



PFBC Partenariat pour les Forêts
du Bassin du Congo

German
Facilitation (2020-2021) 

Draft declaration of ECCAS/COMIFAC countries
On Congo Basin forests and their vicinity
Working version based on contributions from CBFP members
(30 October 2020)

Preamble

(1) This Declaration of member countries of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC):

- outlines on the one hand the commitments these countries are willing to make to contribute to the success of international negotiations on climate change, biodiversity conservation, the fight against desertification and the international dialogue on forests,
- and on the other hand, presents the countries' demands for support from the International Community, that is commensurate with challenges they face in the Congo Basin forests.

This draft declaration builds on the provisions of the [COMIFAC convergence plan](#). It sets out commitments towards sustainable natural resource management and the fight against climate change that were recently reaffirmed by the subregion's Heads of State within the framework of the [revised treaty establishing ECCAS \(Libreville, December 2019, article 74\)](#).

The proposed draft is endorsed by the 120 members of the CBFP (Congo Basin Forest Partnership). It was drafted through a participatory and inclusive process which involved all the stakeholders in the management of Congo Basin forests and their vicinity, grouped together within the CBFP colleges (governments, civil society organizations, indigenous people, national and international NGOs, the private sector, technical and financial partners, training and research institutions, multilateral cooperation agencies and programs).

The members of the CBFP remain fully committed to supporting ECCAS and COMIFAC in the initiatives they have been implementing for several years now to promote sustainable management of their natural heritage in general, and forest resources in particular. The CBFP members also support the countries' legitimate expectations of greater support from the international community in financing and implementing these initiatives.

The decision to draft this declaration was endorsed by:

- The Acting Chairman of COMIFAC, His Excellency Jules Doret Ndongo, Cameroon's Minister of Forests and Wildlife;
 - the ECCAS Commissioner in charge of Regional Planning and Infrastructure, Her Excellency Marie-Thérèse Chantal Mfoula (who was the Deputy Secretary General of ECCAS at the time of the launch of the consultation process to prepare this declaration).
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I. Background

The Congo Basin forests: a globally recognized common heritage for mankind

- (1a) Thanks to the key role they play in regulating the global climate, preserving global biodiversity and as potential drivers of socio-economic development for the people of the countries in which they are found, the Congo Basin's tropical forests have gradually acquired the status of a common heritage for mankind. A host of international agreements and multilateral programs are now established to promote their sustainable and equitable development, in close collaboration with the States in the region.

The Congo Basin forests and climate change

- (2) The Congo Basin forests are often rightly described as the second tropical lung of the planet. They play a crucial role in regulating the climate at the continental and global levels. Their biomass and peatlands store an estimated 80 billion tons of carbon, equivalent to roughly ten years' worth of total global emissions.

The forests, however, are uneven. They encompass a variety of forest biotopes with numerous flora and fauna species, and pose specific challenges in terms of exploitation and conservation. While it is possible to quantify large groups of forest carbon stocks (see below), current research results do not yet enable precise correlations between carbon variations and forest types in the Congo Basin. Local biomass studies are currently underway to complete previous analyses conducted at the regional level.

A typology of Congo Basin forests and related carbon stock estimates can be established as follows:

- the central area contains a huge swampy forest located in a remote area and therefore better preserved. It stretches across a long and dense river system and partly extends to wet soils. In these forests, the biomass-related carbon stock amounts to 100 to 150 tons per hectare, but is supplemented by the large stock found in peatlands;
- the rest of the DRC's forest area, and those of the Congo, Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, are mainly comprised of dense rainforests, which are more or less fragmented in the vicinity of villages and along roads. Current satellite data processing techniques allow increasingly accurate quantifying of the degradation in these areas which include: "intact" forests, fallow land, plantations. These dense rainforests, if left undisturbed, can store up to 200 tons of carbon per hectare;
- in the north and south of the Basin (south of the DRC, south of the CAR), there are dry forests which partly originate from ancient rainforests and have trees of lower height and lower carbon stocks of about 150 tons per hectare;
- moving away from the centre of the Congo Basin, are patchwork forests and savannahs in which patches of dense forests alternate with grassy areas; these types of vegetation store quantities of up to 100 tons of carbon per hectare;
- finally, wooded savannahs (savannahs containing isolated trees) cover large swaths of northern Cameroon, CAR, southern DRC, Chad and Angola, and store small amounts of carbon below 50 tons per hectare.

