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**ITTO PROJECT PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M)**

**ENHANCEMENT OF THE FOREST STATISTICS INFORMATION AND  
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (STATFOR) THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF  
TWO COMPUTER MODULES: COMPILATION OF  
MANAGEMENT INVENTORY DATA AND MANAGEMENT OF  
EXPORT LOG LUMBERYARD**

**EX-POST EVALUATION REPORT  
[EXECUTIVE SUMMARY]**

**Prepared for ITTO**

**by**

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## **The Project and its context**

Project PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M) on the “Enhancement Of The Forest Statistics Information And Management System (STATFOR) Through The Integration Of Two Computer Modules: 1) Compilation Of Management Inventory Data And 2) Management Of Export Log Lumberyards” implemented between February 2002 and March 2004 was the Fourth Phase of a broader process aiming at improving the knowledge of forest and timber statistics in Gabon.

## **General Project Description**

The aim of the project was to design and pilot test two IT modules appropriate for the collection and processing of statistical data relating to both management inventories and timber marketing and sales.

This project was a follow-up project to another ITTO Project – PD 15/98 Rev.2 (M) – which focused on the computerized collection of data at logging operations level.

The two planned modules have been implemented in compliance with the terms and conditions provided for in the Project description, in spite of the late delivery of the final report which led to further delays in the fund balance reconciliation process – the Project financial accounts had not yet been closed when this ex-post evaluation was undertaken.

## **The Project as a component in the series of statistics-related projects in Gabon**

Gabon has long been engaged in policy work focusing on how to improve forest statistics, and Project PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M) was the fourth phase of this process. A Fifth Phase – favourably assessed by the Expert Panel and subsequently funded – is planned for development through Project PD 182/03 Rev.2 (M) and could benefit from some of the observations contained in this ex-post evaluation.

## **Project strengths**

As it benefited from the several years of project management experience accumulated by DIARF in its relationship with ITTO, Project PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M) had a number of definite strengths.

## **The logical sequence of statistics-related Projects in Gabon**

The Project should be commended for its high technical standard.

The modules developed during the project correspond to significant technological advances that can improve the effectiveness of statistical information collection and processing, with information technologies being appropriately used to generate reliable and verifiable data. The pilot-tested methodology incorporates the latest IT developments. A consistently applied methodology and the permanency of personnel among experts hired by the Project have greatly contributed to the high standard of outputs achieved by the Project.

Furthermore, the Project is fully consistent with the concept of a gradual improvement in statistical knowledge geared towards a better monitoring of timber flows from the site of harvesting to the place of final use.

### *The experience and extensive technical expertise of DGEF's experts*

In the conduct of PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M), the high-level technical expertise demonstrated by national experts should also be highlighted. The involvement of these experts in the module configuration process as well as field-level testing guarantees that these modules are adapted to the problems to be addressed. It should also be stressed that the National Project Experts have the dual capacity of sound IT skills combined with a command of basic forest management techniques; they are also anxious to provide national executives with appropriate training in the use of these modules. From this perspective, PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M) can be regarded as a model of what should be done to achieve the objectives of a project.

### *The seriousness of standard management practices applied in this Project*

To our knowledge, the funds allocated to the project have been used as planned in the original Project document and the project was managed with all such transparency and rigour as are usually required. Nevertheless, the submission of the final report encountered a delay which led to another delay of equal length in the disbursement of the last funding instalment, yet these delays were not significant enough to impede the smooth implementation of planned activities.

Besides, the 6-month delay in the implementation of the project translated into the submission of four (4) progress reports duly prepared by DIARF instead of the three (3) reports expected under the Project Agreement.

### **Project weaknesses**

However, in relation to the initial objectives and the general context of the project, some weaknesses should be identified. They relate to the consideration of lessons to be derived from the Project to promote effective, countrywide improvement of statistical work.

#### **A lack of follow-up to replicate project findings and results at country level**

Project PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M) was managed by experts as a technical activity somehow disconnected from the need to undertake a large-scale application of its results.

This approach ultimately resulted in technologically sound, well-adapted and high-performing modules, however nothing has been developed and/or scheduled for any large-scale, country-level implementation of the system. It is significant to note that having been pilot-tested, the four (4) "memos" were stored away and have not been made operational to-date.

The situation could be ascribed to several factors: i) The Project concept developed by highly specialised experts addressed the experimental aspect only, and any implementation of a future operational stage and required conditions were not envisaged howsoever, which resulted in the system's future compatibility with other systems selected in Gabon not being assessed – Forest companies such as SNBG, Rougier and Isoroy selected adapted versions of the Microbois software, which has comparative advantages over the configuration selected in the Project ; (ii) In its current budgetary structure, the Government of Gabon does not have the resources – both human and financial – to build upon the findings and results of the Project at national level.

