From the point of view of private operators, sustainable timber supply chains are not merely about maintaining or increasing market share, although this is an important outcome. They also help businesses ensure efficiency, best practices and transparency at every link in the supply chain: in forests, on log trucks, in mills, on ships and in showrooms. Companies that put in place sustainable supply chains will know exactly where their products are from, where they are in the supply chain at any given time, and how they have been produced. Ultimately, the efficiencies this information will bring will help ensure profitability and increase other indicators of healthy businesses. Most importantly, legal and sustainable practices are the best way to maintain a long-term resource base and provide “wood security”, livelihoods and income, especially in rural areas.

**HOW TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAINS**

Building sustainable timber supply chains involves various levels of actions and commitments across a wide spectrum of stakeholders, who need to interact in a coordinated manner to ensure sustainable and legal production. Most African timber-producing countries lack sufficient infrastructure, technology and human resources to establish such supply chains. Public-private partnerships, both domestically and with consumer countries, are therefore necessary for sharing the incremental costs and ensuring the viability of initiatives to create sustainable supply chains. A long-term task is to reduce the multiplicity and complexity of the sustainable supply-chain requirements applied in different countries. This is necessary to enable small and medium-sized forest producers in tropical countries to become competitive and confident actors in domestic and international markets and to build capacity for sustainable management and production. In many cases, such enterprises will require external assistance and training to prevail in domestic and international markets and become drivers of sustainable forest management.
The shift towards sustainable tropical timber supply chains also requires facilitators. International organizations, including the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), have an important role to play in building capacity among small-scale operators and other stakeholders across supply chains, investigating and demonstrating the elements of sustainable supply chains, and sharing knowledge and technologies.

ITTO is working with major timber-purchasing companies in China (the world’s largest importer of tropical timber) and tropical producers and traders on the development of green supply chains. In October 2019, ITTO and a range of public- and private-sector partners convened an international forum in Shanghai, China, at which more than 30 large timber-purchasing companies agreed to:

- the development of modalities of work and collaboration by building on the experiences of the pre-existing GGSC platform in China;
- the building of an information database accessible to all, including the Global Timber Tracking Network;
- taking into account existing mechanisms for the verification of legality and sustainability within existing global rules and legal frameworks; and
- supporting the implementation of a business-to-business communication and information exchange as part of the GGSC Network, building on the output of an ITTO project and making information on markets for timber and wood products publicly available on a monthly basis.

**Building Capacity in Africa**

One of the major constraints in African tropical timber-producing countries is a lack of qualified human resources in government agencies and even among private-sector companies for mastering the complex requirements for producing, verifying, documenting and trading legal and sustainable forest products. These requirements involve, among other things, forest inventories and planning; sustainable forest management practices; forest operations and production; timber verification and forest certification; tracking products from the forest to the landing site; processing and shipping.

ITTO recently launched an initiative aimed at building a critical mass of human resources in both the public and private sectors, with a special focus on small and medium-sized enterprises and smallholders, for implementing sustainable timber supply chains in Congo Basin countries. Financed by the Government of Germany, the initiative will help improve curricula and other training modules to enable professionals and technicians in the private sector, trade and industry associations and government authorities to better understand and manage legal and sustainable tropical timber product supply chains within the framework of sustainable forest management. It will seek synergies with the GGSC Network and other partners to help ensure the availability of decent jobs for well-trained personnel in putting sustainable supply chains in place in West and Central Africa. It will also promote public-private partnerships in the sustainable production, trade and consumption of legal and sustainable wood and other forest products. Overall, the aim is to ensure that productive tropical forests are sustainably managed and that supply chains and trade flows, from the forest to end consumers, comply with legality and sustainability requirements.

We can create sustainable supply chains in West and Central Africa, and must do so if we want to harness the tremendous power of the market for the benefit of small and medium-sized enterprises and the global good. It requires a massive effort, and it requires resources from international donors and committed private-sector actors. However, the rewards will be significant: sustainable tropical timber supply chains will benefit forests, forest communities and, ultimately, all of us.

**ITTO**

The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) is an intergovernmental organization promoting the sustainable management and conservation of tropical forests and the expansion and diversification of international trade in tropical timber from sustainably managed and legally harvested forests. ITTO is an action- and field-oriented organization with more than 30 years of experience. ITTO’s membership (www.itto.int/about_itto/members/) represents about 90% of the global tropical timber trade and more than 80% of the world’s tropical forests. ITTO’s headquarters are located in Yokohama, Japan. Source: https://www.itto.int/about_itto/.

ITTO supports legal and sustainable supply chains by:

- Providing regular news and information on tropical timber trade market trends and trade from around the world in its Tropical Timber Market Report, published every two weeks (www.itto.int/market_information_service).
- Providing insights into trends in the global timber sector and markets, including the production and trade of primary and secondary processed wood products, in its Biennial Review of the World Timber Situation (www.itto.int/biennial_review).
- Making an online statistical database available (which contains data since 1990), an important tool for analyzing long-term trends in the trade of tropical timber and primary tropical timber products (industrial roundwood, sawn wood, veneer and plywood) and important shifts in timber production and further processing (www.itto.int/annual_review).

**ITTO supports legal and sustainable supply chains by:**

- Providing legal and sustainable supply chains (www.itto.int/legality).
- Providing insights into trends in the global timber sector and markets, including the production and trade of tropical timber (www.itto.int/market_information_service).
- Providing insights into trends in the global timber sector and markets, including the production and trade of primary and secondary processed wood products, in its Biennial Review of the World Timber Situation (www.itto.int/biennial_review).
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