

ITTO IN RACEWOOD

**Pointe Noire, Republic of Congo
29-30 September 2011**

RACEWOOD is a unique meeting that brings together timber companies of the Congo Basin along with their European counterparts in order to promote economic, technological and environmental partnerships. RACEWOOD is jointly organized by IFIA, the Government of the Republic of Congo, FAO, Proinvest of the European Commission, and ITTO.

The 4th edition of RACEWOOD was held in Pointe Noire, Republic of Congo from 29-30 September 2011, and follows previous editions in Gabon (2004), Ghana (2006), and Cameroon (2008).

During the opening ceremony, ITTO Executive Director, Emmanuel Ze Meka, highlighted the potential of timber processing in becoming a driver for economical development for the sub-region, in particular considering that the forest of the Congo Basin are the second largest forest conglomerate in the world, after the Amazon, containing a vast richness of resources that need to be valorized. For such a reason, ITTO has been supporting its member countries in the Congo Basin for achieving this goal, with several actions since 1990, such as:

- The International Conference for the promotion of further processing of tropical hardwoods in the African Region held in 1990;
- The study entitled "Development of Further Processing in ITTO producer countries" done in cooperation with the International Trade Center in 2002;
- An study of further processing of timber with the participation of experts of ATO, which later provided inputs for the ATO Action Plan 2004-2013;
- The International Conference for the Promotion of Intra-African Trade held in Ghana in 2009, that revealed that Africa imports US\$4,400 millions in timber products, out of which only 10% comes from the region; and
- The various workshops held by IFIA and ITTO between 2010-2011 in the countries of the Congo Basin, which have analyzed the situation of further processing, and the recommendations and the way forward they have compiled in what is called the white book "*livre blanc*" to be presented later here in RACEWOOD.

In order to further exemplify the role that further timber processing has in the economical development, Mr. Ze Meka mentioned that according to ITTO's statistic one cubic meter of *Sapelli* is priced at 235 Euros in log form and between 370-450 Euros in sawn timber, and that such price could significantly increase in the form of finished product such as mouldings or furniture.

Mr. Ze Meka also described the road that many of the African countries have followed in order to force the further processing of timber, such as banning log exports, nonetheless he also recognized that further processing of timber in the Congo basin is still to take-off.

Mr. Ze Meka stressed that this is the right moment for the countries of the Congo Basin to engage in further timber processing, as the political will is strong, and the crisis of 2008 has made clear the need to diversify production and the importance of regional and local markets. He also mentioned that ITTO in collaboration with relevant partners will keep promoting further timber processing, hoping that governments and private sector will also join efforts.

Other main messages delivered during the opening ceremony indicated a bigger demand in Europe for FSC certified timber, according to the President of IFIA, Mr. Ralph Ridder.

The opening ceremony was followed by a visit to the stands of 47 companies involved in the forest sector in the region of the Congo basin, and by an exhibition of 10 timber houses

specially built for the occasion, in an effort to demonstrate the benefits of building with tropical timber and create a national program for wood house construction in the Republic of Congo.

Other topics discussed during the meeting were financing for timber processing, market for certified timber, meeting market requirements (with focus on FLEGT and Lacey Act), technologies for timber processing and timber tracking.