and sustainable management, use and trade of tropical forest resources. An intergovernmental organization with 74 members, including Japan and 13 African nations, ITTO has vast experience in encouraging sustainable tropical forest management, the restoration of degraded forests and landscapes, the development of downstream forest industries, and sustainable timber trade. It publishes internationally agreed policy documents and guidelines to promote sustainable forest management and forest-based enterprises (Box 1) and assists its members in Africa and elsewhere to adapt these to local circumstances and implement them in the field through projects.

This policy brief summarizes the lessons learnt from an evaluation of some of ITTO's project work in West and Central Africa and proposes areas for future collaboration between ITTO and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). The full report of the evaluation will be presented to the 58th session of the International Tropical Timber Council in November 2022.

Cover photo: Community farmers in a restored forest area at the Pamu Berekum Forest Reserve, Ghana (PD 530/08). Photo: Emmanuel Antwi Bawuah

Box 1: ITTO policy guidelines

Examples of widely applied ITTO guidelines are the *ITTO/ATO Principles, Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainable Management of African Natural Tropical Forests* (2003),[2] *ITTO/IUCN Guidelines for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Tropical Timber Production Forests* (2009), *Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests* (2015), *Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests* (2016) and *Guidelines for Forest Landscape Restoration in the Tropics* (2020).

GUIDELINES FOR FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION IN THE TROPICS

A healthy forest landscape in the Alto Vale do Itajaí region, Brazil. Photo: © Wigold Schäffer

2020 POLICY BRIEF

International Tropical Timber Organization

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

2 Currently being revised. An updated version is expected to be available in the second half of 2022.

Alignment of ITTO and TICAD

ITTO has two overarching objectives:

1) the expansion and diversification of international trade in tropical timber from sustainably managed and legally harvested forests; and

2) the sustainable management of tropical timber-producing forests.

ITTO recently adopted a new strategic action plan,[3] which sets out the following four priorities for the Organization between 2022 and 2026:
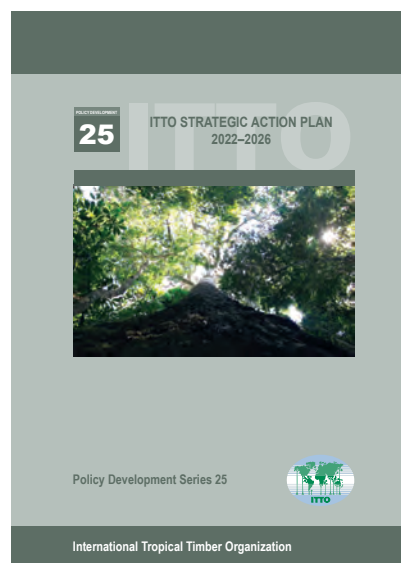
1) **Governance and investment**—Promote good governance and policy frameworks to enhance financing and investment in sustainable tropical forest management and legal and sustainable forest product supply chains and related trade.

2) **Economies and tropical timber trade**—Increase the contribution of the tropical forest sector to national and local economies and resilient livelihoods, including through the further processing and trade of tropical timber and other forest products and services.

3) **Resilience, restoration and conservation**—Reduce tropical deforestation and forest degradation, enhance forest landscape restoration and the resilience of forest ecosystems to climate change, and conserve forest biodiversity and ecosystem services.

4) **Statistics and information**—Improve the quality, availability and timeliness of information on tropical forest product markets, supply chains and international trade, including challenges and opportunities related to market access, expansion and diversification.

TICAD is a Japanese initiative launched in 1993 to promote high-level policy dialogue between African leaders and development partners. Since its inception, TICAD has provided fundamental and comprehensive policies and guidelines for African development. TICAD's goal is to mobilize the knowledge and resources of the international community to assist in the further development of Africa.

TICAD focuses its policy work in the following five key areas:

1) Boosting economic growth

2) Ensuring human security

3) Consolidation of peace

4) Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

5) Addressing environmental issues such as climate change.

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As an intergovernmental organization based in Japan, ITTO recognizes the importance of collaboration with TICAD to further strengthen forestry in Africa. Such collaboration can contribute to the goals of both ITTO and TICAD.

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3 ITTO 2022. *ITTO Strategic Action Plan 2022–2026*. Policy Development Series No. 25. Yokohama, Japan. Available at www.itto.int/council_committees/action_plans.

