

Final Communiqué of the 15th Meeting of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership

June 17-19, 2015 – Yaounde, Cameroon

The 15th Meeting of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership was held from June 17-19, in Yaoundé au Cameroun with support from Norway, USA, France, Cameroon, and Germany under the theme « *Ecosystems of the Congo Basin : Valuing Natural Capital, Green Growth and Regional Development* ».

The meeting was opened by Cameroon's Prime Minister and attended by four Forest Ministers from the sub-region and many international experts. International delegations also attended from the Economic Community of Central Africa (ECCAS), COMIFAC, ten diplomatic missions, members of parliament from the Congo Basin, scientists, researchers, civil society representatives, donors and private sector representatives. Ministers in attendance included S.E.M. NGOLE Philip NGWESE, Minister of Forests and Fauna of Cameroon ; S.E.M. Henri DJOMBO, Minister of Forests and Sustainable Development of Congo-Brazzaville ; S.E.M. Nelson MESSONE, Minister of Waters and Forests of Gabon ; S.E.Mme Isabelle GAUDEILLE, Minister of Forests, Waters, Hunting and Fishing of the Central African Republic. This intergovernmental representation ensured political will and engagement for discussions regarding the management of regional forest resources. Representing the USA was Cynthia AKUETTEH, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Gabon and the Democratic of Sao Tome and Principe, and Michael Hoza, U.S. Ambassador to Cameroon. The meeting provided a platform for over 500 stakeholders to share experiences and explore synergies in their work of sustain Congo Basin forests. Finally, this meeting served as the first public announcement of the next Facilitation of the CBFP, to be undertaken by the European Union.

The CBFP Meeting was organized around six thematic streams, in addition to multiple side events and a village of 25 exhibition pavilions. Alongside the 15th CBFP meeting was the first Central African Parks Congress, two civil society training sessions, a technical meeting on pangolin conservation, a ministerial meeting to re-launch the African Organization for Wildlife Conservation (OCFSA), a meeting of the Tri-national Sangha (TNS) countries, a session of the transboundary Dja-Odzala-Minkébé (TRIDOM) and an awards ceremony for six civil society conservation leaders.

A highlight of the meeting was EU Ambassador Françoise Collet's speech at the opening, announcing that the EU will take over CBFP Facilitation after a transition period in early 2016.

Each technical stream produced a series of recommendations that were presented to the ministers in plenary for adoption and consideration:

Au titre du Stream 1 - AC-CBFP (Ecosystem Services Stream) Policy Recommendations

AC-CBFP (Ecosystem Services Stream) Policy Recommendations

1. Land use planning and enforceable land use zoning are critical to maintain ecosystem services.

Recommendation 1 – An inter-ministerial committee should be formed at the national level to support land use planning and enforceable land use zoning regulations for protection of ecosystem services.

Recommendation 2: Countries with support from their partners should finance projects aiming to restore degraded ecosystem services, in the framework of the implementation of the objectives 11 and 14 of Aichi targets, as well as the Bonn Challenge to restore 150 million hectares by 2020.

2. Protected areas are vital for both protection of biodiversity, ecosystem services and human health, including food security, and carbon sequestration and storage (At least 70% of the total area of protected areas in Central Africa are forested) protected areas) . Protected areas management must balance environmental conservation with the needs of local communities and take into account their role in regard to climate change.

Recommendation 3 – Update laws, revise schedule of fines, and prioritize training of officials to improve laws governing land use and protected area management; ensure that biological expertise is engaged to monitor changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services over time, and to implement adaptive management plans to manage uncertainties (e.g., development, climate change, water resources) over the long term.

Recommendation 4: Invest Climate and REDD+ related funding to support the management effectiveness of protected areas to ensure the sustainability of carbon sequestration and storage.

3. Successful development is dependent on investment in higher education. Governments should require investment in higher education and research as part of conservation and development projects to ensure that students are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills that are needed for successful, sustainable programs and to enhance academic, training, and research opportunities in the region.

Recommendation 5 – Involve and support student researchers, trainees, and interns as much as possible in conservation and development projects as a means to create opportunities for professional collaboration and research to bolster the effectiveness of ministry projects.

Recommendation 5.1 – Support training for key forestry officials, wildlife officials, and land managers focusing on ecosystem services (including evolutionary services).

Recommendation 5.2 – Support development of a higher education network that links points of contact at Universities in all COMIFAC countries with Academic Consortium partners; identify points of contact at universities and national agencies and develop a central website that connects partners through social media.

