

Bringing community forestry to the next level

**A REVIEW OF EUROPEAN SUPPORT IN
THE CONGO BASIN**



Bringing community forestry to the next level: A review of European support in the Congo Basin

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AFD	Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)	ENRTP	Environment and Natural Resources Thematic Programme (EU)	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
AfDB	African Development Bank	ETD	Entité territoriale décentralisée (Decentralised Territorial Entity) (DRC)	NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
CAFI	Central African Forest Initiative	EU	European Union	PES	Payment for environmental services
CAGDFT	Centre d'Appui à la Gestion Durable des Forêts Tropicales (Support Center for Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests (DRC))	FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation	PFNL	Produits forestiers non ligneux (Non-timber forest products)
CAR	Central African Republic	FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility	PNEFEB	National Programme for Environment, Forests, Water and Biodiversity (DRC)
CARPE	Central Africa Regional Programme for the Environment (USAID)	FED	Fonds européen de développement (European Development Fund)	PROFOR	Programme on Forests
CBFP	Congo Basin Forest Partnership	FEM	Fonds pour l'environnement mondial (Global Environment Facility)	PSG	Plan simple de gestion (Simple Management Plan)
CED	Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement (Center for Environment and Development (Cameroon))	FFBC	Fonds pour les Forêts du Bassin du Congo (Congo Basin Forest Fund)	REDD+	Reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation
CFCL	Concessions forestières des communautés locales (Local Community Forest Concession) (DRC)	FFEM	Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial (French Global Environment Facility)	REFACOF	African Women's Network for Community Forest Management
CGDC	Comité de gestion et de développement communautaire (Management and Community Development Committees) (Congo)	FGDH	Forum pour la gouvernance et les droits de l'homme (Congo)	RFUK	Rainforest Foundation United Kingdom
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research	FGMC	Forest Governance, Markets and Climate Programme (DFID)	RRI	Rights and Resources Initiative
Cirad	Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement (Center for International Cooperation in Agricultural Research for Development)	FIP	Forest Investment Programme	SAILD	Support Service for Local Development Initiatives (Cameroon)
CLPA	Communautés locales et populations autochtones (Local communities and indigenous peoples)	FORCOL	Project Mode for the management of forests by local communities in the fight against poverty in the DRC (DFID/Forests Monitor, DRC)	SDC	Série de développement communautaire (Community Development Series) (Congo)
COMIFAC	Commission des forêts d'Afrique centrale (Central African Forests Commission)	FORCOM	Community Forestry Development and Implementation Project (Belgium/FAO, DRC)	SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
CoNGOs	NGO collaboration for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in the Congo Basin forests	FORETS	Tshopo Training, Research and Environment Project (EU/CIFOR, DRC)	SDM	Special Donation Mechanism (World Bank)
CSO	Civil society organisation	FPIC	Free, informed and prior consent	SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sweden)
DACEFI	Development of Community Alternatives to Illegal Forest Exploitation Project (EU)	FPP	Forest Peoples Programme	SNFC	National Strategy on Community Forestry (DRC)
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument (EU)	FSC	Forest Stewardship Council	SNV	Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (Netherlands)
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)	GBP	British Pound Sterling	TBI	Tropenbos International
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	GHG	Greenhouse gas	TFP	Technical and Financial Partner
ECOFAC	Programme d'Appui à la Préservation de la biodiversité et aux Ecosystèmes Fragiles (Central African Ecosystem Forest Programme) (EU)	GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (Germany)	TRMAFC	Round Table Multi-Actors on Community Forestry (DRC)
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative	GP GC	Global Public Goods and Challenges Programme (EU)	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
		ICRAF	World Agroforestry Centre	UNEP	United Nations Programme for the Environment
		IFSLU	Programme Investment in Forests and Sustainable Land Use (DFID)	UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
		IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development	UN	United Nations
		ILLUCBF	Project Improving Livelihoods and Land Use in the Congo Basin Forests (DFID)	UN-REDD	United Nations REDD Programme
		IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature	USAID	United States Agency for International Development (United States)
		ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organisation	USD	U.S. Dollar
		KNOWFOR	Programme International Forestry Knowledge (DFID)	WRI	World Resources Institute
				WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Executive Summary

Introduced in the Congo Basin a little over two decades ago, community forestry has had a mixed record. The initial goal of enabling communities to benefit directly from the development of the forests upon which they depend is still not met. Problems include uneven political support, heavy legal and technical constraints, and land grabbing and revenue capture strategies that have a detrimental impact on communities. Community forestry has nonetheless become established in the region, with an increasing number of countries allowing it to be formalised. The reasons for getting involved have multiplied, especially under the leadership of civil society and the communities themselves.

The issue of how to secure the rights of communities and their active contribution to forest management has become more important due to forest policies that push for sustainable management and international efforts to avoid deforestation. With the spotlight on timber harvesting, the community forestry model has experienced renewed interest due to its potential benefits (food security, income generation, protection of forest areas, general well-being, and legal protections) due to the wide range of uses (collection of non-timber forest products, agroforestry, conservation, ecotourism, etc.)

This evolution is timely given new commitments – including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement – which insist on the role of good forest management in poverty reduction, biodiversity protection and the fight against

Isangi, Democratic Republic of Congo. Photo: Axel Fassio/CIFOR/Flickr.com CC



climate change. These goals are binding on all States in the region, and some of them have already recognised community forestry as an important method in achieving them. Thus, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has adopted since 2018 a National Strategy on Community Forestry, which explicitly articulates these goals.

European donors and multilateral development partners, who are also bound by these commitments, have historically played a role in promoting community forestry in the region. More recently, they have shown growing support for securing land rights and community management. However, community forestry policies suffer from both unequal treatment from one donor to another and low prioritisation. The political context in which they operate has not been very encouraging, the way donations are structured and the stand-alone way that projects are conceived are obstacles to fully achieving community forestry's potential.

The trajectory followed by the DRC has been innovative because it involved multiple stakeholders and developed a vision where community forestry can secure the rights of populations. It also actively engages them in spatial planning and sustainable forest management. Such an approach deserves to be encouraged and strengthened in the long term by donors working in the DRC and throughout the region.

In the light of these observations, donors and development partners, as well as national governments of the countries in the region, should:

- I. Continue to support commitments such as the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, and efforts to improve forest governance (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+), Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), and sectoral reforms).
- II. Propose consistent and long-term support to enable community forestry to be thoroughly and convincingly tested as a possible model for sustainable development.
- III. Encourage the development or strengthening of a consensual national vision on community forestry in each country.
- IV. Contribute to stronger public support for community forestry.
- V. Support the implementation of the *Brazzaville Roadmap for more effective participatory forestry in the context of the United Nations 2030 Agenda*.
- VI. Ensure that any community focused intervention leads to innovation and good practice.
- VII. Continue support for civil society and communities.

Non-governmental organisations and civil society should:

- I. Reach out to and engage with governments to ensure that community forestry remains or becomes a political priority.
- II. Support community empowerment.
- III. Continue to facilitate interactions between communities and official public bodies.

Introduction

Objectives

This research paper/study provides a summary of progress, challenges and emerging opportunities for community forestry in five Congo Basin countries: Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (Congo). It reviews interventions proposed by donors and technical and financial partners who have such policies as their goals. It assesses the overall coherence of the programmes and their adequacy, based on the assumption that community forestry can help countries deliver on their commitments to reduce poverty, promote community rights, and combat deforestation and climate change. The recommendations are aimed at European and multilateral donors and development partners, Congo Basin governments and civil society organisations. It calls for increased support for implementing community forestry in the region.

Conceptual framework

Community forestry can be defined as forestry “where communities or groups of individuals have partial or complete rights over specific forests, including rights to establish, implement and enforce rules governing access and the use of these forests” (Blomley, 2013). In the specific context of Central Africa, marked by the almost exclusive control exercised by national governments over forests, the focus here is on community forestry as an opportunity for communities to strengthen and secure their resource management and land rights. Moreover, community forestry initiatives are not limited to logging activities only; to the contrary, the paper examines its multiple possibilities.

Michel Merlet’s (2015) deliberately broad definition of a *community* has been chosen for this summary a: “more or less organised and structured human group that can be identified locally by a specific use of resources, a common vision, more or less formalised management rules, and power relations between the individuals that make up the community”. The communities to which this review refers are both local communities and indigenous peoples, designated for practical reasons by the acronym CLPA (*communautés locales et populations autochtones* in French).

Methodology

The review was based on a review of the policies and programmatic literature regarding community forest-related initiatives in the region, as well as guidance documents, policies relevant to forest governance, combating deforestation, climate change mitigation and poverty reduction. To gather refined and detailed elements, conversations occurred with people engaged in this work, by telephone and if necessary in the form of a questionnaire. These included people from international NGOs, civil society organisations (CSOs) national agencies, national cooperation agencies of the Member States of the European Union (EU), European institutions, donors and multilateral programmes.



Market in the village of Minwoho, Lekie, Center Region, Cameroon. Photo: Ollivier Girard/CIFOR/Flickr.com CC

Limitations

This review does not claim to be exhaustive. The literature it uses represents only a tiny portion of the knowledge produced over the last two decades regarding this issue in this region. Similarly, projects and programmes may have been overlooked, less by choice than by lack of information. The fact that community forestry is often integrated as a component of different interventions and the sometimes-delicate border between community forestry and participatory forestry in interventions, are all elements that make the topic relatively difficult to delineate.

Community forestry in the Congo Basin: challenges and opportunities

Lessons learned during the first two decades of implementation

With the creation of its first community forests in 1997,¹ Cameroon inaugurated a new dynamic that was marked, retrospectively and regionally, by significant delays between the formalisation of the concept and its implementation.² The pioneering experience of Cameroon has long been the only one of its kind in the Congo Basin; the lessons learned through it have thus largely shaped perceptions about the relevance of community forestry in Central Africa. However, despite encouraging developments and localised successes, Cameroon's (and later Gabon's) trajectory fell short of its original objectives. It is therefore important to highlight here the salient features of this review, as well as the challenges that continue to hinder the potential of community forestry.

Uneven and fragile results

There is a wealth of literature on the development of community forestry in Central Africa, which this report brings together.³

Profitability and economic viability. The viability of community forests depends on a set of intrinsic and extrinsic factors which come together to see whether and how it becomes economically viable to exploit timber.⁴ Legislation (see Julve *et al.*, 2007) imposes important constraints on exploitative operations (inventory and management plans), which have resulted in technical and financial capacity compliance difficulties for CLPA. These inadequacies can lead CLPA to become indebted through the use of third-party forest operators (exploitation) and NGOs (technical support), thereby generating a strong dependence on external actors.

