



FOREST DECLARATION ASSESSMENT

Regional Assessment 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tracking progress towards forest goals in the Congo Basin

Executive Summary

The six countries of the Congo Basin – Cameroon, Central African Republic, Gabon, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Republic of the Congo – hold the second-largest tropical forest in the world and the largest intact forest landscape. The Congo Basin is an important carbon sink for regional and global ecological and climate regulation, a huge biodiversity hotspot, and home to 60 million people for whom the forests represent essential natural resources and cultural heritage. Indigenous peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) in the Congo Basin uniquely rely on and sustainably manage these ecosystems.

Keeping global warming below 1.5°C by the end of the century means achieving a balance between greenhouse gas emissions and removals over the next 30 years. This requires not only emission reductions in all economic sectors, but also the preservation and enhancement of forest carbon sinks. Over the 2001-2019 period, the Congo Basin's forests presented the largest net carbon sink in the tropics, removing 0.61 net gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalents (GtCO₂e) per year. The conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of the Congo Basin forests must be at the center of regional and global climate efforts.

At COP26 in 2021, more than 140 countries, representing more than 90% of the world's forest cover, committed to ending deforestation and land degradation globally by 2030 through the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use. All six countries in the region have signed this Declaration, demonstrating awareness of the need to protect forests globally and in the Congo Basin. Additionally, international donors have recognized the significant role of Congo Basin forests and committed to the distribution of USD 1.5 billion to countries in the Congo Basin region between 2021 and 2025 to support the protection and sustainable management of forests.

These commitments, although positive, are not yet followed by real actions. The 2022 global Forest Declaration Assessment showed that, one year after COP26, 6.8 million hectares of forests were lost globally, leading to the emission of 3.9 billion tons of greenhouse gases. Only eight years remain to achieve the global twin goals of halting and reversing deforestation by 2030. Efforts to monitor and track the implementation of forest pledges and actions are necessary to hold actors accountable. This first regional report of the Forest Declaration Assessment provides an overview of current trends and actions in the Congo Basin to enable future monitoring of actions toward the 2030 forest goals.

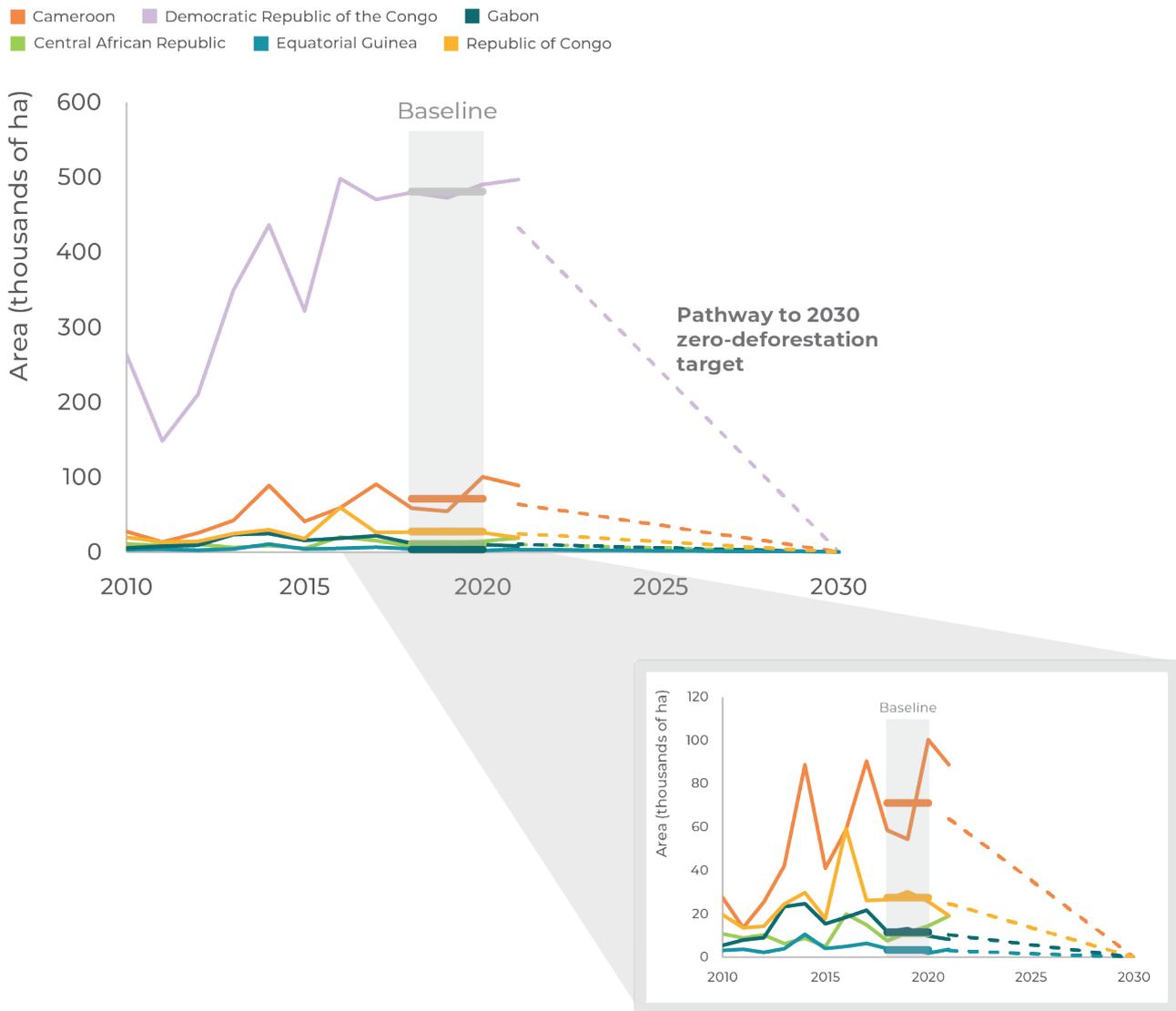
The Congo Basin region has had historically low deforestation rates compared to other tropical forest regions. However, in 2021 forest loss in the Congo Basin jumped up compared to preceding years. Forest degradation and fragmentation pose further risks to the world's largest remaining intact forest landscape.

