

# The Tarapoto Process: establishing criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of Amazon forests

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*Eight countries of the Amazon Basin have jointly developed criteria and indicators within the framework of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization.*

It is often not possible to resolve environmental problems, much less to achieve sustainable development, solely within national boundaries. In 1978, eight countries of the Amazon Basin signed the Amazon Cooperation Treaty (ACT), recognizing it as the most effective instrument for discussion and agreement on policies for a region so complex and rich in natural resources.

The countries party to the treaty have made substantial progress in terms of the gradual joint definition of approaches and policies for the Amazon. They have mobilized a vast network of public and private institutions and organizations and devised strategies for the rational use of the region's natural resources to benefit its people. These strategies take into account the natural renewal cycles and survival chains of the fragile and diverse ecosystems of the region. The parties have worked to identify not only the economic potential of Amazon biodiversity and ways to use it more efficiently, but also the requisites for survival and reproduction of the region's plant and animal species, which are essential to the concept of sustainable

development embraced by the treaty's signatory countries.

An important achievement within the framework of the treaty has been the development of regional criteria and indicators for the sustainability of the Amazonian forest: the Tarapoto Process on Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainability of Amazon Forests. This process, the result of five years of consultation at all levels (including civil society as well as government) within and among the eight member countries, recognizes that each country's management has an impact on the region's forest resources and on its sustainable and integrated development. It aims to achieve a common understanding and harmonization of terms and definitions among countries.

The criteria and indicators will allow member countries to collect and analyse data more efficiently and will facilitate monitoring, evaluation and periodic reporting on progress achieved in sustainable forest management in the Amazon region. This will complement poverty reduction and food security initiatives.

Fifteen priority indicators have been

*Amazon forest landscape, Brazil*



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identified and are now being validated under a project being implemented since July 2004 in close cooperation with national forest programmes in each country.

### AN ORGANIZATION FOR AMAZON COOPERATION

The Amazon Cooperation Treaty is a regional instrument signed by the Governments of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela on 3 July 1978, expressing their joint intention to promote the harmonious development of the Amazon region, raise the standard of living of its peoples and integrate each country's Amazon territories into its respective national economy.

As a regional legal instrument, the treaty provides the underlying framework for cooperation in many areas of sustainable development, including sustainable forest management. It serves as a regional forum for intergovernmental discussion and as an official channel of communication among its member countries and other regional and global organizations.

In 1995, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Amazon region reinforced the treaty's institutional strength by creating the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) to replace the previous *pro tempore* secretariats which had shifted from country to country. ACTO established its permanent secretariat in Brasilia, Brazil in December 2002.

At the time of its establishment, the permanent secretariat identified its main task as the development of a strategic plan to provide guidelines for formulating, implementing and monitoring feasible regional projects, programmes and initiatives. The secretariat would also maintain dialogue and consultation with the member countries as the main means of carrying the treaty's proposals forward.

During its short institutional life, the permanent secretariat has negotiated and signed a number of cooperation agreements with organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations to execute important tasks towards sustainable development in the Amazon region. Its efforts to integrate the political, strategic, technical and operational spheres reflect the political will of the member governments in taking action to reinvigorate the Amazon Cooperation Treaty.

ACTO has placed particular emphasis on formulating its Strategic Plan for the period 2004 to 2012, adopted at the Eighth Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 14 September 2004 in Manaus, Brazil. The plan expresses the shared topics of concern of the Amazon countries and the direction to be adopted

by the permanent secretariat. In operational terms, the plan is built around four strategic axes (or coordination sectors) and six programmatic areas (see Table). ACTO is implementing the Tarapoto Process within the framework of the Strategic Plan; criteria for sustainable forest management are considered as one of the four intervention areas under the programmatic area "Forests, soils and protected areas".

As can be seen in the table, however, the sustainability of the Amazon forests is affected either directly or indirectly by interventions in all programmatic areas.

### CRITERIA AND INDICATORS FOR THE REGION

In the 1990s, the need was recognized to establish criteria to define the sus-

Logical matrix of the strategic plan, showing intervention areas

Strategic axes	Conservation and sustainable use of renewable natural resources	Knowledge management and technological exchange	Regional integration and competitiveness	Institutional strengthening
Programmatic areas	Intervention spaces			
Water	Integrated management of hydrobiological resources Standard agreement on measures towards preventing contamination			
Forests, soils and protected areas	The sustainability of the Amazon as a standing forest Criteria for sustainable forest management (Tarapoto Process) Integral management of natural protected areas Ecotourism			
Biological diversity, biotechnology and biotrade	Regional Amazon strategy on biodiversity Regional Amazon programme on biotrade			
Territory ordering, human settlements and indigenous affairs	Ecological and economic macro-zoning Cultural diversity and respect for the rights of indigenous people Training of indigenous leaders			
Social infrastructure: health and education	Network on epidemiological surveillance and fight against malaria Fomentation of cross-cultural and bilingual education Support to local capacity building Virtual education			
Transportation, electric power and communication infrastructure	Initiative on integration of the South American regional infrastructure Free navigation in the Amazon rivers System of early warning aiming at preventing disasters			

Source: ACTO, 2004.

tainability (environmental, social and economic) of the forests and to obtain indicators to evaluate and monitor their state. The then *pro tempore* secretariat of ACT initiated the process of developing criteria and indicators that would take account of the particular features of the ecosystems of the region. With support from the governments of the member countries, the treaty secretariat started the task of identifying criteria and indicators, with a view to reconciling environmental sustainability factors with optimum use of the natural resources of Amazon forests.