The Congo Basin forests and Biodiversity

- (3) The Congo Basin forests are a unique hub of global biodiversity and an invaluable reservoir of genetic diversity whose development is yet to be organized. Indeed, these forests are home to specific but highly varied flora and fauna, both in terms of species, genera and families. The lowland forests are home to around 10,000 species of higher vascular plants, including 30% which are endemic (including 9 endemic families). The high-altitude forests shelter close to 4,000 species, 70% of which are endemic (including 2 endemic families).

These forests and the biotopes in their vicinity are home to many endemic and iconic African fauna species, such as the okapi, the bongo, the aquatic genet, the gorilla and the bonobo. They also harbour several endemic small primate and antelope species. In addition to the endemic Congo peacock, the forests are home to at least 5 bird families endemic to Africa. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) alone, there are more than 1,000 known freshwater fish species. The diversity of amphibians, reptiles, fish and insects is undoubtedly much higher than shown in current records. These four groups remain poorly known in the Congo Basin region, and new species are regularly discovered.

In addition to its importance in terms of biodiversity and endemism, the Congo Basin is one of the last regions on the planet where the interconnectivity of tropical forests allows biological mechanisms to function naturally and disruption-free. An elephant could, in theory, move from the Albertine Rift to the Gabonese coast without ever leaving the forest.

The Congo Basin forests, the well-being of local populations and economic development

- (4) Efforts to sustainably manage the Congo Basin forests within the framework of the fight against climate change on the one hand, and conserve their biodiversity and enhance the genetic reservoir they represent on the other hand, will only succeed if due consideration is given to the human context in which these forests have flourished and are now under threat.

The natural resources associated with the Congo Basin forests provide livelihoods for 60 million people who live in their direct environment or in the vicinity. These forests also fulfil essential social and cultural functions for the local and indigenous populations who have flourished in their environment.

Consumer products obtained by processing natural resources derived from these forests play a vital role in diversifying the incomes of these populations, although they are financially undervalued owing to the informal economic environment in which they are produced, sold and consumed.

Across Central Africa, both rural and urban areas enjoy a delicate food balance thanks to local agricultural production chains, whose productivity is largely structurally reliant on forest soil fertility, which must be sustainably used and managed as a matter of urgency.

It is therefore vital, in order to secure a better future for the Congo Basin forests, that the farming populations who live in their immediate vicinity and surroundings serve as frontline protectors. To this end, the populations must be provided an economic and institutional framework that allows them to adopt farming models that enable them both to maintain and restore forest areas and meet their legitimate need for food security, income and socio-economic development.

Non-timber forest products, fuelwood, and local non-industrial timber production also contribute significantly to the livelihoods of Central African populations and to local dynamics of economic growth and development:

- Bushmeat provides an affordable source of protein for many rural households. It is transported over long distances and sold in urban markets. Bushmeat consumption in the DRC is estimated in the range of 1.1 to 1.7 million tonnes per year;
- Caterpillars and leaves from the *Gnetum africanum* species are an invaluable source of protein and oligo-elements for local populations in forest areas. They are highly appreciated nutrients with huge markets that support tens of thousands of people;
- In a city like Kinshasa, the combined market for firewood and charcoal is estimated to be worth USD 143 million, employing roughly 300,000 people;
- The Congo Basin forests play a vital role in traditional medicine. An estimated 90% of the population in the DRC has reportedly used medicinal plants from forests for treatment. There is no question that Central Africa's forest ecosystems contain yet unknown molecules, which could be useful for developing treatments in modern medicine.

Sustainable logging for timber production and the timber processing industry make up a significant share of formal economic activity and tax revenue for Congo Basin states, which is likely to increase even further in the future. For instance, it represents the second pillar of the economy of the Republic of Congo, where it accounts for 2 to 6% of the national GDP, depending on the year.

Regional transhumance dynamics deeply rooted in local socio-cultural context have long played a role in maintaining the economic and food balances of Sahelian regions and their vicinity. With adequate supervision to keep their growing environmental and security impacts under control, these dynamics could help to bolster food security and drive inclusive economic growth and job creation for the local communities of the regions concerned.

