



Regional workshop on the definition of the terms "Forest",
"Deforestation" and "Forest Degradation" adapted to the context
of the Congo Basin forests and their periphery in view of the
sustainable development of central Africa

Brazzaville, 3rd - 5th August 2021

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

At the invitation of His Excellency Mr. Gilberto Da Piedade Verissimo, President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the regional workshop on the definition of the terms "Forest", "Deforestation" and "Forest Degradation" adapted to the context of the forests of the Congo Basin and their periphery in view of the sustainable development of central Africa was held from August 3 to 5, 2021 in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. The meeting was jointly organised by ECCAS, the government of the Republic of Congo and the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) with the support of the European Union through the ECOFAC 6 programme, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) through the UK Aid funding, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and CIFOR. Mindful of the constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the workshop was held through face-to-face sessions and by videoconference.

1. Objectives of the workshop

The general objective of the workshop was to contribute to the removal of constraints to the participation of agroforestry and livestock commodities produced in rural areas, situated in forest areas, in the sustainable development of ECCAS countries, as well as their positioning in national, regional and international markets.

2. Workshop participants

About fifty participants took part in the workshop. In addition to the ECCAS team, there were delegations from ECCAS member countries, including Congo, Burundi, Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and Chad, representatives of national, sub-regional and international organizations, donors, the civil society, economic operators and the following initiatives COMIFAC, OCFSA, CEFDHAC, WWF, the European Union, UNESCO, FAO, CIFOR, FSC, FIB-RDC, RIOFAC, ANPN, RECEIAC, etc.

3. Opening ceremony

Six personalities presented speeches during the opening ceremony: the President of the Departmental and Municipal Council and Mayor of the city of Brazzaville, the Director of Policies and Partnerships at WWF Africa, the Ambassador and Head of Mission of the European Union in Congo, the President of the Regional Steering Committee of CEFDHAC, the Commissioner in charge of the Environment, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Rural Development of ECCAS, and the Minister of Forestry Economy of the Republic of Congo.

4. Designation of the Workshop Bureau

After the opening ceremony, a workshop bureau was set up comprising the following:

Chairperson: Mr. Joel LOUMETO from Congo

Vice-Chairman: Mr. Faustin TOKATE-KAMENGE of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Reporter 1: Mr. Berchmans, HATUNGIMANA of Burundi

Reporter 2: Mr. Batedjim NOUDJALBAYE of Chad

Professor Martin TCHAMBA was the moderator.

5. Conduct of the proceedings

The workshop continued with the presentation of objectives, the presentation of the participants and the adoption of the agenda after amendments, structured around the following sessions:

- Basic concepts and notions
- National initiatives to combat deforestation in ECCAS countries
- Monitoring of deforestation trends
- Common approaches to defining the forest and monitoring deforestation trends in central Africa

During these sessions, a series of presentations were made in the plenary followed by discussions that led to the formulation of recommendations.

5.1 Group work and feedback in the plenary

At the end of the exchanges and discussions in plenary, the following groups were formed:

- **Group 1** in charge of the theme: Definitions of the terms "forests", "deforestation" and "forest degradation".
- **Group 2** in charge of two themes: Integrated forest governance and conducive institutional and organizational framework for the development of a sustainable forest economic system in central Africa.
- **Group 3** in charge of two themes: The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), African markets dealing with agroforestry and livestock commodities, and permanent sectoral programmes.

The group work was followed by the restitution of the conclusions of the reports by each group in the plenary session. The restitution in the plenary offered the opportunity to participants, during the fruitful debates, to make observations for the improvement of the group work and to validate it.

5.2 Post-workshop roadmap

In the plenary, a draft post-workshop roadmap for the next steps was presented by ECCAS. After the exchanges and debates, this roadmap was validated subject to the mainstreaming of the amendments made by the working groups and its consolidation by ECCAS in consultation with the government of Republic of Congo and COMIFAC.

5.3 Recommendations

At the end of the deliberations, the following recommendations were made by the participants:

- ❖ **Regarding the definition of the terms "forests", "deforestation" and "forest degradation":**
 - Take into account the following criteria in order to achieve a harmonised definition of the concept of "forest" in the Congo Basin sub-region:

- ✓ Historical aspects (traditional conception of the forest according to countries/habits and customs);
 - ✓ Ecological zoning criteria
 - ✓ Minimum area threshold
 - ✓ Origin/species of trees found in these areas
 - ✓ Size and number of trees within the area
 - ✓ Biomass (rate defined by each country)
 - ✓ Biodiversity (wildlife habitat).
- Seek to agree on the definition of the concept "forest" before going ahead to harmonise the definition of the concepts of "deforestation" and "forest degradation" in the Congo Basin sub-region. This is how the concepts of "deforestation" and "degradation" could find their full meaning, because the criteria of deforestation and degradation are functions of the criteria underlying the definition of the term "forest";
 - Review and harmonise the definitions of the concepts "zero deforestation" and "imported deforestation" before their adoption at the regional level, because they are not consistent with the development ambitions of ECCAS country's members. As it stands, this could amount to limiting what are considered as the legitimate development ambitions that may be based on using land for infrastructure development and agricultural expansion.