Local development and the fight against poverty. In addition to the relative profitability of economic operations, there is the thorny problem of profits being captured by elites that do not represent concerned CLPAs, whether these elites operate locally or remotely. In general, as noted by Karsenty *et al.* (2010), communities are rarely formed in homogeneous sets; the creation of a community forest, provided it does not involve an open and concerted redefinition of governance arrangements, offers the most influential and informed individuals new opportunities to grab revenue and claim land rights. This pattern has been regularly observed in groups involving a third-party operator, in which the elites operate in an opaque manner.

1 The idea is enshrined in *Law No. 94-1 of January 20, 1994 regarding the Forest, Wildlife and Fisheries Plan; it has been further governed by Decree No. 95/531/PM of August 23, 1995 establishing the forestry plan application methods.*

2 It took twelve years in Gabon and sixteen years in the DRC for the community forests announced in the forestry law to be established. In the CAR, seven years passed between the adoption of the forestry law and the publication of the implementing text allowing the creation of such forests.

3 For analyses covering all these aspects in Cameroon, see, in particular: Djeumo (2001); Karsenty *et al.* (2010); Beauchamp & Ingram (2011); Cuny (2011); Piabuo *et al.* (2016); CED, Fern, FPP, IIED & Okani (2017). For the DRC, see Maindo & Kapa (2014) and Van de Rijt (2015). For DRC, see Maindo & Kapa (2014), Van de Rijt (2015) and Lescuyer *et al.* (2019).

4 Regarding the sustainability of timber harvesting, see Mbarga (2013). Excluding timber, other valuation methods are burdened by the significant transaction costs associated with obtaining approvals. This is particularly the case in Cameroon with the sale of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), which is often completed illegally (Foundjem-Tita *et al.*, 2014).

Environmental sustainability. The environmental impact of community forestry operations has been poorly documented. A comparative study by the French Development Agency (AFD), currently underway at the regional level, could bridge this gap; provisional findings have tended to indicate that timber harvesting in community forests has a negative impact on forest cover. These conclusions would be in line with fears expressed elsewhere about exploitation based on the need for a quick return on investment. The sustainability of non-timber activities (agriculture, hunting, collection of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) can also be affected by increased demographic pressure and the emergence of commercial opportunities.

Challenges ahead

In a review of community forestry in Africa, Blomley (2013) identifies six elements for successful implementation: community empowerment; effective community institutions (most often based on existing modalities); equitable access to benefits and clear incentives; enhanced capacities (technical aspects, management, communication, etc.); the adoption of publicly financed national programmes; and grassroots-level sustainability, which ensures that incentives are maintained at the local level. Large political, institutional and socio-economic challenges remain in the Congo Basin, which hinder success.

The pitfall of “nothing but timber”. The initial development of community forestry largely focused on the devolution of timber rights to CLPAs, based on the assumption that this would provide direct and formalised access to the benefits of forest development. The transposition of the current operating model into industrial concessions has not taken into account the capacities and deep aspirations of CLPAs, which do not systematically focus on the exploitation of timber, nor even on the valuation of forests. Some communities, particularly indigenous peoples, may simply wish to create a community forest to preserve non-monetary uses (subsistence, pharmacopoeia, cultural aspects).

Deceptive “simplicity”. The difficulties inherent in devolving timber rights to CLPAs were anticipated and solutions proposed, including tools such as *simple management plans* (Plan simple de gestion or PSG in French), whose simplicity is in reality more than questionable. The methods which bring community exploitation initiatives into compliance remain financially burdensome⁵ and technically complex, with the adverse effects mentioned above in terms of economic viability and dependence.⁶ Recent developments, such as extending the legal requirements of the Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) to the domestic market (Julve Larrubia *et al.*, 2013), could contribute to maintaining and even accentuating this trend.

An unfavourable institutional and economic context. The formalisation of community forestry is part of a landscape marked by the rarely adequate technical, human and financial capacities of the central and decentralised administrative bodies, as well as the disinterest, if not the frank suspicion, of CLPAs and their aspirations. Competition from informal exploitation, the weakness of infrastructures, the distance from the markets, the high transaction costs, and a tax structure not always properly adapted to the situation all reduce incentives for stakeholder engagement and investment. Efforts have already been made by the administration, the

5 For example, Lescuyer *et al.* (2019) ont relevé des coûts dépassant les 150 000 USD pour la création et la mise en conformité de certaines forêts communautaires.

6 A perverse effect, mentioned by several people contacted for this review (including civil society actors), relates to CSOs positioning themselves as indispensable brokers, working to assist communities to adhere to heavy and complex standards and procedures rather than promoting in-depth changes and simplification of legal provisions.

Case study No.1. Reinvesting in bottom up approaches: grounding the process in specific landscapes

The bottom up approach was developed, implemented and analysed during the Makala project (an EU-funded project in the DRC on sustainable fuel wood supply). It was examined in a specific publication (Dubiez *et al.*, 2013) which this case study draws from.

The region concerned, located south of Kinshasa, is characterised by very degraded forest cover, but some wooded areas have been maintained or restored. The project results from observing the lack of community ownership in relation to planning operations in community forests through Simple Management Plans, which reflect the quantification and planning methodologies used in production forests.

The Makala project intends to be 'participatory, progressive and iterative'. To ensure it effectively matches local dwellers' interaction with their surrounding environment, lineage is retained as the fundamental unit, as land tenure rights in rural areas are first and foremost arranged and defined by lineages. This is clearly more legitimate for individuals than a process pegged to social and landscape units defined by external actors.

A sequence of five stages is launched (basic collective mapping of the lineage areas, localising the vernacular typology of landscape units, dividing areas into landscape units, collective endorsement through a model, naming these units), leading to the management phase, which consists of collectively discussing how to link planning arrangements with the defined landscape units. The collective framework for distributing and managing benefits and management is discussed, and the rules and prohibitions are decided.

The benefits from this approach are multiple. It is not expensive, but it is technically accessible. Community members' also feel ownership of all stages of the process, and of results:

"Developing the Simple Management Plan together forced each villager to explain his perceived and lived environment. [...] The community describes the landscape it sees with the typology it uses on a daily basis. Field visits, organised in groups, also enables the reclaiming of collective ownership of the landscape, and the pooling and updating of knowledge. Analysing the relationship to landscape also helps to raise villagers' awareness that it changes with time, and their understanding of the impact of their activities on the environment."

As the authors point out, formulated perceptions can still be influenced by the project's direction which in turn influences management arrangements. Some individuals' positions as intermediaries can also distort the collective dimension of the exercise. A fine and reflexive methodology can however help to avoid or mitigate such risks. The authors also identified concerns regarding the lack of resource quantification. However, this lack of quantification is precisely what makes the approach accessible to communities, and in no way is this intended to replace inventories, especially in production forests using valorisation methods.

Yet even when quantification is carried out, it can be a welcome introduction to community forest management or revising management plans and its value is obvious for communities undertaking this exercise for the first time. Understanding management as a concept and collective and preliminary clarification of landscape units and arrangements for income distribution can contribute to stronger cohesion, which is necessary for any future management initiatives.

private sector and civil society, but they must be intensified;⁷ in many respects, however, these elements are part of the wider problem of spatial planning, which is the sovereign responsibility of the various countries.

The persistence of top-down approaches. While community forestry should allow the expression of locally informed choices based on natural and social capital and the aspirations of CLPAs, the influence of forest administrative bodies, elites, donors, national CSOs and international NGOs remains formidable. This influence undermines the CLPA's use of management methods for which they remain responsible. The temptation of a standardised approach is another pitfall. Finally, the "centralised" definition of what constitutes a community and the community institutions entitled to represent it causes problems. The work to be done upstream to create a community forest is crucial as it ensures the identification of aspirations and opportunities, required skills, and defines internal governance and the distribution of benefits⁸ (see Case Study 1 on page 11).

Reforming the land and state environment. In a region characterised by the virtual government monopoly of forests, and where access to land ownership remains marginal and complex (see RFUK, 2015), community forests have emerged as a relatively easy way to secure the rights of CLPAs. Nonetheless, they are relatively fragile and limited. Fragile, because community forests, regardless of the legal duration of the agreements (including perpetual), are granted by the State, and are therefore likely to change. They are also limited because community forests can constitute a rigid framework. They confine management rights only to the devolved perimeters, and justify the status quo regarding CLPAs' participation in the management of neighbouring forest concessions.⁹ These issues are compounded by the complexity and confusion that characterises current land and tenure regimes – clarifying land tenure should be a priority for most countries in the region.

Renewed dynamics

Community forestry in the Congo Basin has undergone an important evolution during the last decade. On the one hand, it has expanded: four of the five countries now have a regulatory framework (although they allow for effective implementation only to varying degrees). On the other hand, support for community forestry has been split due to other issues such as the fight against deforestation and climate change.

An expanded regional base

Regional Level. In 2010, the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) adopted the *Subregional Guidelines on the Participation of Local and Indigenous Peoples and NGOs in the*

7 Grouping is one of these actions; it allows several communities to pool their skills and explore business opportunities, to share technical and financial burdens for certain procedures, and to better discuss governance issues. In Cameroon, this seems to have helped relations with the forest administration (see Van de Rijt, 2015). This approach is particularly recommended and applied by SAILD in Cameroon and by GIZ in the DRC. In Cameroon, the administration has also facilitated the grouping of processors and sellers of wood products from community forests, following the same logic. In the DRC, Tropenbos devotes part of its work to formalising and integrating artisanal and informal farmers into community enterprises.

8 Beauchamp and Ingram (2011) note the importance of the preliminary establishment of an investment plan, which limits the risk of future conflicts. This is one of the foundations of the approach currently being implemented under the Dryad initiative in Cameroon.

9 This is one of the observations made by Karsenty and Vermeulen (2016), who propose a "Concession 2.0" model aimed at reconciling inclusive and exclusive management when creating forest concessions and riparian community forests. This co-management model would be particularly suited to the situation of land-locked CLPAs in areas predominantly devoted to production forests, where the presence of indigenous peoples with relatively mobile and extensive uses of space calls for greater flexibility, and where the support of the private forest sector would be a major asset for the development of NTFP sectors.

