

# Proceedings of the Seventh Meeting of the Regional Consultative Committee/CCR of the Congo Basin Forests Partnership (CBFP)

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Douala, Cameroon - 18 and 19 May 2009

## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Opening ceremony</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Forest Governance in Central Africa</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1. Report on the 2008 Situation of Forests" and prospective study for 2050	6
3.2. Prospective study for 2050	7
3.3. Dialogue with Chinese operators of the forest sector	7
3.4. Sub-regional workshop on credible forest certification in the Congo Basin and development of FSC standards in Africa	8
3.5. Item on the negotiation of VPAs between the EU and timber producers in Central Africa	9
3.6. Biodiversity protection and sustainable forest management in the DRC, conversion process of forest titles in the DRC	11
<b>4. SUPPORT TO COMIFAC</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1. Assessment of the implementation of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan	13
4.2. Setting up the Canadian support Programme for COMIFAC	14
4.3. Setting up the GEM and World Bank support Programme for COMIFAC	14
4.4. Setting up the ADB support programme for COMIFAC	15
<b>5. INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON FORESTS</b>	<b>166</b>
5.1. Status of the preparation of negotiations on climate change - REDD process	16
5.2. Partnership AFD - NGOs (IC - WCS - WWF) on REDD with the aim of capacity building in the countries located within the Congo Basin	17
5.3. Status of negotiations on the ABS international Regime	17
5.4. Report on the main conclusions of the United Nations' 8 <sup>th</sup> Forum on Forests	18
<b>6. FUNDING MECHANISM</b>	<b>19</b>
6.1. Establishing an autonomous funding mechanism for COMIFAC and partner institutions	19
6.2. Congo Basin Forests Funds and project financing	22
6.3. Mobilization of partners' fundings to implement the Convergence Plan	23
<b>7. FORTHCOMING EVENTS</b>	<b>23</b>
7.1. Commemoration of the Yaounde Declaration + 10	23
7.2. CBFP work schedule for 2009 and major events	23
7.3. Contacts in the perspective of the next CBFP facilitation	23
7.4. Dates for the next RAC meeting and the next major plenary session of CBFP	24
<b>8. CONCLUSIONS OF THE RAC MEETING</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>9. ANNEXES</b>	<b>28</b>
Annex 1: List of Participants in the Regional Consultative Committee, Douala 18 to 19 May 2009	28
Annex 2: Speeches at the opening ceremony, Monday, 18 May 2009	35



## 1. Introduction

The seventh meeting of the Regional Consultative Committee of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership was held in Douala, Cameroon, from 18 to 19 May 2009 under the chairmanship of *Mr. Hans Schipulle*, CBFP Facilitator and in the presence, at the official opening ceremony of 18 May, of *Mr. Elvis Ngolle Ngolle*, Minister of Forests and Wildlife of Cameroon, the host country of this meeting and *Mr. Emmanuel Bizot*, Minister of Water, Forests, Fisheries and Hunting of the Central African Republic, current Chair of COMIFAC.

Approximately 70 participants representing the CBFP member countries and the following groups of stakeholders (international organizations, local and international NGOs, research organizations, as well as the private sector) attended this statutory meeting of the Partnership for the Congo Basin Forests, organized by the German Facility: Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC and the partner institutions of COMIFAC (OCFSA, ADIE, the CEFDHAC networks, RAPAC, Germany, Canada, United States, France, European Union, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, the DRC, Chad, DFID, Intercoopération Suisse, GEF, World Bank, ADB, FAO, ITTO, WWF, UICN, OFAC/FORAF, CIFOR, FSC, TRAFFIC). See annex for the complete attendance sheet.

Alongside the main meeting, participants were given the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on timber logging within the sustainable forest management in the Congo Basin during a thematic workshop. This workshop took place in the afternoon of the 19 May and in the morning of the 20 May. It was run by *Ms. Cyrie Sendashonga*, regional Coordinator of CIFOR and attended by the main stakeholders in the forestry's private sector of the Congo Basin.

Consisting of the RAC's seventh meeting agenda, the attendance sheet, the speeches from the opening ceremony, and a tentative agenda of major forthcoming events, the annexes of this report are available on the CBFP's website ([http://www.cbf.org/rapports/items/Documentation\\_CCRDouala.html](http://www.cbf.org/rapports/items/Documentation_CCRDouala.html)). The integral documentation and the workshop's conclusions are also available on the website (<http://www.cbf.org/actualites/items/conclusions-atelierPFBC-placedelexploitationindustrielle.html>).

## 2. Opening ceremony

In his introductory remarks, *Mr. Hans Schipulle* welcomed all participants and expressed his delight about the holding of the meeting to reaffirm the special relationship between CBFP, COMIFAC and Cameroon, where COMIFAC has its seat and the Yaoundé Declaration was signed in 1999. Going through the agenda items, *Mr. Schipulle* suggested that just like the sixth meeting held in Brazzaville in October 2008, this seventh meeting of the CBFP Regional Consultative Committee should be considered as a meeting designed to facilitate communication and a sincere exchange between partners. The Facilitator then did not hesitate to mention the current delay in putting into place the autonomous funding mechanism for COMIFAC. He insisted that from the outset, several partners were motivated to support a sub-regional process which would be equipped with institutions capable of sustaining their interventions and in so doing, he took the opportunity to heighten governments' awareness of the disastrous impacts which the present "stopgap" approaches may have on the commitment of the CBFP members.

*M. Elvis Ngolle Ngolle*, Minister of Forests and Wildlife of Cameroon very warmly welcomed participants in Douala, Cameroon's economic capital. He expressed his gratitude towards the Facilitation for having trusted Cameroon by giving them the opportunity to host a CBFP statutory meeting once again. He then thanked the current Chairman of COMIFAC who enhanced the meeting's reputation through his presence. After briefly recalling the Partnership's history, the Minister then referred at length to Cameroon's achievements as a CBFP member in its path towards sustainable management of forest resources. First, Cameroon has adopted a land-use plan which dedicates almost 60% of land to become permanent forest properties. 70% of production forests are presently managed with nine hundred thousand hectares having been certified. At the same time, the network of protected areas account for almost 18% of the forest property. The participants were also informed that Cameroon's negotiations with the European Union reached an end on 30 April 2009 and are due to be crowned with the signing of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between both parties in the second half of June. He emphasized the fact that CBFP was a platform dedicated to exchange. Finally, he urged the partners to give various ranges of support so as to enable the countries of the sub-region to face the damaging effects the international financial crisis is causing on the forest sector.

In his opening speech, *Mr. Emmanuel Bizot*, Minister of Water, Forests, Fisheries and Hunting of the Central African Republic, current Chair of COMIFAC thanked first of all the CBFP for its facilitation and for having invited him to attend the Seventh RAC Meeting, as well as Cameroon as host country for giving him such a warm welcome. According to *Minister Bizot*, all COMIFAC members are today irreversibly committed to the sustainable management of their forest ecosystems since the Yaoundé Declaration of March 1999. This declaration's content was the core of the United Nations General Assembly's resolution 54/124 which asks the International Community to support Central African countries in their effort towards sustainable forest management.

After recalling the components of the roadmap applied by COMIFAC's Central African presidency, Minister Bizot reported to be closely working with the COMIFAC ES and development partners for the roadmap's implementation. He then talked about the effects that the global financial and economic crisis is presently having on the Central African forest sector. This was analyzed at the COMIFAC Ministers consultation meeting on 8 May 2009 in Libreville, Gabon. *Mr. Bizot* got back to the outcomes of the evaluation of the Plans of Operations 2006-2008 as well as to the planning of the next three-year phase of the Convergence Plan, and mentioned that only a few of the planned activities could be realized, which he said was mainly due to the weak performance in mobilizing funds at both partner and state levels.

Therefore, he urged the Central African states and the partners to invest more financial resources in the Convergence Plan's implementation, and made a plea for the institutional reinforcement of the Executive Secretary, national coordination and partner institutions of COMIFAC. In order to prevent natural disasters linked to a bad natural resource management to add further to the financial crisis, *Mr. Bizot* called the international community for more vigilance. To finish, he invited the participants to elaborate measures aimed at attracting institutions and partners who are still hesitating to join and participate both in CBFP meetings and in the implementation of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan.

### 3. Forest Governance in Central Africa

#### 3.1 Report on the 2008 Situation of Forests and prospective study for 2050

According to *Mr. Carlos de Wasseige* of the FORAF Project, people should first of all recall that the project, apart from leading to the publishing of the 'Situation of Forests' report as well as to the setting up of a follow-up system called "Observatory of Central African Forests" (OFAC), should also contribute to establish an OFAC institution in order to sustain the present efforts. *Mr. Martin Tadoum*, Assistant Executive Secretary of COMIFAC, confirmed this institutionalization remains a major concern of COMIFAC. The last discussion launched at the last COMIFAC Ministers ordinary Council (Bangui, September 2008), according to *Mr. Tadoum*, resulted in requesting the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat to attempt to sustain the Observatory of Forests.

FORAF deals with the definition of indicators, data collection, follow-up topics (forest cover, forest exploitation, biodiversity conservation and enhancement). Data are collected at regional level, national level (Cameroon, Congo, the DRC, the CAR, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea) and at the level of sites of specific interests (forest concessions, trans-border sites, protected areas, wildlife zones, processing units). Data are transmitted to FORAF by NGOs, the ECOFAC network but also by national administrations. At national level (Cameroon, Congo, the DRC, the CAR, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea), data are collected through national groups, on-line encoding and validation workshops. In this context, *Mr. de Wasseige* emphasized the importance of a conscientious work at the forest administration level which has the charge of providing national data and possesses the required expertise to do so.

Regarding publication of the new edition of « 2008 Situation of Forests », originally due in spring 2009, *Mr. de Wasseige* mentioned the necessity of reducing by a few months the time interval applied for this report's publication. Notable solutions entertained with the aim of reducing time limits and keeping up to date with the follow-up of the forest situation included considering the publication of shorter reports and making them available on the website more rapidly.

The compatibility of the FORAF database with other existing databases (RAPAC etc) was reasserted. Therefore, the memorandum of partnership between FORAF and WRI aimed at setting up a common database was concluded. Since the production of the "2006 Situation of Forests", efforts are being made in order to harmonize the "Situation of Forests" data between FAO and OFAC. Other activities are being carried out in order to build up partnerships with all data providers.

