

OVERVIEW

TFT is launching the Centre of Social Excellence (CSE) – a new multi-year scheme created within its Climate Tree initiative that has been designed to address issues related to deforestation and the implications for local and indigenous communities living in the forests of the Congo Basin, the world's second largest area of contiguous tropical forest. During its first years of implementation, the €2 million project has been granted key support from the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation and Virgin Media. A primary goal of the CSE is to promote excellence and improve the understanding and linkages between forestry companies and indigenous communities, thereby encouraging dialogue and sustainable forestry management practices.

To this end, the CSE will offer a unique one-year programme taught in the classroom and during practical field-based training, covering a broad range of social, ethnographic and forestry management topics including participative mapping techniques. Through the programme, TFT supports the development and expansion of social expertise among recent graduates of central African universities and professionals working in central Africa who wish to practice sustainable forestry. The CSE will promote a unique and innovative approach to sustainable forestry management and conservation by teaching practices and techniques that incorporate the views and rights of indigenous people living in and around forest concessions. This will not only allow indigenous communities a voice in the use of local resources but also will assist forest companies to work towards attaining Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification, the industry standard for responsible and sustainable forest practices.

Promoting informed and appropriate consideration of cultural and social issues is a key challenge facing the CSE in its work in support of the forests of the Congo Basin.

UNDERSTANDING THE CSE

The fundamental objective of the CSE is to train and equip young anthropology, social and rural development graduates, and professional foresters with the tools necessary to initiate and sustain a constructive dialogue between forest companies and local communities. The CSE is being located in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, and will commence its first training course in

60% of Congo-Brazzaville is covered by tropical forests and the country currently hosts the largest area of FSC-certified forest in all of Africa.

May 2009. Students will be chosen based on a highly competitive selection process from a targeted 11 universities in six central African countries. In small groups of 6-9 students, they will complete three

months of classroom training and will then be sent to the field to undertake two months of complimentary work within a forestry company applying the knowledge learned and tools acquired since joining the CSE. During this time, the objective is for each student to assist the company to evaluate/assess its social programme work. The student will also be required to initiate field research on a topic of interest selected during their theoretical training. During the following six months, students will draw on the in-depth knowledge and training acquired in the first half of the course and will work within the forest company in furtherance of its identified social programme goals and objectives.

All courses will be taught by qualified and experienced instructors and it is envisioned that each module will include special visits and presentations by experts in the respective field. The spirit promoted in the classroom and throughout the course will be participatory, innovative and interactive.

While all travel, training and living expenses of the graduate students will be covered by the CSE, candidates fielded from central African forestry companies will be required to cover their own costs, and these fees will enable the CSE to expand the range of instructors participating in the programme. The foresters will study the same modules as the graduate students but in separate groups and the timeframe for their theoretical work and complimentary practical training will be reduced in view of their professional work commitments.

The establishment of this dialogue will result in a respect for the rights and the cultures of indigenous populations, protection of biodiversity, reduced carbon emissions and the possibility for more forestry companies to progress towards and obtain FSC certification.

PARTICIPATION OF FORESTRY COMPANIES

The potential involvement of forestry companies in the CSE is twofold. First, they may choose to enroll current employees in the specialized training course that is being offered to foresters as part of the overall CSE curriculum. This training will take place for a period of two months and will follow a targeted but slightly modified course offering from that available to graduate students, this in view of the needs of the forestry employee and the demands of his/her work. Second, a forestry company may also choose to draw upon the social expertise being created under the programme by hosting a CSE-trained intern for a period of up to eight months during which the individual will assist the company with meeting its social programme goals. As the core principle on which the CSE is founded involves the promotion of excellence and understanding--by equipping individuals with the tools necessary to initiate and sustain a constructive dialogue in forestry management--this is a win-win situation for industry and for indigenous forest communities.

RADIO BISO NA BISO

As part of the CSE initiative, a community radio project is being inaugurated that will further facilitate a dialogue among and with the indigenous people living in the north of the Republic of Congo, allowing them to communicate and exchange ideas and information in their language and according to their oral traditions. Biso na Biso (which means "between us"), the first radio that will broadcast exclusively in indigenous languages, is generously financed during its first three years of operation by the Fondation Chirac. The development of the radio programmes and procurement of equipment was financed with key support from the World Bank (Development Marketplace) and Congolaise Industrielle des Bois (CIB). The forest people who are the "eyes and ears" of the forest will, thanks to this community radio, not only be able to understand the issues surrounding sustainable development but also to participate in the process, thereby preserving their traditional way of life and biodiversity.