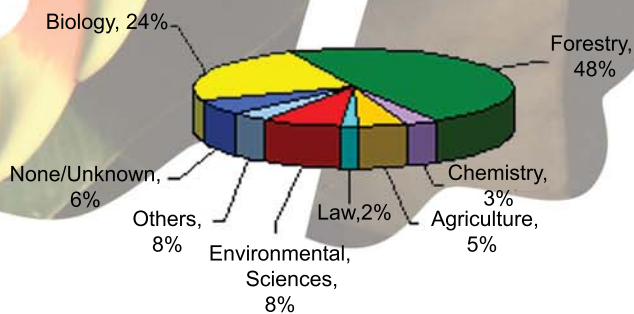


# The status of professionalism in the forest sector in Suriname

A returning observation by almost all stakeholders of the Suriname forest sector is that a lack of human capacity severely limits progress in achieving the objectives of sustainable forest management. This limitation is clearly reflected in a survey of professionals currently active in the forest sector, which was conducted for Tropenbos Suriname in 2006 by Jack Menke. This study concentrated on professionals trained at the degree level, or who are considered to operate as such.

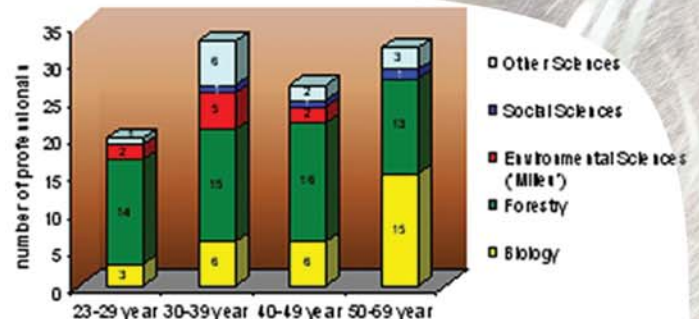
## Professionals in Suriname

The study suggested that the body of professionals at the degree level (incl. higher vocational training) in Suriname currently consists of about 87 persons, in their majority trained as foresters and biologists (each accounting for 48% and 24%), with much smaller numbers of environmental scientists (8%) and social scientists (6%). Another 6 forestry professionals work outside the forest sector, mainly in the mining sector. Of these 87, 60% have obtained a second degree, of which 7 a PhD, mostly biologists. The figure below represents the number of professionals in the forest sector according to their discipline.



It is frequently heard that many of Suriname's forest professionals are about to retire but this is only partly supported by the survey. About 25% are above 55 years old. Biologists are most senior, with 31% within ten years of retirement, while in the "novel" discipline environmental sciences 80% are younger than 40 years old. A gender shift is gradually taking place, with women moving from 35% in the category >55 years to 60% in the category below 40 years. This is mostly accounted for by environmental sciences, where women outnumber men in a ratio 7:1.

The figure below illustrates the number of professionals in a particular field in a certain age group.





### Causes of capacity shortage

The causes of the capacity problem are complex. Suriname has a small population with an inherent limited capacity to produce the number of professionals it needs. Only 7 students started a study in Forestry at the Anton de Kom University of Suriname during 1997-2005, while this figure was 137 for Environmental Sciences. For a second degree, students have to obtain scholarships for studies outside Suriname. As a consequence, many positions in the government and private sector are occupied by relatively under-qualified and inexperienced staff.