The discussion about encoding data for the '2010 Situation of Forests' arose from topics drawn from the '2008 Situation of Forests' report which demand that the follow-up and the data handling are organized at an aggregated level. Those contents consisted of the assessment of protected areas and the "landscape" approach. The new report will deal with other cross-cutting topics like climate change and the sub-region, the informal sector of timber, social conflicts, sharing of benefits from forest resources, food security (bush meat and fishery resources, progress, assessment and impact of forest activities). The impact of the economic crisis was not considered to be that serious in November 2008 when the core contents were selected, but could be taken into account in the preparation of the '2010 Situation of Forests'. On the other hand, the fuel-wood issue was taken into account in the '2008 Situation of Forest' when analyzing the situation of peri-urban forests.

Talking about FORAF, *Mr. Carlos de Wasseige* mentioned that this project has finally provided COMIFAC with the following instruments: an online encoding tool, well-functioning procedures for data collection, a Focal Point as well as a National Group in each country, and finally, expertise for the implementation of the Central Africa's 'Situation of Forests'. Both *Mr. Richard EBA'YA and Mr. Claus Falkenberg* made clear that during discussions in Kinshasa in February 2009, all ten countries of the COMIFAC region, including Burundi, Rwanda and Chad, were taken into account in the 'Situation of Forests' as planned. Therefore, this issue could be easily assessed when making sure that OFAC has a long-lasting effect. The achievements so far could be reached thanks to the European Union's Funds dedicated to six COMIFAC countries (Cameroon, Congo, the DRC, Gabon, the CAR, and Equatorial Guinea).

Participants noted that promotion activities should be strengthened when the 2008 report is published. The World Forest Congress held in Argentina during the last quarter 2009 could be an opportunity for the partners to jointly communicate of the Central African region's progress in monitoring the forest cover.

As regards the publishing of pictures showing indigenous people, *Claus Michael Falkenberg* clarified that GTZ only publishes pictures showing individuals with the consent of each person concerned.

### **3.2 Prospective Study for 2050**

*Mr. Martin Tadoum*, COMIFAC's Assistant Executive Secretary made clear that the prospective study for 2050 was initiated by France in the frame of the climate change negotiations. The Terms of Reference of this study were elaborated by CIRAD and took into account the interests expressed by partners. Consultants were identified. The outcomes of this study will enable COMIFAC Ministers to make a decision on how to guarantee that OFAC has a long-lasting effect. Furthermore, the study will also make it possible to detect the forest trends for 2050. Hence, a certain number of studies should be carried out as a basis for this in the frame of a regionalization process.

According to *Christophe Besacier*, there is a need to efficiently coordinate the prospective study and other studies (modeling – studies on deforestation drivers) within the working programme on REDD carried out by the COMIFAC climate focal points. *Clothilde Ngomba* (World Bank) suggested that issues related to the institutionalization and sustaining (financial contributions) of OFAC shall be analyzed both in the light of the Terms of Reference dedicated to the prospective study and according to the sub-regional REDD context, the objective being to root OFAC within COMIFAC.

### **3.3 Dialogue with Chinese operators of the forest sector**

This item was presented by *Mr. Samuel Makon*, the CBFP Facilitator Delegate. He first mentioned the fact that the dialogue with Chinese operators has been planned for some time, in particular with the Facilitation and some other partners to the UE-China dialogue on FLEG since 2007. The FLEG dialogue led to the "Bilateral mechanism of coordination on FLEG" in January 2009, then, to the participation of SFAA (Ministry of Forests in China) in the CBFP meetings (Plenary meeting 2007 in Paris and Workshop with the Chinese private sector in May 2008 in Libreville, fact-finding trips by Chinese official delegations to Central Africa which were organized by IUCN1 and WWF in 2008). During the

RAC held in Brazzaville, Congo in October 2008, the partners have encouraged to continue the dialogue, given the growing economic presence of China in the Central African forest sector, whereas at the same time, Central African countries are adopting legislations and policies which are generally aiming at the sustainable and participatory management of forest resources.

In this context, CBFP'S Facilitator and Delegate Facilitator took advantage of their invitation to the Forum organized by UICN-China, between 20 and 27 April 2009, aimed at fostering the relationship between Chinese operators in the forest sector and CBFP, with the aim of gaining permission for COMIFAC'S Chair and Executive Secretary to make an official visit to the People's Republic of China, to exchange experience in the forest sector with China, to explore opportunities for COMIFAC/CBFP to contribute to the bilateral coordination mechanism UE-China on FLEG, and more generally, to discuss the growing interest this country is showing toward the Congo Basin forests.

Through this trip, as well as through discussions held while there, we were able to observe China's will to act transparently and in conformity with forest-related policies and legislation of the countries in which Chinese companies are established. This is illustrated by China's preparation of directives regarding forestry and logging for the benefit of Chinese companies operating abroad. WWF will ensure the promotion of these Chinese directives. Concerning the establishing of formal links with COMIFAC, one should be aware that the Chinese Cooperation already has links with the African Union so that a relationship with COMIFAC should be built up in this context. As a consequence, COMIFAC should attempt to check the forest aspect registered within the exchanges between China and Africa. For the meantime, the Chinese forest administration is interested in continuing its collaboration with CBFP as regards the implementation of forest activities and the participation in meetings organized by CBFP and COMIFAC. Besides this, a bilateral agreement has been signed in 2009 between China and the European Union on FLEGT, which also covers Africa in the form of an AFLEG element. This could lead to the promotion of a triangular cooperation between Africa, China and Europe.

With the prospect of establishing a direct collaboration with China, the principle of a visit by COMIFAC'S Chair and Executive Secretary has been accepted. It is necessary to elaborate a roadmap for the next steps of a more structured cooperation between China and COMIFAC, including the possibilities available through the African Union. The main documents related to this consultation are available on the CBFP website ([www.cbfp.org](http://www.cbfp.org)).

### **3.4 Sub-regional workshop on credible forest certification in the Congo Basin and development of FSC standards in Africa**

*Ms. Marie Mbolo* of FSC/Cameroon and *Mr. Elie Hakizumwami* of WWF-CARPO summarized those two initiatives that led to the organization of a larger discussion on what could hinder a credible certification in the Congo basin with the latest update on the technical development of a sub-regional certification standard.

**The idea to organize the sub-regional workshop on credible certification** arose during the FSC General Assembly in Cape Town, South Africa in November 2008, where the controversy of the certificates as well as the lobbying aiming at suspending the FSC certificate within the Congo Basin were acknowledged. The actors present at this Assembly suggested putting in place a "Reflection



Group on credible forest certification in the Congo Basin” in order to discuss topics related to strategic and practical problems of forest certification in Central Africa in the context of the implementation of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. Among others, the group has the following objectives: (1) exchange of experience on forest certification within the Congo basin between different actors of the forest sector, and (2) the identification of the stakes, opportunities, constraints and potential solutions in promoting a credible forest certification that would be beneficial for the Congo Basin.

The problems this group is to analyze particularly included the sub-regional reference framework ‘FSC/high conservation value forest’, the role played by the State within the certification process including following aspects: land-use, capacity and partnership building in certification matters, certification and local development, the issue of the so-called “indigenous” populations, the costs of forest certification and the local markets of certified timber, the role of PCI/OAB/ITTO in certification, the effects/impacts of crisis in the logging sector on the certification process, and finally, the aspects of legality and certification. Following FSC priorities were maintained: (1) the issue of the so-called “indigenous” populations and the challenges to be taken up to enable their access to both resources and the benefits from certification, (2) the necessity to readjust efforts depending on whether a forest is considered to be temperate or tropical, (3) the credibility aspects of the certification including the improvement of standards particularly those related to the Congo Basin.

As regards the possibilities available under the aegis of COMIFAC and in collaboration with OAB, the Ad hoc Committee set up after Cape Town has to pursue following tasks (1) to facilitate the setting up of the reflection group, (2) to mobilize resources needed for the organization of future meeting of which the priority will be to deepen discussions on the different concerns, (3) to recommend consistent strategies, (4) to communicate its roadmap to stakeholders as soon as possible (refined summary of the topics accepted, suggestions of the different working groups, schedule, work approach [meetings / teleworking]).

The idea to initiate a **development process of FSC sub-regional standards goes back** to an original meeting in Douala in October 2007 between FSC, IFIA, ATIBT and WWF. This meeting presented the possibility of becoming aware of the use of intermediary standards by certification Bodies, leading to certifications at different levels in the absence of accredited national standards, which would not encourage the setting up of a credible certification system within the Congo Basin. *Marie Mbolo* insisted on the fact that a credible certification requires extensive support from CBFP partners, particularly by promoting the certification to the consumers and by working towards the success of the development process both of a regional standard and of national FSC standards.

Discussions that took place following *Ms. Mbolo’s* presentation show that several reference frames of certification can co-exist in the same country or in the sub-region. The decision about which system to apply depends on reaction of the loggers’ main market to the certificate in question. The FSC’s privileged position, for instance, should neither be the result of an administrative obligation nor come out of a political choice. Participants also strongly supported the official creation of a working group which is to work closely with COMIFAC Executive Secretary. Finally, *Mr. Hans Schipulle* informed participants about the Convention of Biological Diversity Secretary’s commitment to support the sub-region in developing sub-regional standards. He also mentioned the transfer of the

FSC's African Headquarters from Ghana to Cameroon and informed about the FSC's submission of an application for CBFP membership.

### **3.5. Item on the negotiation of VPAs between the EU and timber producers in Central Africa**

The European Union's FLEGT action plan suggests the signing of a Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPA) with exporting countries who wish their products to have easier access to the European Union market by adopting measures to improve forest governance. The VPA is a legally binding agreement which aims at combating illegal logging and at improving forest management. It strengthens reforms currently underway in the forest sector and sets up a system for a FLEGT proof of legality to be applied on timber export to EU. The VPA grants permission to European Union custom officers to exclude from the European market timbers not certified under the FLEGT legality system.

*Mr. Marc Vandenhoute*, GTZ consultant, joined the Delegation of the European Commission in, first of all, congratulating the Democratic Republic of Congo which is the first COMIFAC country to have signed a VPA agreement with the European Union on 9 May 2009. Cameroon has already concluded the negotiations and will sign its VPA without delay, probably around the beginning of July 2009. These two signings constitute a vivid symbol of a considerable progress in implementing the 5<sup>th</sup> areas of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan, which is the enhancement of forest resources through their monitoring, managing and sustainable use, the certification, traceability as well as the fight against illegal logging.