4. Ecosystems services valuation is critical to economic growth, food security and sustaining forest biodiversity.

Recommendation 6 – COMIFAC States and partners should develop economic valuation tools for Ecosystem Services (metrics, monitoring and evaluation protocol) that incorporate biodiversity research and training in environmental sciences curricula to increase valuation capacity – and create a platform for the implementation for these services.

Develop regional management plans tied to ecological services goals to be implemented in the region.

AC-CBFP Continuing Engagement

- 1) Continue to foster new research and professional collaborations with Universities, Governments, and NGOs across the Congo Basin through regional programs such as CBI, UMD/OSFAC, LAVAL/RIFFEAC, UW-Madison / Lwiro collaboration, and the Bioko Biodiversity Program.
- 2) Enhance and expand relationships with RIFFEAC and other institutions of higher education across the Congo Basin.
- 3) Continue to seek funding from sources that support building conservation and development capacity (including training) of current and future environmental leaders in the Congo Basin.
- 4) Build on current ACCBFP programs (multiple projects in 5 Congo Basin nations, including CABAlliance, LAVAL/RIFFEAC, UMD-OSFAC, and CBI) to promote further development of affiliate field research units across the Congo Basin.
- 5) Pledge support of unity to the new CBFP facilitation team to promote higher education and increase opportunities for building capacity across the Congo Basin.

Stream 2: Conservation, Wildlife and Bushmeat – with special focus on: “Conservation and sustainable use of wildlife - how to optimize complementarity?”

Part 1 Recommendations – Protected Areas and Wildlife

1. Promote and stimulate effective management of protected areas through the adoption of an independent certification mechanism for protected areas;
2. Ensure that forest habitat is secured outside protected areas to augment available forest area for permanent wildlife conservation;
3. Develop and implement national action plans for elephants and great apes in the next two years; planning must aim to suppress poaching, secure important wildlife populations and restore reduced populations to original levels.

Part 2 Recommendations: National Security and Protected Areas

4. In cases where threats to a protected area constitute also a threat to national security, steps should be taken to establish collaboration between the Ministry of Defense and the parks authority to undertake joint actions on the ground.

Part 3 Recommendations: Reconciling Wildlife Protection with Land-use Policies

5. At the information systems level of COMIFAC and CBFP there is a need to develop systems to (1) analyze present and future land use conflicts and (2) support stakeholders to seek solutions to resolving conflicts at multiples levels (local, sectoral, national);
6. Find ways to engage participation (1) of the private sector, and (2) of decentralized sectors in negotiations and CBFP engagements, as well as vis-a-vis COMIFAC (Plan de Convergence) and donors and technical partners.

Part 4 Recommendation: New Technologies for Wildlife Monitoring

7. Formalize use and adoption of SMART in protected areas, to put in place standardized data systems in national coordination structures.

Part 5 Recommendations: When does hunting become poaching?

8. Revise local forest management laws to ensure that community and customary rules are given due consideration, to increase engagement of communities in wildlife management.

Part 6 Recommendations: Looking at the Economics: Ways to Regulate the Bushmeat Trade?

9. Implement pilot projects in a representative number of villages in central Africa to test the local production and distribution capacity and viability of marketing non-protected species or farm animals.
10. Introduce alternative animal protein sources at a scale to satisfy demand in provincial capitals, and urban peripheries, ensuring these sources can be obtained at competitive market prices.

Part 7 Recommendation: Bushmeat and Nutrition

11. Undertake social communication campaigns to reduce urban demand for bushmeat and strictly control the flow of wild game meat from rural areas to urban markets.

Recommendations of Stream 3 : "Forest Law Enforcement and Governance in the context of Land Use"

Main conclusions

1. Governance is now at the heart of development discussions, and is an important theme for debate by all sectors. There are many different definitions for governance, and all include the following elements :

a process of exchange and dialog between all stakeholders, to ensure clear rules of the game, followed by all, and effectively applied.

Recommendations include:

- Better apply the concept of accountability for all sectors, an essential principle for solid governance. This is particularly critical for state actors in their emission of legal documents.
- Integrate key actors such as members of parliament and local officials in governance improvement measures.

2. Corruption is an important constraint on improved governance and should be combatted at all levels. Sanctions should be accompanied with measures to make officials less susceptible to corruption.

Recommandations include:

- Promote a culture of integrity, and combat prevailing attitudes that tolerate corruption at various levels.
- Develop a critical mass of changemakers, to protect those engaged in rooting out and exposing elements of corruption.

3. Land use competition is increasingly a challenge in the Congo Basin. The need for concessions for mining and agroindustrial production activities should be duly considered and harmonized. Illegal forest conversion from these and other activities remains widespread throughout the region.

Recommandations include:

- Ensure that each country develops a master plan for land use, that is supported at the highest levels, and applicable to the entire horizon of sectors competing for land.
- Make sure that any master plan takes into account vulnerable populations.