Workers tend seedlings in a tree nursery in Banamè, Benin. Nursery production is one of the variables measured in the country's National Forest Statistics Information Management System (PD 678/12). Photo: PAGEFCOM

Evaluating ITTO projects in West and Central Africa, 2010–2020

At is 57th session in 2021, the International Tropical Timber Council (ITTO's governing body) requested the ITTO Secretariat to carry out an ex-post evaluation of ITTO projects in Africa with the aim of determining the main findings and to help inform the future forest-related actions of the Government of Japan in Africa. The evaluation examined ten completed ITTO projects implemented in West and Central Africa that were approved between 2010 and 2020 and implemented under the ITTO Strategic Action Plan 2013–2021. Six of the projects were in West Africa (three in Côte d'Ivoire, two in Benin and one in Ghana) and four spanned countries mainly in the Congo Basin. Figure 1 shows the location of these countries and the distribution of forests in Africa and Table 1 provides details of the ten projects.

All countries in which the projects were implemented are experiencing declines in forest area and biodiversity and an increase in forest degradation. Large numbers of people depend for their livelihoods on forest products and the use of forest soils (often in shortened shifting cultivation rotations).

The total ITTO budget for the ten projects was about USD 12.2 million, which was contributed mainly by the Government of Japan, with other donors comprising the governments of Australia,

### Figure 1: Forest distribution in Africa

Note: The projects evaluated in this report were in West Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Benin) and the Congo Basin (Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon). Map source: Blaser, J., Sarre, A., Poore, D. & Johnson, S. (2011). *Status of Tropical Forest Management 2011*. ITTO Technical Series No 38. ITTO, Yokohama, Japan. ITTO (2011). Available at www.itto.int/technical_report

Belgium, China, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America. Recipient countries also made substantial financial and in-kind contributions.

The evaluation found that, overall, the projects had important positive impacts on forests, forest management and local communities in all ten countries, with significant achievements in improving local livelihoods and forest

management, the area of restored forest, and biodiversity conservation. The projects also contributed to global forest-related processes, including the focal work areas formulated by TICAD (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of ITTO projects contributing to global forest processes
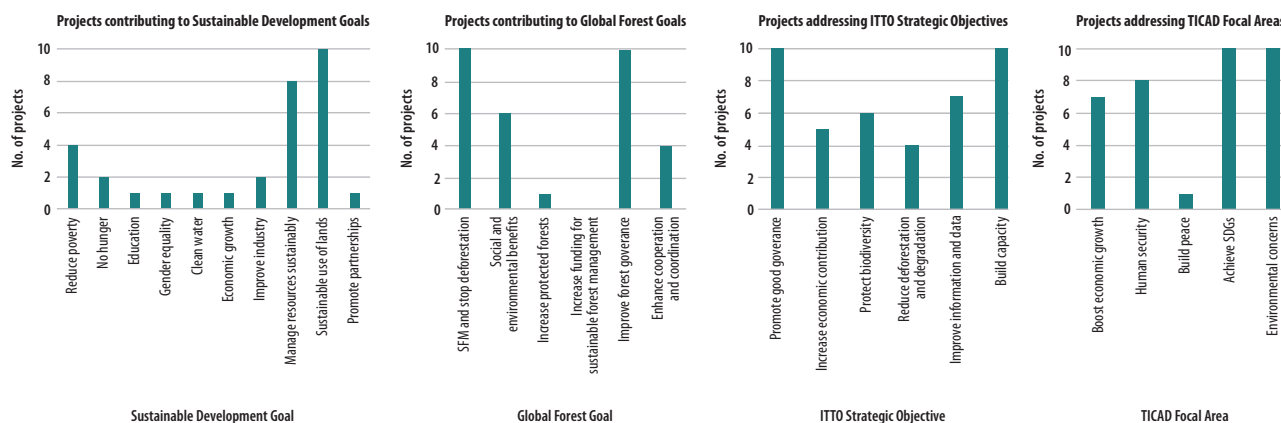
Note: The ITTO Strategic Objectives are those stated in the ITTO Strategic Action Plan 2013–2021, under which the ten projects were implemented.

Table 1: Details of ten ITTO projects implemented in West and Central Africa between 2010 and 2020