The process built on progress made in the 1990s by initiatives developed among countries in other regions seeking to manage their forests sustainably. These included the Helsinki Process in Europe (now the Pan-European Process on Criteria and Indicators, under the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe), which came into being because of concern over the effects of acid rain on forests and a growing environmental awareness; the Montreal Process, which began in 1993 and estab-

lished a forum to produce criteria for the conservation and management of temperate and boreal forests; and the work of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) on sustainable forest management.

In learning from these and other important initiatives, the treaty secretariat was aware of how essential it was to take into account the economic and cultural differences between the Amazon and other regions, as well as the region's legal frameworks, structures and institutional capacities, which are decisive for implementation of effective and efficient development policies.

#### **DEVELOPING THE TARAPOTO PROPOSAL**

The Tarapoto Process was born in February 1995 at the First Regional Meeting on Criteria and Indicators of Amazon Forest Sustainability, organized in Tarapoto, Peru by the ACT *pro tempore* secretariat. Representatives and forest policy-makers from the eight member countries attended this meeting, as well as experts from such international institutions as

FAO (the main ally in the process), the Global Environment Facility, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Resources Institute. The meeting identified 12 criteria and 77 indicators of Amazon forest sustainability, divided into three categories: national level, management and service unit level and global level.

This proposal was supported by the Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the ACT signatory countries, held in Lima, Peru in December 1995. In the Lima Declaration, the ministers underlined the progress achieved and resolved to promote the adoption of a regional document about criteria and indicators for the sustainability of the Amazon forest to continue the Tarapoto Process after the conclusion of national consultations.

On the basis of this mandate from the ACT member countries, the Tarapoto Proposal underwent a broad process of analysis and discussion in each of the Amazon countries between 1996 and 2000, involving a total of 351 institutions and 830 participants from all sectors.

*Countries that have signed the Amazon Cooperation Treaty recognize that the region's challenges of relieving poverty and meeting domestic needs for wood and wood energy influence the conservation of forests*



At the Seventh Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, in November 2000, the treaty organization gave the permanent secretariat the task of formally launching the Tarapoto Process, with a view to the definitive adoption of a specific number of criteria and indicators of Amazon forest sustainability. The secretariat was also entrusted with identifying mechanisms and procedures that would allow validation of the indicators selected as having a high priority.

The secretariat consolidated all the national reports from the various countries into a single document, which was reviewed at a second regional meeting in Tarapoto in 2001. On this occasion representatives of the Amazon coun-

tries selected and prioritized the criteria and indicators contained in the original 1995 Tarapoto Proposal according to the degree of consensus and their perceived applicability. This was necessary because so many criteria and indicators were originally identified that the member countries would have been unable to implement them to monitor, evaluate and report on progress in the management of their forests.

The level of consensus regarding the need for a reduced number of practical indicators that would be easier to measure and assess was an important element facilitating their adoption by the treaty member countries.

Fifteen indicators were selected at the second regional meeting, corresponding

to eight criteria classified as top priorities, having been identified by all the countries as “very applicable” (see Box). It was decided that these 15 indicators should be the first to be validated in a regional project.

A common terminology will also be established among the countries, facilitating the gathering of information to support decisions on the conservation, use and management of each member country’s natural resources.

#### REGIONAL VALIDATION PROJECT

The 20-month regional validation project has received a contribution of approximately US\$400 000 under an agreement made between FAO and ACTO early in 2004. It will be implemented in close collaboration with the national forest programmes of the various countries, with the aim of establishing synergy with them. The secretariat also sought assistance from FAO in the implementation of the indicators at forest management unit level.

