



Brussels, 8 November 2016

Dear Partners,

I am pleased to report to you that preparations for our 16th Meeting of Parties, which will be held in Kigali, Rwanda, on 21-26 November 2016, are proceeding well.

We consider it very positive to be able to organise this first Meeting of Parties of CBFP to be held in Rwanda. I believe the commitment on the part of Rwanda to host this important event aligns very well with Rwanda standing ready to assume the role of President-in-Office of COMIFAC.

Our multi-stakeholder partnership, launched at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, provides the most comprehensive regional platform for the promotion of the conservation of the biodiversity and the sustainable management of the forest ecosystems of the Congo Basin, including the fight against climate change, to the benefit of the local populations. These unique ecosystems constitute a major global public good and as such a key area of shared interest between the countries of Central Africa and the international community.

At this point, the membership of our maturing Partnership has grown substantially and CBFP currently comprises more than eighty African and international partner organisations from both the public and private sectors as well as from civil society and the academic and scientific community.

However, while the membership of CBFP has grown, so has also the need for increased and more efficient cooperation, in order to promote the objectives of our Partnership. Our meeting in Kigali falls at a time when the Congo Basin forests are facing challenges of growing complexity and gravity. There is an urgent need in the region for better articulation between sustainable forest management strategies and economic and development objectives, something which in turn requires improved possibilities for discussing issues, including those of a cross-sectoral nature, and following up on shared viewpoints.

CBFP can and should be able to play an important role here. However, in view of the severity of the challenges to the forests and the significant growth of the membership of CBFP, we need to take measures in order to strengthen the capacity of our Partnership to fulfil this role. Making progress in this area should be a key objective for our meeting in Kigali.

Together we need **to reconfirm our commitment to strengthen CBFP cooperation**. When we meet in Kigali, we can together take several key steps in this direction, including by committing to the following:

- identifying and high-lighting the **added-value** of the Partnership;
- explicitly **attributing more credit and visibility to CBFP as an enabling structure**, which facilitates partner action and allows it to be pursued more effectively;
- taking increased **common responsibility for the functioning and development of CBFP**, including consideration of how individual member organisations can contribute to cooperation inside the partnership structures;
- promoting a significantly **strengthened participation of private sector entities in CBFP** cooperation, in order to increase the capacity of the Partnership to address the current complex and cross-sectoral challenges facing the Congo Basin forests;
- **using the potential of the new structures** – the CBFP colleges and Council – **to strengthen the dialogue and exchanges** within the Partnership to foster stronger convergence of collectively held view on key issues and improving the continuity and follow-up of CBFP discussions and actions.

Regarding key **thematic issues**, preparatory work for Kigali has been underway in five thematic networks since last August and we hope that these "Streams", which will meet during the initial part of the Kigali meeting, will be able to produce concrete outputs of direct relevance and value to CBFP members and practitioners in the field as well as key recommendations addressed to policymakers on a limited and well-focused set of crucial issues.

In respect to our **new cooperation structures**, I am pleased to report that since I last wrote to you at the beginning of July, important progress has been made in terms of setting up these structures with the aim of reinforcing dialogue and exchanges within our Partnership. The CBFP colleges are now being formed and the CBFP Council will hold its inaugural session in Kigali on 24 November.

All **colleges** that so wish will be able to hold meetings at Kigali on 23 or 24 November. The college coaches of our Facilitation Team stand ready to assist as necessary. We hope that all colleges will be able to designate their first pairs of representatives for the CBFP Council in time for the inaugural session.

There is no intention to deal with a substantial agenda during the **inaugural session of the CBFP Council**. However, we would encourage colleges to consider, when they meet, what issues they may wish to propose to the Council Chair for consideration for the agenda of subsequent Council meetings, starting with the one expected to be held in the Spring of 2017.

