

Final Communiqué of the 16th Meeting of Parties of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership 21-25 November 2016 – Kigali, Rwanda

On 21-25 November 2016 the Parties of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) gathered in Kigali, Rwanda, for their 16th meeting.

The Parties expressed their sincere appreciation to the Rwandan host authorities for their hospitality and for their contribution to the successful outcome of this first Meeting of the Parties of CBFP in Rwanda.

The main outcomes of the proceedings were the following:

- Parties agreed on the need to reinvigorate CBFP cooperation, notably by high-lighting the added value of the Partnership, by attributing more credit and visibility to this common regional platform and by taking common responsibility for its functioning and development;
- The new cooperation structures, the CBFP colleges and the CBFP Council, have been established and started to function. These structures are intended to reinforce the possibilities for dialogue and exchanges within a partnership, whose membership has grown substantially since its inception;
- An updated version of the CBFP Cooperation Framework, reflecting the creation of the new cooperation structures, was adopted;
- Parties agreed to initiate a structured dialogue in the colleges and Council of CBFP with a view to arrive at a clear description of the priorities on which partners agree to focus CBFP cooperation during the coming 3-5 year period to be adopted at the next Meeting of Parties.
- In order to increase the impact of Partnership action on the decisions that affect the forests of the Congo Basin, Parties agreed to:
 - seek ways of engaging with other key sectors beyond forestry and environment, such as agriculture, mining and petroleum exploration and exploitation;
 - promote a significantly strengthened engagement of the Partnership with private sector entities;
- Parties expressed concern about the current financial challenges facing COMIFAC and ECCAS and for securing a sustainable basis for the financing of these regional organisations reflecting the ownership of their Member States.
- Parties also called attention to the urgent need to clearly specify the respective roles and the practical working relationship between COMIFAC and ECCAS, as a means to enhance the effectiveness of regional cooperation on issues pertinent to the Congo Basin forests;

- The thematic streams produced a number of recommendations on key issues of relevance to the protection and sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests, including climate change, as well as a number of other documents and tools of value to CBFP partners. The main recommendations are set out below. More comprehensive texts can be found in the Attachment to this communiqué.

Forest management policies and land use planning

Across all of the forested countries of the Congo Basin, threats to the forests are coming more and more from non-forestry sectors: conversion of the forest for agro-industrial plantations, the growth of the mining sector, the development of transport infrastructure, etc. With regard to this, the partners are unanimous in recognising that the future of the Congo Basin forests will depend largely on the political choices that will be made by States in terms of land use and that land use planning strategies are therefore a determining factor today.

In implementing these strategies, which will necessarily happen at inter-sectoral level, it is essential that States make use of the macro- and micro-zonage exercises that have already been underway for many years in the forestry sector. Land use planning policies must be compatible with the preservation of local and global eco-systemic functions, and must be a high political priority. They must also be supported by information management tools that are transparent and accessible to all stakeholders. The role of OFAC in the elaboration and integrated management of these tools at regional level must equally be confirmed by the States of the sub-region and must benefit from financial and technical engagement from all of the CBFP partners.

Management approaches and rapid response mechanisms in protected areas

In response to the growing gravity of poaching and wildlife trafficking in the sub-region, the participants consider that it is necessary to provide protected areas with a rapid response and dissuasion mechanism working with law enforcement, military and intelligence services, according to the specific stability and security conditions in each country. This must also include the question of capacity building, of putting in place social security systems adapted to the particular security situation of park rangers, and of involving the local communities. This new vision of protected area management and of the fight against poaching must also go hand in hand with updates of relevant policies, texts, laws and professional tools.

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the management of protected areas

In addition to the other economic alternatives to be promoted inside and outside of protected areas, Public Private Partnerships were highlighted as a model, which has proven that it can be successful under the right circumstances.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies

COMIFAC should provide support to its member countries in the process of revising their NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions), building on the experiences and achievements of existing programs. To this end, there is a need to put in place a sub-regional facility aiming to improve the access of COMIFAC countries to climate funds. Partners are requested to promote geographical balance in the distribution of climate finance resources.

CBFP partners are invited to help Central African countries in their efforts to transform agriculture into opportunities to fight climate change, feed populations, provide job opportunities for youth and insure a balanced development of agribusiness models.

The sustainability of climate funding, most notably with regard to adaptation issues, should be a specific priority in platforms for exchange and dialogue between COMIFAC member states and their partners.

