

ITTO Tropical Forest

UPDATE

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

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The cutting edge of SFM

SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT (SFM) has always been a goal of foresters. The trouble is, the concept of SFM has changed. Once, foresters learned mainly about sustained timber yield—how to calculate it, measure it and achieve it in the forest. Now, the profession has many more concerns: biodiversity conservation, community involvement, and a rapidly changing marketplace, to name only a few. In the tropics, the forestry profession is beset with problems ranging from illegal harvesting and disputed land tenure to the high profitability of alternative land-uses and competition in international timber markets.

Given the changing nature of the challenges facing SFM in the tropics, international treaties set up to meet them must also evolve. The first International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) was agreed in 1983, the second in 1994. Now, a third has been agreed. The new ITTA, which was adopted amid dramatic scenes on the last day of the fourth part of negotiations in January 2006, is set to come into effect in 2008.

The new agreement is at the cutting edge of international



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Cover image Leaf-cutter ants (*Attini* spp) at work in an Honduran rainforest. © Konrad Wothe/APL

efforts to promote SFM and a sustainable timber trade, say three negotiators who were willing to put their views on paper (page 4). The ITTA, 1994 contained 13 objectives; the new agreement has two key objectives (described on page 3) and 19 specific objectives that expand the scope of ITTO's work. Strengthening the capacity of members to improve forest law enforcement and governance and address illegal logging and related trade in tropical timber will now be an explicit task of the Organization, as will contributing to sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The Organization will also have a clear mandate to encourage its members to recognise the role of forest-dependent indigenous and local communities in achieving SFM and to develop strategies to enhance the capacity of these communities to sustainably manage tropical timber-producing forests. At the same time it will continue its work to promote access to, and transfer of, technologies related to tropical forest industries and increased and further processing of tropical timber from sustainable sources.

The making of forest policy at the international level runs many risks, but probably the greatest of all is that the policies thus made will never be implemented. This is because there is often a huge gap between the international ideal and the reality on the ground, and many countries simply lack the means to put the policies into effect. To be useful, an international organisation such as ITTO must be able to provide its members with resources with which the process of policy implementation can commence. Since 1986, when it became operational, the Organization has committed about US\$280 million in grants towards the achievement of its objectives within member countries, and ITTO certainly ranks among the most generous of all the international organisations concerned with tropical forests. This is a feature that Katsuhiko Kotari, one of ITTO's founding fathers, particularly admires (page 32)—the ability to put policy into practice. Yet spread between 33 producer members over nearly 20 years, the power of a sum of money of this size to drive change is limited; while certainly useful, it falls far short of what is necessary to bring the tropical forest estate

under SFM and to optimise the contribution of tropical forest industries to sustainable development. Under the new agreement, a sub-account for thematic sub-programs has been set up to make it easier for donors to contribute. Time will tell what effect this change will have on the availability of funds to implement the Organization's policy initiatives in member countries.

Elsewhere in this edition we highlight a new law in Brazil that will lead to the country's first timber concessions (page 7). Concessions will only be allocated if bidding entities—companies, communities and non-governmental organisations—can demonstrate high management standards and the generation of social benefits. Two articles on the Tapajós National Forest, where timber harvesting has been carried out with the assistance of an ITTO project, explore the ground-level impacts of a prototype SFM regime, both social and environmental, and foreshadow what might be expected with the adoption of a highly transparent concession regime.

Another article examines the state of teak improvement work in countries where teak is found naturally, and finds that a great deal of work needs to be done before the highest-quality genetic material can be made available for the expanding area of teak plantations. Another looks at France's tropical timber trade, recommending steps that tropical timber producers and ITTO could take to grow that trade, and another at Gabon's efforts to institute a reliable system for the gathering of timber-sector statistics.

This edition of the *TFU*, which was due out at the end of 2005, has been delayed by a number of factors; I apologise for any inconvenience caused. The next edition—a special report on the status of forest management in the tropics—will follow very quickly. It will show that a great deal of progress is being made in the implementation of SFM in the tropics, despite the sector's problems. Yet only a small fraction of the tropical forest estate is under SFM; ITTO and other international and national promoters of SFM will no doubt be kept as busy as ants for many years to come.

Alastair Sarre