II. Challenges

- (6) Deforestation and forest degradation levels have long remained relatively low in the Congo Basin. It is estimated that between 2000 and 2005, the entire African continent accounted for only 5.4% of the global loss of tropical rainforests, compared to 12.8% for Indonesia and 47.8% for Brazil. That said, deforestation and forest degradation have considerably picked up however, in the Congo Basin over the last twenty years. It is estimated that the rate of deforestation doubled between 2000 and 2015, resulting in the loss of 160,000 km² of tropical rainforests (or 10% of their area) during this period.

The fact is that the Congo Basin forests have long been 'passively' protected by gaps in structural governance, legal insecurity, and the high opportunity costs associated with financial added value of their resources in the formal economic sphere. Congo. But this de facto protection is increasingly eroded every day, for two sets of reasons:

- On the one hand, the emergence of new opportunities and players in a context of increasingly globalized commodity markets has reduced the weight of safeguards that were partially protecting the Congo Basin forests. This trend has led today to the often poorly supervised growth of industrial logging, mining investments and infrastructure development;
- On the other hand, and much more importantly for the overall evolution of forest cover in the sub-region, the poorly structured and insufficiently redistributive development processes that are typical of the economies of countries in the sub-region, perpetuate poverty in a significant segment of the population, especially in rural forest areas. The persistence of this structural poverty combines with sustained demographic growth to structurally increase the pressure on natural resources in forest areas, which is further exacerbated by the expansion of low-yield agriculture and growing fuelwood needs.

As they are increasingly opened up and fragmented by this recent destructivetwo-fold dynamic, the Congo Basin forests have come to a critical juncture in their evolution, which may lead to more intense forest degradation dynamics and structurally higher deforestation rates.

If not reversed by realistic, concerted strategies that are recognized as legitimate by the populations who depend on the development of the forest resources to which they still have access today, the unfavourable trend described above will have an increasingly negative impact on the Congo Basin forests.

Their overall environmental functions (regulation of the global climate, genetic and biodiversity reservoir), as well as their potential as catalysts of sustainable socio-economic development for the countries they cover, could be seriously affected to the detriment of all stakeholders.

III. Commitments of ECCAS/COMIFAC member countries to the Congo Basin forests and their vicinity

The ECCAS/COMIFAC countries:

- (7) Undertake to continue and boost their involvement in global climate governance, in close collaboration with the entire international community. To this end, they reiterate their commitment to help combat climate change, in particular by working within the framework of the Nationally Determined Contributions (CDN) process and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Will continue to tighten control of their CO₂ emissions (with a target of 455 Mt of emissions per year by 2030 to 2035) in order to contribute to the global effort to hold the average global temperature increase to below 2 ° C, in accordance with the commitments made in Paris within the framework of COP 21;

Will actively contribute towards restoring forest landscapes within the framework of the Bonn-challenge and AFR 100 (*African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative*) with an already announced commitment of 34.56 million hectares (equivalent to 3.37 GtCO₂ of carbon) and a joint objective provisionally set at 50 million hectares;

- (8) Confirm their desire to promote climate-adapted development policies and strategies, to make them both more resilient (adaptation) and low-carbon inclined (mitigation);

To this end, will continue working to strengthen intersectoral coordination, which is essential for climate-adapted operational development strategies to emerge and be implemented on the ground;

Are aware that key sectoral policies such as agriculture, forestry and nature conservation must be deployed with an integrated vision of land use planning, in close coordination with national objectives in terms of access to water and energy, development of industrial and transport infrastructure, public health, food security, and decentralization. In this context, the Ministries of Planning, Finance, as well as the offices of the Prime Minister and the Presidency of the Republic in each country will play a strategic role in providing coordination and technical guidance. These considerations are key to ensuring that the NDCs of the ECCAS / COMIFAC countries become structuring frameworks for the contributions of these countries to the fight against climate change.