The countries of the Congo Basin face the challenge of reconciling development objectives with commitments to preserve forests. Deforestation rates have been historically low in the region due to a combination of socio-economic factors, but deforestation and forest degradation in core intact forests (forests with high ecological and climate biodiversity) is ongoing. While deforestation rates in the Congo Basin showed a downward trend from 2015-20, the Basin still saw 2.2 million hectares of forest loss and 1.5 million hectares of forest degradation in that period.

Deforestation in the Congo Basin increased in 2021 by 30,000 hectares (or 4.9 percent) compared to the 2018-2020 period, reaching a total of 636,000 hectares. To achieve the global goal of ending deforestation by 2030, a reduction in forest cover loss of 10% per year between 2020 and 2030 is needed in all countries. Based on 2021 trends, only Gabon and Republic of the Congo are currently aligned with this trajectory, while the other four Congo Basin countries are not on track. Among the four, Cameroon and Central African Republic have the highest increase in forest loss in 2021 compared to the baseline period (see Figure 1).

In addition to deforestation, forest degradation and fragmentation pose risks to the Congo Basin's intact forest landscapes, weakening the integrity of these forests and their ecological processes. From 2000-16, the share of intact forests in the region decreased from 78 percent to 67 percent, representing a degraded area of about 23 million hectares. Forest degradation and fragmentation dynamics can be precursors to deforestation. From 2015-20, it is estimated that 11 percent of regional deforestation (about 650,000 ha) occurred in forests that were fragmented before undergoing permanent conversion.

Figure 1. Deforestation (ha) in Congo Basin countries between 2010 and 2021. The dotted line represents the trajectory to reach the goal of ending deforestation by 2030. Note that Gabon and the Central African Republic have an almost identical trajectory to the 2030 goal of zero deforestation, and therefore their trajectories are superimposed on the figure. Source: *Forest Declaration Assessment 2022*, based on data from *Global Forest Watch* (Curtis et al. 2018)



Industrial mining, logging, and commercial agriculture pose the gravest risks to core intact forests by opening primary forest areas to development and deforestation. While subsistence agriculture is the most prevalent direct driver of deforestation in the region, it often takes place in already-fragmented areas. Lack of tenure security for local communities, governance problems, weak institutions, and lack of law enforcement exacerbates encroachment and direct pressures on forests.

