

**Hans Schipulle, CBFP Facilitator**  
**Bonn, May 6<sup>th</sup> 2010**

Dear CBFP members

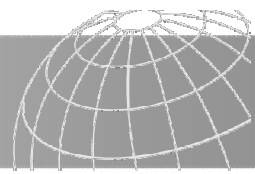
As the German facilitation is getting ready to hand over the steering wheel of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership to our Canadian friends, allow me to draw your attention to five key messages that we would like to sustain:

**1. CBFP facilitation recognizes and welcomes the overall positive development and implementation of the Regional Plan (*Plan de Convergence*) by COMIFAC/CBFP:**

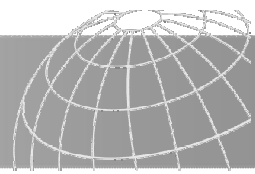
Owing to the professional skills and the personal commitment of the current President (Minister Emmanuel Bizot, CAR) and the newly staffed Executive Secretariat (led by Executive Secretary Raymond Mbitikon and his deputy Martin Tadoum), COMIFAC member states and CBFP partners have, since 2008, improved their management of Regional Plan (*Plan de Convergence*) implementation, while monitoring the international forest policy agenda for further inputs. Although the 2008 evaluation of the Regional Plan continued to reveal lacking involvement of key forest sector actors in many member states, progress has been achieved in (i) implementing forest sector reforms, (ii) involving parliamentarians and (iii) increasing civil society participation.

- ✓ The institutional reform of the CEFDHAC civil society platform led to the election of a regional steering committee (July 2009), which has made a commitment to ensuring regular communication with COMIFAC forest ministries and governments.
- ✓ A paradigm shift towards SFM within the private sector – induced not least by market incentives and negotiations on timber trade regulations – resulted in FSC-certification of nearly 5 million ha in less than 4 years.
- ✓ The region's visibility and impact in terms of climate change and biodiversity negotiations has improved remarkably.
- ✓ Coordination between development partners has been enhanced, further science-based information on the state of the Congo Basin Forests has been provided, and various dialogue platforms on critical issues have led to open exchanges between development partners.
- ✓ Substantial additional external funding has been made available, notably through regional programmes (AfDB, WB, GEF), bilaterals (such as US/CAN/GER/F) and the Congo Basin Forest Fund/CBFF (UK, NOR) in which COMIFAC and CBFP are playing an active role. New additional resources from environmental services might be made available in the near future.
- ✓ CBFP membership has increased and outreach to new actors in the region – in particular China – has shown promising results.

**2. In contrast to these positive developments, CBFP Facilitation sees grounds for major concern in a number of fields.** Allow me to highlight three such fields in which I see the need for clear positioning and concerted, remedial action on the part of CBFP:



- a) **Persistent institutional weakness within COMIFAC:** Unlike a number of other regional institutions, which ceased to function when external project funding dried up, Central African Heads of States deliberately based COMIFAC's operational structure on an autonomous, sustainable funding mechanism (AFM) in order to ensure its professionalism, credibility and strength in coordinating SFM in the region and in mobilizing external support. However, member states have so far failed to establish such mechanisms and worse: many have not paid their contributions. Despite repeated commitments from HoS (most recently in September 2009 during the extraordinary ECCAS-COMIFAC conference in Kinshasa), the budgetary relationship between COMIFAC and its 'umbrella' organization CEEAC/ECCAS continues to be unresolved, and no progress has been reported since last month's Finance Ministers' meeting in Ndjamena, Chad. Increasingly frustrated, Forest Ministers are currently discussing ways of diverting a certain percentage from donor-funded regional programs or obtaining the support of the African Development Bank in order to match recurrent COMIFAC costs. Donors strictly prohibit such kind of practices, which normally only apply to NGOs. The German/French COMIFAC support office in Yaoundé (which still hopes to bring others on board) cannot and will not substitute for the contributions of member states. CBFP partners are increasingly concerned by such symptoms of diminishing ownership, which could potentially undermine the character of COMIFAC as an independent, intergovernmental mechanism and CBFP's regionally steered institutional anchor organization. We should continue to pursue political dialogue at all levels (as many of us are already doing) in order to express our serious concerns. Two occasions might offer useful opportunities for this: (i) the rotating COMIFAC presidency will be transferred later this year from CAR to DRC. In the wake of current President Minister Bizot's strong commitment, incoming Minister Endundo should receive our strong support in maintaining momentum; (ii) DRC has announced its intention to host a summit celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yaoundé Declaration (1999). However, there are as yet no clear indications as to when this will take place or how the preparatory process will be organized, so as to allow partners to feed in their respective inputs. In the meantime, ES COMIFAC has set up an ad hoc committee comprising several CBFP partners, which will propose possible issues to be submitted to HoS for decision-making.
- b) **Regional position in negotiations on climate change, biodiversity and SFM financing:** With the assistance of a number of CBFP partners, COMIFAC countries have improved their ability to define and defend their positions ever more effectively in international negotiations on REDD, ABS etc. However, there is an ongoing need for capacity development, mobilization of expertise, coordination of relevant actors at country level and support for negotiation teams operating under difficult conditions (e.g. having to conduct informal negotiations in English; being confronted with highly experienced UN-negotiators from other forest regions with occasionally competing interests). A further challenge is to make sure that Central African decision-makers maintain a balance between the rapidly increasing expectations of financing mechanisms (REDD, ABS) and a more realistic assessment of the state of negotiations. The ideal vision of mechanisms capable of mobilizing huge flows of money will need to undergo a harsh 'reality check', taking hard factors into account,