Involvement of the private sector

An increase in the involvement of private sector actors is needed within the Partnership, both for forest operators and more broadly for other actors operating in forested areas. To this end, the CBFP must actively encourage the countries of the region to increase the security of the legal environment, in order to allow private operators to invest. Transparency and the sharing of data related to the public management of natural resources, as well as the involvement of private operators in land use planning are other elements that could work to strengthen investor confidence.

The FLEGT approach, in which several countries in the region are engaged, should be used as appropriate to enhance transparency and enable the development of pragmatic, efficient, and easily usable traceability tools for operators.

New instruments to neutralize the environmental impact of the agri-food sector in forest areas are currently being developed. The COMIFAC Member States must integrate such tools, and the partnership must work to promote and disseminate them. Essentially, it is becoming necessary to create innovative frameworks that reconcile conservation objectives with private sector standards and planning.

The small and medium enterprises exploiting and commercialising wood or non timber forest products need to be better included in the legislative framework and text system and recognised as economic actors.

Education and research

OFAC has a key role to play in centralising and circulating the results of projects and research activities, by way of policy briefs, dedicated web pages on its website, and promotion of dedicated social media.

The countries of COMIFAC and the CBFP partners are requested to strengthen their support to applied research and to education and training. Universities and training institutions should liaise with the private sector to develop training schemes adapted to the specific needs of private sector actors involved in the management of natural resources.

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The meeting gathered around 450 participants from countries of the Congo Basin, international organizations, research institutions, the private sector and NGOs. The opening ceremony was graced by the Honorable Dr Vincent Biruta, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources in Rwanda, accompanied by Mrs Rosalie Matondo, the Minister of Forestry Economy and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Congo, Mrs Francesca di Mauro, Head of Unit for Central Africa at the European Commission, Dr Daniel Reifsnyder, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Environment and His Excellency Raymond Mbitikon, Executive Secretary of COMIFAC. Keynote speeches were delivered by Mr Anders Henriksson, EU Facilitator of the CBFP, by Mr Kaddu Sebunya, President of the African Wildlife Foundation and by Mr Praveen Moman, Founder and CEO of Volcanoes Safaris.

The meeting opened with a technical segment consisting of five thematic working sessions (Streams) which benefitted by inaugural statements by His Excellency Mr. Henri Djombo, Minister of State, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of the Republic of Congo and Mr. Armand Guy Zoungwere-Sokambi, Vice President of the Development Bank of Central African States (BDEAC). These Streams were followed by a political segment consisting of meetings of the newly established CBFP Colleges and the inaugural session of the CBFP Council followed by a concluding high-level plenary session.

There was also an Exhibition Space and a number of related side-events.

Kigali, 25 November 2016

Participants

APPENDIX

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC STREAMS

Stream 1: FOREST MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND LAND USE PLANNING

Stream Leaders: World Resource Institute (WRI) - COMIFAC Working Group on Governance (GTGC)

Recommendations

1. Data sharing among various data-collecting bodies (including spatial data) is key to the efficient use of this data and for effective land-use planning which provides a framework for the successful pursuit of sustainable forest management objectives.

The various data-collecting bodies are either sectorial administrations (forests, mines, agriculture, but also health, education, administrations in charge of infrastructures and industrial investments), research institutions (national or international) or private operators (Forest concession holders, for example).

Data sharing among these different bodies must be a policy priority and must be covered by clear instructions from the States. Such sharing requires political commitment, but also technical coordination to develop principles, mechanisms and procedures for efficient real-time data sharing.

2. It is important, in light of the current state of play, for States to establish or strengthen institutional consultative frameworks for all parties to enable the effective development of land-use planning. These consultative frameworks should include participatory and transparent methodologies. At the same time, a strong institutional anchor, constant and visible political will and a clear mandate for the steering bodies are key conditions for the success of these multi-sectorial initiatives and therefore require close inter-ministerial cooperation.

It is essential to strike a practical and operational balance between consultation, effective participation of each relevant planning level and allocation of financial resources commensurate with the involvement of each planning level, both within the administrations concerned and at the level of participating stakeholders.

3. The transparency of information furnished by data management tools is a key prerequisite to their effective use and added value in decision-making. It is crucial that all existing and collected information – or at least, the vast majority – be shared and accessible to all users. However, it should be understood that access to certain types of data must comply with security and confidentiality rules and can only be considered at aggregate level. This requires the definition of property rights through, among other things, prior identification of users and signing of user licenses.
4. State authorization for the publication of the greatest amount possible of comprehensive and relevant data on public portals like, for example, those developed in WRI forest atlases, often needs to be negotiated by the advocates of such information dissemination tools.