Project identifier	Short title	Country/countries	Duration	ITTO budget (USD)
Forest management, conservation, community participation, forest landscape restoration				
PD 456/07	Capacity building for sustainable management of tropical rainforests and biodiversity conservation in the ITTO Congo Basin countries	Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon	2012–2019	3 890 681
PD 754/14	Rehabilitation and sustainable management of sacred forests on Ramsar sites 1017 and 1028	Benin	2017–2020	541 031
PD 725/13	Rehabilitation of degraded forest land in the Ahua forest reserve by the women members of association MALEBI in compensation for the forest resources removed to meet the need for fuelwood (charcoal and firewood)	Côte d'Ivoire	2016–2018	149 408
PD 419/06 (TICAD-5)	Forest seeds management and conservation: rehabilitation and restoration of degraded forests with the involvement of local communities (refugees, internally displaced people and local populations)	Côte d'Ivoire	2013–2018	1 800 000
PD 530/08	Management of forests established through rehabilitation of degraded forests by local communities (Phase 2 of PD 30/97 Rev. 6)	Ghana	2012–2018	569 665
National information systems, statistics, timber trade, timber tracking				
PD 692/13	Implementation and operationalization of a national information system for the sustainable management of forest resources	Côte d'Ivoire	2015–2019	290 541
PD 124/01	Promotion of sustainable management of African forests (implemented by the ITTO Secretariat) – Phase III – Stages 1 and 2	Congo Basin	2011–2016	1 100 000
PD 678/12	Establishment of a national forest statistics information management system	Benin	2013–2016	398 704
PD 700/13	Development of intra-African trade and further processing in tropical timber and timber products – Phase 1, Stage 1	Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo	2015–2016	1 399 989
PD 620/11	Development and implementation of a species identification and timber tracking system in Africa with DNA fingerprints and stable isotopes	Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Ghana	2012–2016	2 046 092
Grand total				**12 186 111**

Key lessons learnt

Important lessons were learnt in the implementation of the ten projects that can be applied in the wider framework of ITTO and TICAD cooperation and help improve outcomes for future projects. The ten projects can be classified into two broad areas of work: (1) forest management, conservation, community participation, and forest landscape restoration; and (2) national information systems, statistics, timber trade, and timber tracking (see Table 1). The key lessons learnt are presented below in these two categories.

Management, conservation, community participation, and forest landscape restoration

Of the five projects in this area of work, one—PD 456/07, implemented by the Network of Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions in Central Africa (*Réseau des Institutions de Formation Forestière et Environnementale en Afrique Centrale*) (RIFFEAC) (see Box 2)—was much larger than the others, with an ITTO budget of USD 3.89 million. Its main purpose was to develop capacity for sustainable forest management in the Congo Basin, and it generated the following key lessons:

- Upgrading forest-sector education and training in Africa is essential for ensuring sustainable forest management, efficient domestic processing and sustainable supply chains.

- The effectiveness of the multistakeholder platforms introduced by RIFFEAC will be enhanced when key groups of actors in leading institutions champion the identified priority actions and ensure the ongoing flow of information.

- Thematic working groups played a crucial role in the implementation and ownership of the training modules and programme developed under the project and in promulgating the associated teaching methods in RIFFEAC training institutions.

- There is a need to assess the compatibility of computer systems and the availability of infrastructure and background information and to conduct needs assessments before embarking on projects to revamp or create databases at either the national or local level.

Professor Mbeté demonstrates forest-measuring equipment to a group of students at the National School of Agronomy and Forestry, the Congo (PD 456/07). Photo: Mamonékéné

The other four projects broadly addressed forest landscape restoration, and all involved local communities and many other stakeholders. The main lessons learnt can be summarized as follows:

- Long-term forest and land-use planning is required for the successful implementation of projects dealing with sustainable forest management and forest landscape restoration. It needs to be done with good knowledge of the landscape, and it requires accurately identifying the key actors influencing land-use decision-making.

- ITTO forest management projects should be viewed as catalysts for testing new approaches and tools for scaling up by countries and their development partners.

- Collaboration among stakeholders contributes to the success of forest restoration. This requires long-term commitment and building relationships and trust.

- Community forestry is an important land-tenure mechanism through which local communities can gain formal rights to access, manage and restore forests, which, in turn, can improve livelihoods (see Box 3).

- To ensure the effective participation of local stakeholders and guarantee fair benefits, communities need strong rights and secured tenure based on customary practices.

- The involvement of rural women in forest restoration can help them increase their incomes by growing crops among tree seedlings, and planting fast-growing tree species for woodfuel production can help reduce pressure on natural forests.

> **Box 2: Advancing forest education in the Congo Basin**
>
> An ITTO study conducted in 2006 in five countries in the Congo Basin concluded that there was a shortage of personnel with the qualifications needed to ensure sustainable forest development. Overall, the annual deficit was estimated at 180 engineers and 440 senior forestry technicians for activities associated with sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation. The study led to the development of a capacity-building project (PD 456/07) implemented by RIFFEAC under the auspices of the Central African Forest Commission with the aim of correcting the shortfall. RIFFEAC comprises 26 forestry and environmental training institutions, and the subregional project, which was conducted between 2012 and 2019, encompassed seven of these institutions across five countries.