Sustainable Management of Central African Forests (COMIFAC, 2010). The paper identifies the need to involve these stakeholders “in the forest management decision-making process”. The requirement for consent is clearly stated, as is the “recognition and guarantee of customary ownership of forests and forest resources”. Additionally, the “sustainability of former human practices of forest ecosystem management” has been emphasised. Although non-binding, these guidelines offer advice on goals that governments in the region must set. By revising its *2015-2025 Convergence Plan* in 2014, COMIFAC took into consideration new themes (REDD+, climate change) and explicitly linked the promotion of “community and decentralised management of forest resources” to economic development and the general well-being of the people. More recently, in May 2018, representatives from the government, civil society and CLPAs from the region came together to approve the Roadmap for *More Effective Participatory Forestry in Central Africa*, also known as the “Brazzaville Road Map” (FAO, 2018a). This roadmap identifies eight priorities to enable participatory forestry to help meet the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The document has yet to be formally adopted at the regional level.¹⁰

Cameroon. The forest administration receives new applications for community forests every year, but enshrining open rights through the allocation of such grants remains uncertain. A recent study (CED, Fern, FPP, IIED & Okani, 2017) also noted the lack of revised PSGs (mandatory every five years) for many community forests. The cumbersome administrative procedures and technical and financial requirements remain significant and, outside of timber, there are constraints to achieving income-generating activities. A dynamic (if not unified) group of national CSOs supports communities, particularly in terms of capacity (access to information, technical and organisational aspects), internal governance (conflict management, income distribution, inclusion and gender) and diversification of possible business models.¹¹

Congo. Community forestry is yet to be formalised in the country. In 2017 and 2018, the Ministry of Forest Economy hosted regional workshops which led to the approval of the Brazzaville Roadmap, a sign of interest in participatory forestry. The development of community forestry, on the other hand, remains limited at the moment both by the absence of supportive legal provisions and by the allocation of forested areas, mainly to industrial concessions and protected areas. This situation places many CLPAs under a restrictive regime, the exercise of user rights being essentially authorised only for the sole satisfaction of personal needs. To date, the closest option to community management are community development series (CDS or series de développement communautaire or SDC in French), as defined in industrial forest concessions. SDCs are a relatively weak device, subject to the effective creation of development plans for these concessions (ClientEarth, 2014). However, they offer interesting prospects, especially for developing a co-management model if legislation were to evolve towards formalised community forestry (Fern, FGDH, ClientEarth & FPP, 2017).¹²

10 In addition to the five countries covered by this study, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda and Chad are included in the Roadmap.

11 Examples include: REFACOF support for the revision of simple management plans with emphasis on greater inclusivity (including gender based) and non-timber activities; CED's recent publication of a simplified guide for better community ownership of the review process for simple management plans (CED, 2018); SAILD's development of a system for checking the legality of timber in community forests; and its work to support the development of community enterprises (Dryad initiative, led by ICRAF), focused on increased access of these companies to technical and financial support, particularly through the development of investment plans and monitoring capabilities.

12 The revision of the forestry law (Law No. 16-2000 of 20 November 2000 regarding the Forest Code), begun in 2013, could lead to such formalization, but this remains to be seen.

Gabon. The allocation of statutory community forests was made possible with the adoption, in 2013, of an order supplementing the existing legal and regulatory framework.¹³ In many ways, Gabon's trajectory (which put an emphasis on logging), has suffered the same pitfalls as in Cameroon. Some 51 statutory forests were created between 2013 and the end of 2017; however, in the face of numerous reported cases of internal conflict and illegal operations, in 2017, the Ministry of Forests called for the temporary suspension of allocations (FAO, 2018b). The results of an evaluation of participatory forestry effectiveness in Gabon, supported by the FAO, were discussed in February 2018. This analysis shows that improvements need to be made in relation to the valuation of community forests, the management of SDCs in forest concessions and in implementing co-management contracts for territories included in protected areas.¹⁴

Central African Republic. The development of community forestry is recent: it dates from 2008 when it was enshrined in law, and from 2015 when it was included in the regulatory framework¹⁵. This came to be after a remarkable consultative process between the administration, private sector, civil society and CLPAs. The aspirations of the latter, focused on the possibility of developing conservation activities, subsistence and commercial valorisation of forest products, mainly non-timber products, have been taken into account (RFUK, 2017). The demarcation of community forests in the south-west of the country (where most of the tropical forest cover is located) has remained closed by the existence of industrial forest concessions and protected areas. However, in 2018, the administration created a new opportunity¹⁶ by making it possible to transform SDCs developed within industrial concessions into community forests, and recognising the rights of CLPAs over non-timber resources (which remain committed to exploitation by the concessionaires). This is a significant step forward in recognising CLPAs' rights over non-timber resources (which are meant to be exploited by logging companies).

Democratic Republic of Congo. Introduced by the Forest Law of 2002, the formalisation of community forestry has undergone a long process of evolution in the DRC, culminating in the development of the regulatory framework in 2014 and 2016.¹⁷ This is based on a one-time regional approach, in that local community forest concessions (concessions forestières des communautés locales – CFCL in French) are recognised by the communities concerned for perpetual possession of the land based on custom¹⁸. To date, around forty CFCLs (covering nearly 400,000 ha) have been registered¹⁹. Since 2015, the process has been based on the Multi-Stakeholder Round Table on Community Forestry (TRMAFC), broken down into national and provincial sessions (see box below). A National Strategy on Community Forestry (SNFC) (DRC, 2018), developed as part of this process, has been in the experimental phase. It introduces innovative provisions, recognising from the outset the various purposes of the CFCL.

13 Order No. 018/MEF/SG/DGF/DFC of 31 January 2013 setting forth the procedures for allocating and managing Community forests; Decree No. 1028/PR/MEFEPEPN of 1 December 2004 setting forth the conditions for the creation of a community forest; Law No. 16/01 of 31 December 2001 on the Forestry Code.

14 Voir : [https://pfbc-cbfp.org/docs/news/Fevrier 2018/COMMUNIQUE FINAL DE L'ATELIER_V finale.pdf](https://pfbc-cbfp.org/docs/news/Fevrier%202018/COMMUNIQUE_FINAL_DE_L'ATELIER_V_finale.pdf)

15 Law No. 08.022 of 17 October 2008 on the Forestry Code; and Decree No. 15.463 of 3 December 2015 set forth the procedures for allocating and managing community forests. With this latest text, the CAR has also adopted the Manual of Community Forest Award Procedures, developed and tested since 2010 in a participatory manner.

16 Administrative authorisation n° 03 of 29 January 2018 on resuming the test process for the community forests in the south-west forest area.

17 Law No. 011/2002 of 29 August 2002 on the Forestry Code; Decree No. 14/018 of 2 August 2014 setting forth the procedures for allocating forest concessions to local communities; Ministerial Order No. 025/CAB/MIN/ECN-DD/CJ/00/RBM/2016 of 9 February 2016 setting forth specific provisions for the management and operation of local community forest concessions.

18 Recognition of possession does not equate to that of property. The CFCLs, granted by the administration, remain subject to the management rules established by law and can therefore be suspended in case of a violation.

19 It should be noted that the vast majority of existing CFCLs have been created for conservation purposes, which raises the question of effectively taking into account the expectations and capacities of the communities concerned.

DRC: Multi-stakeholder Round Table and National Strategy on Community Forestry

When Decree No. 14/018 was adopted on 2 August 2014, national stakeholders welcomed the important milestones included in the text. They also highlighted the flaws and gaps, in particular the absence of safeguards such as the risk of creating monopolies by the elites and uncontrolled exploitation of CFCLs by third party operators. Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK) and the Support Center for Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests (CAGDFT), a CSO involved in forest governance and advocacy, decided to educate administrative bodies and technical and financial partners (TFPs) on how to set up a platform to better implement the regulations.

The TRMAFC (which was launched in October 2015) stands out due to its multi-stakeholder character (administration, CSO, NGO, TFP, private sector, CLPA) and the concern displayed, from the beginning, about allowing stakeholders involved in implementation at provincial level to be heard (four sessions to date). The TRMAFC has an important role in coordinating stakeholders – leading sharing experiences, and centralising and building on lessons learned. The TRMAFC has also been charged with developing the SNFC, which was approved after four national sessions (August 2017) and then sent to the Ministry for approval (decree signed in March 2018). The SNFC largely echoes the introduction into the regulatory framework, through a 2016 decree, of innovative provisions concerning the multiple uses of community forestry in the DRC. The SNFC experimental phase has begun, and will continue during the period of 2018-2022, after which the relevance of the regulatory framework will be reviewed. The chosen approach is pragmatic and adaptive, with an emphasis on securing community rights through CFCLs, building the capacity of communities and state administrations, experimenting with new opportunities (conservation, REDD+), and anchoring community forestry in spatial planning.

In addition to the United Kingdom (RFUK) and the United States (WRI/WWF/USAID), Germany (GIZ) France (AFD via the AGEDUFOR project) and the FAO have participated in the TRMAFC, on an ad hoc and then more regular basis. These actions seem particularly promising, but their viability can be compromised by the discontinuity of funding (the project led by RFUK will end in 2019) as well as the crucial absence of many donors and TFPs committed to it. Replicating this approach in other countries of the region would be a significant step forward. It is quite possible that those in CAR are experiencing benefits based on a strong multi-stakeholder commitment and encouraging ownership from the administration. It would also be welcomed in Cameroon where understanding the multiple purposes of community forestry would justify a renewed dialogue between government, CSOs and communities. In Congo, which has made significant progress using the inclusive VPA FLEGT processes, the absence of a legal framework of reference has proven to be an obstacle; however, the Ministry of Forestry's regional involvement in participatory forestry can be viewed as a good entry point. In Gabon, the crisis in the current model has manifested itself in the moratorium on allocating new community forests and calls for further initiatives.

Opportunities for implementing a more holistic vision

While the pioneering experience of Cameroon has been an opportunity to note a number of pitfalls in formalising and operationalising community forestry, it has also led practitioners to think of approaches that reflect both CLPAs' needs and aspirations, and emerging issues in the forestry sector.