Multiple factors drive deforestation and forest degradation in the Congo Basin. The combination of small-scale agriculture that drives and follows construction of roads and settlements is the largest contributor to deforestation and forest degradation in the Congo Basin. From 2015-20, subsistence agriculture by small-scale farmers in rural areas was the main driver of deforestation and degradation in the Congo Basin. However, subsistence agriculture mostly impacts secondary and fragmented forests. Core primary forests are only accessible with heavy and expensive machinery, such as that used for logging and mining. The presence of industrial activities is more prominent in core forests (see Figure 2) and opens previously inaccessible intact or remote forest areas to other forest-risk activities, such as the establishment of settlements, roads, and agriculture. In the same 2015-20 period, the rate of deforestation driven by industrial activities such as mining and agriculture remained steady and artisanal forestry showed an increasing trend. However, these commercial activities in intact core forests have a greater impact on carbon stocks and biodiversity in the long-term than agricultural conversion of fragmented and secondary forests. Indirect factors such as lack of tenure security, weak governance and institutions enable encroachment into forest areas and adds pressures on forests.

Figure 2. Distribution of forest fragmentation classes in the Congo Basin study area (left) and the proportion of fragmented forest classes affected by disturbance associated with each driver archetype. Proportions are estimated by the number of visually interpreted points. Source : Shapiro et al. (2022)



Governments in the Congo Basin are making noteworthy efforts to combat deforestation in the region. Economic growth and poverty alleviation are central policy priorities for those countries, which can put forests at risk when not aligned with forest goals. Applying a forest lens to macro-economic development plans can help countries achieve sustainable development and improve rural livelihoods while protecting forest ecosystems. Congo Basin countries require the support of industrial countries, the private sector, and philanthropy to invest in sustainable use and management of these forests.

Governments have considerable influence over the use of forests, land, and resources. They can align macro-economic and development priorities with forest goals by making strategic decisions for economic sectors to minimize forest clearance and degradation, at home and abroad. Aligning forest goals and reconciling tradeoffs with other goals does not mean that all deforestation can be stopped. It means that forests' contributions and services for current and future generations are carefully valued and regenerated.

In the Congo Basin, governments have made noteworthy efforts to put in place policies, regulations, and programs to combat deforestation in recent years. Countries have legal texts that regulate the management and protection of forests as well as laws and plans that regulate land use and limit forest loss in the Congo Basin. Positively, strengthening land tenure security and recognizing the rights of IPs and LCs has been a central goal of many public policy developments. There is also a growing consideration of gender issues in forest policy. However, the lack of implementation, enforcement, and cross-sectoral alignment hinders implementation and impact of forest policies.

The following actions will be important in achieving forest objectives:

- Countries in the Congo Basin have ambitious economic growth plans, which rely on industrial economic activities and large-scale development that can negatively impact forests. Responsible forest use is needed to reconcile poverty alleviation for local populations with economic development and forest conservation. Current economic development plans are inconsistent with sustainable forest use. Sectoral laws, whose guidelines are sometimes in contradiction with forestry objectives, is another obstacle to the implementation of forestry policies. Sectoral laws and regulations that contradict forest policies are other obstacles to the implementation of forest objectives. There is a significant overlap between concessions for extractive activities and intact forest landscapes.
- Weaknesses in forest governance exacerbate encroachment into primary forests and increase prevalence of illegality in the forest sector. Strengthening human, operational, and financial capacity to monitor deforestation is an important step toward enforcing laws and reducing illegality. Efforts are underway by some governments to build capacity to monitor deforestation at the national level, but their impacts on law enforcement and illegality are

not yet clear. Independent civil society monitoring initiatives facilitate collaboration between local actors and access to technology to track and report on forest activities. Deforestation alerts issued through accessible and inexpensive remote sensing technologies have proven to be effective in strengthening monitoring and enforcement of forest protection measures, but such systems require scaling up at the national level.