*Mr. Marc Vandenhoute* summarized that, in Cameroon, the negotiation components had 12 annexes and the country had a legality grid which was made up of 5 indicators and 13 checkers. According to *Mr. Boudzanga Claver*, Congo's VPA has 11 annexes and 2 legality grids of which the one is related to natural forests and the other to the plantation sector. In both cases, the review of the legality process made it possible to detect the incoherence between legal texts and gaps in the law. For other countries wishing to launch a similar experiment, synergies would be necessary to face future challenges, as presented by *Marc Vandenhoute*, in particular (i) the adaptation and field application of the National Strategy of Forest Control (ii) the registration of all data from the sector into the central database, (iii) the creation and application of procedures for analyzing and matching data, (iv) ensuring the follow-up of litigations (SIGICOF), (v) the computerization of all logging inventories, for all titles, (vi) to ensure the granting system of secure documents is controlled, (vii) improving the transparency of activities in the sector, (viii) capacity building of the officers working at the Ministry in charge of the control and monitoring.

Among others, the following key questions are still pending on the whole issue of legality:

- i) What should be done about illegal timbers seized and put up for auction?
- ii) How to check the legality of imported timber which does not (yet) have a FLEGT authorization?
- iii) How to take into account private approach for a sustainable management certification?
- iv) How to improve transparency?
- v) How to make sure that the civil society is involved in the phases of the agreement's implementation and monitoring?

Talking about transparency, *Mr. José Ilanga*, forest Advisor to the Minister for Forest in DRC, has indicated, that in the DRC, the VPA's Terms of Reference are elaborate. As for the title conversion

process, the WRI – AGRECO consortium played the role of an independent observer. The campaign of “Global Witness”, an international NGO, which aims at disapproving this entire process, was challenged by the partners. In the end, the negotiations should be dealing with the 65 forest titles which were maintained at the end of title conversion process.

*Mr. Koffi* of the OAB expressed the desire of a regulation which would be put in place for forest auditing in Central African countries.

The significance for the VPA of communication and exchange between the Central African countries was emphasized by *Mr. Martin Tadoum*. The AFLEG/FLEGT Task Force, he said, should assume a stronger role as an intermediary with the aim of enabling countries which have already progressed in the negotiation process to share their experience with countries which are less advanced in this matter.

Given the situation of the current crisis in the timber sector, *Mr. Hans Schipulle* has also encouraged countries to make efforts in order to improve the traceability of timber at a national and regional level as well as to integrate in the FLEGT process the issue of timber legality when timber comes from community forests. According to the Facilitator, the Cameroon’s Ministry for Forests who was consulted in this matter during the week preceding the RAC meeting, this issue is currently being analyzed within his department.

On a concluding note, *Ms. Ntsame* indicated that the issue of « forest governance » will indeed be taken into account as part of the International Tropical Timber Organization 2008-2011 programme.

### **3.6. Biodiversity protection and sustainable forest management in the DRC, conversion process of forest titles in the DRC**

This item was presented by *Mr. Jaap Schoorl*, Coordinator of the biodiversity protection and sustainable forest management Programme in the RDC, with contributions from *Mr. José Ilanga*, forest Advisor to the Forest Minister and of *Mr. Jacques Tunguni*, COMIFAC National Coordinator in DRC.

In order to rehabilitate timber logging in the RDC, a process was launched to enable the conversion of former forest titles into the forest concessions following the publication of the decree 5/116 of 24 October 2005, which specified the detailed rules to be applied in this process.

The process has undergone four main steps:

- The application for conversion by the applicant, be the applicant a natural person or a legal entity;
- The documentary and technical verification by the Technical Working Group (GTT) comprising the representatives of forest and tax administrations;
- The identification by the Civil Society of representatives of the local and indigenous population who live in the sites covered by the titles targeted by the conversion on the one hand, and the nomination of representatives from the private sector on the other;

- The examination by the Interdepartmental Commission in charge of forest titles conversion (CIM), and which includes representatives of the populations concerned, of the GTT's verification report and of the progress report written by the independent expert.

The results of the examination of the applications can be summarized as follows:

- 156 applications for conversion received for the RDC's 6 forest provinces, representing 22,438,605 ha. After examining the administrative appeal, CIM judged 65 titles to be convertible, i.e 9,719,246 ha out of a total area of 22,438,605 ha, which represents 43%;
- 16 titles benefitting from CIM's particular comments and from the council of Ministers' dispensations (13 February 2009) could be re-examined very soon. Those titles were held by companies which have considerably invested in their concessions and throughout the RDC's territory and which are also important job providers.

The process includes, among others, the following steps:

- The signing of an order related to the implementation of decisions to reject applications for conversion and related to the implementation of former forest titles cancellations;
- The signing of forest concession contracts with concessionnaires whose titles were judged eligible by the process (following the negotiation of the social terms and conditions);
- Maintaining the moratorium ( with the three conditions stipulated in the presidential Decree n°05/116 : final publication of the process results, cancellation of titles which were not converted, adoption of a geographical programming –zoning- of the future allocations);
- Setting up an efficient and performing control system along with the international support.
- The transfer of 40% of forest fees to forest provinces and territories from which timbers originate;
- The preparation and implementation of sustainable forest management within the converted concessions;
- Carrying out of participatory and multi-purpose zoning with the extensive involvement of local and indigenous populations.

The workshop on how to implement the various elements of the individual stages following the conversion process of former forest titles in the DRC was attended by different stakeholders with approx. 153 participants. The main aim of the workshop was to particularly reflect on (1) the content of the stages following the forest titles conversion process, (2) the issues, procedures and modalities to be taken into account when implementing those stages, as regards titles which were converted into forest concessions as well as cancelled titles and (3) the setting up of a monitoring system for the various stages.

The recommendations of the workshop were in connection with (1) the modalities of non-converted forest titles cancellation, (2) the modalities concerning titles in litigation, (3) the follow-up of post-conversion process for converted titles, (4) the terms and conditions of forest concessions, (5) forest management and (6) zoning. The overall objective of the evaluation is to: i) to evaluate the implementation of the 2006-2008 three-year plan of operations and (ii) to bring out the recommendations and perspectives for the planning of the next three-year phase (2009-2011)

## 4. SUPPORT TO COMIFAC

### 4.1 Assessment of the implementation of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan

This item was presented by *Mr. Martin Tadoum*, Assistant Executive Secretary of COMIFAC. He first described the objectives and methodological approach. Subsequently, he continued with the evaluation results, the recommendations and the perspectives for the next 2009-2011 three-year plan. As we know, the methodological approach, as well as the results of the 2006-2008 three-year plan of operations of the Convergence Plan's evaluation, has already been presented in Brazzaville in October 2008 during the sixth meeting of the Regional Consultative Committee of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. *Mr. Martin Tadoum* then took up again the key elements of the analysis grid before summarizing the following main results:

- The sub-regional transaction records were of good quality despite the weak results achieved when implementing the Convergence Plan
- The commitment displayed by the partners was not followed by accompaniment at the level desired;
- The appropriation of the Operation Plan differs depending on the various protagonists;
- The communication of the Convergence Plan was poor ;
- The Convergence Plan's areas are not always linked to the different programmes and initiatives carried out in the sub-region ;
- The follow-up and the national coordination of POPC remains feeble;
- The need to strengthen national coordination in order to reinforce the visibility of COMIFAC and the Convergence Plan.

The following results were achieved at a sub-regional level as regards POPC's implementation:

- The entry into force of the COMIFAC Treaty since 2007 and the signing of almost all international conventions related to forests and environment;
- The strengthening of COMIFAC's image at an international level through the joint positions of COMIFAC's member states within the international dialogue on tropical forests ;
- Acknowledgment at an international level of the Convergence Plan as a major instrument, a reference and mobilization frame which gathers several initiatives in the sub-region;
- The setting up of several sub-regional initiatives (OFAC, TNS, EDF, EDF, etc) and of working groups;
- The adoption and signing of the sub-regional Agreement on forest control, the adoption of a Directive on the sustainable management of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) of vegetal origin, etc.

The recommendations made at the end of the evaluation particularly refer to:

- The elaboration in a concerted and participatory of the next POPC
- A higher level of involvement of all stakeholders from each country
- The improvement of communication around POPC
- The improvement of coordination by COMIFAC at a national level
- The obtaining of a stronger commitment from the technical and financial partners

As regards the perspectives, *Mr. Tadoum* spoke about launching the 2009-2011 three-year planning immediately after the 2006-2008 POPC evaluation. The planning would be based on the recommendations mentioned above and would have to be finalized by a writing Committee which would be set up especially for that purpose.

#### **4.2 Setting up of the Canadian support Programme for COMIFAC**

This item was presented by *Mr. Jean-Claude SOH*, Forest Advisor to the Canadian Cooperation. He informed the participants about the fact that the regional programme of the Congo Basin has been approved. This programme, which is validated since November 2006, consists of the following projects:

- FORGN-BC project : 5,000,000 \$ Can
- Model forest/ACDI Project: 5,000,000\$ Can
- Model forest/RN Project: 15,000,000\$ Can
- Support Project for COMIFAC which includes the CBFP facilitation aspect: 7.000.000 \$ per annum. This project could be approved this summer.

#### **4.3 Setting up the GEM and World Bank Support Programme for COMIFAC :**

##### **The GEM Programme for the Sustainable Management of the Congo Basin Forest**

This item was presented by *Mr. Jean-Marc Sinnassamy* of the Global Environment Facility and *Ms. Clotilde Ngomba* of the World Bank. The GEF is the financial mechanism of international conventions related to natural resources (climate change, biodiversity, and desertification).

Their presentations show that several GEF3 projects are being implemented in different countries in order to support the Forests and Environment Sectoral Programmes, FESP, in Gabon and Cameroon, with the aim of reinforcing institutions in charge of protected areas like in the DRC or in Tridom, or of fighting against soil degradation in Cameroon for instance. More than 40 million dollars have been allocated in the different countries.

The GEF4 programme for the Sustainable Management of the Congo Basin Forests has been approved at the GEF Council of November 2008. This was the result of a collective project in countries were at the core of the implementation of the Libreville Roadmap, this roadmap having been approved by the Ministers of the region in February 2008. The World Bank plays a special role within the programme, being the agency that presented the programme and that will inform the Council about its progress. All projects must be compatible with the Convergence Plan. COMIFAC and the Partnership (CBPF) must be involved. The programme consists of 13 regional and national projects representing an amount of 50 million dollars, one third co-financing expected.

The regional projects involve: 1) a support to the REDD capacity building with the World Bank, 2) the mechanisms for sustainable financing of protected areas with UNDP, 3) the sustainable management of bush meat with FAO, 4) the sustainable management of forests, conducted with UNEP with a special mention of the illegal logging, and finally 5) a support project aimed at COMIFAC reinforcement in connection with coordination and follow-up, conducted with the World Bank.