It is essential that the competent administrations are continually made aware of the importance of making the data over which they have legal authority publicly available. This guarantees the reliability and effective use of such data for the economic and social development of these countries' populations. International initiatives such as OFAC and bilateral negotiation processes such as FLEGT VPAs should continue to play a central and catalytic role in this regard.

5. User-friendliness of data management tools is central to their effectiveness and added value. Data infrastructure must receive the requisite investment to meet this key condition.

Maps with the highest impact on land use do not always have to be the complex and exhaustive versions on the computers used by decision-makers, but should also and especially include simple versions, that can be assimilated and used by uninitiated actors at local level, and which actually influence their behaviour.

To allow for the practical use of these data, the information and accompanying maps must be locally accessible, in a format adapted for easy use by local actors (often in laminated paper versions/disseminated in large numbers and displayed at the lowest administrative level).

6. With a view to ensuring the sustainable management of Central African forests and effective monitoring of the implementation of COMIFAC Convergence Plan 2, participants in the working session on data governance, held on 23 November 2016, stressed the importance of promoting a coherent governance and data management mechanism for the management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa.

This mechanism should be built on the following seven main elements:

- 1) Espousing the implementation of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan 2 as a priority issue for all initiatives, sources and operators involved in the production, sharing and dissemination of data on forest ecosystem management in Central Africa;
- 2) Confirming the commitment of COMIFAC member states to ensure effective national ownership of the Central African Forest Observatory (OFAC);
- 3) Equipping OFAC with a framework for coordinating and ensuring the consistency of initiatives, sources and operators involved in the production, sharing and dissemination of data on forest ecosystem management in Central Africa;
- 4) Developing and utilising a charter for collecting, producing, sharing and disseminating data on forest ecosystem management in Central Africa;
- 5) Effectively integrating NTFP indicators into the system of collection, production, sharing and dissemination of data on forest ecosystem management in Central Africa managed by OFAC;
- 6) Integrating COMIFAC National Coordinations (CNCs) into national data collection and centralization bodies, in countries where such agencies already exist;
- 7) Strengthening the technical, institutional and financial capacities of COMIFAC National Coordinations (CNCs) to enable them to play this role effectively and

efficiently in the process of collecting data on the sustainable management of forest ecosystems;

7. Whether at the national or sub-regional level within COMIFAC, it is vital that administrations identify existing data and data gaps in supporting land management and forest management processes that will enable effective planning (for effective sustainable economic development strategies, of course, but also for the implementation of national mitigation or adaptation policies).

Thinking along these lines, it is necessary to start by prioritizing needs in terms of data collection, analysis and compilation. Through its support to CNCs (COMIFAC National Coordinations), OFAC has a crucial role to play in this respect.

8. COMIFAC States should be encouraged to integrate their different levels of international commitments into a single policy strategy for each country, which will enhance their credibility and ability to obtain funding to implement them. The main commitment levels for consideration include:
 - Nationally determined Contributions (NDCs) under the UNFCCC/ COP 21 Paris Agreements;
 - Voluntary targets for land degradation neutrality (LDN) towards the achievement of target 15.1 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
 - Ecosystem restoration commitments made under the Bonn Challenge.
9. COMIFAC States could usefully work together to develop a common strategy to contribute to the African contribution to the Bonn Challenge (AFR100)

Stream 2: CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES, INCLUDING THE FIGHT AGAINST POACHING AND WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

Stream Leaders: AWF, WCS, COMIFAC Biodiversity Working Group (GTBAC)

Recommendations

1. Governance and sustainable financing of protected areas

- a. Conduct studies to take account of a paradigm shift in protected area management by promoting the TERRITORY approach (local, national, regional, cross-border, landscape, etc.) that takes into account geo-political and security / defence, economic aspects, etc.;
- b. Promote Public Private Partnerships as a transitional (and non-permanent) model aimed amongst other things at preparing national human and material resources to take over the reins of protected area management;
- c. Increase the share of "protected area" budgets within the annual budgets of Ministries in charge of wildlife and protected areas;
- d. Establish autonomous protected area management bodies;
- e. Ensure continued financing of protected areas by promoting the use of innovative funding tools (PES, levying taxes on economic activities, ecological compensation of biodiversity, trust funds, etc.)