- Implement and monitor the legal framework underpinning land use changes.
- Produce a guide making diverse land use planning tools readily available.

4. With 5 of the 15 countries in the world engaged in VPAs (Voluntary Partnership Agreements) the Congo Basin offers a rich pool of VPA experiences. These negotiations platforms allow unprecedented spaces for cross-sectoral dialog, and VPA implementation is a testing ground for governance reform and management. While FLEGT licence systems are still in process, APV platforms offer valuable insights to inform national forestry policies.

Recommandations include:

- Better integrate the cost of stakeholder participation into more decentralized land use approaches, and integrate accountability principles throughout.
- Integrate the private sector in all phases of negotiations, policy and implementation.

5. The context for forestry production and commerce in the Congo Basin has fundamentally changed in the last ten years, with huge fluctuations in demand, trade flows and structure among the producer companies present in the region in terms of their operating capital, the requirements imposed by exporting countries in terms of value added, and the legal context of certain importing countries (EU, Lacey Act, etc.). The EU appetite for wood from the region is increasingly limited.

Recommandations include:

- Support the promotion and true valuation of tropical timber in import markets.
- Ensure that producers in the sub-region are attentive to legal requirements, and that countries enforce applicable laws, notably regarding the practices of certain Asian forestry companies.
- Better integrate small timber operators into national systems to ensure legal conformity, and to capitalize on regional discussions, to ensure that consumers have access to legally-produced timber locally.

6. Since 2000, voluntary forest certification schemes have met with some success among the large producers, and good practices have been adopted. But the trend to increase certified production seems to have levelled off today, making the search for new options necessary.

Recommandations include:

- Better evaluate the cost-benefit to forest certification scheme participation, taking into account the benefits accruing to communities and states. Ensuring a new emphasis on certification will mean a better understanding of its elements and their advantages for all stakeholders.

Recommandations of Stream 4 : " Climat and REDD+: central Africa and the road to COP21"

- 1) The governments of the COMIFAC area are pleased to see advanced in the REDD+ process especially in the development of non-carbon benefits, and synergies between adaptation and mitigation measures.

They noted that current funding for Phases 1 & 2 of REDD + are still weak and seek additional funding to finalize these two phases.

Moreover, they want to continue receiving scientific and technological support consistent with advances in ongoing negotiations.

COMIFAC countries recognize the need and urgency to finalize their INDCs and are pursuing this goal in an inclusive, participatory and equitable process. Indeed, examples of CPDNs / INDC already submitted by several countries reflect national climate concerns.

- 2) Countries thus recognize the need to inclusively engage in the development of climate plans. Therefore, cognizant of their limitations they wish to continue to work collaboratively in the preparation of their INDCs and Climate Plans with the participation of all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples, women and youth.

Recommandations of Stream 5 : "Green Economies and Creating Conditions for Growth"

1. **Insist inclusion of all actors** – governments, NGOs, private sector, and local communities— in any dialogue about sustainable use and protection of natural resources and biodiversity conservation management, **as well as actors across thematic sectors**, such as agriculture, conservation, forestry, wildlife conservation, as well as development, finance, transportation, and any socio-economic policymaker. **When discussing any economic issue, environment experts should be consulted, and environmental policies should include economic considerations.** Ensure all sectors are present for this multidisciplinary conversation.
2. **Implement policies to improve the business climate** (visa reform, customs and shipping, information access technology, language capabilities) **thereby attracting investors** to spur economic growth and development. Examples could include streamlining the visa process and improving regulatory processes, lowering taxes for businesses with sustainable and ecologically friendly practices, or offering incentive measures to the private sector to take action in engaging local communities and environmentally sound policies. **These policies must not only be developed, but also enforced.**

Recommandations of Stream 6 – Sustainable Finance

- 1) Recommends COMIFAC analyze existing and proposed sustainable financing mechanism for forests, including their relevance, effectiveness, and synergies;
- 2) Further recommends COMIFAC consider, based on this analysis, whether new financing mechanism for forests in the sub region may be needed, and if so, what form such mechanism may take, for example Conservation trust funds;
- 3) Recommends COMIFAC consider means to mobilize additional private sector investment in forests, for example through the Designation of Compensation Funds for Forests Protections;
- 4) Recommends COMIFAC explore means to increase the fiduciary and institutional capacity, and governance, of local, national and regional Institutions in the sub region to improve their capacity to access financing for forests
- 5) Recommends COMIFAC member Government to consider concrete demonstration of their political will by reinvesting part of their natural capital into development, and strengthening national and regional Institution.

Yaoundé, June 19, 2015

Participants