

## SUMMARY

- Interholco has published its sustainability report
- It measures its performance across environmental, social, economic and regulatory landscapes
- Interholco's IFO subsidiary manages 1.16 million ha of forest in RoC

# REINFORCING SUSTAINABILITY

Interholco has published its latest sustainability report. **Mike Jeffrey** reports

**Interholco, the Swiss-based producer** and global supplier of African hardwoods, has published its latest sustainability report.

The 108-page document looks at its sustainability performance across environmental, social, economic and regulatory landscapes. It measures this against a range of criteria. These cover the spectrum, from the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Global Compact on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, through Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and FSC certification standards, to Pope Francis's encyclical on safeguarding the earth.

In his introduction to the report, Ulrich Grauert, CEO of Interholco, which this year marked 60 years of operation, underlined that the environmental responsibility of forest and timber businesses has never been greater.

"The flags are up," he said. "Forests must be placed at the top of the international agenda if we want to survive on this planet."

Interholco's IFO subsidiary manages 1.16 million ha of forest in the Republic of Congo (RoC), sitting alongside 1.8 million ha of national parks.

With the assurance of FSC certification, said Mr Grauert, the company can state that its forests and wood products are deforestation free, a claim borne out by satellite monitoring, which shows a natural forest loss in Sangha region, where it operates, of just 0.09% in 2021.

But Interholco's focus, he stressed, goes beyond forest maintenance. It is on "managing the entire landscape responsibly".

"This is the effective solution to tackle climate change and support biodiversity, rural development and economic growth, contributing to UN SDGs," said Mr Grauert.

Social responsibilities this entails, he added, include provision of essential services to employees and local people, including clean water supply, healthcare and education. He also highlighted Interholco's response to the Covid crisis, involving implementation of a comprehensive mitigation strategy, raising funds to support healthcare and delivering emergency equipment.

Interholco also stresses the importance of its market success, which fuels economic development of communities around its production operations. It employs 950 people in the RoC and is growing value-added production at source, heavily promoting the 'Made in Africa' credentials of its wood products.

In 2021, said Mr Grauert, the company's all-round strategy paid off. "It yielded a wealth of results, not least financial success [with rising timber demand and prices offsetting logistics disruption and longer lead times], but also in terms of Interholco's synergistic work with employees, B2B customers, investors and specifiers. It positively reaffirmed our 'Sustainable Hardwood Made in Africa' as the go-to solution for people, climate and planet."

Among other aspects of operations in 2021, the Interholco report highlighted that:

- All company workers are paid a living, not just a minimum, wage – in Africa as in Europe.
- None of the suppliers it procured wood from to complement output of its own forests were involved in deforestation.
- 100% of wood from its managed forests and 88% of its wood supply overall is FSC-certified, with the aim of complete third-party certified coverage.

- Its proactive efforts against corruption and other crime continued via communication and training, with IFO eco-guards patrolling its concession to prevent poaching.
- It further progressed strategies to improve water supply and quality, including measures to maintain high conservation value forest and water courses.
- IFO continues to maintain 300,000ha – ie, more than a quarter of its concession as forestry operation-free conservation area. ■

The report has won the 'Best in the world' accolade in the timber and forest category of the international Hallbars Awards. These recognise excellence in sustainability reporting. Download the full report at: <https://bit.ly/IHC-Sustainability-Rep-60-Years>



Above: Interholco employs 950 people in the RoC and is growing value-added production at source