- (9) Undertake to promote the green economy by adopting public strategies that practically promote sustainable natural resource management. These strategies will be shaped by the following main guidelines:

- i. recognize and promote the central role that private sector companies and civil society organizations must play in the practical implementation of policies;
- ii. promote sustainable agriculture in rural forest areas, in order to offer local development prospects that are no longer based on the “default” strategies that local actors currently resort to (accelerated land clearing and slash-and-burn agriculture);
- iii. pursue the “zero deforestation” objective in all sectors of production (timber / mining, agro-food / infrastructure), while insisting on the pursuit of this objective by all stakeholders (including new investors from the recent globalization of trade (Asian) and non-industrial operators (artisanal));
- iv. institutionalize independent certification to monitor the impacts of deforestation in all the formal sectors identified in point (iii) above;
- v. ensure strict compliance with mandatory environmental impact studies in all investment projects in the formal sectors identified in point (iii) above;

(10) Undertake to place land use management and allocation strategies at the centre of their development policies. They shall see to the implementation of appropriate political and institutional frameworks, notably with the following key features:

- Development and implementation of land use planning schemes, based on stakeholder involvement at all levels, and on resource inventories that take into account the economic value of ecosystem services provided by forests (see 10 below);
- Revision of land codes allowing a more practical balance between modern law and traditional law, by clarifying and specifying the rights of local communities over soil resources and the terms and conditions of use rights acquisition for private owners;
- Systematic involvement of civil society and the private sector in planning and implementation initiatives.

(11) Shall take practical "mainstreaming" measures to ensure that public policies systematically incorporate support programs and investment projects, payment approaches for Eco-systemic Services (PSE) and / or payment for the Preservation of Eco-systemic Services (PPSE), based on a scientific assessment of all these services, and including the private sector, local communities and family farms among the beneficiaries.

(12) In all policies that can affect forest environments, exercise extreme caution when dealing with current forest cover and the prospects for maintaining it, in order to preserve the potential of these areas to fight climate change and preserve global biodiversity, and sustainably increase the well-being of the people who live in and depend on it;

Regarding logging for timber production, shall promote an appropriate and comprehensive approach based on the following building blocks:

- i. improve forest governance, with particular emphasis on enhancing transparency and accountability in relations between private operators and public administrations in charge of supervising, controlling and monitoring the sector;
- ii. establish a tax incentive system for sustainable management;

- iii. Promote independent certification and deploy traceability systems for export products;
- iv. formalize local and regional timber markets;
- v. develop modern added value chains, built on industrialization that meets socio-economic development needs and enhances the comparative advantages of countries in the sub-region (this development would especially entail a ban on the exportation of timber logs from all Congo Basin countries with effect from 1 January 2022);
- vi. benefit-sharing for local populations (via effective sharing of forest royalties),

(13) Strengthen biodiversity, wildlife and protected area management, especially in biodiversity *hotspots* located in primary forests and their vicinity.

As part of these efforts, shall implement participatory planning and co-management approaches, by increasing their contribution to the financing of protected areas, and developing policies to promote eco-tourism and strengthen governance and the fight against poaching.

In this regard, shall consider available options for increased implementation of protected area management methods that ensure their security and shore up their value by establishing Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), in close collaboration with the relevant State services, and in countries where these management methods have proven comparative advantages that are recognized by all stakeholders.

Shall maintain and strengthen regional cooperation in biodiversity conservation, notably through transboundary protected areas.

(14) Shall actively participate in ongoing discussions at international forums aimed at increasing the surface area of protected areas (notably considering the 17% target under the Aichi Targets (2011-2020 of the CBD), and the 30% target under the Biodiversity Leader Pledge - Post 2020 agenda).

However, they recall in this regard that their priority is to improve biodiversity and fauna conservation and management within the existing framework, and that any increases in the surface area of protected areas must be done within the framework of a global reflection on development models.

(15) Recognize the need for urgent action to stem the unbridled expansion of transhumance dynamics into Equatorial Africa's forest areas. In keeping with commitments made within the framework of the N'Djamena process (N'Djamena Declaration), they shall take appropriate and sustainable measures that are likely to enable the gradual reining in of the negative impacts of transhumance on wildlife / biodiversity conservation, the potential for renewal of natural resources in the host areas, peace and security, as well as the population's well-being.

