



GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program

Congo Basin Sustainable Landscapes



Program Rationale

At nearly 2 million km², the Congo Basin forests constitute the second-largest contiguous block of dense tropical rainforest in the world. This vast expanse, equivalent to the size of Mexico, represents over 15% of the world's remaining tropical forests. The Congo Basin is one of the last regions on Earth where biological processes continue undisturbed in vast, interconnected expanses of tropical rainforest. These forests have a major role in the Earth's climate dynamics, especially the global distribution of tropical rainfall. The central basin of the Congo watershed represents a huge stock of carbon, estimated at 46 billion metric tons, including the recently identified Cuvette Centrale, the most extensive tropical peatland complex and one of the most carbon-rich ecosystems on Earth, spanning both the Republic of Congo and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Various types of swamp and flooded forests cover the central basin of the Congo watershed, with intact assemblages of large forest mammals, such as forest elephant, western lowland gorilla, chimpanzee, and bonobo. Five out of the six Great Ape species are found here. Furthermore, the large mammals, and especially elephants—ecosystem “engineers”—still range widely along age-old migration routes that often traverse national boundaries to continuously transform the landscape and maintain the ecological functioning of natural systems. Over 10,000 species of plants can be found in the low-altitude forests, of which over 3,000 are endemic. Over 200 animal species new to science have been described from the region since 2000, and more remain to be studied.

These forests provide goods and services, such as the provision of wood, freshwater, foods, and medicines, which are of importance to people and national economies. Congo Basin forests host around 80 million people, and the population may double by 2050. Some

30 million people in the Congo Basin are forest-dependent communities from 150 ethnic groups. These forest native communities are witnessing the arrival of around 40 million non-indigenous people, who are also consumers of the basin's forest products and resources.

Small scale agriculture is the main driver of deforestation and forest degradation in the Congo Basin, with degradation rates largely correlated with population growth and poverty. However, with countries seeking to further develop their natural resources, the region needs to be prepared for upcoming threats related to industrial agriculture, oil, mining, charcoal fuel wood, and bush meat hunting, along with the associated transportation and energy infrastructure. In addition, the Congo Basin has also historically been a place of violence, instability, and displacement of population, making it difficult to foster conditions that support the rule of law, good governance, and sound investments.

Program Overview

The Congo Basin Sustainable Landscape Impact Program (CBSL IP) proposes actions to address immediate problems related to biodiversity loss and lack of tenure and land rights for forest-dependent people. The CBSL IP also aims to prepare the region for increasing threats, such as the development of infrastructure and large-scale agribusiness plantations, that could cause irreversible damages. The CBSL IP supports local planning and governance systems to take biodiversity and ecosystem services into consideration and local stakeholders and the private sector to include sustainable non-timber forest product value chains. This is part of the response to conserve large patches of intact forests and globally important biodiversity as well as to help regulate regional climate and lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from forest and peatland degradation and destruction.

Program Approach

The objective of the CBSL IP is to catalyze transformational change in conservation and sustainable management of the Congo Basin through landscape approaches that empower local communities and forest-dependent people, and through partnership with the private sector.

The CBSL IP will realize this objective through four components: 1) enabling an integrated framework for countries in targeted transboundary landscapes to plan, monitor, and adapt land management and leverage local, national, and international investments for sustainable land management/sustainable forest management; 2) promoting long-term viability of forests and area-based management of critical high conservation value forest that provide important habitat to endangered species and critical ecosystem services; 3) fostering sustainable use of forests by local communities and forest-dependent people through strengthening of rights and tenure, and sustainable management of production sector activities; and 4) supporting capacity building, knowledge management, and regional cooperation.

These four components together will help address four main barriers: conflicting and isolated sectoral developments; poor governance of protected areas, buffer zones, and corridors; lack of engagement of communities, forest-dependent people, and the private sector in conservation and sustainable use; and weak cross-border implementation of conservation actions and learning.

Program Delivery Framework

The **CBSL IP** engages six countries from the heart of the Congo Basin—**Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Republic of Congo**—to focus on the dense rainforest landscapes of the Tri-National Dja-Odzala-Minkebe (TRIDOM), Tri-National Sangha (TNS), and the Cuvette Centrale. Closed evergreen lowland forests represent 60% of the carbon stored in the Congo Basin while only covering 35% of the area. Peripheral landscapes complete the picture, also reflecting the importance of mixed landscapes and ecotones in conservation: Grand Kivu, Monte Alén–Monts de Cristal, and Campo Ma'an-Rio Campo.