As I indicated in my last letter to you, the creation of the new cooperation structures should be reflected in an **updated version of the CBFP Cooperation Framework**. This will help to make clear how these structures are intended to function and how they will serve the objectives of our cooperation within CBFP. Based on our consultations with partners during recent months, we believe it is particularly important to underline the

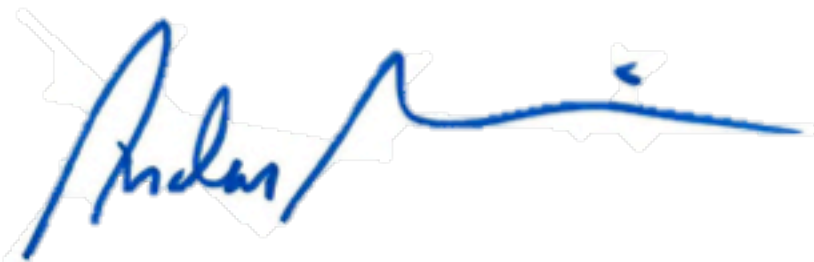
basic principle of transparency in the operation of these structures. It is also important to stress that the mandate of the designated college representatives is to act as "primus inter pares" and as representatives of the collective interests of all their college peers rather than in the sole interest of their own organisations.

We propose that the updated Cooperation Framework be adopted at our Plenary Session in Kigali on 25 November. Attached is the proposed update. As you can see, on substance this text is closely aligned with the current text dating from 2014. No fundamental changes to the Objectives and Principles of CBFP cooperation are proposed beyond the addition of a highly topical reference to climate change. Instead, the update consists of a restructuring of the text and the addition of an Attachment covering the CBFP Cooperation Structures. For more information on the new structures, I refer to information available under the following weblink: <http://pfbc-cbfp.org/keydocs.html> .

Finally, our meeting in Kigali is expected to take place immediately before a session of the Ministerial Council of **COMIFAC**, which will address a number of key issues, including the difficult situation of this regional organisation. We would therefore propose that the Meeting of Parties of CBFP send a strong signal to the COMIFAC Member States regarding the need to take urgent action to address the many challenges facing COMIFAC, including the financial situation, which is a matter of serious concern to many CBFP partners.

I look forward to meet many of you at Kigali in a few weeks and thank you all in advance for your contributions to our meeting and to our common endeavour that is CBFP.

Best regards,



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## **PROPOSED 2016 UPDATE**

### **Cooperation Framework for Members of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership**

CBFP is a non-binding multi-stakeholder partnership enabling member organisations to cooperate on a voluntary basis. The Partnership is open to all states, international institutions and organisations, NGOs, research and academic institutions and private sector entities, which adhere to this Cooperation Framework. Endorsement of this Cooperation Framework, including the CBFP Cooperation objectives, principles and structures, is a prerequisite for CBFP membership. Membership of CBFP does not imply any direct financial commitment.

#### **1. Cooperation objectives of CBFP**

With the signing of the Central Africa Forests Commission (COMIFAC) Treaty and the adoption of the sub-regional COMIFAC Convergence Plan in 2005 in Brazzaville, the Heads of State and Government of the Congo Basin countries confirmed their commitment to the principles of conservation of the biodiversity and the sustainable management of Central African forest ecosystems, the fundamental rights of their populations to benefit from forest resources and the imperative to reconcile development needs with conservation within the framework of international cooperation.

Cooperation within CBFP aims to support this shared vision of the Central African Heads of State, notably by improving measures taken, including technical and financial support measures, to promote the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable management of forest ecosystems, to combat climate change and to alleviate poverty in Central African countries in line with the COMIFAC Convergence Plan.

#### **2. Cooperation principles of CBFP**

In their activities, CBFP members are committed to respect the following set of principles:

- seeking close coordination with other members of the Partnership. They are committed to the development of synergies between partner actions in line with the objectives of the 1999 Yaoundé Declaration, the COMIFAC Convergence Plan and other relevant regional agreements;
- promoting the well-being of local populations through sustainable development, sound management of forest resources and the conservation of the exceptional biodiversity of the Central African forests, recognized as a shared world heritage asset;

- promoting the vital role that the Central African forests play to maintain regional rainfall patterns and combat climate change as an essential means to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement;
- working in a cross-sectorial manner, involving all relevant actors, including agriculture and land use planning, in order to preserve and sustainably manage the forests and their ecosystems and to alleviate poverty as effectively as possible;
- integrating, to the extent possible, their actions into the national and regional programmes of COMIFAC Member States in order to ensure greater engagement of all states for optimal sustainability of results;
- supporting institutional capacity-building of key actors in the forest/environment sector, an essential prerequisite to lasting improvement and effectiveness of actions of COMIFAC Member States;
- devoting particular attention to the increased involvement of civil society and private sector stakeholders in the sustainable management of Central African forest ecosystems and the conservation of their biodiversity;
- participating in national and regional consultation processes in order to guarantee enhanced transparency in the management of the forest/environment sector in COMIFAC Member States;
- sharing information and research data in order to enable effective coordination of their activities at the local, national and regional levels.

