

## **DRAFT BACKGROUND NOTE**

### **Colloquium Working in Partnership – Sustainable Management of the Congo Basin**

Washington, DC – October 23, 2008

#### **Brief History of the Engagement in the Congo Basin**

The Congo Basin consists of a mosaic of ecosystems – rivers, forests, savanna, swamps and flooded forests which provide globally and locally important ecosystem goods and services. These include the regulation of the local and regional climate, the flow of water, the protection of soils, the provision of habitats to thousands of plant and animal species, the control of diseases and safeguarding water quality. The Congo Basin is also home to 24 million people, including indigenous people and other forest dwellers whose livelihoods depend 100% on the forest and the services it provides. It is the world's second largest tropical forest, covering 700,000 square miles in six countries, and containing a quarter of the world's remaining tropical forest.

The ecological integrity of the Congo Basin ecosystems, and its forests ecosystems in particular are increasingly under threat. The continued loss of the forest due to illegal and uncontrolled logging, and the clearing of land for agriculture are seriously affecting the livelihood of millions of people and degrading the forest base at the rate of two million acres every year. Wildlife and plant species are harvested without considering that species need to have optimal conditions to reproduce for maintaining the ecosystem resilience to long and short-term disturbances. Forest degradation is at least as significant as deforestation in terms of impact on biodiversity and climate.

The global community has recognized the importance of the Congo Basin and has made its protection a top priority. At the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002, the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) was launched as a non-binding and voluntary agreement between governments, the private sector, civil society and development organization with the objective to promote the conservation and sustainable management of the Congo basin's forest ecosystems. The CBFP works in close relationship with the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) which is the regional body in charge of forest and environmental policy, coordination and harmonization.

Today, the partnership is comprised of 45 members working together for a common objective:

- Implementing the roadmap approved at the WSSD for promoting the development, sustainable management and conservation of the forest ecosystems of the Central Africa region.
- Supporting the implementation of the Yaoundé Declaration, set up by Central Africa's Head of States in March 1999 and the Brazzaville Treaty of 2005. The Yaoundé Declaration confirms their government's firm commitment to engage

in politics and actions favoring the conservation and sustainable management of the region's forest ecosystems.

The CBFP does not play a direct part in program implementation or financing. It works as an interlocutor between donors and implementing agencies and provides a forum for dialogue between its partners. The form of governance chosen by the CBFP is steering through “facilitation”, provided by one of its members for a set period of time. The role of the facilitation is to organize dialogue and promote cooperation between the partners, to set up a work program based on the guidelines established in the COMIFAC Convergence Plan and embodied in the Brazzaville Treaty, and to represent the partnership externally.

***Major Milestones since WSSD:***

**2005:** The Heads of State of Central Africa adopted the COMIFAC Convergence Plan, which defines a common regional intervention strategy for the countries of the sub-region and their international development partners. The Convergence Plan has ten strategic axes:

- (1) harmonizing forest policy and taxation
- (2) resource knowledge and inventory
- (3) ecosystem management
- (4) biodiversity conservation
- (5) sustainable use of forest resources
- (6) alternative income generation
- (7) capacity development and training
- (8) research
- (9) innovative financing mechanisms
- (10) regional cooperation and partnerships

**2003 – 2009:** After the United States of America (2003-2004) and France (2005-2007), facilitation is now provided by Germany for the period 2008 to 2009. Based on the results of a French-German evaluation of the partnership conducted in 2007, the German facilitation committed to enhance CBFP member activities in the following four strategic priority areas:

1. Strengthening of COMIFAC institutions and the CBFP.
2. Improvement of forest governance and framework conditions.
3. Implementation of the Convergence Plan and major international environmental conventions and agreements.
4. Innovative financial mechanisms to support funding of Convergence Plan measures.

These efforts will further strengthen the CBFP's coordination potential and help fully develop its role as a forum for dialogue for all stakeholders in the forest sector and the Congo Basin.

A third Head of State Summit is being planned for 2009 to take stock of the implementation of the Convergence Plan and to define objectives for management of forests in the context of regional climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

### **A New Momentum for the Congo Basin**

Despite major efforts over the past decades, the deforestation and forest degradation trend in the Congo Basins has increased at an alarming rate. Over the past 23 years, the total net loss of carbon in the six Congo Basin countries was more than 35 million tons<sup>1</sup> or the equivalent of over 100 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Central Africa lost approximately 91,000 km<sup>2</sup> to deforestation between 1990 and 2000. Current estimates put the region's annual deforestation rate as 0.27 % or 487,000 hectares, and forest degradation at 0.1% or 180,460 ha per year although due to limited capacity for monitoring and assessment the later is probably a gross underestimate. According to expert analysis and developed models, the major sites of deforestation are in southern Cameroon and DRC. Deforestation rate for DRC, which holds approximately 108 million hectares of the region's forests, is estimated at 0.33 % per year, or 358,000 ha at current rates that are subject to change with expanding internationally financed infrastructure and post-conflict political stability

Over the past two years, forests have received renewed international attention because of their role in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. The Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC (2007) states that “forestry can make a very significant contribution to a low-cost global mitigation portfolio that provides synergies with adaptation and sustainable development. This opportunity, however, is being lost in the current institutional context and lack of political will to implement and has resulted in only a small portion of this potential being realized at present”.

