

SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT, THE SOLUTION AGAINST DEFORESTATION ?

Feedback on the International Tropical Timber Technical Association's Press Conference
on Tuesday 15th of March 2022

Paris, 21st of March 2022 – At the initiative of the Fair&Precious programme, the International Tropical Timber Technical Association (ATIBT) organised a webinar on Tuesday 15th of March to review its values, commitments and awareness in regards to sustainable management of tropical forests. During ATIBT's conference, civil society representatives were able to express themselves on the matter and share their field experience.

Key figures to remember:

*Concerning the Congo Basin rainforest**

- **300 million hectares of dense forests** (about 3/4 of the European Union's surface)
- **One of the two green lungs of the planet**
- **25% of tropical terrestrial CO² storage**
- **10 million hectares of certified land** (guaranteed zero deforestation)
- **+ 10 000 different plant species, 400 types of wood and + 1 400 different animal species** including emblematic mammals (great apes, elephants, buffaloes)

**ATIBT operates in Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of Congo, where FSC® certified forest concessions are based. ATIBT also works in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and in other countries in the basin to promote FSC® and PEFC certificates.*

Deforestation and the Fight Against Global Warming

With the climate emergency at our doorstep, various European projects related to environmental preservation have emerged in recent years. The Green Deal, initiated in 2019, and the draft regulation on imported deforestation published last November (a project that has been underway for more than two and a half years in France through the [SNDI](#) – National Strategy to Combat Imported Deforestation) are all initiatives that echo the mission of the ATIBT, which aims to achieve "Zero Deforestation" consumption.

ATIBT's support for certification and sustainable forest management is fully in accordance with the European strategy. For example, France, which has a history of activism against deforestation, recognises the FSC® & PEFC-PAFC certifications as key tools to combat deforestation. The EU also recognises these certifications as analysis and risk reduction methods.

Sustainable Forest Management - A Solution to Preserve the Second Lung of the Planet

Tropical rainforests play a crucial role in the healthy functioning of our world's environmental system. They have specific regulating functions by absorbing and capturing carbon. Furthermore, the Congo Basin, also referred to as the second lung of the planet, provides ecosystem services (medicinal resources, food, biodiversity maintenance etc.) when managed properly.

In addition, it is important to remember that the timber sector in the Congo Basin countries is the largest employer after the State. In Gabon, for example, it represents 17,000 to 18,000 jobs (with a real prospect of growth due to the progress of processing among the wood trades in the country).

With the ambition to promote sustainable forest management and to encourage certified tropical timber, the ATIBT's mission is to raise awareness and educate on the issues at stake through its Fair&Precious programme. This programme was created five years ago and it sets ten sustainability objectives for forest managers, in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, such as, maintaining biodiversity, reducing erosion, combating poaching, training of wood industry players, and more.

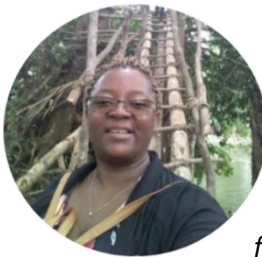
Fair&Precious includes both environmental and human commitments (such as the necessity to provide decent, remunerative and stable employment to the local populations). The programme also intends to promote sustainable management in producing countries as well as in European countries.

Testimonies : What Do the Field Experts Have to Say?

Edwige Eyang Effa, Researcher at the Tropical Ecology Research Institute based in Gabon and Norbet Gami, Anthropologist based in Congo have shared their views on the importance of preserving tropical forests in the Congo Basin.



