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“The world needs more effective and focused international action on tropical forests. That will help reduce poverty, protect biodiversity and also mitigate the effects of climate change.”

Emmanuel Ze Meka, [ITTO](#)'s Executive President, will be urging more effective and focused international action on tropical forests at the XIII World Forestry Congress.



[\[watch the video: part 1\]](#)

[\[watch the video: part 2\]](#)

Yokohama – Rome, FAO headquarters. The **International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)**, an intergovernmental organization headquartered in Yokohama, Japan, has been promoting sustainable forest management (SFM) in the tropics for the last 20 years. At the core of [ITTO](#)'s approach, integrating policy discussion and direct field actions, is the commitment to develop in full the potential of tropical forests to reduce poverty, to protect biodiversity and to conserve the global environment.

Q. In your opinion, how much progress has been made over the last 10 years in the management of tropical forests worldwide? [\[watch the video: part 1\]](#)

A. To put things into perspective, we should go a little bit back, to 1987, when [ITTO](#), which was established in 1986, carried out, among its first activities, **a study on the sustainable management of natural tropical forests for timber production**. The study was not concerned with the other products and services that forests could provide. Nevertheless, it was striking that the assessment **concluded that less than 1 million ha of tropical forests worldwide was deemed to have been managed sustainably**.

In 2005, [ITTO](#) published its first quantitative report on the status of forest management in the tropics. The report covered natural and planted production forests as well as protection forests that were managed sustainably. The result showed that **about 39 million ha of forests in the tropics were found to have been sustainably managed**. Of this, 25 million ha were natural production forests which accounted for most of industrial tropical timber produced while about 2 million ha were planted production tropical forests, with the remainder being sustainably managed protection forest.

[ITTO](#) is now preparing its second report on the status of forest management in the tropics for 2010. I am convinced that there will be further improvements towards the sustainable management of tropical forests. But we will still be quite far from the target of having [ITTO](#) member countries managing a majority of their tropical forests on a sustainable basis.

One notable achievement worth mentioning is the pioneering work of [ITTO](#) in 1992 on defining criteria for sustainable forest management, which has since been enriched, refined and adopted by various criteria and indicator processes and adapted to various types of forests. **The results that we see today have a lot to do with these landmarks decisions taken in early 1990s.**

It would be difficult to achieve sustainability if any one of those criteria is not properly addressed. I have to recognize here the work done by members of the [Collaborative Partnerships on Forests](#) who

have all contributed to consensus building revolving on this concept. I am also pleased to note other instances where the benefits of SFM are being recognised.

We can also take cognizance that various tools for implementing the elements of SFM have been developed. **We have to give due credit here to member countries, members of the [CPF](#), the industry and NGOs.** Although we still have to continue refining these tools, what we have now will enable us to make a real and significant difference in implementing SFM on the ground.

Another important trend is the **growing number of responsible private sector companies**, due to pressure by Governments and civil society and/or their own efforts to improve their public image and gain bigger shares of markets looking for products from sustainable sources.

I think that we have a host of factors which could substantially assist in strengthening the management of tropical forests in the future. We need a critical mass of interventions, in particular at the field level, in order to achieve concrete results.

Q. Accordino to ITTO's la test findings, how do you see the future trends of tropical forest plantations? [\[watch the video: part 2\]](#)

A. [ITTO](#) has recently produced a report on industrial plantations in the tropics, which will be launched during the World Forest Congress. The report shows that in 2005, the total area under forest plantations in tropical countries was 67.5 million ha, representing some 1.4% of the total land area of those countries. Much of the development in plantations has occurred in the Asia-Pacific region which accounts for 54 million ha, followed by Latin America and Caribbean (8.8 million ha) and tropical Africa (4.6 million ha).

This constitutes a significant and steady expansion, with tropical forest plantations having almost doubled in area during the period from 1995 to 2005, particularly in Asia-Pacific, where the rate is highest with India taking the lead, followed by Indonesia and to a lesser extent Thailand and Malaysia. **The forest plantation estates in Asia-Pacific are mainly composed of eucalyptus, rubberwood, teak and acacia.** Development of these estates has mainly depended on Government policies and programmes for the purpose of reducing deforestation and closing the gap between the dwindling supply of timber and the critically important issue of excess processing capacity.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the forest plantation industry underwent significant structural adjustment and consolidation with the view to increasing exports. The most commonly planted tree species in the region are eucalyptus and pines, with generally very high yields. **Brazil is taking the lead,** followed to a lesser extent by Venezuela, Peru and Cuba. **Pulpwood represents the bulk of tropical forest plantations in the region.**

In Africa, an unfavourable investment climate has significantly undermined the potential for forest plantation development. Nigeria, Sudan, Madagascar and Senegal have been in the forefront of efforts to establish forest plantations mainly to combat deforestation. The situation is changing rapidly in some parts of Western Africa, where Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are engaged in ambitious plantation programmes. **Ghana has recently launched a programme to plant 24 million trees aimed at restoring its rain forests and soaking up carbon dioxide.** Apart from the Republic of Congo, where some companies are involved in clonal planting of *Eucalyptus urophylla*, and where about 70 000 ha of plantations have been established, Central Africa is still lagging far behind as far as forest plantations are concerned.

Another opportunity is the growing interest in producing renewable energy particularly from biomass. As the rate of growth is fastest in the tropics, **tropical forest plantations can play a critical role in generating renewable energy,** provided that suitable species are identified, consistent plantations programmes are established, appropriate technologies are developed and concerns regarding environment protection and food security are duly addressed.

The development of forest plantations in the tropics, can help create employment particularly in rural areas, generate revenues, contribute to "green" energy and combat climate change.

However, to make the best use of this opportunity, some enabling conditions have to be put in place: the issue of land tenure and local community rights has to be satisfactorily resolved, the investment climate has to be made conducive, appropriate incentives have to be designed, capacity building is required, transfer of technology as well as applied research are needed and mechanisms to ensure equitable sharing

of benefits have to be put in place. **These represent serious constraints and challenges, but are certainly not beyond the reach of tropical countries**, considering the substantial benefits to be gained from establishing forest plantations in the tropics.

Emmanuel Ze Meka, a national of Cameroon with extensive experience of tropical forests, is [ITTO](#)'s first Executive Director from the African region. After a distinguished career with the Cameroonian government, **Emmanuel Ze Meka** joined [ITTO](#), gaining experience in all aspects of the Organization's work in his roles as Project Manager and, prior to taking up his post, as Assistant Director of [ITTO](#)'s divisions of Forest Industry and Reforestation and Forest Management.