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## COMIFAC Inputs to UNFF11

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## INTRODUCTION

The Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) is an intergovernmental organization (IGO) established by the Treaty signed in 2005 by the Heads of States and Government of ten central African countries<sup>1</sup>. Its mandate is to orientate, harmonize and monitor forest and environment policies in Central Africa.

COMIFAC was created to implement the engagements taken by the Heads of States and Government of the sub region during their first Summit in March 1999 in Yaoundé dedicated to conservation and sustainable management of forest. In order to implement these engagements, a strategic action plan called “Convergence Plan” was adopted.

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<sup>1</sup> Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Congo, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe

## **Section I: Progress towards the implementation of the forest instrument and the achievement of the GOFs as well as the contribution of forests and the IAF to the internationally-agreed development goals, including the MDGs**

### **A. Progress towards implementation of the Forest Instrument**

- 1. Briefly describe actions (e.g. regulatory, financial/economic and informational/educational) taken by your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process to foster political commitment for sustainable forest management (SFM).*

COMIFAC countries forest ecosystems consist of an exceptional biodiversity, which makes up an incalculable potential for the socio-economic development of Central Africa. Acknowledging the economic and ecological importance of these ecosystems, as well as the growing threats posed on them, Central African Heads of State undertook in March 1999 in Yaoundé, through a declaration called "Yaoundé Declaration", to collectively work for the conservation and the sustainable management of their countries' forest ecosystems with a bid to support the social and economic development efforts of their people.

Within the framework of the implementation of this Declaration, an Action Plan divided up into 10 domains, called Convergence Plan, was developed and adopted by Heads of State in February 2005. This Plan is a joint platform of priority interventions to be carried out at sub-regional and national levels.

On the basis of the priorities set out in the Convergence Plan, some progresses have been made in recent years. Some of these achievements are:

- The adoption by the Ministers councils of regional policy guidelines notably on non timber forest products in 2008 (NTFP), on forest control in 2008, on access and benefit sharing in 2010 (ABS), on the participation of indigeneous people and local communities and NGO to the management of forest in 2010 and on forestry and environmental training in 2012 ;
- The adoption of a regional action plan to reinforce the implementation of wildlife laws enforcement in 2012;
- The elaboration of a regional guidelines on the creation of the transboundary protected areas in 2014;
- The creation of news transboundary protected areas like the Binational Conkouati-Mayumba-Gamba between Congo and Gabon in 2009, the Binational lac Télé-lac Tumba (BILTLT) between Congo and DRC in 2010, the Binational Sena Oura-Bouba Ndjida between Cameroon and Chad in 2013;
- The creation of a regional working group on forest governance in 2013 besides three other regional existing working group (biodiversity, climate change and land degradation and desertification).

It's important to highlight that the aims of the policy guidelines is to foster and facilitate the harmonization of forest and environment policies in the COMIFAC member's countries in order to ensure sustainable forest management in Central Africa. These actions have pushed some countries to launch the revision of their forest law in order to enhance SFM and the contribution of forests in the poverty alleviation.

Moreover, in order to integrate the emergent thematic like REDD+ and enhance activities on poaching, wildlife trafficking, the illicit forest exploitation and others threats on forests, the Council of the COMIFAC's Ministers decided to update the Convergence Plan. The revised convergence plan had been adopted by the COMIFAC's Ministers in charge of forests and Environment in July 2014.

*Please describe the main challenges encountered and/or lessons learned.*

The existing funding mechanisms for the implementation of the sub regional convergence plan both at national and sub regional level are deficient. Despite the existence of the national forest or environment funds in some countries, there is a lack of secure and autonomous funding mechanism in Central Africa. For the emergent thematic issues, there are the needs for capacities building. Another challenge is the effective involvement of all stakeholders at the different level where the main decisions and orientations for the sustainable forest management are adopted. TPA initiatives in Central Africa still depend on conservation organization partners. The insufficiency of resources is disparaged as a major TPA management constraint. The effective implementation of these agreements is an incentive for the creation of new transboundary complexes; the reverse would discourage new initiatives.

Another main challenge is that Governments still hesitate on issues relating to their sovereignty. Those administrative inconsistencies limit the efficiency of concerted actions at regional and transboundary levels. In fact, technical administrations and other sovereignty ministries do not always have the same command of the agreements signed by the governments for the sustainable management of forests. For examples: (1) governments are reluctant to have joint patrols that have to cross boundaries with weapons; (2) Legislation harmonization, which is supposed to be a transboundary collaboration asset is not yet completed: between TNS countries, the issue of harmonization is still raised by the differentiated status of species protection such as elephants.