The assumption made by civil society is that community forestry, beyond the historic focus on logging, should enable a diversity of uses locally adapted to the capabilities and expectations of CLPAs. Options could include income generation (exploitation of NTFPs, agroforestry, ecotourism, conservation, payments for environmental services (PES)), or preservation of non-market values (sacred places, pharmacopoeia, knowledge, well-being). It also promotes land tenure security and landscape and resource uses which strengthen CLPAs' empowerment and places them at the heart of decision-making and management processes, community forestry can contribute to poverty reduction, territorial development and the sustainable management of land, resources and the environment. Beyond civil society, several governments in the region are guiding the development of multiple use community forestry. This is the case in CAR and, formally, the DRC through the SNFC adopted in 2018. This vision broadly reflects the belief adopted by influential international forestry organisations, such as the FAO and the World Bank.²⁰ Relevant processes and commitments include:

Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2030 Agenda). Community forestry can contribute to at least three of the seventeen UN-approved targets in 2015: Goal 1 – poverty eradication (securing and developing income-generating activities); Objective 13 – combating climate change (preserving and increasing the capacity of forests to sequester greenhouse gases (GHGs)); and Goal 15 – terrestrial life (preservation of the biological diversity of forest ecosystems). The Brazzaville Roadmap also contributes to Goal 2 (fight against hunger) and Goal 7 (use of renewable energy).

Preservation of forest cover and the fight against climate change. Sustainable forest management and the fight against deforestation feature alongside land-use planning and consolidating land-use plans in the **planned Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** submitted in 2015 to the Secretariat of the United Nations Climate Change (UNFCCC) by each of the five countries included in this review. The promotion of community forestry is explicitly mentioned in the documents submitted by Cameroon and the CAR. **The Paris Climate Agreement**, adopted in 2016 by the UNFCCC, puts focus on the fight against deforestation and forest degradation in order to reduce GHG emissions; the Agreement (UN, 2015) stresses the importance of taking communities and their knowledge into account when developing policies. The Paris Agreement was signed by the five countries covered by the review and has been ratified by four of them: Cameroon, Gabon and the CAR in 2016, and Congo in 2017.

As part of the **Bonn Challenge**, initiated in 2011 by the German Government and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and supported by the New York Declaration on Forests (2014), four countries in the region are committed to restoring large areas of degraded and deforested land.²¹ The Forest Landscape Restoration approach, which underpins efforts being made, involves stakeholder participation in decision-making processes related to land use.

²⁰ See for example FAO (2017).

²¹ The commitments are as follows: 12.6 million hectares to be restored in Cameroon by 2030; 8 million in the DRC by 2020; 3.6 million in CAR and 2 million in Congo by 2030. See: <http://www.bonnchallenge.org/commitments>

Countries in the region are engaged at various stages in the implementation of **REDD+** type initiatives. Launched by Norway in 2015, **the CAFE Initiative** (Central African Forest Initiative) is likely to increase the intensity and impact of REDD+ related activities. The DRC, which is a laboratory for REDD+, is about to receive a historic US\$55 million payment from the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) as part of the Mai-Ndombe Emissions Reduction Programme. Several aspects justify linking community forestry to REDD+ initiatives. On the one hand, clarifying and securing land rights are key milestones for REDD+ projects (especially for the identification of those who will participate in benefit sharing). On the other hand, as noted by Karsenty *et al.* (2010), many community forests are in non-permanent forest areas, along roads, in already degraded forest areas where additionality of payments for ecosystem services (PSEs) is high. Finally, as cited in Stevens *et al.* (2014), the forests that CLPAs make use of, without formal recognition of their rights, are the most vulnerable to changes in use (agro-industry, mining and oil extraction, infrastructure) which is often accompanied by a profound change in forest cover.

Effective recognition of community rights. The need to promote and secure the CLPAs' rights is particularly necessary as governments in the region commit themselves to various international texts and agreements applicable at the national level. Relevant commitments, binding or otherwise, include the recognition of **customary ownership** and **land rights** as well as **valuing traditional knowledge**.²² Many texts also commit partner countries to development assistance. The implementation of these provisions remains uneven in the region and the promotion of community forestry can contribute to greater coherence. The same is true of the principle of **Free, Prior and Informed Consent** (FPIC), which is either absent from national legislation or integrated in a limited manner and which generally lacks a regulatory mechanism for its enforcement.²³ The cross-cutting issues of **inclusivity and gender integration** also arise in the design and implementation of forest policies. While the legal frameworks of the countries covered by the review ensure equal treatment of all citizens, the right of women to property has not been systematically affirmed (RRI, 2017) and, in practice, women, young people, older people and indigenous peoples suffer from weak representation in decision-making processes and reduced access to the benefits of forest valuation. A renewed approach to community forestry, with a focus on greater inclusivity, is expected to amplify the positive impacts at the community level and boost the contribution of all stakeholders to the overall economic fabric, and the various processes informing forest policies.

Improving forest governance. The processes linked to negotiating and implementing **FLEGT VPAs** between timber exporting countries and the EU also play a major transformative role in several countries.²⁴ VPAs, while focused on the development of systems to ensure the legality of timber products exported to the EU (and sometimes timber sold on the domestic market), are not limited to technical aspects only. They involve reviewing legislation and practices, through multi-stakeholder deliberative processes that have led to an unprecedented level of participation by civil society and the private sector. The development of community forestry should allow CLPAs to voice their concerns and aspirations. In addition, VPAs – especially when aligned with REDD+ initiatives – stimulate both the capacity building of administrations and intersectoral collaboration, which is imperative given the cross-cutting nature of the issues. For example, bringing the forestry administration and the tax administration together is crucial

22 Relevant texts may include the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Governance of Tenure, and the Convention on Biological Diversity. See RFUK (2015) for a more detailed list.

23 Cameroon and the DRC have adopted national guidelines for obtaining CLIP as part of REDD+ projects. FPIC provisions are included in Congo's National REDD+ Strategy. In CAR, the creation of community forests is subject to obtaining FPIC. See MINEPDED, 2014; MEDD, 2015; and MEFDDE, 2016.

24 Currently, Cameroon, Congo and CAR are implementing the VPA. The negotiation process has made little progress in recent years in Gabon. In the DRC, the FLEGT Technical Commission resumed its activities in 2016 but negotiations have yet to be restarted.

for optimising revenue collection (and hence redistribution) of forest revenues, these can then be allocated to the decentralised branches of the administration and the local authorities in support of local forest communities. This last aspect can benefit from the countries' participation in **the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)**, which requires disclosure of revenues collected by the State,²⁵ thus offering a lever for demanding more equitable and efficient redistribution of receipts.

Decentralisation, land reform and spatial planning. All the initiatives undertaken by the forest sector in the countries studied, especially those taken as part of the REDD+ and FLEGT processes, have led to planning, launching and accelerating reforms targeting the organisation of national territories. Redefining the jurisdiction of the various administrative levels, clarifying land rights, zoning of land and its uses and identifying 'development corridors' (see Megevand et al., 2013) are essential to the development and implementation of realistic forest policies consistent with sustainable development commitments. Donors' interest in these reforms is evident from current or planned support, with strong emphasis on CLPA participation, particularly as part of zoning projects. However, the relevance and scope of these developments will be limited if they merely confine forest-dependent communities to a passive role, allowing them to act as mere consultants and only allowing expression of consent. For its potential to be fully experienced, community forestry must be placed at the heart of reforms, not peripheral or at the end of the process. In DRC, where the reforms are relatively advanced, substantive work is currently being done along these lines by the TRMAFC.

25 Cameroon, Congo and the DRC have joined the EITI. For the latter two countries, forest revenues are subject to disclosure. Due to political instability, CAR's participation in the initiative has been suspended since 2013.

Review of European support for community forestry in the Congo Basin

This review examines the general framework for interventions and the specific support of EU Member States, the EU, and multilateral organisations whose budget is at least partly based on European contributions.

Bilateral support

Germany – Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

In addition to supporting the implementation of COMIFAC's strategic and operational activities, GIZ plays a significant role in the forestry sector in Cameroon and the DRC.

Cameroon. Supported by the *Forest-Environment Sector Programme* of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, the agency has supported changes to forest legislation and other related topics, without really contributing to the implementation of statutory community forests, preferring to act at the communal forests level. However, community forestry support has recently been initiated, in one region (North) and the problem of fuelwood has been used to justify this approach.

DRC. Similarly, fuelwood (South Kivu) and formalising of artisanal logging (Maniéma) have also prompted GIZ to act at the community level in DRC.²⁶ The agency contributed to the development of a matrix for community concessions' Simple Management Plans. The current phase (2016-2020, € 24.6 million) of the *Biodiversity and Sustainable Forest Management Programme* intends to consolidate and extend the scope of these first initiatives. In Maniéma, the co-management (communities, municipalities, the State and loggers) of 120,000 hectares of natural forest is planned, through setting up cooperatives. GIZ has also financed a study dedicated to the subject (Van de Rijt, 2015) and a mapping of stakeholders involved at the national level. (Bauer, 2016). The agency participates in the TRMAFC.

Belgium

Belgium played a founding role in the development of community forestry in the DRC through the FORCOM project (FAO, 2007-2012), which enabled the government to implement the 2002 Forestry Law. The project contributed to the development of a specific component within the National Programme for Environment, Forests, Waters and Biodiversity, encouraged the creation of a department in charge of the Directorate General of Forests, and participated in the development of procedures and the draft Decree adopted in 2014. Less active than in recent years, the Belgians nonetheless attended the workshops which led to the development of the

26 See: Biodiversité et gestion durable des forêts, https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/20170211_01_PBF_SCREEN_fr.pdf. The Programme took over from the Biodiversity and Sustainable Forest Management Programme (2008-2016), in which GIZ supported the DRC in the development of the National Environment, Forests, Waters and Biodiversity Programme, including a community forestry component. The Bangengele forest (14,000 ha) now has an approved PSG, as does the Kailo concession (44,000 ha), which also has a cooperative. A third forest is in the process of being identified. For the process that led to the development of the Kailo PSG, see: <https://www.dfs-online.de/assets/Uploads/News/5.-COD-GIZ-PBF-WSK-Note-conceptMN3final.pdf>

Brazzaville Roadmap. Additionally, Belgium's facilitation of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) in 2018-2019 will place the country in a position to assist with guiding related discussions.

France – French Development Agency (AFD) and French Global Environment Facility (FFEM)

AFD. The AFD, which helped define sustainable forest management in the region and to interlink the economic, ecological and social issues stemming from the management of logging concessions, has long worked with other donors to manage local communities' expectations of (sharing of benefits, delimitation of community development series, etc.)

