

Managing Mayombe

A new project aims to foster transboundary cooperation in the management of the Mayombe forest

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Flying the flag: The Angolan flag flies over part of the Mayombe forest. *Photo: T. Ron*

The Mayombe forest is shared between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, the Republic of the Congo and Gabon and forms the southwestern limit of the Congo Basin's tropical rainforest. It is home to a large variety of flora and fauna, including species of global importance such as chimpanzees, lowland gorillas and forest elephants. But it is also threatened by deforestation and, in some countries, an alarming rate of degradation. Sub-regional cooperation is urgently required in order to implement policies that will halt the deforestation and degradation processes.

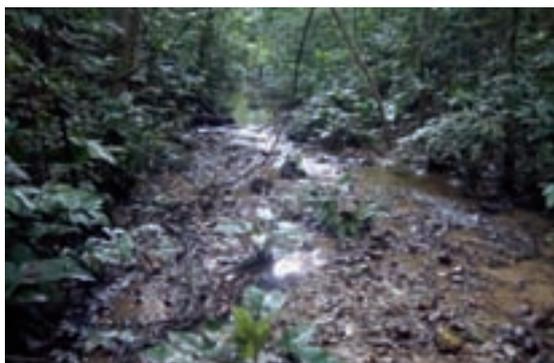


Photo: A. Chicaia

The Mayombe forest transboundary initiative was launched in April 2009 with the long-term objective of establishing a transboundary protected area and a regional cooperation mechanism for its management; the ultimate goal is to enhance natural resource conservation and ensure community welfare in the region. The initiative, which initially is being undertaken in the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola, will

adopt a step-by-step approach that will include a feasibility study, stakeholder meetings and the establishment of a basis for firm cooperation between governments and all key actors.

The challenge of achieving both economic development and biodiversity conservation goals in the landscape and transboundary setting of the Mayombe forest requires the engagement and support of local communities. Such support will only be secured by addressing livelihood development goals, which include not only income improvement but also the recognition of local identity, traditional knowledge rights, effective participation, and secure rights over land and natural resources and their sustainable use. Transboundary conservation represents an important means to coordinate the individual efforts of countries and an opportunity to strengthening local and national institutions.

The Mayombe forest has a large carbon stock and there is good potential to participate in international mechanisms such as REDD. We need to facilitate local commitment in this endeavour, which requires demonstrating to local people that the conservation of globally significant resources such as carbon will benefit them. We think that the more we help the poor to improve their lives, the more we will conserve the forest.