The national projects involve the support to networks of protected areas (the DRC, Equatorial Guinea, and Central African Republic) and the sustainable management of mangrove swamps (Cameroon). A pilot project will test an approach dedicated to the payment of environmental services in the Mbé basin in Gabon. A cross-border project targets the sustainable management of the Télé and Tumba lakes situated between Congo and the DRC. An amount of 50 million dollars has been set aside at the GEF level, and 159 million dollars were announced to have been dedicated to co-financing activities. This amount should increase with the two remaining projects (Congo and Cameroon). A list of the projects is available (amount, co-financing, summary, and agency).

Time for preparation is short compared to what was formally the case within the GEF. In six months, a final project document was approved as far as the DRC is concerned (support to the Maïko site and the ring zones) and 10 project concepts were technically approved (the PIF = Project Identification Forms). There is a massive effort to keep the deadline for approving the medium-scale projects (less than one million) by approximately 12 months and by less than 22 months for large-scale projects (more than one million).

Finally, the next GEF cycle (GEF 5, 2010-2014) will begin next year. Several elements and reforms are being discussed which would make it possible to envisage an ambitious continuation of the programme targeting the Sustainable Management of the Congo Basin Forests (individual allocations, possible merging of the contacts: [jsinnassamy@thegef.org](mailto:jsinnassamy@thegef.org), tel (1) 202-458-8060; [cngomba@worldbank.org](mailto:cngomba@worldbank.org), tel (237) 22 20 38 15 allocations for biodiversity, climatic change and desertification for programmes, opening up to other agencies, the place of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) in GEF5).

#### *Information on special projects*

The World Bank is preparing a 13-million-dollar (USD) project aimed at capacity building with respect to the REDD issues. This project is prepared in collaboration and in complementarity with the FCPF. The project includes a support component to the local, national and regional capacity in order to better integrate REDD in the GDF, a regional scientific component in order to review the stocktaking and follow-up method. The third component aims at integrating REDD in the GDF projects. The project is being prepared in collaboration with COMIFAC and the other initiatives which are currently underway in the sub-region (WWF, GTZ, AFD, etc).

The World Bank is also in charge of the medium-scale support project (\$800,000) to support COMIFAC in its capacity to coordinate and follow-up activities in the region, with a special focus on the GEF programme which serves as a test in real situation. The World Bank is willing to support the institutional auditing process of COMIFAC's Executive Secretary.

#### **4.4 Setting up the ADB support programme for COMIFAC**

This item was presented by *Mr. Abdoulaye Dagamaïssa* of the ADB. The presentation informed the CBFP members that the grant agreement related to the Congo Basin Ecosystems Conservation Support (PACEBCo) was approved on 11 March 2009 by the African Development Bank's Executive Board. Amounting to EUR 37.2 million in total, this grant consists of EUR 32 million that ADB has allocated to the Economic Community of the Central African States (ECCAS) and EUR 5 million of co-financing granted by the ECCAS to this programme which will be carried out by the COMIFAC.

The programme aims at contributing to the sustainable and concerted management of both forest resources and protected areas which represent the biological diversity and the ecosystems of the Central African sub-region, in order to ensure the well-being of the population and the ecological balance of the planet. The objectives are to guarantee the regeneration of ecosystems, to improve the living conditions of the people and to strengthen the institutions in charge of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan.

The programme consists of four components: (1) support to COMIFAC and its related institutions, (2) strengthening and promotion of the ecosystems and biodiversity conservation, (3) sustainable promotion of the well-being of the population and (4) programme management. Besides, the aim is to concentrate and coordinate the BAD's PACEBCo programme within a larger cooperation office which should make the work easier for the benefit of COMIFAC. This approach should be taken into account by all partners who provide to COMIFAC.

Support to COMIFAC by different partners will therefore be achieved by assisting COMIFAC's Executive Secretary, the different national coordinations and the partner organization of COMIFAC. Participants have basically emphasized that it would be indispensable to target an efficient coordination of contributions with the aim of COMIFAC's capacity building so as to prevent the overlapping and duplication of efforts on the one hand, and to make the COMIFAC Executive Secretary's work easier on the other hand.

*Mr. Hans Schipulle* again directed the attention of partners to the fact that ensuring a balance between supports granted to NGOs and to state structures responds to the concerns of both the Paris Declaration and the Accra Action Plan. There is no ready-made solution, no "blueprint", as the governance problem exists within state structures as well as within NGOs. The general desire to promote a common approach and make it possible for all parties to be represented in all meetings was also expressed. In order to improve the intervention's efficiency, the question of having a leader for each topic – which was suggested by the Facilitation at the 5<sup>th</sup> RAC meeting in Bangui (April 2008) – needs to be reexamined.

## **5. INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON FORESTS**

### **5.1 Status of the preparation of negotiations on climate change**

This item was presented by *Mr. Christophe Besacier* of the French Cooperation who summarized the progress achieved in the preparation of the negotiations related to climate change and the REDD process.

*Mr. Besacier* then presented an update on the actual progress achieved since October 2008 by summarizing some elements of the Poznan Conference in 2008. A whole series of projects are being prepared and several countries of the Congo Basin have submitted the R-PIN. Several uncertainties remain as regards the REDD follow-up and on how to envisage relationships with the local communities in order to apply REDD methodologies.

The focal points have also participated in the session of negotiations on climate in Bonn (29 March – 8 April 2009) where the discussion has progressed towards "REDD+", taking into account not only the reduction of greenhouse gases emissions from deforestation, but also the storage or the increase of carbon stocks through the sustainable forest management and the afforestation in developing



countries. Several meetings organized by the German facilitation simultaneously gathered COMIFAC's climate focal points. Written and detailed conclusions of this April session in Bonn have yet to be translated into a specific text proposition with a view to the next Bonn session (June 2009) and the Copenhagen Agreement.

As regards the REDD programme implementation, there are currently several initiatives in which the COMIFAC countries are or could be involved, for instance, the World Bank's CBFP, the UN-REDD programme, the AFD-NGO Partnership (WWF), among others. According to *Mr. Besacier*, a certain cacophony reigns as far as support initiatives to REDD are concerned and the coordination between partners who are CBFP members is still deficient. *Mr. Besacier* therefore insisted on the need to rapidly set up the national offices and to strengthen them, if necessary, with foreign expertise. In connection with this topic, he also mentioned the fundamental role the COMIFAC Executive Secretary has to play in the regional coordination in order to ensure a good coherence of the REDD activities within the Congo Basin (national actions/regional actions). Furthermore, he pointed out worrying delays in the implementation of the working programme aimed at clarifying certain aspects of the negotiations' forthcoming events in Nairobi (African Ministers in May 2009) and Copenhagen. Finally, he emphasized the need for a stronger political mobilization of the countries in the region with a view to the negotiation in Copenhagen, which above all, will be a "political" one.

## **5.2 Partnership AFD-NGOs (IC – WCS – WWF) on REDD with the aim of capacity building in the countries located within the Congo Basin**

*Mr. André Kamdem* of WWF-CARPO presented a support project at a regional level aimed at triggering the emergence of a REDD financing mechanism (particularly in complementarity with FCPF) and at capacity building on REDD in countries located within the Congo Basin. This should be carried out by the partnership between the AFD and the NGOs (IC – WCS – WWF). For the next 4 years, starting in 2009, the partnership proposes to intervene at three levels with a total financing amounting EUR 3 million (of which 47% will be provided by AFD and 53% by the NGOs). WWF will be the NGO leader. Firstly, the project will be about a support with a view to capacity building within the Climate Working Group for the implementation of a joint REDD working programme for countries located within the Congo Basin. This will consist of the coordination of the regional dialogue on the positioning of REDD, the update and follow-up of the working programme implementation, the integration of REDD technical and financial initiatives and, finally, of the management of regional initiatives on REDD. Secondly, the partnership supports institutional and technical capacities at the national level in the following countries: Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the CAR, and the DRC. Thirdly, it implements pilot projects in the region and looks for investors.

## **5.3. Status of negotiations on the ABS international regime**

To present this activity, *Mr. Oko Rufin*, Technical Coordinator of OCFSA and Co-pilot of the Working Group on Biodiversity in Central Africa gave an update on the International ABS Regime from the COP7 of the Parties at the CBD of Kuala Lumpur in 2007, the COP8 of Curitiba (Brazil) to the COP 9 of Bonn in May 2008, without excepting the 6<sup>th</sup> ABS WG in Geneva in January 2008. He recalled that the problem of elaboration and negotiation of an International Regime on Access and Benefit Sharing from the use of genetic resources was a concern to all Parties to the CDB and to other protagonists involved in the process.

At the ABS WG in Paris in April 2009, the following components of the International Regime (IR) on ABS were examined: the objective, the scope, the conformity, the access and the fair and equitable sharing of advantages. Based on the principle of prior consent, given with full knowledge of the facts (PIC= Prior Informed Consent), on the agreed conditions of joint negotiations, on the different components (MAC= Mutual Agreed Conditions), and finally on the Win/Win principle in the negotiations, the different components of the IR on ABS were adopted.

In conclusion, the following key points can be retained: the negotiation is structured around the compromise and win-win principles. The consensus on the reports from legal and technical expert groups as well as the announcement by Norway that it has adopted a national ABS legislation led to a very significant progress which would bring its adoption at the COP 10 in Nagoya in 2010.

The issue on the nature of the International Regime (binding or non-binding) will be examined at the 8<sup>th</sup> ABS WG meeting in Kuala Lumpur in November 2009. The 9<sup>th</sup> and last meeting of this Working Group which is planned for the beginning of 2010 before Nagoya will put the finishing touches on the International ABS Regime's final draft which is to be presented at COP 10.

#### **5.4. Report on the main conclusions of the United Nations 8th Forum on Forests**

This item was presented by *Mr. Martin Tadoum*, COMIFAC Assistant Executive Secretary, *Mr. Herbert Christ*, Coordinator of the German CBFP Facilitation and Honourable *Jean-Jacques Zam*, Coordinator of the REPAR (Network of Members of Parliament). It dealt with the main conclusion of the United Nations 8<sup>th</sup> Forum on Forests (UNFF) which took place in New-York, United States from 20 April to 1 May 2009. The UNFF is the United Nations subsidiary body which is negotiating an international convention on forests.

Within the framework of the preparation of the COMIFAC countries for the UNFF-8, a preparatory meeting was organized in Douala on 24 and 25 March 2009. The results of this meeting made it possible to define the joint position of Central Africa besides elaborating a negotiation strategy.

The UNFF 8th session aimed at analyzing progress and at finding an agreement for the implementation of a non-binding instrument on sustainable management of forests. Achievements were analyzed as regards the implementation of the sustainable forest management objectives, the regional and sub-regional contributions, the issue of forests within a changing environment, the means for the implementation of the sustainable forest management, the multi-stakeholder dialogue, the strengthening of cooperation, the Coordination policy and programme which include providing additional advice to CPF (Collaborative Partnership on Forests).