- Securing land tenure for forest communities is central to combatting deforestation, and some countries in the Congo Basin have taken promising action. Scaling up of rights and the participation of local actors in forest governance can improve forest outcomes. Land tenure security is a fundamental prerequisite for combating deforestation in a sustainable and equitable manner. Decentralization of forest management to the local level can improve forest governance while supporting sustainable rural development. The DRC and the Republic of the Congo have established policies and laws that recognize and protect the rights of IPs and LCs. Community forest laws are in place in Cameroon, Gabon, the Republic of the Congo, and the DRC. Other laws and plans related to land use planning are in place or under development. The impact of these laws and policies on deforestation and forest degradation will depend on the involvement of affected communities in implementation.
- Private sector actors have made zero-deforestation commitments in commodity supply chains, but effectiveness in reducing deforestation is mixed. Despite an increase in the number of zero-deforestation commitments made by private actors in recent years, private sector activities are insufficient to halt deforestation and require coherent policy frameworks and governance structures to strengthen the effectiveness.
- Forest goals in the Congo Basin are underfinanced by governments and the private sector. Global finance needs to achieve forest goals are estimated at USD 460 billion. While there is no estimate of investments needed specifically for the Congo Basin, as the second largest forest and largest forest carbon sink in the world, it is certain that the protection and sustainable use of Congo Basin forests will require a significant portion of that forest finance. Recent high-level commitments only meet a fraction of the required finance. The joint declaration for the Congo Basin by a group of 12 donors including the European Commission, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Bezos Earth Fund calls for the distribution of USD 1.5 billion to the six Congo Basin countries between 2021 and 2025. In addition, USD 465 million is planned through letters of intent signed between the Central Africa Forest Initiative (CAFI) and the DRC, Republic of the Congo, and Gabon. These financial pledges are rarely accompanied by quantifiable and transparent targets.

An evaluation of progress in the fight against deforestation in the Congo Basin will require:

- The active participation of non-state partners, particularly civil society, to act as watchdogs and advocate for the integration of the views of vulnerable groups in forestry decisions, the creation of jobs and income, and the sustainable management of forests. The countries of the Congo Basin have developed laws and processes to enable civil society participation in forest decision making, but implementation challenges persist. Similarly, the inclusion of gender considerations in national laws and policies has had limited implementation. Despite the lack of resources and political support for participation of civil society, women, and other vulnerable groups, civil society organizations remain at the heart of advocacy for positive developments in forestry actions and the protection and sustainable use of forests in Congo Basin countries.
- The implementation of systems and indicators to monitor deforestation and the impact of forest policies, particularly through the characterization and harmonization of forest and deforestation terminology.
- An evaluation of the implementation of monitoring strategies and mechanisms, approaches, and results. The implementation of evaluations such as the Forest Declaration Assessment will allow for periodic reviews of these advances.
- A great deal of research and monitoring work exists at the regional level. The Observatoire des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (OFAC), in particular, plays an important role in the collection and centralization of regional forestry data and publishes regular reports on scientific knowledge on forestry issues, including proposals for action.

This first regional report of the *Forest Declaration Assessment* is intended to complement the many ongoing efforts and initiatives in the region. By establishing an inventory of existing and developing public and private policies on a wide range of issues related to forest protection, restoration, and sustainable use, the regional report can serve as a reference for assessing future progress and implementation of the actions identified. The Forest Assessment partners welcome comments and feedback from all stakeholders on this work in progress.

Key Messages

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- The Forest Declaration Assessment 2022 finds that the implementation of global forest goals has been far too slow, with global tropical deforestation increasing unsustainably since the signing of the New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF) was signed in 2014.
- The commitments made at COP26 demonstrated an international will to reduce deforestation and ensure sustainable land use, including in the Congo Basin. However, these commitments lack concrete objectives. Without increased transparency and clarification of their objectives, assessments of the impact and implementation of COP26 commitments will be limited.
- The Forest Declaration Assessment uses monitoring indicators to assess the status of the public and private actions needed to protect, restore, and sustainably use forests, the quality and implementation of these actions, progress to be made by 2030, and the changes in public and private policies needed to achieve forest goals.
- As the world's second largest tropical forest and a major carbon sink, this region of Central Africa plays an important role in achieving global forest goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the objectives of the Paris Agreement.
- This first-ever regional Forest Declaration Assessment results from collaboration with eight regional partners over six months. The report provides an overview of the major efforts to combat deforestation and baseline conditions in the Congo Basin, and also sets a baseline for assessing progress in future years.

