

**Statement by the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) to the ITTO 60th Council
Session held in Yokohama, Japan, 2-6 December 2024**

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

CSAG would like to thank the Government of Japan, the City of Yokohama and the ITTO for hosting this Council session.

Globally, forest loss and degradation continue to degrade the quality of ecosystems worldwide. We believe that solving the problem requires more than just planting trees, and ITTO and its partners have increasingly recognised that a landscape approach is essential. However, while Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR), as presented by ITTO and its partners, is an effort to increase the resilience of landscapes and the communities they support, it should not only be about restoring pristine forests but also about making landscapes more resilient for Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) and Sustainable Land Management practices that provide a pathway to resilience, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation, including supporting forest-dependent communities, especially women, in their efforts to increase and sustain the benefits they derive from land and forest management.

In many forest-dependent communities, women are often responsible for managing scarce resources such as water, food and fuel, positioning them as key stakeholders in land and forest restoration initiatives. They also have indigenous knowledge of local farming methods, plants and ecosystems, and sustainable land management and restoration practices. We have no doubt, therefore, that, if empowered, women's agricultural experience can inform effective strategies for rehabilitating and restoring degraded land by identifying Indigenous timber and non-timber forest species and selecting crops that will improve soil health and build resilience and sustainability for future generations within the community. Hence, members need to ensure that forest restoration should not only focus on reforestation but to consider the wide range of focus, perspectives and needs of people, biodiversity and also economic development.

CSAG is very pleased that ITTO agreed to the CSAG panel discussion on 'Restoration strategies and experiences: Challenges and lessons from Africa, Asia and South America', not only to further highlight the importance of community-led restoration but also to focus on financial inclusion, women's empowerment and policies that enable an environment where livelihoods and landscape restoration are all taken care of.

CSAG/TRAFFIC, through our collaboration with partners, has been working on various tools and systems that contribute towards integrating sustainable use and trade into landscape restoration. TRAFFIC is currently partnering with Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER) and others to develop the Global Biodiversity Standard, a new standard and certification system that aims to recognise and promote the protection, restoration, and enhancement of biodiversity within a range of different landscapes and land management interventions (tree planting, habitat restoration and agroforestry). In partnership with FairWild and the IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULI), TRAFFIC is developing guidance for restoration practitioners wishing to integrate sustainable use into their landscapes as part of a project funded by the Endangered Landscapes and Seascapes Programme, and TRAFFIC developed guidance to support sustainable use of CITES-listed rosewood tree species which includes criteria relevant to restoration.

CSAG notes the considerable knowledge and experience among forest-dependent communities, including women, on how to restore degraded forest landscapes. For example,

CSAG members have already implemented highly successful restoration projects in several tropical countries. The African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests (REFACOF), is very active in ecosystem restoration in several regions:

1. In Cameroon, REFACOF works in three (3) mangrove areas: the Douala estuary, the Rio del Rey and the Rio Ntem. REFACOF's interventions have resulted in the restoration of 600 hectares of degraded mangrove and terrestrial forest areas. More than 3,000 local workers were involved in this restoration project, with women making up about 80% of the workforce;
2. In Togo and Benin, ITTO women-led agroforestry projects restored about 100 hectares of degraded landscapes in the Lakes and Blitta regions of Togo. These initiatives involved over 150 women and introduced agroforestry systems to improve food security and increase incomes through agroforestry and landscape restoration practices;
3. In Côte d'Ivoire, the MALEBI association organized women and young people to reforest more than 500 hectares with food crops (taungya) in three classified forests, as part of the Forest Investment Project (PIF) financed by the World Bank. This initiative involved more than 60 associations and 2000 people, 90% of whom were women and 10% young people; and

With the revision of the FairWild Standard to version 3.0, FairWild now covers a wider range of land-use/collection scenarios, including restoration and rewilding projects. The FairWild standard and certification system is therefore a valuable framework for certifying the sustainable use of restored landscapes.

In South America, many initiatives are being developing on ecosystems restoration with focus on conservation and productive landscapes, highlighting the importance of integrate social and cultural diversity, of using timber and non-timber valuable species for restoration, the importance human wellbeing; the role of women and young and the need to address big challenges and big opportunities, For example the lack of enough financial resources to sustain the initiatives and monitoring and to enhance and position the wider, integrate and inclusive restoration concept and related tools.

At the same time, forest restoration programs in Indonesia show the role of gender in supporting target achievement. The research collaboration on the impact of the restoration program in Lampung Province, conducted by the Forum Komunikasi Kehutanan Masyarakat (FKKM) and the University of Lampung (Unila), shows that there is an increase in gender roles in farmer institutions and forest management, and can show that additional income from this program can reach 10-15%. Gender also plays a role in increasing land cover by about 5% per year.

We encourage ITTO to rampant up support of more gender-focused projects.

Given the escalating global climate crisis and the central role of forests in mitigating and adapting to climate change, CSAG looks forward to working closely with ITTO to achieve its overarching objectives, in particular the various efforts to promote the sustainable management of tropical timber-producing forests and make visible the role of women in those efforts.

Recommendations

Moving forward, we therefore recommend that:

1. ITTO should consider actively engaging our member organizations and communities in the various conversations and opportunities that contribute to sustainable development and climate goals, for example, in working with the Global Green Fund (GCF)¹ on forest landscape restoration and resilient livelihoods to help scale up the area and governance of forest landscape restoration and increase the provision of goods and services from planted and restored forests in ITTO member countries;
2. To recognize and promote the role of women in both forestry and land restoration, and to improve outcomes for women and the environment, there is a need for gender-sensitive policies and laws that are informed by women's experiences;
3. Support is needed from the ITTO, its member countries and investors to address the barriers women face to effective and efficient participation in the forest sector, such as cultural barriers, limited access to resources, land tenure, benefit sharing, rights, and decision-making power; and
4. Given the momentum already created by the various ITTO projects, we urge the ED, Council and Secretariat to further accelerate support for community-led implementation of the ITTO's published guidelines on Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR), in particular two (2) of the principles and guiding elements (i.e. Principles 2 & 5) formulated by the ITTO to support stakeholders involved in FLR implementation and outcomes. This recommendation is further supported by lessons² already learned by ITTO from case studies in restoration that: a.) To ensure the effective participation of local stakeholders and guarantee fair benefits, communities need to have strong rights and secured tenure based on customary practices; b.) Stakeholder engagement, especially among local communities, plays a big role in the success of FLR; and c.) Strong awareness among local people and communities of the direct and indirect economic and social benefits of FLR is essential for obtaining their commitment and support.

We encourage the Council to also take into account our previous statements.

We look forward to working with ITTO on all these issues.

Thank you.

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¹ <https://www.greenclimate.fund/ae/itto>

² ITTO 2020. Guidelines for forest landscape restoration in the tropics. ITTO Policy Development Series No. 24. International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), Yokohama, Japan, p.135

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