The work was organized in plenary sessions (presentations, exchange panel, multi-stakeholder dialogue), in working groups and in other meetings (informal meetings of regional groups: Africa, EU, G77 and China). During the plenary sessions as well as in the working groups, the weak point of the Africa group, so *Hon. Jean-Jacques Zam* was that it did not master the stakes of forest conservation, particularly the carbon sequestration (tonnage). The stumbling block was the question as to whether to set up a worldwide fund or a financing mechanism. The meetings have encouraged the increased collaboration and cooperation between stakeholders as well as the use of products from sustainably managed forests.

COMIFAC contributed to the exchange panel on the topic of the “regional perspectives on forests in a changing environment”. This panel consisted of representatives from ASEAN, COMIFAC, the Organization of American States, and the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of European Forests. In collaboration with the CBFP Facilitation, COMIFAC also organized a “side event” which dealt on lessons drawn from regional partnerships (COMIFAC and CBFO). The objective of this event was to communicate the working method within the sub-region following the example of the support to the Climate Change Working Group and the participation within the panel of delegates from Central Africa. The message was about the work carried out within the sub-region to support the Climate Working Group. The CBFP was presented with the contribution of *Ms. Jan McAlpine*, UNFF Director and former American CBFP Facilitator and *Mr. Herbert Christ*, Coordinator of the German CBFP Facilitation. Other members, who were present because of the main event, like the USA, France, the EU as well as China and other regional initiatives (Pacific Community) have also participated.

Summarizing the experience of both this conference and the preparatory meetings, *Mr. Martin Tadoum* emphasized the importance of the Douala preparatory meeting which made it possible to define a joint strategy and to bring the position of the Congo Basin countries to the attention of the Africa group at another preparatory workshop which was organized in Nairobi later on. Therefore, the position of Central Africa was taken into account when adopting Africa’s position. This strategy should be completed by an involvement of negotiators/diplomats in the technical meetings with the aim of ensuring a vertical coherence in the negotiations as well as a better communication between political and technical officials.

Concerning the commitment of the COMIFAC representatives during the exchanges, the Assistant Executive Secretary reckoned that Central Africa was very active. The participation in the regional panel with the presentation of the position and of the work in the sub-region in general, he continued, was strongly appreciated by the participants of the conference, and has contributed to increase awareness for COMIFAC.

The next Forum session will be held in January 2011 under the title “Forest for People, Livelihoods and Poverty Eradication”.

## **6. FUNDING MECHANISM**

### **6.1 Establishing an autonomous funding mechanism for COMIFAC and partner institutions**

Before presenting a sincere and transparent account of the obstacles which COMIFAC is facing in setting up a funding mechanism, the Executive Secretary, *Mr. Raymond Mbitikon*, first thanked partners and the German Facilitation for the supports hitherto provided to COMIFAC. This 7<sup>th</sup> RAC meeting will then enable the new COMIFAC Executive Secretary team to meet with different partners apart from those they already met with at the level of the COMIFAC Executive Secretary. *Mr. Mbitikon* subsequently reminded the participants of the serious nature of the situation, which is worrying and requests a concerted solution.

COMIFAC, like other partner institutions, owes its running to the egalitarian contributions from member countries. In 2005, the Heads of State made the decision to establish an autonomous funding mechanism. But at present, the collection ratio of these egalitarian contributions is only 42%. A new study was carried out in order to determine COMIFAC's needs. The recommendations that resulted from the study were validated at the Council of Ministers which took place in Bangui in September 2008. Since then, one single country (the Central African Republic) has managed to set up this mechanism.

According to *Mr. Mbitikon*, the other event that fogged the issue was the integration of COMIFAC in the Economic Community of the Central African States (ECCAS) in 2007. The Ministers' recommendations suggested a consultation between COMIFAC and ECCAS in order to determine the budget-related responsibilities. In March 2009, there was a conciliation meeting between the current COMIFAC Chair and the ECCAS. The ECCAS does not acknowledge that (1) it has the task to implement the budget disbursement needed to run COMIFAC, (2) the resources that would result from the present collection mechanism would not entirely be put at the disposal of ECCAS. This would not enable ECCAS to pay out all financial supports expected by COMIFAC.

During a last conciliation meeting between COMIFAC Ministers held in Libreville, the question about COMIFAC funding was raised and the representatives of Ministerial authority who were attending unanimously declared that the COMIFAC Executive Secretary and ECCAS should agree on putting this issue on agenda of the "Yaounde + 10" Summit of Heads of State that will take place in Kinshasa in June 2009.

The Honourable Jean-Jacques Zam, Regional REPAR Coordinator, acknowledged that **today**, the funding mechanism was not yet a priority to several COMIFAC member countries and their respective administrations. There are countries where neither Ministers in charge of forests nor the Ministers of finance have a real command of information related to the autonomous funding mechanism. This non-prioritization is said to be illustrated by the cancellation of the Mongomo meeting on January 2008 in which representatives of Ministers of finance are said to have participated. Given the implementation of the Heads of State's declaration regarding the enforcement of the decision on the autonomous funding mechanism is experiencing some deficiencies, it is discussed whether COMIFAC's anchoring to ECCAS was really an asset. According to *Mr. Christophe Besacier*, there is a certain coherence of the sub-regional integration process within the Heads of State's decision to make of COMIFAC an ECCAS specialized institution. However, this process should not become an obstacle to the mobilization of national resources in the frame of the COMIFAC's autonomous funding mechanism and/or the ECCAS Community Integration Contribution (CIC). Therefore, ECCAS should not position itself like the other technical and financial partners by refusing to contribute to the running of COMIFAC and its partner institutions. On the contrary, if it mobilizes the resources of the autonomous funding mechanism in order to simplify the collection within the framework of CIC, it has therefore to procure the resources needed to run COMIFAC.

According to *Mr. Zam*, an efficient political strategy has yet to be developed. To this end, the current COMIFAC Chair should meet with the Ministers in charge of forests or even with the Prime Ministers of the COMIFAC member states. According to *Mr. Benga* of MINFOF, it would also be ideal to get back to the work table and facilitate the meeting between Ministers of forests and Ministers of finance in order to elaborate suggestions to be transferred to the different Heads of State. This

indeed, would be the ideal situation. According to *Mr. Besacier*, organizing a public awareness-raising tour of Heads of State by the current COMIFAC Chair is not really the right option. Such a tour has been mentioned by the successive COMIFAC Chairmanships since the year 2006 (Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and presently the CAR) but could not be organized due to practical reasons (financial resources – the availability of the Heads of State to receive the Minister in charge of COMIFAC). Moreover, each forest Minister can indeed discuss this topic with their respective finance Minister and is able to let the “relevant texts be validated” during a cabinet meeting at national level without having to depend on the support of the current COMIFAC Chair. It is true that the setting up of an autonomous funding mechanism to COMIFAC was already the subject of a resolution by Heads of State in Brazzaville (February 2005) and, therefore, a “public awareness-raising” tour seems to be redundant as each country should by now be trying to put in place a sustainable solution, as been decided by the authorities of CAR.

According to *Mr. Claus Michael Falkenberg*, solutions that come through partners’ funding have a low sustainability. There are far-reaching projects which must move forward and of which the small percentage of funding that comes from partners’ funding could cause a year-long delay in the progress desired on the basis of the autonomous funding mechanism. *Mr. Besacier* joined *Mr. Falkenberg* in this point and asked whether the support to COMIFAC’s activities by the partners since February 2005 did not in the end delay the action of governments to set up the necessary measures to finance their regional institution. Besides, some partners are sometimes criticized for having too much influence on the COMIFAC’s working programme. Would the financial autonomy of COMIFAC, which would be guaranteed through the setting up of an autonomous funding mechanism, not be a solution to take this institution out of its dependency upon some technical and financial partners?

According to *Mr. Jean-Pierre Agnangoye*, RAPAC’s Executive Secretary, shortly before the launch of the Convergence Plan Process, it was clear that its conception was based on country fundings and that fundings from partners should serve as a support. But after CBFP’s creation in Johannesburg, the Convergence Plan had bigger ambitions and from then on, partners were expected to support. Today, even if we do not like to hear about conditionalities, the time has come to make it conditional for countries to contribute in order to carry on with the support to the Convergence Plan.

Finally, *Mr. Hans Schipulle*, CBFP’s Facilitator, and *Mr. Raymond Mbitikon*, COMIFAC’s Executive Secretary, summarized the position of the CBFP members: COMIFAC as an institution which is able to define and implement a regional forest policy is not credible if not able to work because of financial problems. Therefore, member countries are urged to take responsibility of the autonomous funding of their institution in order to improve its political credibility. Concurrently, CBFP acknowledged that the issue of the autonomous funding mechanism goes beyond the RAC’s framework and particularly requires a dialogue between forest and finance Ministers. The initiative to organize such a meeting could be taken by the current COMIFAC Chairmanship. It is in this direction that the COMIFAC’s Executive Secretariat and the CBFP work in order to raise public awareness on this issue within the COMIFAC countries.

CBFP members agree on the analysis of the funding situation of the COMIFAC system’s institutions which they judge to be catastrophic. They unanimously reject each solution according to which an autonomous funding system would be replaced by other fundings, particularly by fundings based on support projects. The only solution that could and must be brought to combat the problem is

considerable political effort. All partners should make sure that this consensus would not be jeopardized by ambiguous signals as far as the financial support to the COMIFAC system is concerned.

## **6.2 Congo Basin Forests Funds and project financing**

This item was presented by *Mr. Abdoulaye Dagamaissa* from the ADB. He first specified that the interim Secretariat of the Congo Basin Forests Funds continues its work until the actual Funds Secretary is put in place. He then presented the Funds' objectives, which are (1) the reduction of poverty, (2) the reduction of greenhouse gases emissions and (3) the slowing down of the deforestation and degradation rate.

The funding mechanism is organized (1) by a call for proposal and (2) through projects which are initiated by the FFBC steering committee in response to the needs of the different protagonists in the Congo Basin and to the deficits that are noticed. The Funds Secretariat works with the Board of directors in close collaboration with the COMIFAC's Executive Secretariat. A call for applications has been launched and a certain number of projects selected. Yet, among these projects, only a few come from state structures.

The national coordinators of COMIFAC have to guarantee the quality of projects that are to be submitted for selection. The same applies to the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat who is to make sure that quality requirements are met and the topics of the respective projects can be linked with the Convergence Plan areas.

