

CLIMATE SOLUTION:

Healthy forests and resilient communities in the Congo

ENABLING LOCAL AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE Congo Basin to take over forest management has the potential to restore natural forests, conserve biodiversity, combat illegal logging, address climate change and secure sustainable livelihoods. By managing forests sustainably and inclusively, community forestry can help curb deforestation and reduce associated greenhouse gas emissions, as well as supporting sustainable resource management and development.

Fern is working with Centre pour l'Environnement et de Développement (CED) in Cameroon, Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD) in Central African Republic and Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH) in the Republic of Congo as part of a DFID-funded CoNGOs (NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in the Congo Basin forests) project. This project aims to raise awareness, to trial pilot projects, and to create a favourable environment for community forestry.

However, "community forestry management" is a contested concept. Governments in the region and donors tend to reduce community forestry to usage rights, resource exploitation focusing on timber extraction and the redistribution of revenues to communities often through the intervention of third parties. Such approaches ignore the recognition and protection of customary tenure and other community rights, making indigenous peoples and women particularly vulnerable to national policy changes and re-distribution of land (or large scale land acquisitions by companies).

Creating effective, equitable, sustainable and genuinely community-based management of resources requires an informed and participatory approach to addressing the legal, governance, capacity and financial constraints that communities face especially IPs and women. Secure communities, equipped with good evidence about their forest management options, can claim their rights and participate effectively in strengthening and sustaining their livelihoods, while protecting forests.

Through scoping studies, policy dialogues, awareness raising through films and practical guides, regional learning and pilot field projects, Fern, CED, CIEDD and OCDH have gained more in-depth understanding of viable and sustainable options for community forest management which empower communities directly.

Fern, CED, CIEDD and OCDH have contributed to the Brazzaville roadmap, a regional policy document for implementing participatory forestry in the Congo Basin. We have also engaged in policy discussions at regional and local levels including putting community forestry on the agenda of The Congo Basin Forest Partnership, a regional initiative supporting

Type of action

Community forestry and policy advocacy

Groups and organizations involved

Fern (Brussels and UK) and their partner Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH) in Congo. Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD) in Central African Republic and (Centre pour l'Environnement et de Développement)(CED) in Cameroon.

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Location

Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Central African Republic

the implementation of REDD+ strategies in the Congo Basin.

We have engaged with the national Republic of Congo, Cameroon, and Central African Republic (CAR) agendas, by promoting community forestry as a mitigation measure linked to the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions, and agreeing on a national roadmap for community forestry and for pilots in forested areas. There has been agreement to create pilot community forests, where people will manage forests that meet their needs and aspirations.

Through community forest management, local communities in the Republic of Congo, Cameroon and CAR will protect land from plantations for palm oil, rubber and cocoa, and mining. These activities are already damaging forests in the Congo Basin, and are driven by demand largely from the EU and China. By getting decision-makers to listen to the need for community forest management from both a climate and social perspective, we can reduce the amount of land taken up by these extractive industries, and in the process reduce emissions associated with global production chains.

The CoNGOs project has led to several dialogues on community forestry between governments and EU institutions and civil society and communities. At the EU level, the European Commission has committed to supporting community forestry projects in the Congo Basin through the FLEGT Action Plan. Furthermore, the fact that the European Parliament report on natural resource management specifically recommends scaling up community forestry and strengthening women's participation demonstrates that there is now increased interest and support for further action.

Impacts of this action on...

Carbon emissions

Because community forest management prioritises local-level economies over international production chains for e.g. rubber, timber, palm oil and cocoa, such an approach means fewer emissions from transport and production.

Carbon capture

Community forestry means the sustainable management of forests, with reduced levels of harvesting and ongoing protection of trees at all levels of growth, especially older trees. As such, this restoration and protection of forests leads to sustained and in many cases increased natural carbon sinks.

Climate resilience

Protecting forests goes hand in hand with increased climate resilience. With increasingly large areas of land under community forestry, soils are held in place (they are not washed away by heavy rains as they would be in plantations), and more food can be produced and stored by local communities.

Social and economic factors

Community forestry enables communities to exercise their land rights where previously land was taken over by agri-business and logging and extractive companies. Local economies are invigorated by income from sustainably-harvested forest products such as fruit and timber. Community forestry and good governance also provide roles for women where previously men were the main or only breadwinners, thus improving gender equality.

Food security

Food is sustainably produced within community-managed forests, allowing local populations access to food that they have produced. This can also be sold for additional income.

Biodiversity and ecosystem resilience

The forests that are protected through these actions are home to an array of flora and fauna, so community forestry ensures the ongoing resilience of native biodiversity.

Massif du Mayombe
(Republic of Congo).





Isangi,
Democratic
Republic of
Congo.

AXEL FASSIO/CIFOR/FICKR.COM

This action is transformational because...

It pays attention to the needs of communities, as well as the needs of the environment—this means people, forests and biodiversity all benefit. Inclusive and equitable development requires that “community forestry” permits and encourages local commercial enterprises, while payments for social and environmental services including carbon storage are directed to communities. Resource use is grounded in secure customary tenure rights and participatory governance models in which local control delivers non-economic benefits for communities—including the conservation of forests, social cohesion, and better participation by marginalized groups. Such an approach is sustainable into the long-term as governments search for ways to reduce emissions while meeting human needs.

This action could be scaled up through...

Further empowerment of women to hold leading roles in community forest management. Combating illegal forest conversion for agricultural purposes. Removal of incentives for forest conversion. Further financial assistance and trainings for communities. Policy changes and effective law enforcement to halt illegal logging and impunity in Congo Basin countries to support community forest management; and policy changes in the EU and China, whose demand for palm oil and other agricultural commodities is driving deforestation.

The CLARA network includes climate justice advocates, faith groups, conservation groups, land-rights campaigners, agroecologists, and representative of peoples movements around the globe. Our commitment to social justice brought us into the climate debate and informs our approaches to climate solutions. For more information about CLARA, visit climatelandambitionrightsalliance.org.

CLARA
Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance

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