CHAPTER 2: THE FORESTS OF THE CONGO BASIN: SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

- The Congo Basin, situated in Central Africa, is home to the second largest tropical forest in the world and is a major biodiversity hotspot. In 2020, the total area of tropical rainforests in Central Africa was estimated at 200 million hectares (ha), of which 184.7 million had no visible signs of disturbance. The Congo Basin plays an important role in regional and global ecological regulation.
- The region's forests are also natural, socio-economic, and cultural wellspings for the Indigenous peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) who live there, providing food, medicine, energy, building materials and income. The forests of the Congo Basin provide livelihoods for 60 million people who live in or near forest areas and indirectly feed the 40 million people who live in nearby urban centers.
- Ecosystems in the Congo Basin include dense tropical forests, dry forests, peatlands, and mangroves. All are rich in biodiversity and hold significant carbon storage capacity.

- Over the 2001-2019 period, the Congo Basin's forests presented the largest net carbon sink in the tropics, removing 0.61 net gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalents (GtCO₂e) per year—nearly six times the net removals of the Amazon Basin forests in only 60 percent of the area.
- Actions to combat deforestation in the Congo Basin must take into account the region's complex socio-economic context with high poverty rates and growing urbanization in some countries.
- Women, youth, and other vulnerable groups are central to the functioning of community forests and associated economies, but are often marginalized in forest-related decisions. However, there has been progress in recognizing the rights of IPs in legal frameworks, such as in the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Forests support the economies of Congo Basin countries, including through logging. Congo Basin countries face reconciling development objectives with commitments to preserve forests. Government-backed logging companies and local populations with ownership rights under customary law are often in conflict. In addition to logging, there is increasing interest in developing mineral extraction in Congo Basin forests.
- The Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), particularly through its Central African Forest Observatory (OFAC), plays a role in harmonizing national institutional frameworks and collecting data at the national level.

CHAPTER 3: TRENDS AND DRIVERS OF DEFORESTATION AND FOREST DEGRADATION IN THE CONGO BASIN

- The rate of deforestation in the Congo Basin is lower than in other tropical forest regions. These forests are considered to have been "passively" protected by a combination of low population density in rural areas, political instability, lack of infrastructure and transport, and high risks associated with private investment.
- Global and regional studies analyzing the evolution of deforestation and forest degradation show a decreasing trend of forest loss in the region from 2015-20. Studies suggest that more than 2.2 million hectares of forests were lost, and more than 1.5 million hectares were degraded over the same period.
- Deforestation in the Congo Basin increased in 2021 compared to the baseline period 2018-2020 by nearly 30,000 hectares (or 4.9 percent), reaching a total of 636,000 hectares lost in 2021.
- To achieve the global goal of halting deforestation by 2030, a reduction in forest cover loss of 10 percent per year from the 2018-20 baseline will be necessary. Only two Congo Basin countries - Republic of the Congo and Gabon - are currently on track to meet this goal with decreases of 30 percent and 28 percent, respectively. Each year that passes without sufficient progress makes it increasingly difficult to meet global forest protection goals—and increases the annual reductions required in future years.
- Deforestation and associated emissions have increased in four Congo Basin countries in 2021 compared to the 2018-20 baseline period. Deforestation is highest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cameroon.

- In addition to deforestation, forest degradation and fragmentation pose risks to the Congo Basin's intact forest landscapes, weakening the integrity of these forests and their ecological processes. From 2000-16, the share of intact forests in the region decreased from 78 percent to 67 percent, representing a degraded area of about 23 million hectares.
- Evidence suggests that forest degradation and fragmentation dynamics can be precursors to deforestation. Between 2015 and 2020, it is estimated that 11 percent of regional deforestation (approximately 650,000 ha) occurred in forests that were first fragmented before undergoing permanent conversion.
- Recent data show that forest integrity has declined in all six Congo Basin countries. The greatest reductions in forest integrity are seen in Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Equatorial Guinea. DRC has over 100 million hectares of undisturbed tropical forest, the largest area in Africa. If the current rate of forest disturbance in DRC continues, the country could lose 22 percent of its tropical forests and 33 percent of its intact tropical forests by 2050. ,
- From 2015-20, subsistence agriculture by small-scale farmers in rural areas was the main driver of deforestation and degradation in the Congo Basin – accompanied by the construction of roads and settlements, which accelerate land clearing. Artisanal forestry is increasing, while industrial activities such as mining and agriculture remained steady over the same period.
- Industrial mining, forestry, and commercial agriculture cause forest disturbance in intact core forests, with greater impacts on carbon stocks and biodiversity than current smaller-scale disturbances in degraded forests. The activities in intact or more remote forest areas also indirectly impact forests by attracting people and settlements, which in turn use forest resources for livelihoods and other forest-risk economic activities.
- Lack of tenure security for IPs and LCs and overlapping land use regimes are the main underlying factors of forest disturbance. In addition, poor governance, weak institutions, and lack of law enforcement hamper the protection and sustainable use of forests. Illegal conversion of forests for logging and extractive activities is also increasing.