(16) In order to promote more sustainable and more profitable added value of non-wood forest products, shall establish a legal and institutional framework that provides incentives to develop value chains for the numerous and currently undervalued NWFP sectors that present significant potential for economic added value;

(17) Shall work to increase the involvement of civil society, local communities and indigenous populations in all decision-making processes relating to the sustainable management of natural resources in the Congo Basin forests and their vicinity. Shall ensure that they are strongly involved in defining, implementing and monitoring policies to combat climate change at the international, regional, national and local levels.

IV. Demands of ECCAS/COMIFAC member states on the international community:

The ECCAS/COMIFAC countries demand the following from the international community:

- (18) The Congo Basin is the “second lung” of the Earth. The Congo Basin countries lay claim to a share of the funds mobilized as part of the fight against climate change, that reflects this reality as well as the region's efforts to keep the Congo Basin forests intact.
- That adequate financial support be raised, both within the multilateral framework and through bilateral channels, that is commensurate with scale of the challenges at hand and the mitigation and adaptation potential of the Congo Basin forests (between 10 and 20% of the global plant carbon stock), and which will support and help to strengthen political and financial commitments already made by the countries of the Congo Basin and its vicinity. This claim will entail, among other things:
- Recognizing equity and equality in the geographical distribution of resources mobilized by climate finance, by making this distribution more proportionate to the relative importance of tropical forests in the Amazon, the Congo Basin and the 'South East Asia in global climate issues;
 - Honouring the pledges made during the establishment of the Green Climate Fund;
 - Developing and funding the financial mechanism that supports the development and implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (CDN), as provided in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC));
- (19) That funds mobilized be geared specifically toward implementing commitments made by Congo Basin countries:
- Within the framework of the Bonn-challenge (USD 500 / ha)
 - Within the framework of the N'Djamena Declaration
- (20) That appropriate technical and financial assistance be mobilized to enable capacity-building and the transfer of technologies needed to implement sustainable forest management approaches, as recommended by this Declaration. The strengthening of infrastructural, institutional and individual capacities shall be particularly geared towards meeting the human and institutional resource needs of regional and national scientific bodies;
- (21) That coordination and harmonization of technical and financial support be improved, and that this support be mainstreamed into public planning and programming mechanisms in beneficiary countries and into their regional organizations (such as the COMIFAC Convergence Plan), in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness;
- (22) That a joint evaluation be conducted to assess the implementation of REDD + in the countries of Central Africa, with a view to adjusting existing support systems based on lessons learned and experience gained over the past ten years and establishing appropriate financing mechanisms to support the implementation of phase 2 of the reformed REDD + in the Congo Basin forests and their vicinity;
- (23) That the public institutions of beneficiary countries, local civil society actors from surrounding communities (indigenous peoples and local communities), and private sector organizations, be more strongly involved in identifying, formulating and implementing programs and projects to support the sustainable management of forests in the Congo Basin and its vicinity;

More specifically, that greater consideration be given to traditional knowledge and local governance structures in order to promote better ownership of the stakes and strengthen the legitimacy of solutions in the view of local actors;

- (24) That more consideration be given, in economic and trade relations, to issues relating to the conservation and sustainable management of the Congo Basin's natural resources. This increased consideration should be built on the establishment of favourable pricing conditions to promote sustainable value-added chains (ecologically and socially sustainable wood / zero deforestation commodities / non-wood forest products).

Information sources and reference scientific documentation

- [Emissions mondiales de carbone](#)
- [Rôle des forêts tropicales africaines dans la régulation du climat à l'échelle continentale et à l'échelle globale](#)
- [Biomasse et stocks de carbone des forêts tropicales africaines](#)
- [Importance des tourbières abritées par les forêts du bassin du Congo](#)
- [Expansion de la petite agriculture domestique et augmentation des taux de déforestation en Afrique centrale](#)
- [Expansion de l'exploitation forestière industrielle et augmentation des taux de déforestation en Afrique centrale](#)
- [Importance des processus de perforation et de fragmentation pour les perspectives d'avenir des forêts de la RD Congo](#)
- [Engagements des pays d'Afrique centrale dans le cadre du Bonn Challenge \(restauration des terres forestières\)](#)
- [Engagements des pays d'Afrique centrale dans le cadre du processus de Ndjamen \(transhumance\)](#)