Sir Nicholas Stern noted in 2008 that “given the scale of emissions from deforestation, any climate change deal that does not fully integrate forestry will fail to meet the necessary targets. Forestry, in particular reduced deforestation, has the potential to make a substantial and relatively immediate contribution to a low-cost global mitigation portfolio that provides synergies with adaptation and sustainable development. Standing forests also perform other significant environmental services, such as the regulation of water supplies and the conservation of biodiversity”.

Addressing the role of forests in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change is challenging and will require holistic approaches to combine the best science with concrete action by governments, civil society, local communities and the private sector. The forest “community” will need to work with other sectors to develop comprehensive systems to overcome fragmentation of responsibilities and actions among sectors and to meet societal expectations. There have been many attempts to map ongoing activities and initiatives with the potential to reduce deforestation and forest degradation - and hence reduce emissions of GHGs - but such efforts are frequently disjointed and dispersed over many actors and agencies. Reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD) is a potentially cost-effective method of limiting emissions, while augmenting the essential forest values such as biodiversity conservation, watershed management, and improving

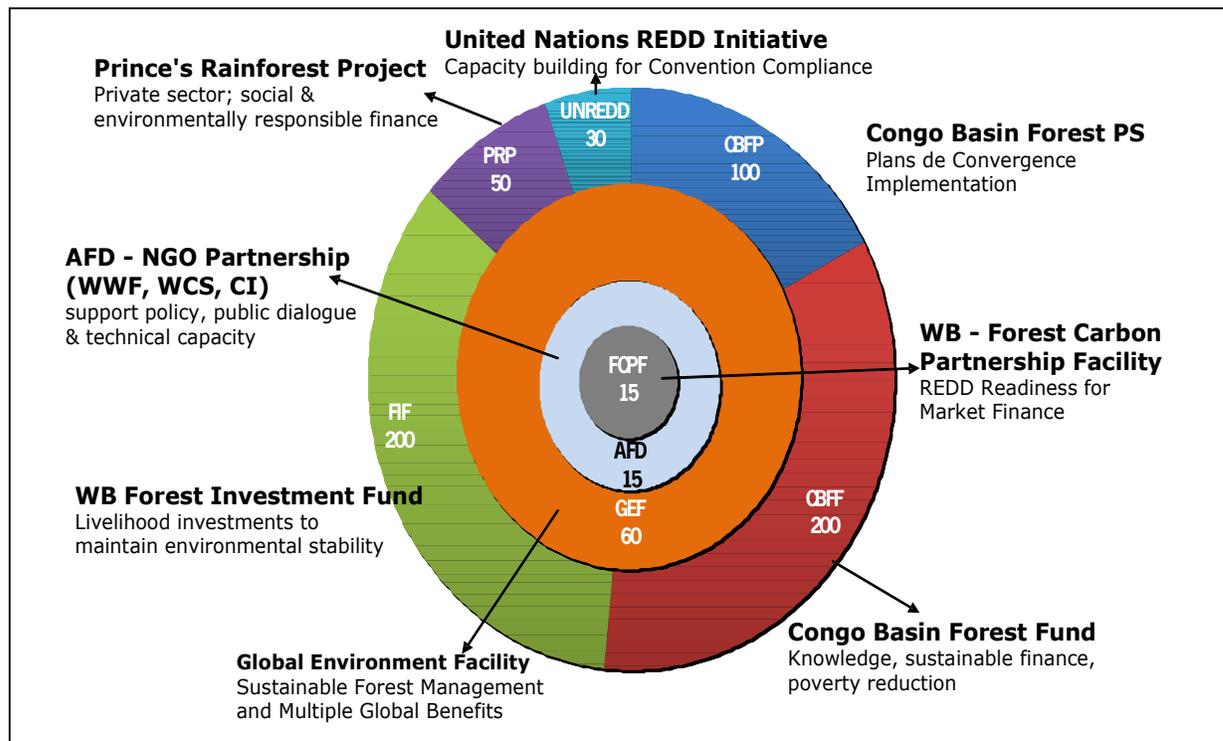
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<sup>1</sup> Bai, Dent, Olsson, Schaepman. 2008. *Proxy Global Assessment of Land Degradation*. Soil Use and Management, 24, 223-234

local livelihoods; the so-called “co-benefits”. Of equal importance for developing national sustainable development plans and policies is the potential “asset value” of reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, the preservation of natural carbon stocks in soils and vegetation, and carbon sequestration through afforestation, reforestation, agro-forestry and improved agricultural practices.