Country-level Engagement

Cameroon: Integrated management of Cameroon's forest landscapes in the Congo Basin (GEF \$9.6 million, co-financing \$76 million), GEF Agency: WWF-US. This project aims to bring a new set of tools and approaches such as natural and social capital assessment, land use change, and driver analyses to Cameroon, which will enable

government, local communities, indigenous people, CSOs, and partners to work towards integrated landscape planning and management. This project will promote sustainable wildlife management, sustainable forest management, and sustainable tourism development, promoting participatory (community/private sector) models, focusing on the Cameroon side of the TNS, TRIDOM, and Campo Ma'an-Rio Campo, coordinating with other country/child projects.

Central African Republic: Scaling up ecological corridors and transboundary connectivity through integrated natural resource management in the Ngotto Forest landscape and Mbaéré-Bodingué National Park (GEF \$76 million; co-financing \$275 million), GEF Agency: World Bank. The baseline scenario is defined by extreme poverty and marginalization of forest dependent communities, institutional isolation, and disconnect of protected areas within the TNS landscape. This project aims to support the development of policy, legal, and technical instruments for land use planning, participative management of natural resources, and sustainable financing mechanisms for protected areas, including with the private sector.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Community-based forested landscape management in the Grand Kivu and Lake Télé-Tumba (GEF \$13.76 million; co-financing \$80 million), GEF Agency: UNEP. This project will build on baseline initiatives and co-financing opportunities to promote synergy, complementarity on the ground, and avoid duplication (Central African Forest Initiative, World Bank, and projects funded by Belgium and Sweden in the target area). This project will work with targeted provincial governments on land use zoning plans, indigenous and local community land tenure and natural resource user rights, conservation on private and community lands, and improved agricultural production in the Grand Kivu landscape. The efforts in the Democratic Republic of Congo side of the Lac Télé-Lac Tumba transboundary landscape will be coordinated with the Republic of Congo project.

Equatorial Guinea: Transforming and scaling up results and lessons learned in the Monte Alén and Rio Campo Landscapes through an inclusive landscape-scale approach, effective land use planning and promotion of local governance (GEF \$5.35 million; co-financing \$37.5 million), GEF Agency: IUCN. This project builds on efforts to ensure a demonstrable decreased rate of deforestation, improved carbon stocks and biodiversity in forested lands, and enhanced livelihoods of local and indigenous populations. This project will promote integrated land use planning policies and management through cross-border multi-stakeholder dialogues on key subjects (e.g., illegal hunting, logging, mining, infrastructure development, connectivity, water rights).