The criteria applicable to the preparation of the submissions are being re-examined and the instruction manual is being finalized and will be made available to users.

### *What are the lessons learnt?*

- To extend the consultation period with COMIFAC, and in particular with the National Coordinators (to obtain the opinions and enable discussion with the Ministries and the Secretary);
- To disseminate information on a larger scale on calls for proposals: (National Coordinators, NGOs, AGF).
- To extend the period between the announcement and the submission date of concept notes (1<sup>st</sup> step).
- To encourage the proposals of good quality project from public institutions as well as from national and local NGOs.

### *Next steps :*

- 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> meetings of the Management Committee: decisions about the "pipeline" proposals
- The announcement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> call for Proposal : (3rd quarter, 2009)
- Meeting with managers of projects which are supported by CBFF (September 2009)
- Memorandum for the benefit of the National Coordinators and the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat (July 2009) and fact-finding sessions (September 2009)
- Commitment of the Management Committee members to the Copenhagen Summit preparations

Within the framework of this presentation, it was suggested that there was a need for the coordination of the projects in order to meet the national priorities of COMIFAC countries and to guarantee that the projects are able to trigger the desired changes/impacts.

### **6.3 Mobilization of partners' funding to implement the Convergence Plan**

This item was introduced by the Executive Secretary of COMIFAC and it was possible to seek the views of all those present.

According to *Ms. Clotilde Ngomba* of the World Bank, one should avoid mixing up the credibility of COMIFAC with lack of information. In reality, the Convergence Plan is appreciated and used by all donor agencies. But among them, very few would linger over the Convergence Plan. Thus, there is sometimes a mix between technical and political concerns. *Ms. Clotilde Ngomba* reminded that two studies had been carried out since the creation of COMIFAC, viz: (1) the institutional mechanism of COMIFAC and (2) the funding mechanism. These results of these studies were never implemented. Moreover, the fact that COMIFAC has a provisional organization chart must be stressed as well. COMIFAC consists of organizations which have boards of directors and others are governed by the cabinet. Therefore, there is a harmonization problem that requires a solution.

According to *Mr. Hans Schipulle*, the aim of the consultation meeting of Ministers organized in Libreville, Gabon, was to present answers to the above-mentioned remarks from *Ms. Ngomba*, as Partners are only able to support COMIFAC under the aspect of the implementation of the Convergence Plan.

## **7. FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

### **7.1 Commemoration of the Yaounde Declaration + 10**

Yaoundé +10 would be commemorated in Kinshasa. During the last two ordinary sessions of the COMIFAC Ministerial Conference, DRC's Forest Minister expressed the country's wish to host this Summit. At the request of the DRC, this Yaoundé +10 should coincide with the country's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence. During this RAC, Cameroon also declared its desire to host the Yaoundé +10 Summit. The COMIFAC's Executive Secretary has promised to get back to the Minister of Forests and Wildlife in order to solve this issue.

We should point out that the Yaoundé +10 Summit will also be the occasion for the German CBFP Facilitation to pass on the baton to another partner. The total cost of this Summit is not known; however, the WWF is interested in accompanying the process.

### **7.2 CBFP work schedule for 2009 and major events planned in the sub-region**

A CBFP plenary session will be organized in November 2009 in Yaounde and coincide with the installation of the African FSC International Headquarters in Yaounde, Cameroon.

### **7.3 Contacts in view of the next CBFP facilitation**

Two partners are expressing their interest to carry on the CBFP Facilitation after Germany, namely Canada and the European Union. While the European Union has already clearly expressed its

commitment to the CBFP Facilitation, Canada's political commitment to the Facilitation has not yet been confirmed, even though Canada has integrated the "CBFP Facilitation" component in its support programme for COMIFAC which is currently in planning. The next facilitator should be known during the CBFP plenary session in November 2009 at the latest, and this would be in the interest of all partners.

#### **7.4 Schedules for the next RAC meeting and the next major CBFP plenary session**

The next RAC meeting will be a plenary session and will take place in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in November 2009. This plenary session will be organized in collaboration with the FSC International board of directors' meeting, of which the African headquarters would have already been installed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

During this plenary meeting, the FSC International could support the organization of a dialogue on certification. Bringing together the two events would be interesting if the Congo Basin is meant to be a driving force behind the sustainable management of forest resources. It would be appropriate to schedule this plenary meeting for the second half of November 2009, given the fact that the OIBT already plans to organize its meeting for the first half of November, to which several partners of the COMIFAC countries would be invited.

As a plenary due in November 2009 will already be integrated in the agenda around the COP UNFCCC Copenhagen, it would be important to extend the attendance to the Ministers of environment.



## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions of the seventh meeting of the Regional Consultative Committee of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, Douala, 18-19 May 2009

- The seventh meeting of the Regional Consultative Committee of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) was very well attended by the members of the subregion, including the local partners of the Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (central African forests commission – COMIFAC), the umbrella structure. Some 90 participants representing the member countries, international organisations, local and international NGOs, research institutions and the private sector attended this statutory CBFP meeting organised by the German Facilitation. The event was also honoured by the presence of Mr Elvis Ngolle Ngolle, Minister of Forestry in Cameroon, the country hosting the meeting, and Mr Emanuel Bizot, Minister of Forestry in the Central African Republic and COMIFAC president-in-office.

- The subject of an autonomous financing mechanism for the COMIFAC, mentioned by the Facilitator in his words of introduction, was one of the key issues discussed during the plenary sessions. The partners stressed that their main motivation for intervening in the forest sector in the subregion was initially to support viable institutions operating as the hub of a sovereign process in Central African countries. Today, all the CBFP members agree with the analysis that the COMIFAC system is faced with a disastrous financial situation and the precarious operation of its institutions, which poses problems for its credibility. The fact that the COMIFAC is performing an increasing number of tasks associated with the coordination of numerous projects funded by partners has further exacerbated these difficulties.

All the partners share the view that it is necessary to provide the institution with a sustainable foundation and funding, rather than continuing to use stopgaps. The responsibility for ensuring that this matter is delayed no further lies partly with the COMIFAC member countries, considering that the declarations and agreements signed by the ministers on this subject are a priori reasonably clear. However, the CBFP members also have a responsibility in this regard when they design their support programmes or have recourse, sometimes too easily, to external funding. They unanimously reject any solution that would involve replacing an independent financing system with other types of funding, particularly those associated with support projects. The CBFP members are of the view that only a concerted political effort in the subregion can and should provide a solution to the problem. They consider that all the partners should take special care not to jeopardise this consensus by sending out mixed signals about financial support for the operation of the COMIFAC system.

- With regard to dialogue with China, the partners applauded the efforts undertaken by the Facilitation to forge closer relations and establish a dialogue between the CBFP, as a multi-actor network involved in the forest sector in the Congo Basin, and China. A consensus emerged from the debate to the effect that the CBFP would pursue this approach with China, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the European Union and the private sector and that an official visit to China by a COMIFAC delegation should be organised. The CBFP Facilitation, in conjunction with the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat, will propose a roadmap to prepare the next steps to be taken to establish more direct relations between the Central African countries and China. Furthermore, this will put the CBFP in a position to play a privileged liaison role in the development of new triangular cooperation channels linking China, Africa and the European Union.

- With regard to forest governance, the partners took note of progress made in the negotiations on forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT). They encouraged other countries in the subregion to follow the example of the Republic of the Congo, which has just signed a partnership agreement with the European Union. The fundamental question arising from the exchanges was how to integrate timber from European Union forests into the process to establish the legality of logging operations. In view of the current crisis affecting the timber sector, it would be important to encourage trade efforts at the national and regional level, which could improve the traceability of timber in Central African countries. Such efforts should be supported by the AFLEGT/FLEG (African forest law enforcement, governance and trade/forest law enforcement and governance) task-force.

- It was also noted that the final stage of the logging title conversion process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was carried out in a participatory spirit of independence and consultation. The CBFP supported this process in spite of the criticisms leveled at it. The conversion of the old logging titles constitutes a good basis for progressing towards the situation of legality required to move forward with the sustainable development and management of forest concessions. The choice of certification methods and systems required to ensure the cost-effectiveness of sustainable forest management efforts by logging companies will largely depend on the markets where the timber products are to be sold. The CBFP continues to support the working group that has begun the task of developing regional standards to ensure the credibility of these certificates. The fact that the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) plans to move its African headquarters from Ghana to Cameroon was considered an indication of the attention that certification bodies are paying to the Central African subregion, committed to the promotion of sustainable forest resource management.

- The CBFP members also support the COMIFAC countries in developing capacities associated with international forest dialogue other than that conducted in connection with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Globally, the COMIFAC, as a regional actor, is much more visible now in the various forest-related processes in progress than it was ten years ago. Nevertheless, it was observed that the formulation of very advanced technical positions alone is not enough to promote the interests of the subregion. All the partners agreed on the need to make an appeal at the political level and cooperate with professional negotiators to improve coordination, although efforts to strengthen negotiating techniques must not be neglected. In short, it can be said that Central Africa has built an exemplary image of good management, which will allow it to participate in debates on the subject with pride.

- Lastly, the publication of the State of the Forests 2010 report, considered the flagship product of collaboration between the two bodies, will provide a good opportunity to showcase the work carried out under the partnership. Advantage should be taken of the upcoming African Union summit of heads of state and government to organise a parallel event, with a view to using the State of the Forests report to convey the position of the subregion within the framework of the UNFCCC, where Africa has not yet submitted a position. It would, however, be necessary to ensure that the next edition of the report included sections on countries that do not play a central role in the COMIFAC, such as Rwanda, Burundi and Chad. The members contributing to data collection also emphasised the responsibility of national authorities to produce accurate and reliable data, as the

quality of the report and the assessment of prospects relating to the evolution of forest cover largely depend on the availability of valid information.

- With regard to support for the COMIFAC, the evaluation of the implementation of the three-year plan of operations for 2006-2008, formulated under the Convergence Plan, provided the basis for planning for the period 2009-2011. It revealed significant differences in the degree of implementation of the Convergence Plan by the stakeholders and the weak operational capacity of regional partners. In the implementation of the plan of operations for 2009-2011, the findings of the evaluation should contribute not only to bringing all the stakeholders into line, but also to fulfilling the commitment of leaders to implement the agreements signed under the Convergence Plan. The credibility of the COMIFAC depends on the willingness of the member countries to provide the funding necessary to ensure that it can work effectively and complete the process to reform the partner institutions.