While communal forestry has been a work area for the agency until recently the community level had not been specifically addressed. In the DRC, the AFD has expressed interest, through the *Sustainable Forest Management*²⁷ Programme, initially proposed in 2017 as part of the CAFI initiative. The programme (which is yet to be approved) includes a component specifically dedicated to CFCL and the forests of the Territorial Decentralised Entities (ETD). AFD's AGEDUFOR project (*Support for Sustainable Forest Management*, 2011-2019) is participating in the TRMAFC.

A study carried out by AFD is underway at the regional level to assess the impact on deforestation of different managerial methods and forestry management. Community forests are covered by this study alongside developed and undeveloped industrial logging concessions, and *Forest Stewardship Council* (FSC) certified logging concessions.

FFEM. Launched in 2006, the Fund's *Small Initiatives Programme* (IPP) intends to finance environmental projects led by national CSOs. Technical support by the IUCN is foreseen. Between 2006 and 2016, the Fund supported, to varying degrees, 65 projects in the five countries covered by this review (representing a total of €4.4 million). Community-based resource management was largely addressed and a number of projects were specifically part of community forests,²⁸ with a clear interest in strengthening cooperatives.

The Netherlands

Although not directly involved in the forestry sector in the region, Dutch assistance has supported two organisations, Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (SNV) and Tropenbos International (TBI). The SNV, which played a founding role in supporting the development of community forests in Cameroon²⁹ and initiated pilot projects in the DRC, has now stopped working on this in the region. The TBI contributes to better understanding of the participation of small-scale industries and community forestry in the DRC. The organisation also benefits from EU funding.

27 See the CAFI specific entry later in this document. AFD will contribute US\$6 million. See: <http://www.fonaredd-rdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/GDF-DOCUMENT-DE-PROGRAMME.pdf>

28 See: <https://www.ffem.fr/fr/resume-executif-capitalisation-de-10-ans-dexperiences-du-programme-de-petites-initiatives-2006-2016>

29 In 2011, the organisation supported 44 community forests in the country (Cuny, 2011).

UK – Department for International Development (DFID)

DFID has historically been a supporter of community forestry in the region, initially in Cameroon through the *Community Forestry Development Project*,³⁰ then in the DRC with the management of forests by local communities in the fight against poverty in the DRC (FORCOL) project. The initial support was continued, with Norway's participation, through the Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF) from 2008 to 2014. This experience strengthened DFID's interest in securing CLPAs' livelihoods as a pillar of forest protection, as demonstrated in the current ILLUCBF project (see below).

Global Programmes. Of the three global British programmes launched in this decade in the forest sector, *Forest Governance, Markets and Climate*³¹ (FGMC, 2011-2021) has had the greatest impact in the region. By promoting reforms conducive to good forest governance and the legal timber market, and placing an emphasis on ownership by all stakeholders in VPAs, the FGMC has contributed to the EU's FLEGT Action Plan. CLPAs' rights in these processes have improved due to FGMC interventions, notably through civil society's work.

Regional Focus on Community Forestry: ILLUCBF. The *Improving Livelihoods and Land Use project in Congo Basin Forests* (ILLUCBF, 2015-2020, GBP 18.7 million)³² was set up with the aim of improving the living conditions of forest-dependent communities in the five countries. Through support for legal reform, advocacy and independent observation, it supports recognition of CLPAs' rights and anchoring community forestry. It also works at the community forest enterprise level, focusing on the development of sustainable, inclusive and multiple socio-economic models that are likely to attract innovative investments.³³ The ILLUCBF has already played a decisive role in consolidating multi-stakeholder actions around community forestry, which have facilitated recent developments in CAR, and the development and adoption of the SNFC in the DRC. The project was designed to work with CAFI and improve links between community forestry and REDD+, community rights, and the political and programmatic prioritisation of these aspects.

Sweden – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)

Community forestry does not appear to be one of Sweden's main intervention areas, but the country places great emphasis on boosting civil society and building CLPAs' ability to secure their rights. In the DRC, the agency has long supported Forest Peoples Programme's (FPP) actions, including securing livelihoods, CLPAs' access to REDD+ benefits, and promoting FPIC. The *Rights & Resources Initiative* (RRI) and the *Tenure Facility*,³⁴ launched by the latter, are also supported by Sweden.

30 See Djeumo, 2001. The project supported the establishment of a dedicated unit at the Ministry level, as well as the adoption of an initial Manual of Grant Procedures and Community Forest Management Standards.

31 See: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-201724>. The other two global programmes in question are the International Forestry Knowledge (KNOWFOR, 2012-2017, see: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-203034>), and Investments in Forests and Sustainable Land Use (IFSLU, 2014-2020, see: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-202745>), which aims to combat deforestation in the agricultural and agroforestry sector through public-private partnerships involving communities (projects are planned in Cameroon, Gabon and the DRC).

32 See: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-204956>

33 The project has three components: (i) the CoNGOs consortium (region), supported by IIED (see <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G04056.pdf>); (ii) the Dryad initiative (Cameroon), supported by the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) (see http://www.worldagroforestry.org/sites/default/files/DRYAD_Flier.pdf); and (iii) the Community Forests project in the DRC, supported by RFUK in association with national CSOs (see <https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/media.ashx/forests-communautaires-in-rdc-web.pdf>).

34 In the region, the only intervention by the Facility was in Cameroon, in the form of support for the development of a standardised approach for participatory mapping. See: <https://thetenurefacility.org/timeline/cameroon/>

Possible developments for EU support for forest governance in the region

At a European Parliament panel organised by FAO and Fern in November 2018, the Commission's Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation provided some details about developments in EU support for conservation and sustainable forest management that should be considered. It is clear from this statement that the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 will, in principle, merge the main development cooperation instruments, notably the European Development Fund (EDF) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), both of which have so far been particularly involved in actions supported by the EU in Central Africa.

On the other hand, redirecting the environmental budget within the GPGC programme is foreseen for the geographic areas covered by EU cooperation. This reconfiguration will have important implications for the range of EU-supported issues in the region, including community forestry, as choices will be made according to priorities identified by the governments themselves and then negotiated with the EU.

The EU's External Investment Plan, launched in 2017, aims to stimulate investment in unfavourable environments by financing a small private sector. The link with the SDGs is clearly visible. This could be used to create and strengthen community forest enterprises focused on these objectives (see: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/factsheet-eip-20171120_en.pdf).

European Union

In its new Consensus on Development (EU, 2017), the EU reiterates its commitment to the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, which shapes its overall strategy. There is a clear link between environmental protection and the fight against climate change, and eliminating poverty, which is the priority of EU development aid.

Substantial EU intervention in Central African biodiversity protection emphasises complementarity between conservation of protected areas and local communities' social and economic development. Actions to date have supported the development of the participatory rather than the community component of conservation.³⁵ However, community-based forest management is mentioned under the Global Public Goods and Challenges Programme³⁶ (GPGC), one of two global flagship EU environmental programmes, along with Biodiversity for Life. The GPGC aims to support the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity through innovative approaches such as PES, community management and public-private partnerships.

³⁵ Under the Central African Forest Ecosystem Programme (ECOFAC), the EU has mobilised around €200 million since 1992 (including €76.6 million for Phase 6, 2017-2022). The ECOFAC 6 programme documentation emphasises local populations, their representation in steering committees, their access to the benefits of conservation and the development of natural resources. See: https://www.observatoire-comifac.net/ajax/download?mk=project_general_info_program&fk=project_document&id=296

³⁶ The GPGC (2014-2020) took over from the Environment and Natural Resources Thematic Programme (ENRTP). Its projected 2020 budget (updated in 2017) amounts to €1.318 billion.

To date, EU interventions related to community forestry have mainly been in the broader context of the FLEGT Action Plan and the negotiation or implementation of VPAs. The largest number of these interventions³⁷ (but not the most important) emerged through the EU FAO FLEGT Programme, launched in 2012 as a result of the ACP-FLEGT Support Programme (2008-2012). More broadly, the different phases of the programme have supported strengthening of the legal and operational framework for community forest management. Particular emphasis has been given to formalising artisanal mining, structuring of domestic markets, promoting independent forest monitoring, and stakeholder engagement in VPA processes. Apart from EU FAO FLEGT, this review has identified a relatively limited number of actions, but with more substantial single funding.³⁸ The DACEFI project was, in particular, crucial for refining the regulatory framework and testing the first community forests in Gabon.

While the last phase of the GPGC calls for special attention to promoting community management at the global level,³⁹ it remains marginal in EU actions in Central Africa. The EU, mainly under the FLEGT Action Plan, intends to continue to support improved governance, notably through multi-stakeholder deliberative processes, strengthening capacities of supervisory administrations, and optimising systems for collecting and redistributing forest revenues – all of which could benefit community forestry. The FORETS project in the DRC is an interesting example of current support and could lead to the creation of additional CFCL.⁴⁰

The EU supported negotiations and implementation of the FAO *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure* (VGGT). It seems to be giving increasing importance, in the context of external actions, to land and land use issues⁴¹. The feasibility of stronger EU actions to combat global deforestation is currently being examined by the Commission, and a study to this effect (COWI, 2018) has recently been published. If such an action plan is forthcoming, it will certainly be an opportunity for the EU to step up interventions for spatial planning and clarifying land rights.⁴²

37 This review has identified seven interventions supported in this framework since 2008 at the community level or explicitly involving communities, for a total of approximately US\$940,000 (calculated on the basis of the projects presented at the URL: <http://www.fao.org/in-action/eu-fao-flegt-programme/where-we-work/fr/#/web/map>).

38 In particular: the Promotion project for the legal production and export of wood from community forests, (Cameroon, 2011-2013, implemented by the SNV, approximately €1.3 million with 76 per cent EU funding); and the Development of Community Alternatives to Illegal Forest Exploitation project (DACEFI), with two phases (DACEFI 1 in Cameroon and Gabon, 2006-2008, DACEFI 2 in Gabon, 2010-2014) implemented by WWF and Nature+ with an overall budget of around €5 million.

39 See: GPGC Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2018-2020 (https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/mip-gpgc-2018-2020-annex_en.pdf).

40 The Training, Research and Environment project in Tshopo (FORETS) was launched at the beginning of 2018. One of its components focuses on local market actions and the consolidation of value chains for the artisanal exploitation of timber and the development of tourism. In particular, the rehabilitation works of Kisangani University, supported by the project, will be an opportunity to test the socio-economic and environmental robustness of this value chain by creating a timber supply chain which can be followed from the source to the final production. These elements will make it possible to assess the sustainability of technical and financial requirements applicable to CLFC. See: http://www.cifor.org/publications/pdf_files/brochures/6627-brochure.pdf

41 The EU expects to allocate €240 million to land governance over the period 2012-2021. See: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/node/119101_fr. Un appui à la Tenure Facility est en cours de préparation.

