

Opening Remarks
“International Expert Meeting on the Development and Implementation of
National Codes of Practice for Forest Harvesting – Issues and Options”
17-20 November 2003, Kisarazu City, Japan

On behalf of the Executive Director of the International Tropical Timber Organization, Dr. Manoel Sobral Filho, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to the organizers of this International Expert Meeting for giving me the opportunity to address the distinguished delegates at the opening of this important event.

ITTO is certainly no stranger to the issues, which will be discussed here in the next few days. In fact, improved forest harvesting or reduced impact logging in tropical forests is at the core of ITTO's concern with the sustainable management of the world's tropical forests. As Dennis Dykstra notes in an article, which will be shortly published in ITTO's Tropical Forest Update: “While acknowledging that by itself RIL cannot guarantee the sustainability of tropical forests, most tropical foresters and conservation advocates seem to agree that sustainable forest management cannot be achieved without it.”

In the past ten years, much action has been taken to improve forest harvesting, although not nearly enough. ITTO, together with FAO, CIFOR and others, has been active in trying to raise the standard of logging in the tropics. A lot of effort has gone into developing RIL techniques, testing them, determining their costs and benefits and proving that indeed, RIL is feasible in the tropics and contributes to managing tropical forests more sustainably. And yet, all these efforts do not yet seem to have had any substantial effect on the situation on the ground. Few logging companies and concessionaires in tropical countries apply RIL on a routine basis in their operations and most of those who currently do are companies, which are certified or work towards certification.

We have to ask ourselves why RIL is not taken up more enthusiastically if it is as beneficial as our studies seem to suggest. Firstly, in most cases, there is a lack of trained human resources, i.e. forest operators capable of carrying out RIL operations. Even if companies are interested in applying RIL, they will not find trained personnel to do the work the way they want it. Secondly, there is the much-cited cost factor: RIL in most cases requires a somewhat higher initial investment in planning and road construction, while many of the benefits occur at a later stage in the operation. Companies, which have no long-term interest in the forest, will not be convinced to apply RIL techniques. Their attitudes may only be changed if they see benefits in a longer-term engagement and find appropriate conditions for such an engagement.

Even under the best of circumstances, the myth of the elevated costs of RIL makes many companies reluctant to embark on the new path of RIL.

What is ITTO doing to address these challenges?

Since it started operations in 1987, ITTO has funded more than five hundred projects, pre-projects and activities valued at some US\$250 million, mostly implemented by national administrators and/or non-governmental organisations. Such projects promote groundwork action in tropical timber producing countries in the three tropical regions of Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America/Caribbean. While all of ITTO's projects have at least indirectly contributed to more sustainable forest practices, its main direct contribution to the adoption of RIL has come through a series of focused initiatives.

One major focus has been on capacity building, i.e. training forestry personnel in the application of RIL. In Brazil for example, through an ITTO project implemented by Fundação Floresta Tropical 138 forestry operators were trained. But this project had even more far reaching effects: The procedures for RIL are now encoded in the regulations and field guides by the Brazilian Forestry Agency IBAMA and other agencies and there is an increased awareness among private forest companies about the advantages of RIL. ITTO is also supporting initiatives in various countries to establish permanent logging schools, for example, in..... In a related initiative, ITTO is training forest owners and concessionaires in the application of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management.

A second major focus is the demonstration of RIL in the field. In Bulungan, East Kalimantan, CIFOR, with support from ITTO, has established a demonstration area in a State-owned concession, where loggers have been trained and are applying RIL techniques. The RIL activities in this area have attracted the interest of other logging companies and hundreds of loggers and forestry professionals have visited the site to view good logging practices in action.

Providing incentives to forest concessionaires to apply RIL is another concept promoted by ITTO, for example through the establishment of partnerships with the Government and NGOs. In the Republic of Congo, ITTO supports to a project to assist a forest concessionaire to establish a sound forest management plan by introducing RIL techniques in harvesting operations and integrating biodiversity management. In this endeavour, he is assisted by the Wildlife Conservation Society and all activities are implemented in close coordination with the Ministry of Forest Economy and Environment. The Ministry is considering the forest management

approach developed in this concession as a model to be applied as a standard in other concessions in the future.

These are good examples of what can be done in the field, but we are also aware that more needs to be done at policy level. Through its policy programme, ITTO has developed guidelines and criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management in the tropics, which include RIL as an integral component. The introduction of national codes of practice for forest harvesting is certainly another important step, which needs to go hand in hand with the aforementioned activities. ITTO therefore welcomes the organization of this meeting, which brings together experts from all over the world to exchange experiences and discuss the way forward. I would like to close by wishing you all a successful meeting and hope that the outcomes will contribute to finding solutions to improving forest harvesting in the tropics.

Thank you for your attention.