### 3. Cooperation structures of CBFP

Consistent with its non-binding and voluntary character, CBFP does not have a formalized institutional structure. Instead it has a set of informal structures, which serves to enable effective dialogue, exchanges and collaboration and to promote the convergence of collectively held views on issues of major importance to the protection and sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests among the large number of CBFP members. These structures are described in the Attachment, which forms an integral part of this document.

## **The CBFP Annual Meeting of Parties**

The annual CBFP Meeting of Parties serves as the “General Assembly” of the Partnership. This meeting is held annually in one of the COMIFAC Member States and brings together all CBFP stakeholders. The official programme of the meeting consists of a technical segment with thematic workshops, so-called streams, followed by a political segment with meetings of the CBFP colleges and Council followed by a high-level plenary session, which adopts conclusions and recommendations. In parallel to the official programme there is an exhibition space, allowing partners to exhibit their programmes and activities, as well as a number of related side-events.

## **The CBFP Colleges**

CBFP members are grouped in seven colleges based on the type and role of actor. The seven colleges are:

- The CBFP Regional College
- The CBFP Civil Society College
- The CBFP International NGO College
- The CBFP Private Sector College
- The CBFP Donor College
- The CBFP Scientific and Academic College
- The CBFP Multilaterals College

Only CBFP members can belong to a CBFP college. A CBFP member can only belong to one CBFP college. Each college establishes its own working methods and modalities for sharing information and forming collective opinions, including for designating two college members to represent the college in the work of the CBFP Council.

The colleges provide a forum where CBFP members of the same category can raise and discuss issues and concerns of common interest, exchange views on the outcome of meetings of the CBFP Council and of the annual Meetings of Parties, and identify issues they would like to be considered by the Council. The colleges should promote an effective dialogue among their members and enable all members that so wish to engage in the dialogue within CBFP. Colleges should therefore ensure that channels for information-sharing exist and function as efficiently as possible.

In order to ensure a fair and balanced representation of all CBFP members, while safeguarding sufficient continuity in the work of the CBFP Council, the mandate of college representatives should enable them to represent their college at no fewer than two but not more than five meetings of the CBFP Council. When representing their college in the CBFP Council, college representatives should act in line with the orientations that have been agreed beforehand by the college they represent. They should also report on all Council meetings to all members of their college. Throughout their mandate, college representatives need to be able to animate an ongoing dialogue

and exchange within their college as well as represent their college in two meetings of the CBFP Council annually. Consideration inside the colleges constitutes the way through which individual CBFP members can propose issues which they think should be discussed in the CBFP Council.

Colleges meet physically at least once a year, during the annual Meeting of Parties. Colleges should be able to prepare their views on items on the agenda of the CBFP Council without holding a physical meeting.

### **The CBFP Council**

The CBFP Council is composed of two representatives of each CBFP college and chaired by the CBFP Facilitation. It meets twice a year, once during the annual Meeting of Parties and once between such meetings. Council meetings may be held in Central Africa or in Europe.

With its college-based composition, the Council is a platform for effective inter-partner discussion. It allows the viewpoints of different groups of CBFP partners to be brought together and considered. This helps to promote the convergence of collectively held view on issues of major importance to the protection and sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests, including key problems, priorities and efforts to foster concerted action.

The Council regularly follows up on the outcome of the annual Meetings of Parties, including minutes, conclusions and recommendations and assists the Facilitation in preparing such meetings. The Council supports the Facilitation in steering the Partnership, including through discussions of strategic issues regarding the key challenges facing the Congo Basin forests and the orientation and priorities of CBFP cooperation.

The CBFP colleges may propose items to be considered by the Council. Such items should reflect a significant level of shared interest in the respective college. The Facilitation may also propose agenda items and request feedback from the colleges. The Council operates with a high degree of transparency. All CBFP members are informed of the outcome of all Council meetings.

### **The CBFP Facilitation**

CBFP is led on a voluntary basis by one of its members, which serves as Facilitator. The Facilitation, which plays a key role in fostering effective dialogue and cooperation within the Partnership, chairs the CBFP Council, represents the Partnership externally, leads the organisation of the annual Meetings of Parties and manages the CBFP communication and information sharing tools. Any CBFP member may provide financial and/or technical support to support the work of the CBFP Facilitation.