- Briefly describe efforts taken at the regional level to foster economically, socially and environmentally sound measures that act as incentives for the sustainable management of forests.*

As presented on point 1, the Council of the COMIFAC's Ministers adopted a regional guideline on implication of local populations and NGO in forest management in Central Africa. This guideline give the provisions and strategic orientations for the full and effective participation of indigeneous people, local communities and NGO in one hand and the

valorization of the traditional knowledge for the sustainable management of forests in other hand. It explain how Civil Society Organisation, Private Sector and Local and Indigenous people can be involve in the process of the sustainable management of forests in Central Africa.

Therefore, community or social forestry initiatives have developed in some countries. And the communal forestry initiatives are developed gradually in the Sub region. Some countries also developed the mechanism to share the benefits arise from the exploitation of the forests with the local communities. For exemple, Government of Cameroon paid royalties to the Local communities or give a portion of the fees or forest taxes to local authorities and communities in order to improve their livelihoods.

*Please describe the main challenges encountered and/or lessons learned.*

The main challenges to truly enhance the sustainable management of the forests are: ensuring the training of stakeholders on techniques and tools for sustainable management of forests and marketing of forest products, to put in place suitable mechanisms of management and control of timber royalties, and to implement adequacy modern tenure and the traditional land tenure system for the recognition of traditional land ownership, Conflicts related to the use of the same space (mining, agriculture and forest).

3. *Briefly describe actions taken to enhance regional cooperation to promote international trade in forest products from sustainably managed forests harvested.*

The Council of the COMIFAC's Ministers adopted a regional Accord on forest control in order to promote cooperation between COMIFAC Member States to strengthen the production and the commercialization of timber products in Central Africa. Also, some countries (Cameroon Congo and CAR) have already signed the VPA FLEGT with European Union to guarantee the legal source of the timber products in the EU markets. Other countries (DRC, Gabon) have launched negociations with EU on that issue.

Morover, COMIFAC is implementing since 2012 a regional project to promote forests certification (FSC standards or similar standards) thanks to the support of German Cooperation. The objective of this project is to encrease to total forest area under certification from 5 million hectares to 8 million hectares by the year 2020.

*Please describe the main challenges encountered and/or lessons learned.*

The main challenges are: (i) the complexity to develop and implement the national system of traceability of timber at country level in the context of VPA FLEGT, (ii) the difficulty of a mutual acknowledgement between the VPA/FLEGT and certification schemes by international partners or markets, (iii) the lack of human and technical capacities to properly implement the regional forest control Accord and national forest control strategy.

4. *Briefly describe actions taken to enhance regional cooperation to address illicit international trafficking in forest products through the promotion of forest law enforcement and good governance.*

With a view to strengthening the implementation of national laws, sub regional, regional and international Agreements and Conventions governing wildlife management, the Council of the COMIFAC's Ministers adopted in 2012 the Sub regional action plan of the COMIFAC countries Members to strengthen implementation of national wildlife laws (PAPECALF) for the period running from 2012-2017. This action plan provides a comprehensive framework of actions needed to strengthen the implementation of laws on the wildlife trade.

The objectives of this Action Plan are: (1) to foster cooperation and collaboration between relevant law enforcement authorities and prosecution authorities the implementation of wildlife laws at national level as well as across the countries of the COMIFAC sphere;

(2) to increase investigations especially in key transit or border areas, domestic markets and cross-border areas; (3) to raise awareness of illegal wildlife trade issues; and (4) to implement efficient deterrents to fight poaching and illegal trading in wildlife, ensuring that prosecution is regularly conducted, in compliance with national laws and the results of enforcement and prosecution are monitored, published and widely disseminated.

Following the adoption of the Action Plan by the Council of Ministers of COMIFAC, the Executive Secretariat elaborated and established a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the implementation of the Action Plan based on global indicators. At the sub regional level, we put in place a Sub Working Group on Wildlife and Protected Areas (SGTFAP) which is part of the Central African Biodiversity Working Group (GTBAC) of COMIFAC. One of its roles is the implementation of actions at sub regional level, such as training, harmonization criminal sanctions, communication, as well as coordinating collective action to dissuade illegal hunting and the illegal wildlife trade. At national level a National Coordination Unit (CNU) which is part of the Ministry in charge of Wildlife in each member country of COMIFAC will be established.

Two tri-party Agreements on cross-border anti-poaching collaboration have been signed in June 2012 between the Central African Republic, Cameroon and Chad and between Cameroun, Republic of Congo and Gabon. The aim of these Agreements is to develop a joint strategy to combat cross-border poaching and to put in place an operational mechanism suitable for the strengthening of cross-border cooperation, improving the coordination of interventions and the involvement of key stakeholders.