CHAPTER 4: MONITORING PROGRESS: WHAT STEPS ARE COUNTRIES TAKING? WHAT GAPS REMAIN?

4.1. Robust public policies combat deforestation in the Congo Basin

- The countries of the Congo Basin have legal frameworks that aim to regulate the management and protection of forests. However, the lack of regulations and guidelines hinders implementation of these laws. Sectoral laws and regulations that contradict forest policies are also obstacles to the implementation of forest objectives.
- Responsible forest use is needed to reconcile poverty alleviation and economic development with forest conservation. Yet, current economic development plans are inconsistent with sustainable forest use. Oil, gas and mining permits impact up to 48 percent of intact forest landscapes in some

countries, including the Central African Republic, DRC, Gabon and Republic of the Congo -- and nearly one-third of the region's logging concessions overlap with protected areas.

- Strengthening forest management at the local level is necessary to address poverty and deforestation. This requires adapted land use planning policies and the clarification and securing of IPs and LCs' rights in legal frameworks. The implementation of land use laws and plans will depend on the involvement of affected communities in land use decision-making. Other key initiatives include assistance programs for smallholders and awareness campaigns on forest management conventions and laws with various stakeholders.
- Five of the six Congo Basin countries have been engaged in the REDD+ process since its inception. Nevertheless, REDD+ implementation has not been easy for participating countries, which have expended significant effort and capacity but seen few results in terms of funding. The lack of funding at the international and national levels is a challenge for the REDD+ process, which cannot compete financially with revenues from other land uses.
- Some import markets are putting measures in place to address imported deforestation. Although the production of forest-risk commodities for export is not currently a major driver of deforestation in the Congo Basin, potential future increase in the export of forest products from the region makes these policies relevant.
- Evaluation frameworks and monitoring systems for the implementation of these strategies, their means and results, will allow for an assessment of progress in terms of the fight against deforestation. However, it is difficult to define indicators for monitoring deforestation and the impact of public policies without characterizing and harmonizing forest and deforestation terminologies.

4.2 Strengthening forest governance through improved enforcement, monitoring and transparency

- Forest governance plays a fundamental role in ensuring the protection and sustainable management of forests, and in limiting illegal conversion. Fair and strong laws, effective monitoring and enforcement, and high levels of transparency are key elements of strong forest governance.
- The prevalence of illegality indicates shortcomings in the forest governance systems of Congo Basin countries. Corruption and political favoritism in the allocation and use of natural resource concessions are growing issues that undermine forest governance. Private companies engage in fraudulent practices with impunity. Major obstacles compromise the capacity of the judicial system to respond to forest crime in the region.
- Building human, operational, and financial capacity to monitor deforestation is an important step toward enforcing laws and reducing illegality. Some governments have made efforts to build capacity to monitor deforestation at the national level. However, the impact of these actions is not yet clear.
- Increasing transparency in the forest sector by making data, information, and decisions accessible to stakeholders can improve the accountability of forest sector actors. Efforts have been made by Congo Basin countries to improve transparency in the timber sector through participation in the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) initiative. However, progress has been slow, resulting in a decline in interest from countries.

- Civil society actors, including non-governmental and community-based organizations, are making efforts at the local level to improve forest governance. Many independent monitoring initiatives have been established based on collaboration between local actors and access to technology. Deforestation alerts issued through accessible and inexpensive remote sensing technologies have proven to be effective in strengthening monitoring and enforcement of forest protection measures. These tools are essential for holding governments, landowners, and companies accountable, and for promoting transparency.
- Countries in the Congo Basin have committed to improving transparency in the mining sector through the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). While progress is needed, this commitment has already led to increased transparency in the sector, notably in Cameroon, DRC, and Republic of the Congo.