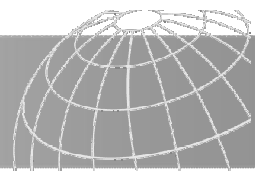


which will determine whether or not a certain group of actors benefit from potential results. These include: (i) difficult negotiations on reference scenarios; (ii) performance-based access to funding; (iii) the need to comply with difficult-to-handle funding mechanisms (as opposed to a simple sharing of budgetary resources from multilateral funds with equitable access); (iv) tough scientific and technological requirements for MRV; (v) high transaction costs; (vi) asymmetric trade relations and (vii) the competing interests of developing countries. Above all, many years of SFM and biodiversity conservation experience provide ample evidence that money alone cannot solve the problems of weak structures, land use conflicts, conflicting commercial interests and demographic, economic and social change. Millions have been invested without substantially reducing the rates of deforestation and forest degradation. In order to make better use of the billions which are being expected, fundamental governance challenges must be addressed.

- c) **Coordination of REDD initiatives:** Many CBFP partners are engaged in helping COMIFAC countries prepare for negotiations and the implementation of REDD mechanisms. However, lessons from the Paris declaration and Accra agenda seem to have been neglected: countries have often been driven by institutional interests (e.g. multilateral organizations; bilateral agencies; international NGOs) or commercial concerns (e.g. satellite technologies; consultants). Furthermore, transparency criteria based on the road map established by the COMIFAC Climate Working Group are not being adhered to. In short, there is no strong hand at the regional helm – another deficiency resulting from the institutional weakness of COMIFAC. Decisions made at the recent ministerial meeting (19-21 April, Brazzaville, attended by only three COMIFAC ministers) in preparation for the REDD conference on 27 May in Oslo, risk further complicating the situation. A new coordinating role for REDD initiatives was established (the Republic of Congo; its relationship to ES-COMIFAC, to the climate working group and to the DRC coordination for climate negotiations still needs clarification) and CEEAC was asked to help create a Central African climate research group.

In addition to these issues, allow me to draw your attention and make a statement on the ongoing dialogue with Chinese actors and the role of the private sector in SFM.

**3. Dialogue with Chinese actors:** For over a decade, Central African countries have witnessed increased Chinese activity in the forest or forestry-related sectors (infrastructure, agriculture, and mining) and have thus felt the need to broaden the dialogue on SFM by including Chinese government representatives (State Forest Administration/SFA), companies interested in different forms of land-use and NGOs working with Chinese partners. As a result, CBFP members and Chinese partners have started cooperating on pilot initiatives. Today there is a wide variety of related activities, such as conferences in China on legal and sustainable timber trade (IUCN/WWF/US); the EC's 'Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade/FLEGT' program (EC/UK/Germany/IUCN); training for handling timber tracking instruments (UK/EC/US/IUCN/WWF); research on timber trade and its effects (CIFOR); study tours to Africa (WWF/IUCN); and the promotion of professional exchange through workshops in Libreville and Douala (COMIFAC/IFIA/WWF/CBFP-Facilitation). The

