



## **Internship: research support to a study on large-scale infrastructure developments in the Congo Basin**

**September 2017**

### **Project background**

Governments in Africa and the Congo Basin in particular, as well as international organisations and donors widely agree that improving the region's infrastructure base is essential to economic growth.<sup>1</sup> Transport networks are extremely limited, poorly maintained and expensive for users. Electricity is expensive and the service unreliable, generation is insufficient and interconnection is extremely limited.

Substantial human and financial resources are being funnelled to develop key infrastructure projects, including road and rail corridors, ports, enterprise zones, and mining and manufacturing hubs. Some major initiatives include the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), the Central Africa Consensual Transport Master Plan, the CEMAC Transport-Transit facilitation project and the International Commission of the Congo-Oubangui-Sangha Basin for river transport. At the national level, governments are allocating significant portions of their budgets and mobilising large sums in private investments and international funding. Some of the main backers to these initiatives are the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, NEPAD and the European Union and its member states, as well as the private sector, where Chinese investment plays an outstanding role. Many of the major projects being funded are planned to service extractive activities, particularly mining.

However, alongside this boom in infrastructure building, concomitant social and environmental impacts will increase exponentially in the coming years. Evidence widely demonstrates that infrastructure development is a major driver of environmental damage including deforestation, ecosystem fragmentation, pollution and biodiversity loss. Studies also show that infrastructure and especially road building are also important indirect drivers of deforestation and environmental damage, as they spur increased migration to previously inaccessible areas, facilitating illegal logging and agricultural expansion and poaching.

Although less studied in the Central African context, infrastructure development can also severely endanger community rights and livelihoods and sometimes even lead to bitter conflict. Displacement of local communities without prior consultation, lack of adequate compensation, loss of livelihoods, encroachment over community lands and inter-communal conflicts are some consequences of poorly planned infrastructure projects.

Therefore, in a weak governance context such as the Congo Basin, an upsurge in infrastructure development can be a serious threat to peoples and to forests. This process must urgently address the absence of coherent and updated land tenure regimes, of recognition of customary rights to lands and resources, of adequate environmental protection policies and of comprehensive land use

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<sup>1</sup> Infrastructure development features highly in the African Union Common position for the post-2015 agenda, for instance (see the Common Position [here](#)), and it has been a priority in continental economic growth and integration plans for decades, notably the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000 (full document [here](#)).

planning. Unless squarely placed within a framework of rights recognition and sound environmental management, the potential of infrastructure to foster equitable and sustainable development will be seriously compromised.

## **Objective**

The Rainforest Foundation UK is conducting research on the social and environmental impacts of major infrastructure projects in the Congo Basin in order to:

- Document and raise awareness about the scale of the problem, highlighting the observed or expected impacts of major projects, and the likely impacts on environment and people
- To analyse current legal and policy frameworks and point out how they are failing to tackle deforestation, defend rights and promote equitable development, either by not being respected or by being inadequate (or both).

This work will focus on large-scale projects in the transport and energy sectors, as these are likely to present the most important challenges in terms of respect to forest communities' rights and livelihoods and environmental sustainability.

## **Objective of the internship**

The intern will undertake and support desk research on a number of pre-identified ongoing and planned infrastructure projects, under the supervision of RFUK's policy team (Ana Osuna Orozco, Research and Development Advisor and Maud Salber, Policy Advisor).

Specific tasks:

- Completing "project factsheets" for specific infrastructure projects in Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, Gabon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic, based on a template provided by RFUK, including an update on the current status of the project, observed and expected environmental impacts and observed and expected social impacts and human rights abuses where relevant.
- Compiling a resource bank with relevant documents per project (Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Studies, project documents from lenders and investors, due diligence documents, independent reports, news articles and others as available)
- Contributing to updating a project database based on the research above
- Conducting other research tasks, as required

## **Benefits**

This internship is an excellent opportunity for someone interested in gaining experience in a sector that is at the crossroads of development, environmental protection and community rights. Research in infrastructure in Africa will also provide crucial insights into the evolving field of business and human rights.

- The intern will gain knowledge on an issue that is understudied but poised to become increasingly important. Given the upsurge of infrastructure expenditure in the region, this will likely become a very relevant field for environment and human rights activists in the near future.
- The intern will have access to RFUK's information on this matter, including a database on community mapping.
- The intern will be invited to participate in RFUK's meetings and events and will be welcome to network with RFUK's staff.

- The intern will be reimbursed for all reasonable expenses
- The intern will receive constant support and supervision to perform the assigned tasks and will have the opportunity to make suggestions and comments regarding his/her duties as well as the research at hand.

**Skills/Experience**

- Studies or equivalent experience on development studies, environmental conservation, human rights, indigenous peoples, international financial organisations or related fields
- Demonstrable experience of desk based research
- Fluency in English and working knowledge of French
- Knowledge or understanding of the Congo Basin or African context (desirable)

**Start date:** as soon as possible

**Duration and working hours:** at least two months, two days per week, but negotiable depending on availability.

**Expenses:** daily travel expenses up to the cost of a London Travelcard and £5 per day for lunch

**Location:** RFUK's office, 233A Kentish Town Road, London, NW5 2JT