- With regard to the implementation of programmes supporting the COMIFAC (African Development Bank, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Global Environment Facility/World Bank, etc.) and with a view to avoiding any overlapping or duplication of efforts undertaken by partners and facilitating the work of the Executive Secretariat, the CBFP members expressed their desire to improve dialogue, collaboration and coordination efforts relating to actions aimed at promoting a common approach by the partners, while at the same time making the most of opportunities provided by the COMIFAC support office (cooperation platform) in order to implement the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. The same applies to support provided by other donors and the main policy directions.

## 9. ANNEXES

### Annexe 1 : Participants at the Regional Consultative Committee Meeting in Douala, 18 to 19<sup>th</sup> May 2009

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- **Annexe 3 : Indicative agenda of upcoming events (please consult [www.cbfp.org](http://www.cbfp.org) for updated version)**

Date	Lieu	Activité
25. - 29.5.	Nairobi	AMCEN
25. – 29.5	Yaoundé	Conférence Tenue forestière, gouvernance, entreprises (Rights and Resources Initiative, Intercoopération)
Fin Mai, début Juin	Pays COMIFAC	Journées nationales des Aires Protégées
1. – 12.6.	Bonn	UNFCCC SB 30
8. – 12.6.	Yaoundé	WWF-China visite en Afrique centrale (WWF-CARPO)
15. – 17.6.	Libreville	WWF-China visite en Afrique centrale (WWF-CARPO)
15. – 16.6.	Kinshasa	Forum sur Efficacité de l’Aide internationale (BM)
15. – 19.6.	lieu à déterminer	UNCCD réunion de préparation COP 10 pour l’Afrique
22. -25. 6.	Nairobi	Atelier panafricain : APA et forêts (UNEP, GTZ)
22. – 22.6.	Washington	Conseil du FEM/GEF
30.6. – 2.7.	Accra	Conférence internationale sur la promotion du Commerce intra africain du bois et des produits bois (OIBT, Gouvernement du Ghana)
8. – 10.7.	Montréal	Réunion informelle d’experts ASEAN, COMIFAC, OTCA (SCBD, GTZ)
13. – 17.7.	Douala	8 <sup>ème</sup> réunion du GTBAC
20. – 24.7.	Tunis	UNCCD réunion de préparation COP9 pour l’Afrique
10. – 14.8.	Bonn	UNFCCC réunions de préparation
23.-28.8	Nairobi	2 <sup>nd</sup> World Agroforestry Congress
21.9. – 2.10.	Buenos Aires	COP9 UNCCD
28.9. – 9.10.	Bangkok	UNFCCC réunions des groupes de travail
Fin Sep.	Lieu ??	Réunion avec les responsables des projets FFBC/CBFF (BAD)
5. – 9.10.	Douala	9 <sup>ème</sup> réunion GTBAC
17.10.	Buenos Aires	Pré-event sur les initiatives régionales (FAO)
18.- 23.10.	Buenos Aires	Congrès forestier mondial (FAO)
9. – 13.11.	Washington	Conseil du FEM/GEF
2. – 6.11.	Lieu à déterminer	UNFCCC réunions des groupes de travail en préparation COP 15

3. – 8.11.	Yokohama	44 <sup>ème</sup> OIBT
6. – 7.11. 9. – 15.11.	Kuala Lumpur	Réunions initiative APA, COMIFAC/GTBAC, SCDB
<b>Nov.</b> <b>(2<sup>ème</sup> partie)</b>	<b>Yaoundé</b>	<b>Réunion plénière PFBC</b>
16.-20.11.	Guilin	CLI China NFP Facility : forests for people, livelihood and poverty reduction
22. – 24.11.	Kinshasa	Atelier sous-régional CICOS (U.E., CICOS
7.-18.12	Copenhague	COP 15 et COP/MOP5 UNFCCC
14. – 18.12.	Douala	10 <sup>ème</sup> réunion GTBAC
Dernier trimestre	Yaoundé	Journée de la forêt AC (CIFOR), à confirmer
Fev : 2010	Brazzaville	Semaine forestière Africaine (FAO)
Mars 2010	Douala	RACE Wood Forum : Rencontre Africain pour la Coopération Economique (IFIA)



## Annex 4 : Agenda

<b>Sunday 17 May 2009</b>	
<b>19.00 – 21.00</b>	<b>Welcome Dinner offered by the Facilitation (<i>Restaurant « Le Provençal »</i>)</b>
<b>Monday 18 May 2009</b>	
<b>8.30 – 9.00</b>	<b>Registration and assembling of the participants of the CBFF Regional Consultative Committee meeting</b>
<b>9.00 – 9.40</b>	<b>Official opening session of the CBFP Regional Consultative Committee</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory address by M. Hans Schipulle, CBFP Facilitator</li> <li>• Keynote speech by Raymond Mbitikon, COMIFAC Executive Secretary</li> <li>• Allocution by Cameroon's Minister in charge of forests</li> <li>• Allocution by COMIFAC President</li> </ul>
<b>9.40 – 10.00</b>	<b><i>Coffee break</i></b>
	<b>Forest Governance in Central Africa</b>
<b>10.00 – 11.00</b>	<b>Update on the report « State of the Forests 2008 » (Carlos de Wasseige, FORAF) and on the prospective study for 2050 (Martin Tadoum)</b>
<b>11.00 – 11.30</b>	<b>Dialogue with Chinese actors in the forest sector (Samuel Makon)</b>
<b>11.30 – 12.00</b>	<b>Regional Workshop on Credible Forest Certification in the Congo Basin and the Development of FSC standards in Central Africa (Elie Hakizumwami –WWF &amp; Marie Mbolo -FSC)</b>
<b>12.00 – 12.30</b>	<b>Update on EU/VPA negotiations with Central African countries (Marc Vandenhoute)</b>
<b>12.30 – 13.00</b>	<b>Process related to converting forest titles in RDC – summary of the Kinshasa workshop (José Ilanga/Jaap Schoorl)</b>
<b>13.00 – 14.00</b>	<b><i>Lunch Break</i></b>
	<b>Support to COMIFAC</b>
<b>14.00 – 14.30</b>	<b>Evaluation of the implementation of COMIFAC's (Martin Tadoum)</b>
<b>14.30 – 15.00</b>	<b>Update on the implementation of the Canadian COMIFAC support programme (Jean Claude SOH)</b>
<b>15.00 – 15.30</b>	<b>Update on the setting up of the World Bank/GEF support programme to COMIFAC (Clotilde Ngomba/Jean-Marc Sinnassamy)</b>
<b>15.30 – 16.00</b>	<b>Update on the setting up the (Abdoulaye Dagamaissa, ADB)</b>
<b>16.00 – 16.30</b>	<b><i>Coffee Break</i></b>
	<b>International dialogue on forests</b>
<b>16.30 – 17.30</b>	<p><b>Update on preparations for negotiating climate change – REDD mechanism (M. Besacier)</b></p> <p><b>State of the negotiations on international ABS regime (OKO Rufin, GTBAC)</b></p>
<b>17.30 – 18.00</b>	<b>Reporting major conclusions from UNFF 8 (Herbert Christ &amp; Martin Tadoum)</b>

	<b>Tuesday 19 May 2009</b>
	<b>Financing mechanisms</b>
<b>8.30 - 9.00</b>	<b>Update on setting up of an independent self-reliant financing mechanism for COMIFAC and partner institutions (SE/COMIFAC)</b>
<b>9.30 - 10.00</b>	<b>Update on the meeting of the Congo Basin Forest Fund and state of project financing (Abdoulaye Dagamaïssa, ABD)</b>
<b>10.00 – 10.30</b>	<b>State of the release of financial contributions to support implementation of Convergence Plan (SE/COMIFAC and inputs from participants)</b>
<b>10.00 – 10.30</b>	<b><i>Coffee break</i></b>
	<b>Upcoming items</b>
<b>10.00 – 10.30</b>	<b>Commemoration of the Yaoundé Declaration + 10 (SE/COMIFAC et Facilitateur du PFBC)</b>
<b>10.30 – 11.00</b>	<b>CBFP working calendar 2009 (Herbert Christ) and major evens in the region in 2009 (Martin Tadoum)</b>
<b>11.00 – 11.30</b>	<b>Update on transition to a new CBFP facilitation phase /Facilitator (Hans Schipulle)</b>
<b>11.30 – 12.00</b>	<b>Dates for the next CCR and the upcoming CBFP Plenary Meeting (Christ/Makon)</b>
<b>12.00</b>	<b>Closing ceremony</b>

## **Annex 2: Speeches at the opening ceremony, Monday, 18 May 2009**

- **Introductory Statement by Mr. Hans SCHIPULLE, CBFP Facilitator**

Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers.  
The Executive Secretary of COMIFAC,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my capacity as Facilitator of the Congo Basin Forests Partnership, welcoming you here in Douala, Cameroon's economic capital, is a real pleasure that I neither would, nor could deny. Cameroon, a country acknowledged worldwide for its football in which it is on first-name terms with all great players, is also unanimously referred to by well-informed observers as "Africa in miniature". It is acknowledged as a forest country which works to lift up sustainable forest management at the level of its first priorities. Therefore, it is no coincidence that COMIFAC's headquarters are located here. As an intergovernmental Institution, COMIFAC is in charge of implementing the historical Declaration of Central African Heads of State on conservation and sustainable management of the Congo Basin Forests. As a matter of fact, Cameroon "is sitting in the first row" when it comes to forest, and in so doing, Cameroon is not allowed to sleep, as it is permanently watched by the International Community.

I am all the more happy to welcome you in Douala since the current COMIFAC Chair, Mr. Emmanuel BIZOT and Minister Elvis NGOLLE NGOLLE, are giving us the distinguished honor to participate in our works. I would like to extend my cordial welcome to them and promise them to listen carefully to their wise advice on the course of CBFP.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The present meeting of the Regional Consultative Committee, just like the previous ones, may be considered as mainly focusing on information, communication and exchanges. During these conferences, participants will have the opportunity to obtain information and exchange their opinions on the report on the 2008 State of the Congo Basin Forests that is being prepared, as well as on the 2050 prospective study on these forests. They will learn more about forest certification in Central Africa, the voluntary partnership agreement signed or to be signed with the European Union, the process of forest titles conversion in DRC, the results of the Convergence Plan implementation assessment, the support COMIFAC expects from the World Bank, the African Development Bank and Canada. They will also learn more about how Central Africa is preparing itself for the negotiations on climate change and will receive the reports of respectively the UNFF meeting in New York, the recent conciliation meeting between COMIFAC Ministers in Libreville and the meeting of the Congo Basin Forests Funds' Board of Directors. Furthermore, we will dedicate two half-days to discuss and exchange our opinions on the positioning of timber logging within the sustainable management of Central African forests.