42 According to the feasibility study, weak land and environmental governance is the main driver in three of the five types of interventions the EU could develop in producing countries.

Multilateral support

World Bank

In its 2016-2020 Forest Action Plan (World Bank, 2016), the World Bank renews its commitment to clarifying forest tenure rights, recalling that forests of outstanding biodiversity and carbon sequestration ability are often located in areas characterised by poorly defined, fragile or disputed property rights. Securing CLPAs' rights is highlighted as an important criterion for approving the Bank's actions.⁴³ It further recognises the role of CLPAs in sustainable forest management and the centrality, though often neglected, of the cultural and spiritual aspects.

The Bank hosts three of the top five Multilateral Recipients of EU Aid (EU and Member States) in the global forest sector, after the UN REDD Programme and the Global Environment Facility (GEF, which the Bank administers): the Forest Investment Programme (FIP), the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and, to a lesser extent, the PROFOR programme⁴⁴ (see Speechly, 2015).

The Bank is a historic advocate of formalising community and participatory forestry both globally and in the region. It supported the development and implementation of the concept in Cameroon, supported land reform and the current revision of forestry law in the Republic of Congo, and is working with the DRC, particularly through the implementation of the REDD+ investment plan, which focuses on CLPAs' access to REDD+ financing benefits. Under the Forest Investment Programme (FIP), the Bank has introduced a mechanism (the US\$80 million *Special Grant Facility*) dedicated to CLPAs in 14 pilot countries. Governance of this mechanism is entrusted to national steering committees made up of CLPA representatives. Such committees are now in place in the Republic of Congo and the DRC.⁴⁵

Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI)

The initiative was launched in 2015 at the instigation of Norway.⁴⁶ The six countries in the region targeted by CAFI are at different stages of preparation, negotiation or implementation: the DRC and Gabon each have a Letter of Intent (LOI), respectively signed in 2016 and 2017; Republic of Congo has submitted its investment plan; and Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and the CAR are in the process of developing theirs. The primary objective of the initiative is to support the Central African region in making strategic choices that are conducive to preserving healthy forest cover, as well as using it as an engine for development. Efforts aim to support the implementation of REDD+ strategies and attract additional funding, notably through the FCPF, the FIP, the GEF, and the UNFCCC Green Climate Fund.

Gabon. The LOI⁴⁷ will trigger US\$18.4 million in funding by 2020. The selected focus areas include (a) spatial planning; (b) the development of a monitoring system for natural resources and forests; and (c) strengthening forest governance to optimise carbon sequestration, reduce

43 See: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/24026/K8828EN.pdf?sequence=7&isAllowed=y>

44 PROFOR is particularly interested in the domestic market and the legality of timber in the DRC and Cameroon. On a broader scale, its work on REDD+ benefit sharing has helped to inform the World Bank's strategy. See: <https://www.profor.info/knowledge/making-benefit-sharing-arrangements-work-forest-dependent-communities>

45 In Congo, funding of \$4.5 million has been announced. A project is now in place in the DRC (Forest-Dependent Communities Support Project, 2016-2021, USD 6 million including 2 million raised by the GEF). See: <http://projects.worldbank.org/P149049?lang=fr>

46 To date, only Norway and France have made financial commitments to the initiative, with pledges of approximately USD 252 million and USD 3 million respectively. The EU, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and South Korea are listed as other expected contributors.

47 See: http://www.cafi.org/content/dam/cafi/docs/Executive Board/CAFI_EB_Decisions/English/EB.2017.12 Gabon .pdf

emissions from forest degradation, and ensuring the inclusiveness of these processes. While the LOI uses FPIC as one of the milestones for releasing the second tranche of funding, it does not mention community forestry. The AFD's programme for supporting actions in the three identified focus areas is slightly more explicit.⁴⁸

DRC. The LOI⁴⁹ provides for at least US\$200 million over the 2016-2020 period, through the National REDD Fund. It promotes a holistic approach through a series of interventions: integrated REDD+ programmes, support of land-use planning (UN-Habitat), support to land reform (UNDP), forest cover monitoring, sustainable forest management, support for civil society engagement, and support for forest management by indigenous peoples.⁵⁰ In contrast to Gabon, community forestry is explicitly mentioned as one of the milestones of the LOI. It should be noted, however, that CAFI has not yet participated in TRMAFC. As part of CAFI, in 2017 AFD proposed the *Programme for Sustainable Forest Management*, estimated at US\$18 million, with US\$4 million specifically dedicated to community and ETD forests. The AFD approach recognises the importance of integrated management based on multiple modes of recovery (timber, fuelwood, NTFP, carbon). However, the programme remains to be approved.⁵¹

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

The Fund was established in 1991 by the World Bank, which still administers its funds. The actions taken which are relevant to this review are biodiversity, climate change, sustainable forest management and REDD+.

GEF interventions are aligned with the Aichi Targets, including Goal 18 (legal recognition of knowledge and practices of relevant CLPAs regarding conservation and sustainable use of resources). Additionally, a number of these actions explicitly place community management at the heart of their approach. The GEF is aligned with the FAO, which is implementing several projects in the region, as well as with the World Bank, UNDP and UNEP. GEF has supported a series of projects focusing on integrated ecosystem management, wildlife protection, and community-based landscape restoration.⁵² The interventions which have been supported by GEF have a strong potential for knowledge generation. Two future projects, entrusted to UNEP, seem particularly interesting for this review because of their strong community base and focus on securing rights: the COBALAM project in Cameroon and a project regarding the management of the Salonga National Park in the DRC.⁵³

48 National land use planning and forest monitoring to promote sustainable development strategies for Gabon (2018-2022). Clarification of land use is expected to contribute to the consolidation of community forestry initiatives. See: [http://www.cafi.org/content/dam/cafi/docs/Gabon documents/French/Gabon_pRODOC_AFD_CAFI_FINAL.pdf](http://www.cafi.org/content/dam/cafi/docs/Gabon%20documents/French/Gabon_pRODOC_AFD_CAFI_FINAL.pdf)

49 See: [http://www.cafi.org/content/dam/cafi/docs/drc-documents/DRC_2016_LOI V7 Final 18 April 2016 -ENG - with logos.pdf](http://www.cafi.org/content/dam/cafi/docs/drc-documents/DRC_2016_LOI%20V7%20Final%2018%20April%202016-ENG-with%20logos.pdf)

50 For the list of approved programmes (September 2018), see: <http://www.cafi.org/content/cafi/en/home/partner-countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/drc-fonaredd-programmes.html>

51 National civil society organisations and international NGOs have expressed concerns about the aims and effects of the programme. On the one hand, they believe that the risks of opening up new forests to industrial logging would have effects contrary to the objectives stated in the reduction of GHG emissions; and secondly that some proposed interventions contravene the principles put forward in the SNFC, which intend to entrust decision-making and management power to the communities themselves.

52 In particular, see the Community-Based Miombo Forest Management project in South East Katanga (DRC, 2016-2021, US\$19 million: <http://www.fao.org/gef/projects/detail/en/c/1056857/>), through which FAO contributes at the provincial level to the TRMAFC.

53 The US\$22 million Removing Barriers to Biodiversity Conservation, Land Restoration and Sustainable Forest Management through Community-Based Landscape Management (COBALAM) project will involve the Ministry of the Environment and Rainforest Alliance, who have long experience of community forestry in the country. It intends to entrust the conservation management of high value forests to communities. See: https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/project_documents/10-28-16_PIF_Request_Document_2nd_Resubmission_clean.pdf. The project concept of Promoting the Effective Management of Salonga National Park through Community Forests and Improving the Well-being of Local Communities was approved in 2017. With a budget of approximately US\$40 million, it aims to grant 225,000 hectares of community forests with clear land and usage rights. See: https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/project_documents/09-19-17_PIF_Request_Document_clean_SN.pdf

Through its *Small Grants Programme*, executed by UNDP, the GEF is directly targeting the community level. A variety of initiatives are in place in Cameroon, CAR and DRC. In DRC, a community-based REDD+ programme (co-funded by the UN-REDD programme) is in the pilot phase.⁵⁴

Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

FAO has played a leading role in defining the concept of community and participatory forestry at the international level. The organisation sees significant benefits in terms of poverty reduction, forest management and the fight against global warming from community-based management. The recognition and securing of CLPAs' rights are also the subject of an entire section of the *VGGT* (FAO, 2012a).⁵⁵

At the programme level, some interventions are monitored through the FAO FLEGT Programme (see section on the EU). Other broader programmes have been implemented by FAO itself (especially those co-financed by GEF). When this was the case, the FAO has shown interest in projects combining support for the recognition of community management rights, establishing management structures, and operationalising management plans intended to relieve pressure on resources and vulnerable environments.

Building on lessons learned is a strong component of the FAO's interventions, which aim to strengthen enabling factors for community forestry and particularly its legal and institutional structures (see FAO, 2012b, FAO, 2015 and FAO, 2017). In recent years, it has published works examining dynamics in the Congo Basin surrounding inclusive forest management (FAO/CIFOR, 2016) and the sustainable use of wildlife by communities (FAO/CIFOR)(CIRAD, 2017).

The Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF)

The CBFF was established in 2008 as a partnership between the African Development Bank (AfDB) and COMIFAC, with joint funding from Norway and the United Kingdom (€119 million), and from Canada (14 million); its aim is to finance activities conducive to preserving forests and the livelihoods of people who depend on them. In 2014, the two major contributors, dissatisfied with the Fund's governance, decided to end their support. The Fund was expected to cease operation in late 2018. Despite the difficulties encountered, the Fund has been singled out both for pooling financial contributions (prefiguring the CAFI initiative) and creating opportunities for civil society.

The CBFF portfolio, a total of 38 projects, funded community-based activities, including three community forestry initiatives, all in Cameroon.⁵⁶ Two of them have been noted for innovations in grouping community forest enterprises into management entities (associations or single enterprises) – an approach which allows for efforts and investments to be pooled, improving sustainability. The independent evaluation of the CBFF (AfDB, 2018) found that this innovation was compelling and should be replicated.