Collaboration between Central African Governments is essential to effectively combat transnational wildlife crime. These Agreements come at an opportune time to help stop the ongoing slaughtering of elephant populations in Central Africa. For the first time in history, these countries addressed the poaching of elephants at the regional level, which involves actors operating across multiple countries. It will help stop the massacre of elephants in our sub region.

Various capacities building activities have been carry out within the sub region in order to strengthen capacity for combating poaching and illicit international trafficking of forests products. WWF-GFTN/TRAFFIC Initiative of development of the criteria and policies to define and check the legality of wood and the sub region Developed a system of traceability of Timber.

*Please describe the main challenges encountered and/or lessons learned.*

The main challenge remains the effective implementation of the PAPECALF and the Agreements on cross-border anti-poaching by concerned stakeholders at national level. This

implementation needs financial resources and effective collaboration of donor and technical partners. Anti-poaching approaches are essential to safeguard protected areas, but to be successful in the long run, it is critical that these actions take into account activities throughout the entire territory of a country and not just within protected areas.

The illicit exploitation of forest products is done in the majority of cases with the complicity of indigenous and local communities which are very poor. Therefore, it is important to develop the capacity of the communities in the various socio-economic fields in order to fight against poverty.

5. *List and briefly describe activities aimed at mobilizing new and additional resources from all sources for SFM.*

The international community has largely supported the Yaoundé Declaration on SFM of March 1999. Indeed the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in 2000 to call for the international community support to Central African countries in their collective efforts to manage sustainably the Congo basin forests. To respond to this resolution, the Congo Basin Forest Partnership was launched in 2002 during the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg. This non binding partnership is a unique coalition of representatives of donors countries, multilateral agencies, NGOs, international organizations, private companies, scientific communities set up to support the implementation of the Convergence Plan. In this regard, many consultations and advocacy have been conducted by COMIFAC to mobilize new resources for SFM. As the result of these actions, two financing systems have been put in place: the Congo basin forest fund (CBFF) and the Sangha tri national trust fund.

a) Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF)

The Congo Basin Forest Fund was launched in June 2008 with a grant of £100 million from the governments of the UK and Norway to develop the capacity of the people and institutions of the Congo Basin to preserve and manage their forests.

The Congo Basin Forest Fund accepts proposals from NGOs and governments for innovative and transformative projects that change the way people live in and earn a living from the Congo Basin forests and the way that governments protect and preserve them, thereby contributing to fighting climate change.

b) The Sangha trinational trust fund

The Sangha trinational Trust Fund has been created in 2007 to finance sustainable cross-border complex protected areas between Cameroon, the Congo and the Central African Republic. Since 2012, the trust fund has received an amount of 23.5 million euros of capital from German Cooperation (20.5 million euros) and French Development Agency (3 million euros).

Moreover, COMIFAC has benefitted additional resources from donors to implement

some regional project. Some of these projects are:

- The Congo Basin Ecosystems Conservation Support Programme (PACEBCo) funded by African Development Bank (AfDB) for a total amount of 50 million \$ US from 2009 to 2014 ;
- The regional capacity building project on REDD+ funded by GEF through the World Bank for an amount of 13 million \$ US from 2011 to 2016;
- The promotion of forest certification programme funded by German Cooperation through KfW for an amount of 13 million euros from 2012 to 2016.

*Please describe the main challenges encountered and/or lessons learned.*

The main challenges are amongst others the complexity of procedures of the international financing mechanisms, the weak of internal capacity within COMIFAC to master the innovative financing systems.

### **B. Progress towards the achievement of the GOFs**

1. Please describe actions taken by your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process and/or by other major stakeholders in your region/sub-region to help achieve the following:

GOF1, “Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation”

At the regulatory and institutional level, there were the adoption of a Sub-regional Action Plan to Combating the lands Degradation and Desertification (PASR-LCD) by the council of Ministers in 2008, the creation of a Sub regional Working Group on lands degradation and desertification.

At operational level, many countries in Central Africa carried out various programmes and projects on restoration, afforestation and reforestation. COMIFAC is also promoting the REDD+ initiatives in the sub region and few pilot projects on REDD+ have been developed in few countries (DRC, Cameroon and Congo).

GOF2, “Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest dependent people”

Forest is one of the major natural asset which contributes to the gross domestic product (GDP) of many COMIFAC countries. This contribution ranges from 2 to

6% of GDP despite the consequences of world economic crisis.

To enhance forest-based social benefits, community or social forestry initiatives have been experimented in some countries. Also the communal forestry initiatives are gradually experimented in the Sub region and some countries have developed the mechanism to share the benefits arise from the exploitation of the forests with the local communities.

