



Agroforestry cocoa farming
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Decoupling deforestation from commercial farming development : combining territorial and zero deforestation approaches

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Central Africa is a region with a very strong potential for agricultural development. The desire of the countries in the subregion for economic emergence, the availability of arable land, and encouraging prices on the world market for perennial crops will inexorably lead to increased production of cash crops. In Central Africa this growth, which will be sustained by both agro-industrial firms and by hundreds of small producers, significantly increases the risks of deforestation and of anthropogenic transformation of natural environments.

Efficient management of farming growth that equally aims for economic development and limiting deforestation will require the creation of relevant public policies, the provision of support to the public and private sectors, and the promotion of alternative agricultural practices that dissociate deforestation and farming.

Central Africa is a region with a very high potential for agricultural development. Not including protected areas, 40% of the region's arable land is not farmed, is sparsely populated, and is suitable for sub-Saharan crop production. These fertile lands are increasingly sought after for the production of cash crops: palm oil, cacao, manioc, rubber, maize, etc. This form of growth raises numerous fears with regard to the consequences for society and for the environment.

Central Africa is one of the regions of the world with the highest forest cover per capita and where deforestation has increased in recent years. The rate of gross deforestation between 2004 - 2014 was 0.36% per annum¹, a total of 6,885,000 ha. During the same period, the Democratic Republic of Congo alone accounted for 85% of the loss in forest cover (Fig.1).

Currently, the main causes of deforestation are the expansion of itinerant slash and burn farming and the use of fuelwood as the main source of energy for cooking food. Areas of deforestation are mainly located on the edges of urban centres, along transportation routes (waterways and roads), and in areas of population concentration.

In the near future, the desire of the countries in the subregion for economic emergence, the high availability of arable land, and encouraging prices on the world market for perennial crops will inexorably lead to increased production of cash crops and to a rise in the application of agro-industrial models.

¹ Gross deforestation rate between 2004 and 2014, calculated on the basis of a forest cover rate of 75%, which corresponds to dense forests (Source: Global Forest Watch, 2016).

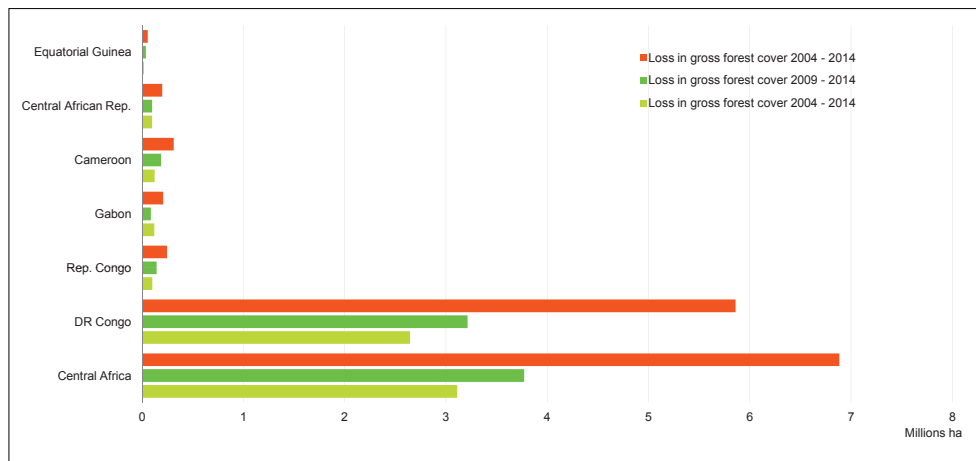


Figure 1 : Loss of forest cover between 2004 and 2014, in millions of hectares (Source: Global Forest Watch, 2016)

Businesses looking for large-scale commercial farming land have been investing in Central Africa for the last ten years (Feintrenie, 2014). Since 1991, the amount of agricultural land obtained through concessions has doubled and in some cases tripled (Fig.2).

Notwithstanding, the increase in perennial cash crop production is not due to agro-industrial firms exclusively. Many small producers looking for additional sources of revenue have started plantations and benefit from the deployment of regional commercial channels. Small producers account for 95% of the cacao produced world-wide and for 80% of the rubber and 40% of the palm oil (Sourisseau, 2014).