2- Engagement of local communities in sustainable natural resource management

- a. Implement sub-regional guidelines for engaging indigenous and local communities and civil society organizations in the sustainable management of forest ecosystems;
- b. Operationalize the Central African bush meat tracking system (SYLVBAC) with the support of technical and financial partners, make use of the human-wildlife conflict toolbox as well as the ATO/ITTO guidelines on wildlife;
- c. Implement the sub-regional strategy for the sustainable use of wildlife by indigenous and local communities in COMIFAC countries (January 2015);
- d. The development of new approaches to combating the illegal trade in bush meat must be subject to thorough evaluation and pilot tests appropriate for bush meat legalisation before they are integrated into national policies;

3- Poaching and wildlife trafficking

- a.** Establish a social security fund for rangers as recommended in the Libreville call for greater recognition of the park ranger's profession;
- b.** Support community-based conservation initiatives in key corridors for wildlife trafficking and in other areas where poaching occurs or is likely to happen
- c.** Revise wildlife legislation to include sanctions for wildlife offenses;
- d.** Revise species classifications in light of CITES COP 17 decisions on some species such as pangolins and parrots;
- e.** Equip protected areas with rapid response as well as deterrent capabilities by bringing in the military, intelligence and customs services;
- f.** Equip major airports, ports and railways with wildlife product screening technology;
- g.** Foster sub-regional coordination and dialogue between governments on cross-border transhumance and the attendant threats to human and wildlife security.
- h.** Build upon successful models that enhance stability and make the connections between human and wildlife security in the DRC-SS-CAR tri-border region, including (1) Early Warning Networks, (2) protected areas and natural resource governance, and (3) the coordination of four armies in the region to conduct joint operations against the LRA with support of US Special Operations.

Stream 3: STREAM 3: CLIMATE CHANGE (MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION)

Stream Leaders: World Bank (PRE-REDD) - COMIFAC Climate Working Group (GTC)

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: COMIFAC must develop sub-regional programs incorporating gender equality, with the most urgent programs focusing on:

- Supporting countries with the revision and implementation of their NDCs and action plan in line with the Paris Agreement and with the participation of all stakeholders, especially the private sector, civil society, indigenous peoples, women and youths;
- Developing a broad-based sub-regional REDD+ program, involving all the sub-region's countries and capitalizing on the achievements of existing programs such as PREREDD+ and MNV;
- Fostering the establishment of a sub-regional climate finance accessibility facility for countries in the sub-region;
- Working in synergy to develop project proposals/documents by drawing on existing sub-regional project resources or UNFCCC mechanisms;
- Establishing expert groups at country and sub regional level which will be tasked with translating the project ideas expressed in the NDCs into bankable programs and projects;

Recommendation 2: Urge financial partners to provide resources for the implementation of the programs identified above, making sure they take into account gender equality.

Recommendation 3: Engage REPAR as well as relevant civil society organizations and mobilize the requisite resources to conduct advocacy with other countries in the sub region to speed up the process for ratification of the Paris Agreement by all the countries before the end of the first half of 2017.

Recommendation 4: Small scale farming when practiced extensively remains harmful to the environment. The tropical forests of the Congo Basin are likely to be the next destination/frontier for the expansion of commercial agriculture, while many non-forest lands, including the still largely uncultivated savannahs and fallow lands hold significant potential.

The demand for both ecological services and economic development places the States in situations where land use planning policies are crucial to better support and guide the development of interventions and especially commercial agriculture (palm oil, cocoa, etc.).

Partners are urged to help the Central African countries transform agriculture into an opportunity to combat climate change, feed people, provide employment for young people and ensure controlled development of agro-industrial models in Central African countries.

Recommendation 5: Encourage the countries in the sub-region and partners to support BDEAC as it seeks accreditation with various climate finance mechanisms.

Recommendation 6: Urge the financial partners to advocate for geographical equity and equality in the allocation of climate finance resources.