- All projects should include biodiversity objectives to ensure that this important aspect of forests is always fully considered.

- The engagement of local stakeholders and the provision of incentives for local communities are key factors in convincing people that local tree species—either planted or regenerating naturally—can be used to restore forests.

- Enabling local communities to participate in forest activities and use products produced in planted forests helps them develop a sense of ownership for restoration work.

- Perceptions of an environmental crisis due to forest loss can strongly influence people's motivation to plant trees.

- Opportunity costs for not converting degraded forest areas into agricultural lands need to be compensated, for example through payments for ecosystem services, carbon credits, and alternative livelihoods.

- Establishing an effective monitoring and evaluation system is crucial for successful project implementation and increases efficiency and effectiveness.

- There is a need to carefully assess government procedures and systems before attempting to introduce new systems that will either replace or supplement existing ones.

Box 3: Conserving biodiversity in Benin's sacred forests

Sacred forests are forests maintained by local communities for religious reasons. They may be small in area but are often rich in biodiversity and play important ecological, cultural and spiritual roles. Benin has more than 2900 sacred forests covering an area of 18 400 ha. Many have become degraded by uncontrolled exploitation, conversion to agriculture, urban pressures, strong demand for woodfuel, rural poverty, and the loss of religious beliefs. Under ITTO project PD 754/14, 42 sacred forests were legally recognized and demarcated, and simple forest management plans were developed. More than 150 ha of sacred forests were enriched with seedlings of valuable tree species, and fauna species were re-introduced in some areas. Local people are benefiting from income-generating ventures introduced through the project, such as agroforestry; beekeeping; the raising of goats, pigs, poultry and rabbits; fish farming; and the production and trade of non-wood forest products. Parts of the buffer zones of sacred forests have been planted with teak, acacia and other species to help satisfy local needs for timber and wood energy.

Enrichment-planting in Benin's sacred forest conducted as part of ITTO project PD 754/14. A total of 162 hectares were enriched with indigenous species in 42 sacred forests under the project. Photo: B.Bossou/CESAREN

A woman works in a tree nursery in Benin. Enabling local communities to participate in forest activities and use products produced in planted forests helps them develop a sense of ownership for restoration work Photo: J. Blaser

Community members tend a frake sapling in the Duekoue gazetted forest, Côte d'Ivoire (PD 419/06 (TICAD-5)). Photo: E. Amonkou/SODEFOR

National information systems, statistics, timber trade and timber-tracking

Three of the five projects in this category were regional, and the findings from these can be summarized as follows:

- In projects and activities related to trade and industry, as far as possible involve regional economic communities in implementation.

- The establishment of a regional coordination team, including a regional manager, will help ensure adequate oversight of project implementation across countries.

- Ensuring that all participating countries reach a common understanding of project objectives, scope and targets is essential.

Other more general lessons include the following:

- A project's technical and scientific findings should provide practical recommendations for policymakers at all levels.

- Ensuring the effective dissemination of the main findings and achievements of projects to potential users and wider audiences in English, French and other widely spoken languages will help broaden community support.

- With wood consumption increasing in Africa, there is a need and opportunity to develop the inter-African trade of wood and timber products by removing artificial barriers and increasing dialogue on this issue in regional economic bodies.

- Lessons learnt from ITTO project PD 620/11, which trained laboratory staff in advanced timber-tracking methodologies, included the following:

  - Sufficient training on the implementation of quality control for the collection of reference samples is needed.

  - Sample sizes should be large enough to ensure accurate results, with work expanded to include all major tree species.

Francois Mankessi, a trainee from the Congo, practises a DNA extraction technique at the Thünen Institute of Forest Genetics, Germany (PD 620/11). Photo: Lasse Schindler/Thünen Institute

  - There is generally a need for wider use of genetic identification tools for forest law enforcement and management in African countries. Ultimately, these tools will increase access to markets for African forest products.

Community members plant acacia seedlings in a maize field as part of efforts to establish agroforestry in the buffer zone of the Zounkidjazoun sacred forest, Benin (PD 754/14). Photo: B. Bossou/CeSaReN

A project officer introduces forest restoration to a group of displaced persons, Côte d'Ivoire (PD 419/06 (TICAD-5)). Photo: E. Amonkou/SODEFOR

Women and children pose outside a warehouse built by ITTO project PD 419/06 (TICAD-5) in Duekoue, Côte d'Ivoire. Photo: P. Masupa/ITTO

Fostering change for the future

Future project and policy work to promote sustainable forestry in Africa will be undertaken in a rapidly changing global political environment and amid concerns about human safety, conflict, climate change, food security and emerging zoonotic diseases. Nevertheless, there are also opportunities for the forest sector in Africa to help in "building back better", increasing resilience and economic output, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Governments, civil society, the private sector, scientific organizations and the global donor community will need to work together to optimize the positive impacts of interventions and counter potential threats. Areas of work that address the objectives of both ITTO and TICAD might include:

- Halting the degradation and loss of natural forests as a means for supporting food security at the landscape level.