⁵⁴ See: <https://sgp.undp.org/about-us-157/partnerships/community-based-redd-cbr.html>

⁵⁵ The implementation of the Guidelines is supported by international institutions and donors, whose interventions are now guided by this document.

⁵⁶ Namely: (i) Partnerships Project for Community Forest Development (Nature+, completed in 2013); (ii) Reforestation of degraded areas and valorisation of non-timber forest products project in the Sanaga Maritime (Cameroon Ecology, completed in 2013); and (iii) Ensuring Livelihoods Conservation and Improvement through the Sustainable Management of Community Forest Operations in Cameroon (Rainforest Alliance, completed in 2015).



Photo: Nat Dyer

The International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO)

ITTO's interest in the development of community forestry in the region began in the early 2000s in Cameroon.⁵⁷ In Gabon, ITTO piloted the testing of forest law provisions in 2001, with important links with the DACEFI Project (EU).⁵⁸ ITTO seems inclined to encourage diversification initiatives (NTPFs, agroforestry). In 2010, it launched its *Community Forest Management and Enterprises* programme, which focuses on boosting the small private sector. No country in the region has seen any effects, and it is important to remember that ITTO intervenes if it has received a well-thought through proposal from a member state.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

In addition to its GEF-funded activities (see above), UNDP supports decentralisation processes in Republic of Congo and the DRC. In Republic of Congo, the Programme has supported the creation of Community Management and Development Committees (CGDCs), which could ultimately play a role if the country were to decide to formalise community forestry. In the DRC, UNDP is in charge of the Support to the Territorial Development Reform Programme (within the framework of CAFI), which aims to establish a management policy "respectful of the forests and the rights and needs" of CLPAs.⁵⁹ It is expected that links will be formed with the Development Programme of the Land Policy Document (UN-Habitat, also under the auspices of the CAFI),⁶⁰

57 The Integrated Community Forest Management Project in the Mefou Valley and Afamba (2002-2008) has, among other things, enabled the allocation and management of community forests to be refined. See: https://www.itto.int/project_search/information/?proid=PD028%2F00+Rev.2.29%28F

58 The Community Forest Development Project (2009-2016) has produced a technical reference sheet for community forestry in Gabon. See: https://www.itto.int/project_search/information/?proid=PD383%2F05+Rev.2.29%28F

59 See: <http://www.cafi.org/content/dam/cafi/docs/drc-documents/DRC-Approved Programmes/DRC-AT-UNDP/DRC-UNDP-Aménagement du territoire- Prod 14-12-2016.pdf>

60 See: <http://www.cafi.org/content/dam/cafi/docs/drc-documents/DRC-Approved Programmes/DRC-Tenure-UN-Habitat/DRC-UN-Habitat-Foncier-Prod.pdf>

Impact and effectiveness of European support to date

Two decades after being formalised, community forestry has failed to establish itself in the region as a convincing method for land use and development. There are many lessons to be learnt from this which must be taken on board by national and local governments, as well as donors and technical and financial partners (TFPs).

A half-hearted commitment

Crucial contributions to anchoring policies

FAO (2018) identifies six keys to effective participatory forestry: safe land tenure; a supportive regulatory environment; strong governance; viable technology; adequate market knowledge; and a favourable administration. These keys, which underlie all bilateral and multilateral TFP actions in the forest sector, are also relevant to the development of community forestry.

Women preparing the Gnetum (*okok*) nursery in the village of Minwoho. Lekié, Center Region, Cameroon.
Photo: Ollivier Girard/CIFOR/Flickr.com CC



TFP-supported sectoral reforms have been crucial, as have initiatives to strengthen forest governance – in particular REDD+ and FLEGT VPAs, whose multi-stakeholder dimension has enabled civil society and to a certain extent communities to weigh in on the reform of legal frameworks in several countries. The impact of interventions is particularly evident with regard to the legal, regulatory and institutional anchoring of policies in Cameroon, Gabon, the CAR and the DRC. Many TFPs, although varying in number, have experimented with pilot projects, as well as implementation of community forests where legislation allows it. These activities have created and refined a large body of tools (procedures, manuals, guidelines, practical guides and toolkits), and helped to identify the limiting factors and possible avenues for improvement.

Several initiatives currently focus on optimising value chains as well as their social and environmental sustainability. Others are improving community forest governance to be more inclusive and redesigning governing structures in order to pool their efforts. The sustainability and effectiveness of community reforestation initiatives, in combination with sustainable fuelwood production, is being tested in different locations. Community-based REDD+ projects, whose benefits remain to be determined, need to be strengthened to deliver real lessons.

An unequal and divided offer

Contrasting positions and an overall inconsistent offer. The second part of this review discusses significant differences in terms of commitment from one TFP to another. Some donors stand out due to the foundational aspect and/or the size of their interventions, such as Germany (GIZ-KfW), Belgium, the United States (USAID through WWF), the United Kingdom (DFID) and the EU at the bilateral level; as well as the World Bank, the FAO, GEF, and ITTO at the multilateral level. Others, on the other hand, have adopted a more cautious attitude. Continuity is rarely a salient feature of these interventions, even for TFPs historically engaged in the promotion and development of these policies. Thus, while pioneering, the World Bank's role has been more discreet in Cameroon, before being once again restated in the DRC. Belgium and the Netherlands made important contributions over the long term before stepping back. The EU's support, meanwhile, has been episodic. Conversely, the renewed interest emerging in the region (such as GIZ's commitment in the DRC, which contrasts with its previous actions in Cameroon), also indicates how prioritising these policies is, unlike sustainable forest management or conservation, easily subject to change.

A very relative prioritisation. Budgets allocated to community forestry are difficult to compare with those for sustainable management of logging concessions and conservation. There are certainly notable examples of policy focused projects with substantial funding, but these are the exception. Moreover, most community forestry projects approach the latter as part of a larger intervention (conservation, reforestation, REDD+ benefits, etc.)⁶¹

The vicious circle of project approaches. The fact that most policies have taken the form of stand-alone projects is both a symptom and factor of this inconstancy and low prioritisation. Projects are subject to time and budget constraints which do not work well with the in-depth efforts that community forestry requires. The project-based approach could be one of the reasons behind the ultimate failure at the end of the cycle. Even in the case of a successful intervention, the project will not necessarily be sustainable.

61 For example, recent criticisms by RRI (2018) and RFUK (2018) of REDD+ initiatives in Mai-Ndombe (DRC) point to the minimal application of safeguards, the inadequacy of identified governance infrastructures, and a lack of interest in the implementation of legislation regarding the formation of CFCLs.

A policy based on a poor common vision

The regional governance frameworks are not conducive to community forestry and, ultimately, donor engagement. The absence of a common vision from TFPs echoes the lack of a vision in national policies. However, the support DRC currently receives through TRMAFC and SNFC indicates that even a vision is not enough to ensure commitments are met. Indeed, fundamental uncertainties remain today over the nature and extent of CLPAs' rights, and community forestry model(s) to push for.

The thorny issue of securing rights

A unanimous commitment to the issue. Community forestry policies largely benefited from TFPs' increased interest in clarifying and securing CLPAs' rights to land and resource management. This support echoes international commitments made over the past two decades, which place community rights at the heart of efforts to reduce poverty, protect biodiversity and combat climate change. The increased focus on REDD+ in the region has been an accelerator, as the identification of rights holders is a prerequisite for establishing compensation schemes and sharing benefits.

Implementation challenges. Securing CLPAs' rights in the region's forestry policies is hampered by the legal dualism that characterises land and tenure systems. The evolution of national legislation is the result of a complex and high-stakes trade-offs between systems inherited from the colonial period and customary arrangements governing possession, use and access. Beyond the obvious political resistance, a fundamental difficulty lies in taking these methods into account in "modern" land-use policies, which are based on the geometric division of space.

The TFPs deal with this complexity mainly through support for participatory forestry, rather than community forestry. While some interventions tend to favour the status quo (for example the implementation of standards and procedures guaranteeing the exercise of user rights within logging concessions and protected areas), others have undeniably made it possible to change legal frameworks so that they will be in favour of genuine community-based management.

The temptation posed by division. The dominant pattern to date, particularly as experienced in Cameroon and Gabon, is to delineate community forests along areas reserved for permanent uses (production and conservation), while turning their backs on them. This confines CLPAs to land that is not rich in timber and relatively small, which leads to communities exercising limited usage and management rights in dedicated areas. Contrary to this option are claims for translating extensive customary uses into extended property rights – an idea that governments can hardly endorse and whose relevance is uncertain, as is stated by Karsenty and Vermeulen (2016: 207): *"Land ownership in the strict sense only concerns a small part of the area used on a daily basis"*.⁶² The temptation to divide land to simplify the situation can be found in the drawing of boundaries, either when they are being promoted or

62 To continue the quote (pp. 207–208): "These are the fields, which are generally quite close to the huts and fallow lands, as well as reserved land, future clearing sites that are pre-assigned to family groups or identified communities. These forms of land ownership can be translated into terms of exclusive control by one or more groups. On top of that [...] the soil is no longer primarily an object of control, but rather where hunting, gathering and extraction activities take place."

are already in place, for community forests assigned to indigenous populations. This is an idea with laudable intentions but which can have repercussions that are rarely anticipated.⁶³

A flexible and adaptive way of accepting overlapping uses that are not mutually exclusive and allow for rights to be secured while ensuring true co-management of lands, has yet to emerge. Ongoing processes, particularly in the DRC through formalising community forestry and land reform and use planning, represent a historic opportunity for TFPs. To this end, it is important to agree on the objectives and potential of community forestry, which is still a challenge.

What community forestry?

From a divided landscape on community forest management ... Public authorities have long been accused of mistrusting community management, but they hold no monopoly on this attitude. This is also reflected in the speeches and positions of several donors, particularly those who have prioritised valuation of forested areas by the timber industry and point the finger at the weak technical and commercial skills of CLPAs. There are also those who place increasing population pressure and intensified anthropogenic effects on forests at the forefront of their concerns. Added to this are difficulties in terms of internal governance and redistribution of income, which are used to legitimise preference for municipal rather than community management.

... A possible convergence around community rural development policy. The interviews carried out for this review, however, indicate that a community forestry policy based on strengthening rights with a lighter “forestry” base, namely logging, could lead to stronger engagement from TFPs whose involvement with these policies has been limited to date.

