

Local Solutions with Global Significance: Participatory Forestry in the Congo Basin

Background:

The Congo Basin contains among the most intact forest landscapes in the world and is a carbon sink and biodiversity reserve of global importance. The expansion of agribusiness, extractive industries and associated infrastructure development all place increasing pressures on these ecosystems. The forests are also home to 50 million rural communities, including up to 500,000 Indigenous Peoples.ⁱ

The IPCC Special Report on Land reminds us that **recognising the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, whose culture and livelihoods are closely tied to forests, is key to protecting these ecosystems and addressing climate change.**ⁱⁱ

Fortunately, effective rights-based approaches to protecting biodiverse ecosystems exist and are starting to be implemented in the region. A growing number of countries are legally recognising community forestry regimes, and newly developed safeguards are ensuring communities fully benefit from adjacent projects. Innovative technologies are enabling communities to map their resources and monitor illegal logging, which enhances forest governance and contributes to the sustainable development of local landscapes.

Recognising the central role of communities in the management and protection of forests, the COMIFAC Convergence Plan (2015-2025) called for the promotion of community-based and decentralised management of forests. In 2018, Central African countries agreed on the Brazzaville Roadmap to mainstream participatory forestry. The Roadmap outlines eight priorities for governments to achieve by 2030, thereby contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.ⁱⁱⁱ Three years on, countries are at varying degrees of implementing the Roadmap. COP26 is the ideal moment to take stock of progress made and how this can feed into renewed climate action.

This event will focus on the COP26 themes of protecting nature and reinforcing the resilience of communities most vulnerable to climate change, showing how the two can and must be interlinked to protect forests, biodiversity, climate and people. At the local level, rights-based approaches support communities to protect their environment and control their natural resources, which is essential for their long-term well-being. At the national level, these approaches strengthen forest governance and are a central strategy to achieving climate targets outlined in Nationally Determined Contributions.

The event:

The Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK) and ClientEarth (CE) are leading organisations in the implementation of rights-based approaches to environmental protection. We will host a two-hour panel discussion with leading experts to present innovative, inclusive and scalable strategies to protect Congo Basin rainforests. These include:

- **Community forests:** Securing communities' rights can improve forest management and prevent the encroachment of harmful industries in intact forests.
- **Community-based forest monitoring:** Equipping forest communities with the tools to monitor and protect their lands from illegal logging can increase transparency and accountability in areas where enforcement is difficult due to inaccessibility or corruption.

Participants:

The panel will comprise high-level representation from **Congo Basin governments**, who will discuss what actions they can take to elevate participatory forestry as a priority for protecting natural resources and mitigating climate change. Panellists may include:

- Minister Rosalie Matondo, Minister of Forest Economy, Republic of Congo (RoC)
- A representative from the Sustainable Development Department of DRC's Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MEDD)

The panel will also include influential **civil society representatives** from the DRC and RoC, to present the latest advances in participatory forest management. Panellists may include:

- M. Blaise Mudodosi, Coordinator, Actions pour la Promotion et Protection des Peuples et Espèces Menacés (APEM), DRC
- M. Lilian Barros, Permanent Secretary of CJJ and Coordinator of the Plateforme pour la Gestion Durable des Forêts (PGDF), RoC

Location:

The event will take place from 14h00 to 16h00 on Thursday, November 4, 2021 in the COMIFAC pavilion in the Blue Zone at COP26. The panel discussion will be livestreamed over zoom.

ⁱ Lewis, J. and Nelson, J. (2006) Logging in the Congo Basin. What hope for indigenous peoples' resources, and their environments? *The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs*.

ⁱⁱ IPCC (2019) Special Report on Climate Change and Land. <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ FAO (2018) Rendre la foresterie participative plus efficace en Afrique centrale dans le contexte de l'agenda 2030 - La feuille de route de Brazzaville. <https://www.fao.org/3/CA2324FR/ca2324fr.pdf>.