Finally, COMIFAC is promoting innovative and transformative projects that change the way people live in and earn a living from the Congo Basin forests, e.g. the implementation of PACEBCo and non timber forest product initiatives in the sub region.

GOF3, “Increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests”

Currently, around 50 million ha are erected as Protected Area (PA) and are representing more than 11% of the total area of Central Africa. As most ecological landscapes go beyond national boundaries, the transnational protected areas have been created. More than six transboundary PA complex are in place. This is a major innovation in biodiversity conservation between several countries in the sub-region. The concerted management of Transboundary protected areas (TPA) complex is one of the concerns clearly expressed by the Central African Heads of State by signing the Yaoundé Declaration.

According to FSC, some 5 million ha forest are certified, making up more than 10 percent of the 41.636.677 ha of production forests mapped out into concessions and thus making the Congo Basin the largest certified natural forest block in the world.

GOF4, “Reverse the decline in ODA for SFM and mobilize significantly increased, new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of SFM”

The sub region has also committed approaches and initiatives to mobilize other types of financing, including innovative financing such as the Foundation of the Tri Sangha (Trust Fund put in place to finance sustainable cross-border complex protected between Cameroon, the Congo and the Central African Republic). Reflections are ongoing to put in place a mechanism for sustainable financing of protected areas in Central Africa.

Thus, other additional resources coming from donor agencies and bilateral cooperation such as GEF, AfDB, Germany, Norway and UK, Japan, France are contributing to the implementation of the Convergence Plan.



2. Please provide additional information specific to your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process on progress towards the achievement of the GOFs.

No additional information

**C. Contribution of forests and the IAF to the internationally-agreed development goals, including the MDGs**

1. Please describe studies or initiatives in your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process that capture the contribution of forests to the achievement of the internationally-agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

Thanks to the support of FAO, COMIFAC conducted a study in 2010 to evaluate the contribution of forest taxes to socio economic development of populations in Central Africa. The study shown the potential of forest taxes to alleviate poverty of local communities in the remote areas.

Other studies related to the contribution of NTFP to fight hunger and improving the livelihoods of local populations has been realized.

2. What indicators have been, or could be, used to assess the contribution of forests to the MDGs?

Some indicators related to the MDGs have been defined in the new and revised Convergence Plan validated in July 2014. Some of these indicators are:

- Number of employment from forest sector
- Percentage of taxes or revenue from forest sector
- Number of local initiatives or social equipments realized from forest revenue

3. Please provide additional information specific to your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process on MDGs forest-related work.

No additional information

**Section II: Review of the effectiveness of the current IAF and the future options**

1. From the perspective of your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process, please provide a general evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement of the current IAF.

The important strength of the current IAF is its voluntary and non binding nature. This gives some flexibility to countries to adapt the instrument according to their national circumstances.

As the weaknesses of the IAF, there is less interest of developed countries and donors to support the implementation of the instrument and to set up an international finance mechanism. Consequently, forestry sector is not sufficiently funded in developing countries.

For the areas of improvement of the current IAF, the monitoring and assessment system should be reinforced. In this case, the set of specific criteria and indicators should be defined. Also, an international financing mechanism related to SFM should be determined.

2. *Has the input of your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process been adequately taken into account in the Forum's deliberations?*

3. *What measures has your organization undertaken to strengthen the current IAF? Please list the most important measures (maximum five):*

Some measures undertaken by COMIFAC are:

- The adoption of the policy guidelines (NTFP, forest control, ABS, etc.) to ensure SFM;
- The creation of sub regional platform (forest governance, biodiversity, land degradation, etc.) to foster participation and reinforce capacities of stakeholders on SFM
- The creation of the transboundary protected areas complex between two or three countries
- The creation of Sangha trinational trust fund (innovative financial resources) to support the management of Sangha trinational protected area complex between Cameroon, Congo and CAR.

4. *How would your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process envisage a strengthened regional/sub-regional component in a future IAF?*

5. *Has your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process worked jointly with member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)<sup>2</sup> and/or*

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<sup>2</sup> CPF member organizations: Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), International

*major stakeholders to support the work of UNFF? If yes, please evaluate the overall collaboration.*

COMIFAC has a good collaboration with many partners and some are member organizations of the CPF. Some of these partners are: CIFOR, FAO, ITTO, ICRAF, CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC, UNFF, GEF, World Bank, AfDB, IUCN, WWF, TRAFFIC.

6. *How would your respective regional, sub-regional organization/process envisage a strengthened collaboration with CPF member organizations and/or major stakeholders in a revised IAF?*

COMIFAC will continuous to strength its collaboration with the CPF member organizations and other members organizations and/or major stakeholders of IAF

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Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Secretariat of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFF), Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), The World Bank, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)