Norbert Gami recalled that Congo is one of the first countries to be FSC® certified (since 2008). *'More than 2 million hectares of forests are FSC® certified which answers a national and political necessity to have a sustainably managed forest. Today, logging is seen as destructive, whereas on the contrary, we have seen enormous progress in terms of human and social conditions of the population in sustainably managed forests. Indeed, there is access to education and health systems, it is possible to legalise employment contracts, thus providing employment security. Certification is improving the daily lives of local and indigenous populations. There is real awareness in regards to forest preservation among the inhabitants.'*



Edwige Eyang Effa, shares her daily experience in certified concessions that participate in biodiversity development: *'Operators who respect sustainable regulations (through selective harvesting, rotation in logging, a guideline for conservation of rare ecosystems with the establishment of conservation zones and the protection of HVCs, etc.), participate greatly in the preservation of the environment. Gabon has recently imposed environmental impact studies on all forest concessions, which certified concessions already do in depth. They must indeed justify their participation in the protection of the fauna and flora (with a management and preservation plan for the protection of biodiversity and/or the preservation of the communities living there). Certification is always beneficial for the environment, but it also contributes the community and worker rights.'*

A recent WCS study has found that the elephant population in the basin is growing since the last 30 years as a result of the conservation and monitoring practices of forest management companies.

Tropical Rainforest Preservation: A Powerful Economic Factor

Managing tropical forests sustainably is not free. To ensure that it is understood and implemented by all, the ATIBT, together with NGOs such as WWF and certification bodies, are setting up training courses for all those involved in the sector. The goal is to continue the fight against the illegal timber trade. The association's objective is to double the certified areas in the heart of the Congo Basin, but also in other African countries.



'Today, certification is known but unfortunately we are not paying the right price for this wood because there is unfair competition from illegal operations that do not respect the rules and harm not only the environment, but also society,' stated Françoise Van de Ven, President of the ATIBT. She also highlighted that '300 million hectares of forests cannot be monitored on a daily basis! And out of 51 million hectares of production forests, only 10% are certified today. It is progressing, but there is still a lot work ahead. We are hoping to double our certified surfaces in the Congo Basin and in other countries (Liberia and Sierra Leone for example), with the support of our partners such as KfW, PPECF, etc., who actively guide actors in the certification process.'

'Thanks to sustainable forest management, we can see real progress. We can now count 95,000 elephants, compared to 60,000 a few years ago, and the majority of these mammals are found in forest concessions! Economically, we wish to continue our efforts with the Fair&Precious initiative because this programme allows us to preserve the rainforests for future generations, while creating local employment, boosting flora and fauna and storing carbon' she concluded.

The ATIBT's Commitment to Add Value to the Forest

Good tropical forest management means contributing to its protection. In order to save the forest, it is necessary to cut down trees. This idea is negatively perceived by Europeans and is generally misunderstood. *'If we want to protect the forest, let's consume certified wood at the right price!'*

According to Benoît Jobbé-Duval, General Director of the ATIBT, *'forestry companies remove one or two trees per hectare every 20 to 30 years. Indeed, there is some degradation linked to*



human action, but it is temporary and reversible in a few years. Plus, it has beneficial aspects because this process contributes to employment, finances training programmes, battles poaching and contributes to public health. It is essential to understand the importance of sustainable forest management for our future generations. Importers and consumers of tropical timber need to understand that choosing certified timber means adding value to the forest, and supporting the populations that live in it and make a living from it.'

Tropical wood is the only natural raw material that is infinitely renewable and provides services to local populations and to the rest of the world. It is ATIBT's mission, and the duty of all actors in the sector, to promote certified wood in order to preserve this treasure for future generations.

About ATIBT

The ATIBT (International Tropical Timber Technical Association) was founded in 1951 at the request of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). At the service of the "tropical timber" sector, from the forest to the final consumer, the association plays a leading role in the implementation of international projects dedicated to the sustainable and responsible management of tropical forests. It also acts as one of the best technical and scientific advisors for tropical wood resources. Between 2016 and 2019, ATIBT saw an increase of nearly 50% in the number of its members, bringing it to a total of more than 130. ATIBT brings together European players in the African tropical timber sector, countries (Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic), various African (Gabon, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, DRC) and European professional associations, NGOs (such as WWF or the Prince Albert II) and large companies.

Web sites: www.atibt.org & www.fair-and-precious.org

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