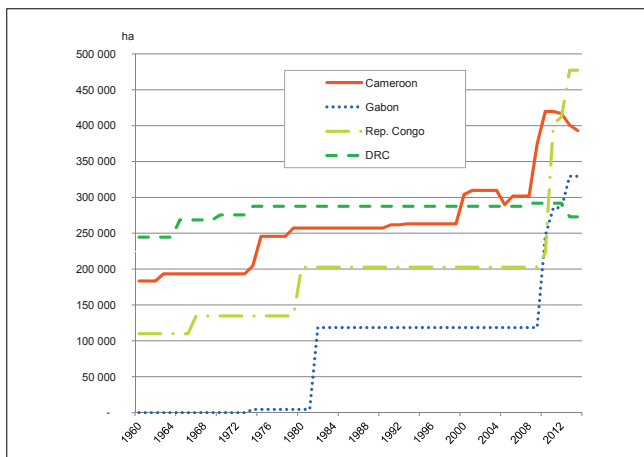


Figure 2: Hectares of agricultural land concessions granted between 1960 and 2010 (Source: Feintrenie, 2014)

Managing the expansion of commercial farming and its impact on forest ecosystems requires relevant and differentiated strategies for industrial-scale plantations and for the different forms of small-scale farming. It would be impracticable to have a single overarching strategy. Spatial planning and the strengthening of the rule of law are essential in order to limit the fragmentation of forests. Small producers need incentives, land

security, and public and private support if they are to adopt agricultural practices that are respectful of the environment.

The prevention of forest land conversion

Countries should determine which parcels of land will be used predominantly as forests and take the measures needed to give them a legal status that will provide protection from any permanent change in their use. National legal frameworks could provide for mechanisms such classification or registration for forests and forested areas. These mechanisms must comply with the international principles of self-determination and of prior and free and informed consent of the populations concerned. These areas will comprise a permanent forest estate, parts of which may be public, private, or community property.

Cameroon is the only country to have clearly established, in its Forestry Code, provisions for the assignment of lands to its permanent forest estate (*forêts domaniales*, which correspond to state-owned forest estates, and *forêts communales*, which correspond to municipality-owned forests) and for the allocation of land that is part of the non-permanent forest estate (*forêts du domaine national* or national forests, *forêts communautaires* or community forests, and *forêts des particuliers*, private forests) for uses other than those related to forestry.

In the subregion, the largest areas of assigned forests are protected areas (approximately 40 million ha.) and forest concessions (approximately 50 million ha). In the other countries in the subregion, not all forested lands have been given effective legal status through either classification or registration.

Only protected areas, because their general objective is protection and preservation, have been specifically classified and are thusly protected from any administrative decision that would change land use (Fig.3). Forest concessions are not yet covered by similar legal mechanisms and can therefore be converted to other uses. Protected areas in the DRC, for example, account for 13% of forested land, the remaining 87% can be converted.

States in the subregion have committed to re-launching land use policies, this occasion should be seized to clarify the legal status of forested lands and to create public policies aimed at separating deforestation from the production of goods and services that are essential to the well-being of a growing population.

Providing operational guidance for major agro-industrial firms

Major agro-industrial firms, with a rationale of immediate profitability and faced with an unstable political and economic context, are tempted to open operations in forested areas for two reasons: 1) the risk of social conflict is lower because population density is low and 2) inexpensive agricultural practices can be used because the land is assumed to be fertile.

Public authorities have an important role to play in providing guidance to large corporations, with regard to the geographically identifying locations and social and environmental standards.

In the countries in the region, major agro-industrial operators negotiate the granting of concessions with governments. After negotiations, public surveys are conducted and publicly validated, and environmental impact studies are

conducted. Both of these processes can lead to the redefining of concession limits, prior to the granting of planting rights.

The granting of concessions should be strictly limited to lands that are located on legally owned state land (registered as such or identified as such through some other procedure). Public authorities should ascertain that the development of agricultural investment zones are in line with the relevant land use plan once it has been established. Moreover, public enquiries into the land rights held by the local population must be conducted in keeping with international land governance principles², namely the concept of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

The strengthening of the rule of law is also necessary. The case of SG SOC and that of Sud-Cameroun Hévée in Cameroon revealed situations of non-compliance with existing regulations.

As regards social and environmental standards, since 2004, in response to pressure from environmental protection organisations, certain agro-industrial firms have engaged in certification procedures (Round Table for Sustainable Palm Oil); and as of 2010, in a “zero-deforestation” approach.