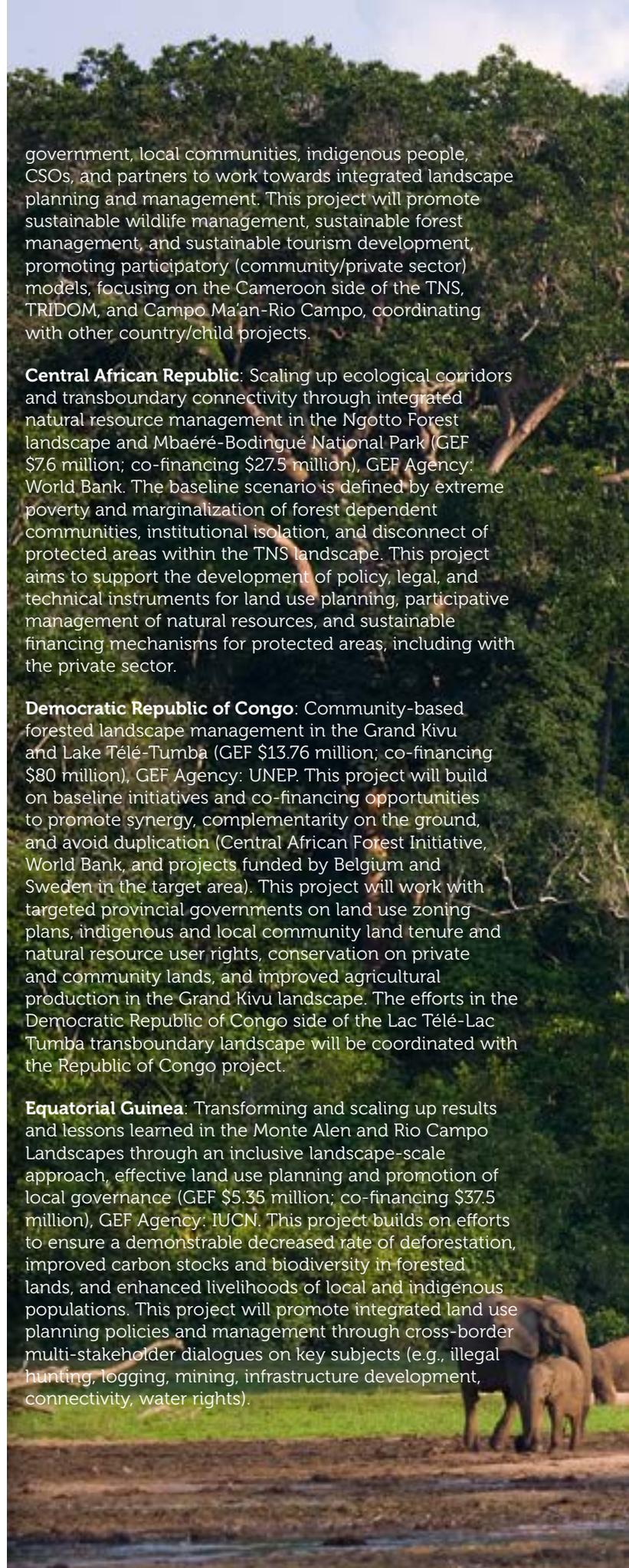




Photo by Sergey Uryadnikov/Shutterstock

Protected area management will be considered within the Rio Campo and Monte Alén landscapes in collaboration with local communities.

Gabon: Transforming Forest Landscape Governance (GEF \$6.56 million; co-financing \$59.7 million), GEF Agency: World Bank. This project builds on a baseline scenario in which Gabon is finalizing the National Land Use Plan (PNAT) for optimal spatial management of lands and natural resources, protection of high conservation value/high carbon stock forests, and mitigation of deforestation/forest degradation by informing the expansion of commerce and infrastructure. The project integrates natural capital accounting for improved decision-making and governance in forestry management. PNAT, sponsored by the Central African Forest Initiative, is the government's primary tool for the design and implementation of sustainable development policy and the sound management of national territory.

Republic of Congo: Integrated Community-Based Conservation of Peatlands Ecosystems and Promotion of Ecotourism in Lac Télé Landscape of Republic of Congo (GEF \$6.11 million; co-financing \$41.77 million), GEF Agency: UNEP. This project aims to promote a model for integrated community-based conservation and protected area management applied to the peatland area and forest ecosystems of the Republic of Congo. The project supports the development of land use plans for the Lac Télé landscape protected areas and surrounding landscape with a focus on ensuring and formalizing community involvement. The project will build the capacity of local communities and forest-dependent peoples to participate in, manage, and benefit from actions to limit environmental degradation across the biome.

Regional-level Engagement

Transformational Change in Sustainable Forest Management in Transboundary Landscapes of the Congo Basin (GEF \$8.19 million; co-financing \$65.9 million), GEF Agency: UNEP. The regional project will act as a single platform to feed innovations and policies developed under its child projects and transfer knowledge between

the regional and global organizations working on forest conservation and sustainable use. It will follow the CBSL IP framework to: 1) facilitate the political and technical process to develop land use planning processes, integrating systems thinking and natural capital valuation in decision making; 2) support region-wide actions for addressing wildlife crime and the conservation of elephants and great apes; 3) empower local communities, forest-dependent people and private sector; and 4) promote improved knowledge management, program coordination, and communication. The regional project will promote synergies with existing partners and initiatives. It will also connect with the Global Wildlife Program on poaching and trafficking.

Expected Results

The CBSL IP seeks to improve the management effectiveness of 20 protected areas covering more than 6.4 million hectares, create 600,000 hectares of new protected areas, restore 500,000 hectares of forest and forest lands, improve land management practices on more than 4.3 million hectares of landscapes. All these activities will result in GHG emissions reductions of 121 million tCO₂e and target 358,000 direct beneficiaries, 53% of whom are female.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. Since then, the GEF has provided close to **\$20 billion** in grants and mobilized an additional **\$107 billion** in co-financing for more than **4,700 projects** in **170 countries**. Through its Small Grants Programme, the GEF has provided support to nearly 24,000 civil society and community initiatives in 128 countries.