For the Congo Basin, donors and interest groups have recently announced new initiatives that could result in investments in the aggregate amount of \$670 million. Most of these investments have been pledged in the context of the emerging agenda of forests and climate. While it is applaudable that significant funding will be made available for sustainably managing the natural resources of the Congo Basin and its forests in particular, there is need for clarification of the objectives and scopes of these initiatives in the context of the ten axes of the COMIFAC Covergence Plan and their consistency with the four priority areas of the CBFP.

**Figure 1: Recently Announced Investment Initiatives for the Congo Basin (estimates of potential financial resources in US dollars for 2008-2013)**



Source: WWF (2008)

Another positive development in recent donor investment strategies is the move from a project-based approach to a programmatic approach. A programmatic approach in the area of natural resources management allows for promoting an integrated approach to address

multiple threats to ecosystems across wider landscapes. Programs are designed with a long-term vision, a clear focus on measurable results (incl. impacts) and a partnership approach based on the use of the comparative advantages of international and national institutions which are then accountable for their contribution to the program results. This approach is fully in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (endorsed in 2005) for an increased effort in the harmonization, alignment and managing of aid for results with a set of monitorable actions and indicators and the emphasis within the UNFCCC that actions to address climate change be “measurable, reportable and verifiable”. This applies to both “new” financing and physical results.

For the Congo Basin, it will be important to reinforce the promotion of an integrated approach to sustainable forest management which includes four major elements:

- Creation of a **policy, legal and regulatory environment** which is conducive to SFM at the country and regional level (governance);
- Development of **national and regional institutional capacities** to manage national forest resources and threats to it with the aim to preserve the forest and other ecosystems as well as their connectivity in the wider Congo Basin;
- Implement **concrete local-level activities** which enhance the management of forest resources, incl. technologies linked to sustainable harvesting of timber and non-timber products; reforestation activities; reforestation with native tree species; removal of invasive species etc; and
- Implementation of **enabling activities** that increase the capacity of countries to have more secure ownership/tenure of investment results such as forest/carbon inventories and monitoring of other co-benefits from sustainable forest management, incl. those associated with people’s livelihoods.

All these elements are well reflected in the COMIFAC Convergence Plan implemented by and reinforced through the actions of participants in the CBFP. The emerging initiatives need to be aligned with and designed as a country-driven approach to secure the ownership and accountability of the Congo Basin countries of the “carbon assets” that may be generated through agreements within the UNFCCC. For the Congo Basin, there is an agreed framework for action – the Convergence Plan – which should provide the appropriate umbrella for the harmonization of existing and new donor and country interventions that have both multiple benefits and beneficiaries.

### **Need for a Collaborative Arrangement to Manage Operations and Financing Flows**

The meeting convened by the COMIFAC Secretariat and hosted by WWF continues on the path toward enhancing the coordination of efforts to support conservation and sustainable use of the Congo Basin’s renewable natural resources. The COMIFAC Convergence Plan and the newly defined priority areas of the CBFP provide the appropriate partnership framework to guide and coordinate the prospective new and additional funding being mobilized to support the sustainable management of the Congo Basin’s environmental resources and to address the overlapping goals of climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation and land restoration or reversal of degradation. This dialog on “strategic coordination” which will enable the partners to identify potential gaps (and overlaps) in programs still being designed should form a good basis for intra-regional “operational” coordination once these programs go into implementation.

Participants of the meeting will reaffirm their

- Commitment to work within the framework of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan;
- Respect and strengthen the role of the CBFP as an interlocutor to facilitate meaningful dialog between donors and implementing agencies and use the CBFP as a forum for multilateral coordination among its partners;
- Agreement to work through a transparent and collaborative partnership approach that is based on comparative advantages of and synergies between its partners with reliable reporting and periodic stock taking of results and assessment of objectives;
- Commitment to an integrated approach to managing the Congo Basin's forest resources for multiple benefits that enable the COMIFAC countries to play their appropriate role in addressing global environmental concerns while improving the quality and sustainability of the "asset base" that provides the livelihoods of millions of forest dependant people.
- Commitment to facilitating the fullest and most productive engagement of the Congo Basin countries in international processes such as the UNCBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC to identify and assert their common and individual interests in the decisions agreed in these fora that are based on improved knowledge and understanding of their renewable natural resource base and the options available to them for mobilizing resources for its conservation and sustainable use that can provide both local and global environmental, social and economic benefits.

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