4.3. Land tenure security for Indigenous peoples and local populations

- In the Congo Basin, colonial land governance systems, which were replicated by post-colonial regimes, led to the overthrow of the customary rights of Indigenous peoples and local populations to the lands they had occupied for centuries in harmony with forest ecosystems.
- Land tenure security is a fundamental prerequisite for combating deforestation in a sustainable and equitable manner. DRC and Republic of the Congo have established policies and laws that recognize and protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities. Community forest laws establishing the rights and legal basis for communities to manage their forests are in place in Cameroon, Gabon, Republic of the Congo, and DRC.
- Decentralization of forest management to the local level can improve forest governance while supporting sustainable rural development. Strengthening community forestry requires investments in rural development and governance, reforms of the legal system, and the introduction of administrative decentralization.
- The enactment of community forest management laws and policies does not guarantee implementation. Implementation challenges limit the benefits of laws to people and forests.
- Participatory land use planning processes can clarify community land rights, integrate land considerations into sectoral planning, and increase effectiveness of forest management. Efforts have been made to integrate local communities into land use planning processes in the region.

4.4. The role and contribution of non-state actors in achieving forest objectives

- Non-state actors – including civil society organizations, social movements, and the private sector – have an important role to play in forest governance. Stakeholder participation takes place at different levels: in legislative processes at the national level, at the local level through community management mechanisms, in policy design, implementation, and decision-making. Broadening the

participation of marginalized and vulnerable groups ensures that their voices are included and incorporated into policies and laws.

- Congo Basin countries have developed laws and processes that allow for the participation of civil society in forestry decision-making. However, the implementation of these laws and processes at all decision-making levels presents significant challenges. Despite challenges and lack of resources, civil society organizations remain at the heart of positive developments in forestry actions and advocate for the protection and sustainable use of forests in Congo Basin countries.
- The countries of the Congo Basin are increasingly integrating gender into their economic policies, recognizing the importance of including women in decision-making spheres. DRC has recognized the role of women in forest management frameworks. Despite these advances, the implementation of gender-inclusive policies for forest governance at the local level remains limited due to traditional practices that exclude women from forest ownership and management.
- Private sector efforts are an important step in the fight against deforestation in the Congo Basin. Globally, the number of zero deforestation commitments by private actors has increased in recent years and several multinational companies have committed to deforestation-free supply chains in Central Africa. However, private sector activities are insufficient without a coherent framework of public policies or governance structures that reinforce private action.
- Private actors have increasingly embraced voluntary sustainability standards as part of sustainable forest management efforts in Central Africa. However, there is not consensus on the effectiveness of voluntary sustainability standards, neither in the Congo Basin nor globally. Despite the lack of solid evidence that voluntary sustainability standards reduce deforestation rates, the focus of these standards on transparency and efficiency can ensure greater capacity in supply chains and lower transaction costs.

4.5. Align funding with forest conservation and sustainable management objectives

- International funding in the region has increased in recent years, notably through the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI) and renewed commitments at COP26.
- The joint declaration for the Congo Basin calls for the distribution of USD 1.5 billion in funding to the six countries of the region between 2021 and 2025, and USD 465 million in funding is provided in the letters of intent signed between CAFI and DRC, Republic of the Congo, and Gabon. However, these commitments are insufficient to meet the estimated needs to ensure forest protection in the Congo Basin.
- The land sector needs of Cameroon and DRC, as stated in their NDCs, amount to US\$29.8 billion over the period of 2020-30. International financial commitments are rarely accompanied by quantifiable and transparent targets. The Congo Basin receives less funding for climate action and environmental protection than other tropical forest regions.
- Funding for Indigenous peoples and local communities is inadequate, and these actors are not sufficiently included in decision-making processes. Funding to support other vulnerable groups, such as rural women and small farmers, is also insufficient.

- At the national level, governments provide budget lines for forest conservation and protected area funding, but the actions and financial objectives of different ministries are not always aligned. Governments should use improved fiscal processes and plans to redirect existing national funding streams to forest protection activities (or to activities that have a positive impact on forest protection).
- Some observers have argued that REDD+ approaches and the voluntary carbon market could channel significant amounts of funding to Congo Basin forests, but available funding falls far short of what is needed. In 2021, Gabon became the first, and only, country in Africa to receive performance-based payments through REDD+, with USD 17 million of the USD 150 million it received approved through CAFI. This is a positive development, but the level of funding through REDD+ remains low. The integrity of the voluntary carbon market is also criticized and the potential funding that can be mobilized is far from what is needed.

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