

CONTRIBUTION TO UNFF8 - CONGO BASIN FOREST PARTNERSHIP

1. BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK OF THE CONGO BASIN FOREST PARTNERSHIP

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) is an informal association which today brings together around 45 governmental, non-governmental and international organisations. The CBFP was launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in September 2002 in response to a call by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 54/214 of 1 February 2000 encouraging the international community to support the countries of the Congo Basin, through the provision of financial and technical assistance, in their efforts towards sustainable management of the forests. As a “type II” partnership (“type I” being intergovernmental negotiations), the CBFP is a non-binding network based on a voluntary agreement between governments, the private sector, civil society and development organisations.

At their first meeting in Paris in 2003, the CBFP members agreed to align their support with the COMIFAC process, established through the Yaoundé Declaration on the protection of forest ecosystems in Central Africa, adopted by the Heads of State of the Central African countries in March 1999. CBFP members also agreed to support effective implementation of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan, to share information and to better harmonise their activities. These principles of the partnership were set out in a ‘cooperation framework’, adopted by the CBFP members on the occasion of the second summit of the Central African Heads of State in February 2005 in Brazzaville. According to the definition in the cooperation framework, the objectives of the partnership are to enhance the effectiveness of the partners’ interventions in favour of **conservation** and **sustainable management of forest ecosystems, economic growth** and **poverty reduction** in the countries of Central Africa.

In order to achieve these fundamental goals, the members agreed in their ‘cooperation framework’ to respect the five ‘sustainability principles’ set out below:

- Simultaneous promotion of economic development, poverty reduction and conservation of biodiversity;
- Incorporation of their activities into the national and regional programmes of COMIFAC member states;
- Institutional support to COMIFAC and its subregional partner institutions;
- Greater involvement of civil society and the private sector;
- Better transparency in the management of the sector through national and regional consultation processes.

The form of governance chosen for the CBFP is steering through ‘facilitation’ provided by one of the members for a two-year period. The role of the facilitator is to organise a dialogue and to promote collaboration between the different partners, to set up a work programme based on the guidelines provided in the COMIFAC Convergence Plan, and to represent the partnership externally. The facilitator is chosen on a voluntary basis. After the United States of America, which was facilitator from 2003 to 2004, this role was played by France for the period 2005-2007, and now by Germany (2008-2009).

During the German facilitation period CBFP members agreed on the following four strategic priority areas:

- Strengthening of COMIFAC institutions and the CBFP
- Improvement of forest governance and framework conditions
- Implementation of the Convergence Plan and major international environmental conventions and agreements
- Innovative financial mechanisms to support funding of Convergence Plan measures

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2. COMMENTS ON ISSUES AND AGENDA ITEMS OF UNFF8

Section I: Substantive matters of the Forum
Forests in a Changing Environment; and Means of Implementation for Sustainable Forest Management (See Annex 3: Provisional Agenda of UNFF8)
1. Forests and climate change
2. Reversing the loss of forest cover, preventing forest degradation in all types of forests and combating desertification, including low forest cover countries
3. Forests and Biodiversity Conservation, including Protected Areas
4. Means of implementation for sustainable forest management
a. Please indicate major developments and challenges, discussions and/or analyses carried out in relation to the four topics above. b. Please indicate regional/ sub-regional level experiences on the application of any of the following cross-cutting issues: finance, transfer of environmentally sound technologies, capacitybuilding, awareness-raising, education, information-sharing and forest law enforcement and governance, in relation to the four topics above. c. In view of challenges identified, please mention key issues, which need to be tackled in the near future, to help contribute to the implementation of the four topics above.
Despite the continuing challenges facing the forests in the Congo basin, considerable improvements have been made regarding the conservation and sustainable management of the Congo basin forest ecosystems since the start of the Congo basin forests partnership. According to recent research data tropical forest cover loss in Africa is much lower than in South America and Asia. The Congo Basin is the only one of the three major tropical forest areas, where the riparian countries have agreed on a joint strategy aiming to conserve and sustainably use the forest ecosystems and where the main international donors, NGOs and research organizations have joint forces in a voluntary partnership supporting this strategy. Main achievements, besides the joint regional strategy and partnership, are the increase of certified forest areas (currently 3 million hectares in certification process, 10 million planned to be certified by 2010) in the Congo basin, a first comprehensive state-of-the-forests report for the Congo basin published in 2007 with an updated version currently in preparation; continued strengthening of the COMIFAC Presidency, Executive Secretariat and regional institutions; systematic capacity building of the COMIFAC institutions and several regional thematic working groups related to important regional and international forest processes (CBD, CCC, CCD, FLEGT, UNFF); Several CBFP partner countries are engaged in VPA negotiations with the EU and have been selected to be part of the WB REDD readiness fund.

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Section II: Characteristics of regional and sub-regional cooperation and partnerships
a. Please provide examples of how existing regional and/or sub-regional cooperation, including the following cross-cutting issues: financial support, technology transfer, capacity-building and education, have played a catalytic role in supporting the efforts of countries to achieve sustainable forest management. Kindly indicate any relevant lessons learned related to the application of these cross-cutting issues.
b. Please indicate how you have addressed multi-stakeholder dialogues and participation.
c. Please describe any joint activity relevant to the Forum's work undertaken with member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and/or major groups (as identified by Agenda 21).
d. Please mention whether this input was prepared in consultation with government representatives, other regional bodies and stakeholder groups, and the extent to which they contributed.
e. Please provide information on lessons learned, challenges and the value added in preparing this input.
Ad a) and b) The activities of the CBFP and its different facilitations succeeded in increasing financial support to the COMIFAC convergence plan from about €70m since 2002 to projected €170m in 2009. More than 15 new organisations joined the partnership during the same period. Newly created regional funds, namely the Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF), financed by UK and Norway and the GEF Strategic Program for Sustainable Forest Management in the Congo Basin (CBSP), with a total funding amount of about \$400m, are providing substantial new support to the implementation of the COMIFAC convergence plan. This increased support is partially due to the efforts and advice provided by the CBFP, both during the design and the ongoing implementation of the funds. The CBFP is also promoting the coordination role of the COMIFAC the design and coordination processes related to new projects and programmes and other regional working groups and other initiatives (e.g. REDD initiatives, regional ABS and FLEGT processes, etc.). Regular regional consultative meetings provide opportunities for CBFP partners to exchange information on and discuss ongoing activities, agree on coordination aspects and joint initiatives to implement the convergence plan. A continuous dialogue and information exchange within the Partnership is maintained via dedicated CBFP communication services, including a communication officer, the CBFP web site, a CBFP mailing list and regular CBFP newsletters.
Ad c) The CPF member institutions CIFOR, FAO, ITTO, SCBD, GEF Secretariat, SUNCCC, UNDP, UNEP, WB and IUCN are all members of the CBFP and contribute actively and regularly to the activities of the Partnership.
Ad d) This communication was prepared by the CBFP facilitation team and not through a consultation process within the Partnership.