Public authorities could oversee these voluntary mechanisms. Transparency during the concession issuance procedure is essential. The use of competitive calls for tender to assign pre-defined farming concessions, using a mechanism similar to the one currently used in Cameroon for Forest management Units, would significantly improve governance. Commitments to certification and/or “zero-deforestation” approaches made by agro-industrial firms could be used as a technical evaluation criterion for bids.

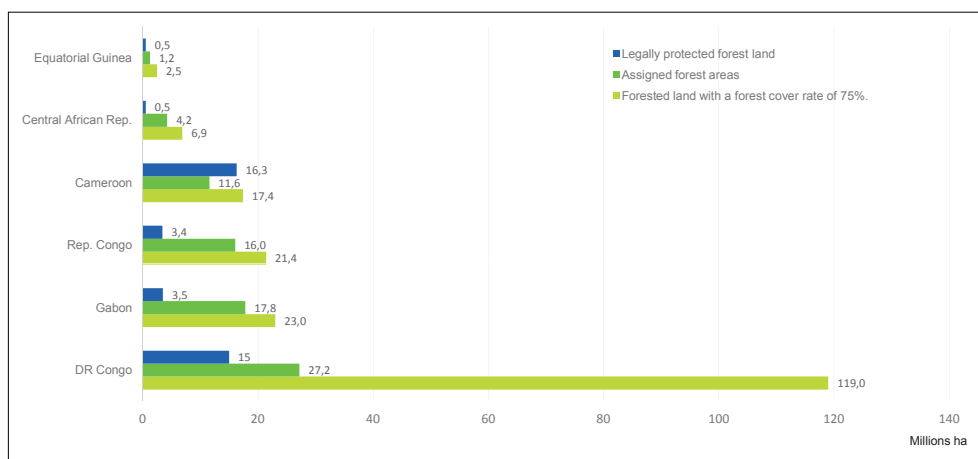


Figure 3 : Legally protected forested land, assigned forested lands (forest concessions, protected areas, community forests, forests owned by local authorities) and forest land (forest cover rate of 75%) (in millions of hectares).

² Namely, the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, retrieved at http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1112/VG/VG_Final_FR_May_2012.pdf

An independent observer could be used to ensure transparency and equity during the concession granting process, and the observer's reports can be used to document firms' social and environmental commitments. Said reports could be made available to civil society for the purposes of monitoring. These commitments can also be included in concessions holders' lists of specifications, thusly making them a legal obligation. Public tendering procedures should become the rule for the assignment of agro-industrial concessions.

Encouraging small producers to adopt farming practices that are not harmful to the environment

Small-scale, subsistence and cash crop farming are increasingly practiced in forested lands, very frequently to the detriment of forests. For farmers, agricultural incursion into forested lands is a means of acquiring land and increasing, in the short term, production and revenue at a low cost.

In areas where demographic pressure is increasingly rising, farmers clear tracts of forests to increase their land assets with a view to transfer or sell them.

Improving farming practices in accordance with the principles of agroforestry or agroecology should increase or, at the least, maintain levels of farming productivity by ecologically intensifying production systems and at the same time limiting pressure on forest ecosystems. Cocoa agroforests, for example, accommodate sustainable farming and limit environmental impacts (Jagoret *et al.*, 2014).

In the absence of land constraints, farmers will not spontaneously adopt new farming practices. Incentives mechanisms are needed to help farmers change their practices and preserve forested lands. An agro-industrial firm that enters into agreements with farmers must support and contribute to the financing of change in farmers' productions practices and must ascertain that these practices are in keeping with the commitments to "zero deforestation" made by the firm. The identification, clarification, and registration of traditional land rights held by a community contribute to improving the traceability of products along the entire value chain and to guaranteeing that producers and communities fulfil their commitments.



Artisanal production of palm oil
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Additional (public) funding and public policy instruments will have to be made available and deployed. Payment for Environmental Services (PES) could be used to decouple agricultural development from deforestation. PES systems earmarked for investment could be used to encourage small producers to adopt new farming practices that have less of an impact on the environment and collective PES systems could be used to remunerate communities for preserving and restoring forest ecosystems in areas where they hold traditional land rights (Karsenty, 2015).

Also, guiding the development of a part of cash crop farming in savannahs, as envisaged by REDD+ in the DRC and in the Republic of Congo, could contribute to reducing the pressure exerted on forest ecosystems.

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