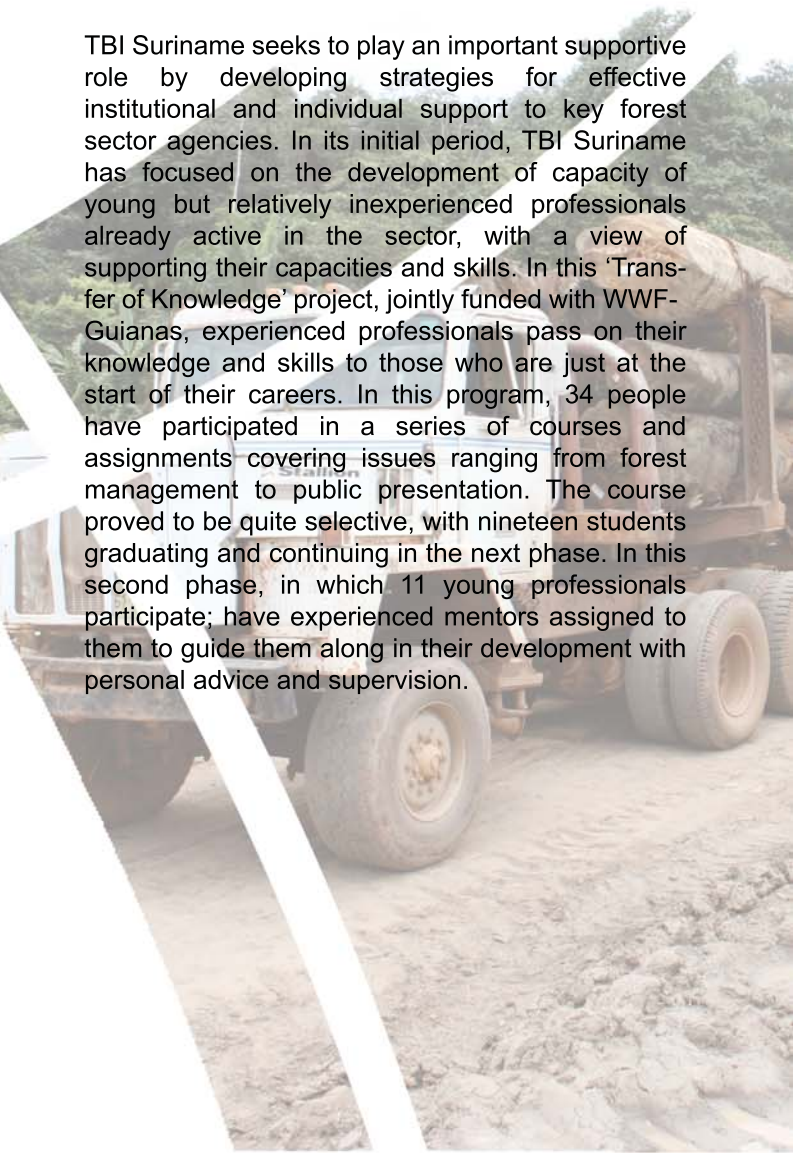
The public sector is the dominant employer of professionals, with 46% of them employed by institutes of learning and research and another 33% elsewhere in the public sector. The forest industry is notably absent as employer of degree-professionals (3%), although this figure may rise with a more thorough survey. New opportunities such as conservation management, community-based forestry and ecotourism have not yet created an upsurge in employment, although students are increasingly opting for these subjects. Employers interviewed indicated that the curricula offered have generally not kept abreast with the demands of the sector or the developments of the international forest agenda. On the other hand, few prospective students seem ready to make a choice for an uncertain career which is associated with hard work under primitive conditions in a sector where innovation comes at a premium.

With such challenges to deal with, addressing capacity needs is a daunting task. Many of the problems are interlinked and can't be dealt with in isolation. Currently there is a capacity shortage at all levels in the forestry sector due to:

- Capacity loss because of retirement
- Poor student enrollment in forestry studies
- Capacity loss due to departure to other sectors in Suriname

Thus a structured approach is required, based on a clear vision on the forest sector that incorporates the views of all involved. The Suriname Forest Policy offers a first glimpse of such a vision and should be complemented by a capacity development strategy.

TBI Suriname seeks to play an important supportive role by developing strategies for effective institutional and individual support to key forest sector agencies. In its initial period, TBI Suriname has focused on the development of capacity of young but relatively inexperienced professionals already active in the sector, with a view of supporting their capacities and skills. In this 'Transfer of Knowledge' project, jointly funded with WWF-Guianas, experienced professionals pass on their knowledge and skills to those who are just at the start of their careers. In this program, 34 people have participated in a series of courses and assignments covering issues ranging from forest management to public presentation. The course proved to be quite selective, with nineteen students graduating and continuing in the next phase. In this second phase, in which 11 young professionals participate; have experienced mentors assigned to them to guide them along in their development with personal advice and supervision.



#### For more information:

Tropenbos International Suriname, PO Box 4194-Paramaribo Zuid, Suriname  
Leysweg-CELOS gebouw  
Phone: +597-532001