- Reducing the risk of emergence of new zoonotic diseases by minimizing the opening up of remote forests and better regulating wildlife trade and markets.

- Protecting conservation investments in the face of diverse pressures causing forest loss and degradation.

- Enacting policies and strategies for a nature-positive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and towards a more circular bioeconomy.

- Encouraging forest landscape restoration in areas with high land-degradation pressures, such as refugee hotspots.

Policy guidance for ITTO and TICAD

A framework for collaboration between ITTO and TICAD can be identified that responds to the challenges and needs of African people in the pursuit of sustainable development and which is in line with the objectives of the two institutions. ITTO's focus is on sustainable forest management and timber value-adding and trade. Its projects are usually implemented over 1–4 years (but can also be phased and thus span much longer periods); they emphasize best practices, capacity development in communities and institutions, and scaling up at the local, national and international levels. ITTO has considerable experience in project implementation and a well-developed process, with safeguards, that provides transparency, oversight, monitoring and reporting.

Collaboration between ITTO and TICAD, with sufficient seed funding from the Japanese government, has the potential to attract funding from other donors and financing institutions due to the strong interest among many such donors in promoting sustainable forest management in Africa. Project proposals could also explore co-funding options by associating ITTO/TICAD projects with broader initiatives and programmes in West Africa and the Congo Basin (e.g. those of the Global Environment Facility and the Central African Forest Initiative).

To maximize the contributions of projects to the shared objectives of the two institutions, as well as to national and regional goals, projects submitted by African countries to ITTO should:

- Be designed in the region and focus on forest landscape-based solutions, recognizing the importance of restoring landscape intactness, conserving biodiversity, and enhancing ecosystem services for present and future generations.[4]
- Be designed to function at multiple scales based on spatial planning.
- Have specific objectives on biodiversity conservation and the delivery of other ecosystem services.
- Have robust monitoring, evaluation and learning systems with clear, measurable indicators.
- Lead to improved economic outcomes in local communities and at the national level.

Dorothy Asare Akoto interviews a smallholder in the Sunyani Forest District, Ghana, as part of field research for her thesis, partly funded by an ITTO Fellowship. Photo: D. Akoto

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4 Forest landscape-based solutions seek to enhance the role of forests in combating climate change (mitigation and adaptation) and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on (for example) the roles of green supply chains, biocorridor restoration, community-based REDD+ projects, innovative forest monitoring systems, and research and development. See ITTO's *Guidelines for Forest Landscape Restoration in the Tropics* at www.itto.int/guidelines.

Elephants in Bayanga, Central African Republic. Future ITTO projects in Africa should focus on forest landscape-based solutions, recognizing the importance of restoring landscape intactness, conserving biodiversity, and enhancing ecosystem services. Photo: Intu Boedhihartono

A mature *Pericopsis elata* in the Mpameso Forest Reserve, Ghana. Photo: NDF

For governments, field practitioners, and academic and research institutions

- Projects should support the sustainable management of production forests in locations where a long-term commitment to project objectives can be made.

- Capacity development in institutions and communities should be integral to all projects.

- Projects should use appropriate information and communication technologies (e.g. DNA barcoding, drones and mobile-phone applications) and support training and education in the application of these in the forest sector in Africa.

For governments and field practitioners

- Projects must include local communities, Indigenous Peoples (where applicable), women and youth in project development, implementation and outcomes and ensure that free, prior and informed consent is always obtained.

- Project development should include wide consultation with communities to enable (for example) an understanding of local needs, favoured tree species, and the level of training and infrastructure required.

- Livelihood programmes should establish sustainable and green supply chains and have a formal plan for monitoring livelihood outcomes for an adequate period (e.g. three years) after project completion.

- Regional and transboundary projects should be underpinned by work-sharing and planning agreements, high-level participation, and formal signed agreements between the governments involved.

Projects must include local communities, Indigenous Peoples, women and youth in project development, implementation and outcomes and ensure that free, prior and informed consent is always obtained. Photo: A. Sarre

Delphine Ahossi, president of the MALEBI women's group, stands in a restored area planted with teak, acacia and cassava, Ahua gazetted forest, Côte d'Ivoire (PD 725/13). Photo: MALEBI