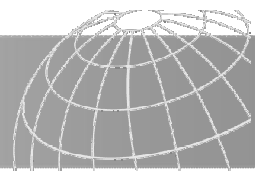


amendment of the Lacey Act in 2008 and the establishment of the EU-China Bilateral Coordination Mechanism on FLEG in January 2009 marked a turning point in the capacity of development partners to structure international timber trade with China. Having consulted government representatives and forest sector stakeholders in Beijing in April 2009, the CBFP facilitation team reported back to partners, arranged a number of follow-up meetings involving COMIFAC-ES and SFA representatives and proposed a road map for further action to CBFP members at the CCR in Douala (May 2009).

Further consultations between SFA and COMIFAC-ES with the participation of the CBFP facilitation team and with IUCN support took place in March 2010 on the margins of RACEWOOD in Douala, and continued on 26 April, this time with WWF support. The objective was to establish a more structured relationship between SFA and COMIFAC in the framework of the China-Africa Dialogue (FOCAC), providing a basis, amongst other things, for the training of African experts in China, a refinement of SFA “Guide on Sustainable Overseas Forest Management and Utilization by Chinese Enterprises” and its adaptation to the Central African region, and professional exchange on the current state of SFM, certification and biodiversity conservation.

**4. The role of the private sector in SFM:** The need for increased support to Central African countries in promoting SFM and biodiversity conservation based on the region’s strategy is indisputable. However, evidence shows that owing to weak administration, protected area management tends to have less impact on poaching and is less effective in preserving high-value forest landscapes than well-managed timber extraction concessions, which respect FSC sustainability principles. Following controversial discussions on this issue during the 2008 FSC conference in Cape Town, a number of CBFP partners (including WWF, IUCN and FSC International as a new member) organised workshops in Douala (February and May 2009), Kinshasa (March 2009) and during the November 2009 CBFP plenary in Yaoundé. The partners tried – not always successfully – to involve skeptical NGOs such as Greenpeace, Global Witness and Rainforest Foundation in the dialogue, in order to establish consensus on the basis of the COMIFAC strategy. CBFP agreed that making role models of companies working within the law and doing an exemplary job in terms of SFM and certification would seem to be the best way of reconciling the development and conservation interests of Central African governments, as well as forest-dependent people. Investing in management plans and certification is expensive, as companies need to respond not only to social and environmental requirements but also to economic constraints. Certain companies have positive experience of preserving their certified product market niche during the recent financial crisis, with its dramatic impact on timber markets. Others are still struggling with volatile tropical timber markets, while still others are on the point of closure and about to sell their assets to investors with unknown certification track records. To sum up, there are strong reasons for CBFP to convince timber producers and consumers that certified tropical timber constitutes an instrument for contributing to more sustainable management and to the preservation of forest resources.

**Finally...**



The November 2009 plenary meeting in Yaoundé was very successful – both in terms of the number of participants and the number of regional ministers involved in chairing workshops. The intense debates and positive exchange of practical experience certainly testified to the vitality of the partnership. As your current Facilitator I was particularly pleased by the Canadian High Commissioner’s announcement that his country is prepared to take over the facilitation role for the coming period. We agreed to work closely together with the Canadian team while they are establishing their new facilitation team and road map, taking account of consultations with COMIFAC and other partners and the results of the ongoing evaluation of CBFP. I would like to encourage all of you to respond quickly to the questionnaire!

Germany will continue to provide active support, as the two previous facilitations (USA, France) did for their successors. We recommend that the idea of a ‘division of labor’ or ‘leading partner’ on certain thematic areas, as discussed during the 2008 CCR in Bangui, be given renewed consideration at the next CCR, which will also serve to mark officially the start of the Canadian Facilitation. We are currently considering the time and venue as well as the main focus of the deliberations, such as forest development in dry and savanna regions – an issue which would respond to the hitherto relatively neglected needs of countries without dense humid forests. Proposals are always welcome!

*Bien cordialement,*

Hans Schipulle