Not that it is desirable to remove the timber component from a community forestry policy – it remains a source of income that is difficult to ignore and retains a strong potential for boosting local economies and the technical training of communities. On the other hand, a shift away from making softwood lumber one option amongst others in community forestry could be a game changer. It would facilitate the implementation of co-management models, strengthen communities wishing to get away from “nothing but timber” and help reduce some specific timber requirements in the establishment and management of community forests.

The importance of experimenting and gathering evidence. Evidence of the sustainability and effectiveness of community forestry still needs to be collected and documented. This is essential to ensure strategic approaches and is equally important for the emergence of agreement on what is meant by community. As new situations emerge, they should be used to test innovative models or revisit previous successes. In any case, it is necessary to be pragmatic and true bottom-up approaches must be reinstated.

A strong and long-term commitment by the TFPs is required to multiply and amplify on-going efforts. While all stakeholders can count on research institutes and NGOs’ follow up, and monitoring and evaluation by TFPs,⁶⁴ it is also essential that monitoring and evaluation capacity

63 Motivations related to securing communities’ rights to mobility, which is thwarted by the restrictive uses of forest domains, as well as the valuation of traditional knowledge. Such segmentation can exacerbate conflicts between indigenous peoples and farming communities – complex relationships which are also characterised by a strong interdependence, both around the use of landscapes and resources and, increasingly with sedentary, conjugal ties. A large number of investigations have looked at the nature and evolution of relations between indigenous peoples and farmers in the Congo Basin – see, for example, Bahuchet & Guillaume (1979) and Robillard (2010).

64 These include CIRAD, CIFOR, ICRAF, IIED, PROFOR, RRI, Tropenbos, and Gembloux University/Nature+.

is strengthened at the administrative level, and by the CSOs and CLPAs themselves. Establishing criteria for adjusting and evaluating actions should be encouraged.

The required intervention links to consensual national visions. The innovations introduced in the DRC by the TRMAFC and the SNFC offer promising prospects. Such innovations can:

- Promote good ownership of the policies by national stakeholders at all levels, stimulating collaboration and consensus;
- Allow centralisation, processing and dissemination of lessons learned;
- Ensure the adaptive nature of the national strategy and legislation, which can be refined or redirected as needed;
- Identify the need for technical and financial support and mobilise assistance from TFPs, ensuring the congruence and complementary nature of interventions; and
- Ensure that community forestry is linked to land reform and land-use planning processes.

Due to its multi-stakeholder nature, the multiple-use model that it promotes (timber, NTFPs, agroforestry and agriculture, conservation, ecotourism, etc.) and all the policies it intends to contribute to (rural development, sustainable management and protection of forests, the fight against climate change), this offers an unprecedented framework for sustained commitment by the TFPs. They should invest fully in them, and emerging, similar actions should be promoted in other countries.

Case study No. 2. Integrated conservation in the community forests of Mount Oku (Cameroon)

Located in the North-West Region, the Kilum-Ijim forest is the primary Afromontane sub-ecozone in West Africa. It stretches along the slopes of Mount Oku and contains water supplies vital to the densely populated areas below, including the city of Bamenda. Forests are known for the medicinal value of its flora and are home to iconic bird species (including the Golden Turaco – *Tauraco bannermani* – classified as threatened by IUCN). Its escarpment is not suitable for logging, but the forests have been under severe pressure, including from slash-and-burn agriculture and fuelwood harvesting – from some 200,000 people, according to BirdLife International which, in 1987, initiated a project of community conservation in the area.

In the 1980s, Birdlife's project helped to establish a community management system to protect sensitive areas, improve agricultural practices, and search for alternative sources of income. The project led to the creation of community forests in the early 2000s (there are 13 today). While forest cover has regenerated over the course of the project, its end, in 2003, revealed significant problems with community ownership, whereby elites and elected members turned away from the original objectives in favour of more lucrative options, in particular the exploitation of Pygeum bark (*Prunus africana*), which provides an extract with medicinal properties of interest to both local and international industries. The intensity and inadequacy of sampling methods, combined with other factors (poorly controlled burns, straying domestic animals), have exerted new pressures, to the point that its exploitation within the zone had to be banned.

Created in 2007, the NGO Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch (CAMGEW) first focused on the Kilum-Ijim forest area through its activities promoting education and awareness about the protection of fauna and flora. Its activities were widened after observations were made regarding the over-exploitation of the African plum tree, the general health of the area, agricultural and forestry uses, community governance and its use by the local populations are indivisible and therefore require integrated responses. Beekeeping has proved to be a relevant point of entry, in this regard. The flora allows for the production of *Oku* white honey, which has a particular taste and appearance. With support from CAMGEW, the communities have embarked on a triple project: reforesting the area, especially to reinvigorate the *Prunus africana* population and maintain the rich flora; develop beekeeping and local reinvestment of generated income; and revisit governance arrangements for existing community forests.

Nurseries have been established and several thousand trees have been replanted since 2012 (some 75,000 by CAMGEW and 30,000 by individuals and groups formed by the project). More than a thousand people have been trained in beekeeping and nearly 700 received hives, placed in the heart of the forest – which allows regular monitoring of the area. Fires are better monitored and controlled and attempts to encroach on the forest through other uses are more quickly identified. The incentive aspect of beekeeping has been reinforced by the success of the subsequent honey production, which has benefited, since 2013, from a Protected Geographical Indication, with the selling price increasing (5000 FCA/kg in 2018, versus 2500 FCA in 2012). Six cooperatives are in place across the area to facilitate honey collection and a shop has

opened in Bamenda, offering a direct outlet. A strong emphasis is placed on training residents in horticultural and apicultural techniques, local processing of products, entrepreneurship and understanding value chains. A portion of honey revenues is intended to support microfinance schemes aimed at supporting women – for whom plots are being cleared, including by fire – to develop better adapted agroforestry practices or entrepreneurial activities.

CAMGEW intends to evolve towards supporting work in the area, thanks to increasing engagements with local organisations (associations, cooperatives and stakeholder platforms). Based on changes to practices and local populations' proper use of them, the renewal of the community forests' management committees was endorsed by administrative authorities in 2018, allowing the constitution of more representative institutions with a greater focus on the common good.

One of the strengths of the model promoted by CAMGEW lies in efforts to document and publish the progress made and challenges faced. This model has proved convincing and attracted international support, particularly from the FFEM (training in reforestation and beekeeping) and the New England Biolabs Foundation (support for environmental education). Partnerships with Cameroonian universities have also been established, reinforcing the academic and pedagogical scope of the initiatives.

Massif du Mayombe (Republic of Congo). Photo: Scamperdale/Flickr.com CC



Conclusion and recommendations

A renewed understanding of community forestry is emerging in the Congo Basin; to date it is supported by civil society and by national governments in two countries (CAR and DRC). It advocates for the potential of wider management arrangements that would focus on forests' multiple-uses, thus meeting community expectations (local development, and land rights security) while supporting responsible forest management and landscape governance. This would help governments and their technical and financial partners achieve their commitments to sustainable development and fighting deforestation and climate change.

However, important challenges and uncertainties remain not only in terms of sustainability and inclusivity, but also – and critically – the potential of community forestry to contribute to sustainable development, still needs to be demonstrated. While support from European donors has contributed to significant progress, more consistent and sustained efforts are essential. Particular emphasis should be placed on making community forestry a political and programmatic priority, strengthening capacity of both communities and supervisory bodies, and testing viable and long-lasting models along with generating solid evidence.

Recommendations to technical and financial partners and governments

TFPs and regional governments should:

- I. **Continue to support commitments such as the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, and those related to forest governance (FLEGT, REDD+, EITI, sectoral reforms).** It is essential to strengthen progress regarding transparency, intersectoral dialogue, capacity building, and CLPAs' participation. Maximising forest revenue collection and allocation systems must also be prioritised to allow administrations to decide how to support communities.
- II. **Provide consistent and long-term support to enable community forestry to be tested as a possible model for sustainable development, in a robust and convincing manner.** In particular, the EU should support stronger implementation of the FLEGT Action Plan and the possible development of an Action Plan to Protect Forests and Respect Rights to elaborate on the role and contribution expected from communities', securing rights, and community forestry.
- III. **Encourage the development or reinforcement of a consensual national vision on community forestry in each country.** Such a tool (which is a vehicle for ownership from all stakeholders) will make it possible to agree milestones, define in a structured way the division of labour and possible contributions, and better identify the resources required. The dialogue leading to the development of this vision will also be an opportunity for TFPs to harmonise their positions and priorities.
- IV. **Encourage general public support for community forestry.** TFP support needs to be strengthened in order to support testing (especially regarding the multiple use dimension of community forestry) and the consolidation of gains, ensuring that these inform the development of consensual national visions, and their implementation.

- V. **Support for implementation of the Brazzaville Roadmap.** The Roadmap demonstrates a regional commitment that needs to be supported and informed. Particular emphasis will be placed on the contribution of each national dialogue to the functioning of the regional platform envisaged in Priority No. 7 of the Roadmap.
- VI. **Ensure that any initiative led by communities leads to innovation and good practice.** This includes the systematic application of bottom-up approaches and the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, as well as linking interventions with the objectives of empowering concerned CLPAs and helping them to account, through existing legal provisions on the creation of community forests and community managed forests.
- VII. **Continued support to civil society and communities.** CSOs have a crucial role to play in advocating for adequate regulatory provisions (especially for simplifying procedures) and community empowerment. To ensure support is effective, it is important to push for criteria defining the nature and role of proposed actions, and to carry out systematic monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendations to non-governmental organisations and civil society

CSOs and NGOs should:

- I. **Reach out and engage with governments to ensure that community forestry remains or becomes a political priority.** Civil society must call for and contribute to the adoption and refining of a consensual national vision tied to international commitments and development goals. In their advocacy work with donors and development partners, they should ensure that governments prioritise the issue.
- II. **Support community empowerment.** This involves continued support to CLPAs related to awareness raising, improving internal governance and capacity building (technical aspects, management, marketing, monitoring and documentation). The growth of local associations and entrepreneurial infrastructure will increase ownership. Empowerment also implies the existence of simple and accessible rules and procedures, as well as focusing advocacy on adjusting regulatory frameworks.
- III. **Continue to facilitate interactions between communities and administrative bodies.** Interactions facilitated by CSOs can increase trust and lead to a community of practice at the local level. Joint training events and independent forest monitoring projects involving administrative authorities and community members have had positive effects; such initiatives should occur more systematically.

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“To be successful, community forestry must strengthen communities’ rights, and enable their active involvement in the sustainable management of forests and land.”



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