Objectives of the project include:

- identifying, through a process of on-site verification, a set of indicators that will facilitate periodic monitoring, evaluation and reporting – to the country’s population in general – on progress achieved in sustainable management of the member countries’ Amazon forests as a way of helping them to reduce poverty and improve food security;
- jointly boosting the Tarapoto Process in the eight ACTO member countries, through analysis, discussion and practical implementation of the validation process for indicators identified as having “priority one” status;
- training the technical staff of the institutions responsible for carrying out the Tarapoto Process mandate in each of the Amazon countries in the vari-



*Amazon forests are a vital habitat and source of livelihoods, containing age-old cultures and ancestral knowledge; shown, in Ecuador, people harvest the edible fruit of *Prunus serotina*, use the leaves to heal bruises and make instruments from the wood*



ous activities involved in validating the selected indicators;

- training the officers and decision-makers of the various ACTO governments so that they will have the capacity and skill to make informed decisions on forest resources on the

basis of information derived from the monitoring and measurement of the indicators;

- periodically disseminating within the region and throughout the world reports of the progress achieved by the Tarapoto Process member countries

regarding sustainable management of the Amazon forest as demonstrated by the validation process, as well as the methodology used in validating the indicators;

- providing member countries with a standardized forest management instrument that enables them to provide regular information – to their own populations as well as to the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), FAO, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other bodies requiring it – on their progress towards sustainable forest management as a contribution to sustainable development.

The ACTO permanent secretariat, in coordination with FAO, asked the member countries to nominate national coordinators who would be responsible for implementation of the project in their respective countries. A regional coordinator, hired by FAO, would oversee the project network. The coordinators met for the first time in Lima on 26 and 27 July 2004 at the First Regional Workshop for Project Coordination, where they shared information about their respective national forest policies. The member countries acknowledged that although they had not all reached the same level in developing their forest policies, this exchange of experiences and information encouraged them to work in the same direction. With the direct support of their governments, they hoped in a few months to achieve:

- a regional, field-tested methodology for validating the indicators of Amazon forest sustainability;
- a set of properly validated indicators of Amazon forest sustainability suitable for all the ACTO countries;
- a corpus of institutions and technical staff adequately trained in gathering information and in measuring variables, capable of starting to apply

### **Fifteen priority indicators of sustainable Amazon forest management**

#### **NATIONAL LEVEL**

1. Existence of policies and a legal framework for land-use planning through ecological and economic zoning
2. Area, by forest type, categorized as conservation areas, in relation to total forest area
3. Rate of conversion of forest cover to other uses
4. Quantity and quality of appropriate techniques for forest management and sustainable production
5. Investment in research, education and technology transfer
6. Quantity and quality of research and sustainable development projects in course of implementation

#### **MANAGEMENT UNIT LEVEL**

7. Forest management plan and other plans concerning the use of forest resources, approved by the authorities responsible
8. Frequency of the evaluation of management plan implementation and the average percentage of implementation
9. Degree of utilization of environmentally sound, appropriate and compatible technologies
10. Proportion of environmental protection areas as against permanent production areas
11. Existence of prevention measures to protect water courses from the impact of forest extraction activities
12. Number of direct and indirect jobs, and income levels

#### **GLOBAL LEVEL**

13. Contribution to the conservation of biological diversity
14. Contribution to the maintenance, restoration and protection of the cultural values and diversity of the indigenous and local population
15. Contribution to the economy, health, culture, science and recreation



*The implementation of criteria and indicators should enable women, young people and forest communities to play a greater role in decision-making concerning Amazon forest management*

the validated indicators periodically and systematically in their respective countries;

- the capacity, among officers and decision-makers from the various governments of the region, to analyse the information gathered from the measurements and to evaluate the validated indicators over time, and to use this knowledge as a basis for appropriate decisions to rectify negative trends in management of the Amazon forest resource;
- a body of information on the validated indicators of Amazon forest sustainability and on the methodology, mechanisms and procedures adopted by ACTO countries in validating these indicators, which would be accessible not only to institutions concerned with the future of Amazon forests, but also to those involved in similar international processes dealing with other types of forest.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to the commitment and shared vision of its member countries, ACTO hopes to have periodic, simplified, standardized reports on each country's progress towards the sustainable management of its forest resources and on the progress of the Amazon region in general, so that it can provide informa-

tion to such international processes as the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and similar processes in other regions.

For ACTO, the joint criteria and indicators exercise is particularly important for offering the possibility of full compliance with the various commitments undertaken at major international fora on natural resource issues such as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992), the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002) and the fourth session of UNFF (Geneva, Switzerland, May 2004). Most specifically, the criteria and indicators will help meet the objectives of ACT, which recognizes that sustainable development entails taking into account the influence of the human dimension on the conservation of nature and the social and cultural aspects of forests – bearing in mind that the countries of the Amazon Basin are facing enormous challenges to relieve poverty, achieve goals of sustainable production in all fields, create jobs, meet domestic needs for basic raw materials (especially from forests) and meet the energy demands of growing economies.

The Amazon forests are the roots, origin and future of the region's people. They are a vital habitat and source

of livelihoods, containing age-old cultures and ancestral knowledge. ACTO recognizes that implementation of the validated indicators will enable women, young people and forest communities to play a greater role in decision-making concerning Amazon forest management. The organization views progress towards achievement of the goals of the Tarapoto Process with great hope, for along with the organization's other initiatives, this process will help to reduce poverty, raise living standards and improve the food security of the Amazon people. ♦



## Bibliography

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