❖ **Regarding forest governance:**

To ECCAS,

- Develop and implement a sub-regional forestry policy based on the Yaoundé Declaration of 1999, existing sub-regional strategies and guidelines aimed at converting forests into the engine of economic, social and cultural development for the States and peoples of Central Africa;
- Institutionalise the monitoring and evaluation of integrated forest governance at the sub-regional level and provide countries with instruments (barometer/index) for the monitoring of integrated forest governance;
- Ensure the international marketing of forest products from the Congo Basin and promotion of the achievements made in favour of sustainable forest management. This promotion can be made, for example, by letting the world know that the Congo Basin alone contains 5 million hectares of certified natural forest, representing the largest certified natural forest area in the world, in addition to its strong capacity to regulate the climate. Or by implementing the mechanism of rewarding actors for their performance in forest governance (the ECCAS good governance award), etc.;
- Harmonise regulations on taxation and logging standards;
- Promote the economy of protected areas and the Public Private Partnership approach.

To the ECCAS member States,

- Translate the sub-regional forestry policy into national forestry policies for countries that do not have them, or update them for countries that do have, and placing as such forests at the heart of the economic, social and cultural planning and development of the States and peoples of central Africa;
- Develop and implement national land-use plans and set up national land-use commissions for countries that do not have them and/or update them for countries that do have such plans in order to achieve integrated forest governance;
- Establish mechanisms and institutions for the arbitration and management of conflicts that arise between the sectoral administrations involved in forest management;
- Harmonise sectoral natural resource management policies and legislation (promote coexistence and cohabitation of land uses);
- Put in place coherent mechanisms and/or frameworks for the promotion of national initiatives relating to the fight against climate change, responsible forest management, forest landscape restoration and the development of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge (REDD+, FLEGT, AFR 100, APA);
- Proceed with the revision of national texts and instruments to take into account the economic dimension of forest resources, in particular aspects related to the promotion of a sustainable forest economy; an economy that targets the local development and processing of forest products, sustainable industrialisation, development of natural capital, the green economy, ecotourism, promotion of NTFPs, development of genetic resources and associated knowledge, tax incentives, creation of wealth through the exploitation of forest and wildlife resources, etc;
- Develop and implement specific mechanisms and institutions to fight forestry crime. Example 1: The Special Court for the fight against forestry crime. Example 2: National forest management monitoring and control system; Example 3: Inter-sectoral inspection missions.

To ECCAS, COMIFAC and the States:

- Promote forest certification as:
 - ✓ an instrument for strengthening governance, transparency and responsible management of central African forests;
 - ✓ a mechanism for public-private partnerships in sustainable forest management
 - ✓ a mechanism for facilitating access to niche markets for central African forest products and increasing the ecological and social value of our forests;

❖ With regard to the establishment of an institutional and organisational framework conducive for the development of the sustainable forestry economy system in central Africa:

To ECCAS and COMIFAC,

- Update the auditing of sub-regional institutions involved in the forestry sector in central Africa with a view to identifying their strengths and weaknesses, their uniqueness and

complementarity and make proposals to update their mandate in order to keep those that are relevant, merge those that should be merged and dissolve those that are no longer relevant;

- Continue the rationalisation of the sub-regional institutions involved in the forestry sector;
- Establish a sustainable financing mechanism that takes into account all the rationalised sub-regional institutions, drawing inspiration from the ECCAS and CEMAC such as Community Contribution Integration mechanism;
- Transform OFAC into an instrument of governance and data sharing among the States of the sub-region with a view to promoting the sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests;
- Strengthen the capacity of sub-regional institutions to anticipate and act in a forward-looking manner with the States to achieve integrated governance of the Congo Basin forests;
- Improve the status of the staff of the sub-regional institutions in order to make them more attractive.

❖ **Regarding the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and responsible African markets for agroforestry and livestock commodities:**

- Establish a regional task force to develop a sustainable and responsible competitiveness plan (sustainable business plan) for strategic agro-forestry and livestock commodities in central Africa, in order to increase the contribution of those agro-forestry, livestock and fishery commodities to the GDP of the States, taking into account the opportunity provided by the AfCFTA,
- Promote investments aimed at creating added value in the perspective of a responsible intra-African markets;
- Mobilise funds to support private investments dedicated to continental markets;
- Develop training programmes (marketing, negotiation with customers, etc.) targeting intra-African trade;
- Develop or create "Marketing" units/agencies in the ministerial institutions with a clear profile for regional markets;
- Support investments in sustainable forest management;
- Facilitate and organise access to regional markets by simplifying intra-African trade procedures and harmonising tax and customs regimes;
- Support SMEs that are already involved in sub-regional exports;
- Initiate inter-sectoral coordination in the States on the problem of intra-regional trade;
- Develop responsible procurement policies for public purchases in the administrations;
- Promote deforestation-free commodity supply chains and support companies, which committed for (i.e. trade fairs, exhibitions, etc.).

❖ Regarding the finalisation of the post-workshop roadmap:

To ECCAS,

- Take into account the recommendations made by the participants in updating the roadmap in consultation with the Government of Republic of Congo, COMIFAC and the development partners.

At the end of the deliberations, the participants expressed their sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Congo for the facilities offered to ensure the success of this meeting. They also thanked the European Union, WWF, UNESCO, UK Aid and CIFOR for their financial and technical support in organising the workshop.

Done in Brazzaville, on 5 August 2021

The participants