#### **A strong dependence on international expertise**

The need for international expertise during the implementation of the project seems to have been overestimated as software development and the testing of the two modules concerned could have taken less expert time with a more efficient organization of the role of the international expert and better coordination between the latter and the national team.

Furthermore, in its current design, the technology of the computerized information system relies on equipment, technological processes and maintenance services heavily dependent on a single country – Canada – the country the international expert hails from. Considering the rapid pace of development in this area, it would be necessary to first question the compatibility of this equipment with alternative equipment being used elsewhere (some major forestry operators have equipped themselves with different systems and their compatibility with the system developed under the Project should be ascertained), and secondly to consider reducing related costs which are particularly high.

#### **The discontinued overall efforts in forest statistics data collection, processing and dissemination**

The implementation of an alternative concept for improving statistics started in 1999 – together with the transfer of trained staff and the reorganization of tasks within DGEF – have contributed to create a rupture in the national forest statistic improvement process – a situation not addressed by the Project. The Gabon Forest Statistics Yearbook Series was published for three years only, and ever since it was discontinued, there have been no centralised statistics information and/or statistical data base, which has translated into an actual regression of information. Project PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M) was therefore executed in a context where it stood only slight chances to become effectively used at field level. Finally, the design of both INVFOR and COMFOR modules has been developed without ensuring that results from the previous project phase – considered as successfully completed but actually non operational - had been adequately built upon.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

### **For DGEF**

#### **To develop an effective strategy to improve national forest and timber statistics**

- To provide DGEF with a clear mandate to collect, process and disseminate country-level forest and timber statistics, with detailed terms of references, in coordination with the SIGEF scheduled at Ministerial level;
- To organize the publication of the Gabon Forest Statistics Yearbook Series – interrupted in 1998 – by the Statistics Division of DGEF-DED;
- To reorganize the collection of data for the ITTO Statistics Questionnaire by Forest Statistics Services of DGEF-DED through the establishment of a structured network of correspondents from the various technical directorates of DGEF (DIARF, DDICB) and directorates in charge of specific sectors;

#### **To implement a large-scale programme focusing on the wide-range application of Phase II and III results and findings**

- To define a 3-year programme for the country-level implementation of the computer modules developed under ITTO statistics-related projects; this implementation should cover the entire country from the outset and follow a schedule of specific actions, each deriving from the preceding ones and being commensurate with human and financial resources available.
- To resume the designing of statistic modules only in so far as this work will go abreast with this programme identification process, since such design and development work can only be efficient in relation to the defined long-term objective.
- In the near-term, and pending any large-scale implementation of the system, to submit existing “memos” to executive forest staff in charge of monitoring the Owendo site and to entrust them with the mission to continue the job for which they received training under the project using the appropriate software tools and IT resources.

### **For ITTO**

#### **Seeking the collaboration of other potential donors in order to finance the nationwide implementation of pilot-tested computer modules**

- To compile a technical synthesis of the main merits and results of ITTO Project PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M) for improving Gabon forest information monitoring system and to use this summary to brief other potential donors;
- Using the ATO/ITTO Project on Principles, Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainable Management of African Forests as template to consider formulating an international, multi-donor project proposal addressing the need to extend the computerized forest statistic data collection and processing system to more relevant countries;

#### **Linking the support to be granted to any future statistics-related project to a national commitment to own and add value to the results of any projects**

- To clearly mention in any project document the scheduled, mandatory dissemination of future findings and outputs to be yielded by the project, and not to be contented with mentioning the need to submit standard progress reports as the latter only provide an administrative picture – hence an imperfect one – of work achieved.

#### **Reformulating Project Proposal PD 182/03 Rev.2 (M) accordingly**

By introducing the following amendments :

- To specify the respective project management responsibilities within DGEF in line with the technical skills of each of its promoting agencies (management by DGEF, collaborative execution by DIARF and DDICB, reporting to SIGEF);

- To clearly specify the need to approach timber industrialists in order to involve them in the Project;
- To clearly specify the need to take into account the compatibility of module technical components with those of existing and potential systems;
- To clearly specify the nature of the Government of Gabon's commitment to undertake national-level implementation of project findings and results;
- To include as project activity the publication of user's manuals for the module to be developed as well as for already-developed modules;
- To include as project activity the identification of a strategy to implement the nationwide extension of the module together with those modules already developed under project PD 56/00 Rev.3 (M).

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