As you can notice, this meeting's schedule is tight and compact enough. To me, it also seems to be interesting enough to captivate the participants' attention and to satisfy their wish to be informed

and to know about what is presently happening within the partnership. It is the price we have to pay in order to safeguard an active dialogue, transparency and sincere collaboration which we intend to establish within the CBFP by letting each member participate in frank and open debates, by encouraging the setting up of national and regional conciliation processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I use to say, the CBFP has been established with the aim of bringing support to COMIFAC countries in their efforts to maintain and sustainably use their forest patrimony. But it is also well about a support based on the Paris Declaration on the efficiency of development aid and not about substituting national and regional institutions which are in charge, be it in mobilizing the funds required, be it in the implementation of the activities agreed upon. The Heads of State's initiative to set up an autonomous funding mechanism to cover the costs linked to the running of COMIFAC's Executive Secretariat and of the other sub-regional partner institutions was highly appreciated by the partners. For many of them, the idea of an efficient financing of sub-regional institutions by the sub-region itself, and which in so doing, unlike other funding systems, will guarantee that these institutions will fulfill their functions and mandates on a sustainable way. This idea was one of the trigger of their intervention. However, this initiative of the sub-region's Heads of State to implement this funding mechanism unfortunately needs lots of time to be put in practice. This further paves the way for approaches to close gaps which might considerably weaken the Executive Secretariat. According to the meetings I had, in my opinion, this could moreover discourage partners who are still intending to add funds to those already gathered by the Central African sub-region countries.

Therefore, I would like to take the opportunity this very RAC meeting is giving me to raise the governments' awareness to the harmful consequences those approaches can lead to. But while we are expecting that an appropriate solution is found to this situation, I would like to urge the donor agencies, the development partners, the civil society and the private sector to continue keeping the commitments they subscribed to in the frame of the implementation of all Convergence Plan areas without any interruption.

Long live the international solidarity and cooperation,  
I thank you for your kind attention.

- **Welcome statement of His Excellency Elvis Ngolle Ngolle, Cameroon's Minister of Forests and Wildlife**

Your Excellency, Minister of Forests and Environment of the Central African Republic,  
Current President of the Congo Basin Forests Partnership,  
Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Representatives of International Organizations,  
Development Partners,  
Ladies,  
Gentlemen,  
Dear Delegates,

I am really delighted to warmly welcome all and each of you in Cameroon, in this pleasant venue at the SAWA Hotel of Douala. It is a pleasure to take the opportunity of this 7<sup>th</sup> Session Congo Basin Forests Partnership's the Regional Consultative Meeting to wish you an agreeable stay in Douala, economic Capital of our country.

We appreciate the presence of so many partners in this meeting which undoubtedly proves the importance you give to the sustainable management of the Congo basin forests. Cameroon is happy to host this event during the next three days, and would like to sincerely express its gratitude to the Facilitation for having reasserted its trust in our country. We are particularly delighted with the presence of our friend, brother and colleague, Central African Minister Emmanuel BIZOT, who is in charge of the Forests and Environment, and is current COMIFAC Chair. His presence means a lot to us, and enhances the splendour of this meeting.

The Congo Basin Forests Partnership was created in 2002 to support the declaration made in Yaoundé by the Central African Heads of State in 1999 and translates their will to jointly work towards the sustainable management of their forest ecosystems.

Cameroon, as all other countries in the sub-region is member of the Congo Basin Forests Partnership. It has resolutely committed itself to the sustainable management of forests and can demonstrate several achievements, as follows:

- The adoption of a land-use plan that determined almost 60% of land (meaning fourteen million hectares) to become permanent forest properties for the forest and fauna management;
- Almost five million hectares, meaning 70% of production forest are presently managed;
- A network of protected areas accounts for almost 18% of the forest property ;
- Almost nine hundred thousand hectares of forests are certified;
- Since the commitment of the negotiations of a partnership agreement with the European Union shall guarantee the legal Commerce of timbers from Cameroon, these negotiations were concluded on 30 April 2009 and are supposed to be signed during the next days to come.

Excellency,  
Ladies,

Gentlemen,

As you all know, the Congo Basin Forests Partnership is a platform of exchange and commercialization between partners on programmes and projects which are carried out in the Central African sub-region with the aim of bundling their actions into a synergy, in order to fulfill the different areas of the COMIFAC's Convergence Plan, and also to mobilize new partners.

I hereby express the wish that, at the end of these conferences, all partners have an overview on the progresses registered during the last few months in the frame of the sustainable management of the forest ecosystems of the sub-region.

I could not conclude my speech without urging all our partners to support us in various ways with the aim of enabling our countries to face the ill effects of the international financial crisis that damage our national economies, and as a result, impact negatively on the level of sustainable management of forests.

With this, I wish you all the best for your work that shall enable us turning Congo Basin Forests Partnership into a more efficient instrument day after day.

Long live the International Cooperation.

Long live Cameroon.

Thank you for your attention.

- **Official meeting opening speech by His Excellency, Mr. Emmanuel BIZOT, Minister for Water, Forests, Hunting and Fisheries of the Central African Republic, current COMIFAC Chair**

Your Excellency, Minister of Forests and Wildlife of Cameroon,  
The Facilitator of the Congo Basin Forests Partnership  
Representatives of International Organizations and development Partners,  
Dear Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure for me to be in Douala on the occasion of the present meeting of the Congo Basin Forests Partnership's Regional Consultative Committee. Therefore, I am honored to take the floor at the opening of the proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> RAC/CBFP meeting in my capacity of the current COMIFAC Chair.

Allow me to thank the CBFP facilitation for having invited me to participate in this meeting and above all, for the quality of this meeting's organization.

I am also grateful to Cameroon's government and People for the warm welcome they have reserved for me since my arrival in Douala.

Your Excellency, Minister of Forests and Wildlife of Cameroon,  
The Facilitator of the Congo Basin Forests Partnership,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Participants,

As you know, the Central African countries have irremediably committed themselves to the sustainable management of their respective forests. The Yaoundé Declaration of March 1999 is the foundation stone of this commitment. The General Assembly of the United Nations noted this Declaration formally through its resolution 54/214 adopted in December 2000 through which the Assembly urges the International Committee to support Central African countries in their effort towards sustainable management of forest resources.

The Congo Basin Forests Partnership launched in 2002 in Johannesburg was an answer to this United Nations' call. As a matter of fact, through its structure, the CBFP is a voluntary association gathering all partners working in the sub-region with the aim of supporting the Yaoundé Declaration as well as the COMIFAC's Convergence Plan.

Today, this sort of partnership which is innovative enough and which assembles governmental actors, the civil society, the private sector and the financial partners, serves as a model in the world. As it happens, the CBFP's development has been continuous since its creation and I can only be delighted about it. This development was possible thanks to the impetus and dynamism of different facilitations that have known how, with the passing years, to establish mechanisms of dialogue, exchange of views and coordination between the CBFP members.

It is also the opportunity to thank the United States of America and France for their previous facilitations and Germany for the work done since taking over the facilitation in 2007.

The Regional Consultative Committee, initiated by the French facilitation, builds today a space for dialogue and exchange of views on the progress of the different partners' activities and programmes. This Douala meeting, the seventh in a row since the launch of CBFP, is taking place at a crucial period in which the world is facing a serious financial crisis. As you know, this crisis has led to damaging consequences on the forest sector of most countries of COMIFAC. That is the reason why the COMIFAC Ministers met on 8 May this year in Libreville to analyze this worrying issue to our countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The present RAC is the second meeting which takes place after the torch of the current COMIFAC Chairmanship has been taken by my country, the Central African Republic in September 2008. In accordance with the Central African Presidency's roadmap, we have planned to put the stress on the following intervention areas during our mandate:

- Institutional reinforcement of the COMIFAC's Executive Secretariat and the national coordinations ;
- Improvement of the forest governance and the sustainable management of forests ;
- Implementation of the major international conventions that have been ratified in the sub-region ;
- Contribution to the setting up of an autonomous funding mechanism of COMIFAC and of other innovative funding mechanisms of the convergence plan ;
- Reform and reinforcement of sub-regional institutions which are COMIFAC partners.

Therefore, since Bangui, our country works in close collaboration with the Executive Secretariat and the development partners in order to implement our roadmap.

This meeting in Douala is thus important since it will give us the opportunity to take stock of the actions carried out by the ones and the others since the last RAC in Brazzaville.

As far as the COMIFAC is concerned, apart from capacity building, the major action carried out during the last few months are related to the evaluation of the 2006-2008 plan of operations and the planning of the second 2009-2011 three-year phase of the convergence plan. As regards the evaluation of the three-year phase of the convergence plan, the conclusions reveal a low fulfillment rate of the planned activities. One of the major reasons for this low fulfillment rate is the weak mobilization of financial contributions at both partner and state levels.

Realizing this, shows how important it is to remind of the voluntary nature of the commitments made during the World Summit on sustainable development in 2002 in Johannesburg by Partners to support the Central African countries in the implementation of the Convergence Plan on the one hand, and to recall, on the other hand, the political will to manage their forest resources in a concerted manner that the Central African States expressed during the same conference. Laudable efforts to mobilize the partners' support were certainly made since the second Summit of Heads of State in Brazzaville in February 2005. I would like to take the opportunity that is given to me to thank



all development partners and donor agencies for their contributions to the Convergence Plan's implementation.

Given the implementation's costs of the Convergence Plan which are estimated at 1.7 billion dollar US, the financing gap still remains important. That is why, from the top of this platform, I would like to issue an appeal towards partners to increase the financial support brought in order to implement the so-called Convergence Plan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If the present financial crisis could be a limiting factor to the increase of development partners and the Congo Basin States' contribution to the implementation of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan for the coming years, it is appropriate to note that the world would experience severe crisis in the case natural disasters linked to a bad management of natural resources add further to the present financial problem.

Considering what has just been said, and taking account of real and growing threats weighing on the durability of natural resources, the international community should be more vigilant and active to prevent situations which would be difficult to be made up for, such as the increase of the earth temperature, desertification, drying-up of streams etc.

During last years, many potential partners have continued to observe very attentively what was being done at sub-regional level as concerns the sustainable management of forest resources and also tried to see if this partnership as well as COMIFAC could be a real frame of consultation and a serious institution before involving themselves in the process.

Today, we can assert that even though the Congo Basin Forests Partnership is still young, it is on the right path and shall develop more actions towards institutions and Partners that are still unsure whether to join and take part in the CBFP meetings.

I would like to conclude with a wish: may the Douala meeting give a new perspective towards a more active cooperation so that we could safeguard the planet's second tropical forest big massif, the Congo basin forests.

Long live the international cooperation

Long live COMIFAC

Thank you for your attention