Recommendation 7:

- Public and private investments, including in the area of agriculture, should take into account the relevant existing tools and instruments (laws and regulations, strategy documents, investment code), including the National Investment Frameworks developed as part of initiatives such as FIP and CAFI, in order to make for programmes on green economies that are robust enough to produce catalytic effects and economies of scale.
- Urge the partners towards greater synergy in conducting catalytic action between the funds in order to make an impact on a wider scale.
- In the VPA and REDD+ countries of the Congo Basin, these two processes underline the importance of consultation, transparency and accountability which must guide the definition of objectives and consensually agreed modalities for implementing NDCs. Lessons learned in the REDD+ and VPA-FLEGT processes in the Congo Basin countries highlight the need to combine technical capacity building with efforts to address the root causes of weak governance in the countries in order to give support to the role of forests in the NDC objectives.
- Encourage the countries to use support programs (national dialogue, formulation of priorities, etc) to finally consolidate GEF governance at country level

Recommendation 8: Calls on the Acting Presidency of COMIFAC to organise the 3rd COMIFAC Heads of State Summit during the year 2017.

Stream 4: SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Stream Leaders: International Technical Tropical Timber Association (ATIBT)
The Forest Trust (TFT)

Recommendations

1. The participants underline the need for all CBFP partners to actively raise awareness among the States in the sub-region about the crucial importance of securing the legal environment in which private operators conduct business.

States need to ensure the legal security of technical and financial resources that operators invest into the sustainable use of natural resources, either by exploiting these natural resources (such as in the case of logging under sustainable management or through investments into sustainable agricultural business) or within the framework of the conservation of these natural resources (investing in protected area management).

Securing the legal framework for investment is essential if the States are to ensure the credibility and effectiveness of their own sustainable economic development policies.
2. The participants recommend that the States in the sub-region engage private sector operators more actively, including holders of forest concessions under sustainable management, in the on-going process of developing national land use plans.
3. The participants recommend that the States in the sub-region, the scientific community and technical and financial partners should conduct studies aiming to provide an in-depth and thorough analysis of the economic, social and environmental impacts that an investment-friendly legal framework and tax strategies could have on the profitable use of logging products and on the supply of controlled wood to the domestic market.
4. The participants recommend that the COMIFAC member States and especially those involved in negotiations or in the implementation of Voluntary Partnership Agreements with the European Union, should strengthen transparency and information sharing in public management of natural resources, both when issuing licenses for the exploitation of natural resources and in monitoring the exploitation of these natural resources by private sector operators.
5. The participants stressed the importance of having operational traceability tools for monitoring the exploitation of natural resources in the COMIFAC countries, especially for tracking wood in countries involved in negotiations or implementation of Voluntary Partnership Agreements with the European Union. They call on all FLEGT-VPA stakeholders to fast track the establishment of pragmatic, accessible and intuitive systems by the operators, in compliance with the current regulatory framework.
6. The participants recommend that private operators in the Forest Sector (forest concession holders) should forge strategic and transparent partnerships with all the other categories of actors so as to enhance the prospects for equitable economic development and sustainable management of natural resources within and around their concessions.

7. *High carbon stock* and zero-deforestation approaches have catalyzed the development of new instruments for offsetting the environmental impact of the agro-industrial sector in forested areas.

Participants recommend that COMIFAC States, investors in the agro-industrial sector and technical and financial partners should organize a regional workshop, in the first half of 2017, to introduce and promote the dissemination of these new instruments across the Congo Basin.

Stream 5: KNOWLEDGE-BASED DECISION-MAKING
Stream Leaders: ACCBFP (CBFP Academic Consortium)

Recommendations

1- On research and training priorities

The participants recommend that the sub-regional forestry research strategy whose initial draft was developed with COMIFAC's help in 2014 be updated, finalized and adopted.

2- On improved reporting of research findings

The participants recommend making use of OFAC as a key vehicle for centralizing and disseminating the findings of projects and scientific research, particularly through the release of strategic policy papers, the creation of dedicated pages on its website and set up of on line discussion forums.

3- On building research and training capacities

The participants urge the COMIFAC countries and all CBFP partners to strengthen their support for applied research and training.

They further encourage research institutions and universities to work with national stakeholders (private sector, civil society organizations, governments and end user communities) involved in the sustainable management of natural resources to design training that is tailored/adapted to societal needs.

They recommend that researchers should develop joint research projects between institutions in the North and South in order to improve funding prospects for research and training in the sub-region.

Finally, they recommend that the CBFP and COMIFAC should lend political support to help such joint projects attract financing from international donors.

4- On strengthening Stream 5

The participants recommend that in the future, Stream 5 could become a platform for science-policy dialogue. To this end, policy makers and private sector actors are requested to join Stream 5, which has been left entirely to the scientists and scholars.