

Paths to partnerships in central Africa

A review of experiences in forest management partnerships in the Congo Basin should lead to the strengthening of collaborative work there

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WITH a surface area of almost 204 million hectares, the moist forests of the Congo Basin comprise the second-largest contiguous stretch of tropical forest on the planet (the largest being in the Amazon Basin). Most of this forest occurs in five countries: Cameroon (19.6 million hectares), Gabon (17.9 million hectares), The Republic of Congo (19.5 million hectares), The Central African Republic (29.9 million hectares) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (109 million hectares).

The annual rate of deforestation for the decade 1991–2000 is estimated to have been in the range 0.1% or less in Congo, Gabon and the Central African Republic, 0.4% in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and 0.9% in Cameroon (FAO 2001). The main causes of this deforestation include the use of forested land for agriculture (slash-and-burn, for example), the activities of extractive industries such as mining and logging, the creation and extension of towns, and the building of new roads. About 8% of the surface area of the five countries (15 million hectares) is in declared protected areas.

Timber harvesting is one of the most important economic activities of these countries. However, total production has declined in the region in recent years, from an estimated 8.5 million m³ in 2000 to 7.6 million m³ in 2002, notably because of decreases in Gabon, the Republic of Congo and Cameroon (production increased slightly over the period in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo; ITTO 2003).

In an attempt to increase the uptake of sustainable forest management principles and the contribution of the timber sector to development in central Africa, ITTO decided (through Council Decision 10(XXXII)) to review and assess the experiences of partnerships among various organisations in the region. The decision was made at the request of Congo Basin countries in the context of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, a Type II initiative announced at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in August/September 2002. Without being exhaustive, this article highlights some of the major findings of the study, which was executed by IUCN, the facilitating agency of the Conference on Central African Moist-Forest Ecosystems (Conférence sur les écosystèmes de forêts denses et humides d'Afrique Centrale—CEFDHAC).



Engagement: forest concessionaires should be engaged as partners to improve forest management, particularly in the context of transboundary conservation reserves. *Photo: C. Ndikumagenge*

The multinational study was carried out between April and August 2003. It aimed to analyse and illustrate partnership experiences in forest management in Cameroon, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, with particular emphasis on:

- activities financed by ITTO as well as others funded by the French Development Agency, the Wildlife Conservation Society (wcs) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF);
- the impact of commercial logging on local populations and transboundary sites; and
- the degree of implementation of ITTO policy initiatives at the national level and in forest management units.

Methodology

Following discussions between IUCN, CEFDHAC and ITTO, the following methodology was used to carry out the study:

- first, documents on partnerships and forest management in each of the five countries were compiled. This acquainted each group of consultants with the subject matter and the involvement of ITTO and relevant partners in forest management;
- a harmonisation meeting was then convened in Douala, Cameroon, on 9–10 April 2003. This meeting, which involved the main consultants in each country plus an international consultant and IUCN/CEFDHAC, aimed to: encourage the exchange of experiences, especially on the management of forest resources, between national consultants, the international consultant and the facilitating agency of CEFDHAC; and harmonise the understanding of key concepts, ITTO policy initiatives and approaches, and the methodology to be used;

- third, national workshops were convened by national consultants to comment on and validate the findings of national reports. This was a very important part of the process because it gave all stakeholders the opportunity to provide input;
- the national workshops were followed by the organisation of a regional workshop (reported in *TFU 13/3*) in which the national reports of all five countries were presented, discussed and amended. This provided the raw material from which the international consultant and IUCN/CEFDHAC wrote a synthesised regional report aimed at improving the management of forest concessions, reinforcing existing partnerships and creating new ones. Participants in the workshop included representatives of government, non-government organisations (NGOs), logging companies, local and indigenous populations, and forestry and research institutions; and
- the last phase was the integration of inputs gathered from the workshop and field trip into the final report.

Types of forest management partnerships and experiences

The study found a range of different partnership structures in the sub-region. They included: partnerships between national governments, between government and the private sector, between government and regional and international organisations, between government, international organisations and local communities, and between international organisations and logging companies. Some of these are described below.

With ITTO: partnerships between ITTO and the five countries and various other stakeholders have developed a large number of projects across a wide range of relevant activities, including forest inventory, the pilot management of forest and transboundary reserves, forest stratification and cartography, agroforestry, the building of capacity in training institutions, support for improving forest management, the promotion of sustainable use and of reforestation, the restoration of degraded forests, increasing the capacity to conserve and valorise non-timber forest products, and institutional capacity-building.

With WWF: partnerships between states in the Congo Basin and WWF are essentially in the domain of conservation and the management of biological diversity. WWF generally executes projects funded by bilateral and multilateral donors;

With WCS: WCS is involved in projects undertaking rural development, conservation and the preservation of the environment, more especially within the context of the sustainable use of protected areas. One of its projects is in partnership with ITTO;

With the French Development Agency: the French Development Agency is a partner in all five countries,

generally in the sustainable management of forest resources. It also provides loans to concession-holders in countries like Gabon.

Other partnerships

Many other regional and global organisations are involved in partnerships in the region. The list provided here is not exhaustive but indicates the kind of partnerships that each pursues.

UNDP develops partnerships at three levels: at the global and national levels, where it facilitates the establishment and functioning of consultation initiatives, and at the regional level, where it is supporting the development of a regional strategic action plan for biological conservation. **IUCN – the World Conservation Union** favours partnerships between all actors involved in conservation: states, NGOs, and other affiliated bodies. **CEFDHAC** (also known as the Brazzaville Process) is a forum for consultation between all actors (governments, private sector, local and indigenous populations, parliamentarians, NGOs, research institutions, civil society, etc) involved in conservation and sustainable use as well as the equitable management of Central African forest ecosystems. The **African Timber Organization**, an intergovernmental organisation, is focusing predominantly on the establishment of a Pan-African certification scheme. For example, it recently collaborated with ITTO in the development and publishing of the *ATO/ITTO Principles, criteria and indicators for the sustainable forest management of African natural tropical forests* and is now implementing a substantial ITTO project designed to build capacity to implement these at the national level in African member countries (including the five Congo Basin countries). The **Conference of Ministers in Charge of Central African Forests (COMIFAC)** is a body that studies, consults and takes decisions on matters concerning the sustainable management and conservation of Central African forests. The **Central African Regional Programme for the Environment (CARPE)**, a USAID regional initiative, aims to fight deforestation and the loss of biological diversity in Central Africa.

Other newly established partnerships in the region include the **New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)**, the **Congo Basin Forest Partnership** (as mentioned previously), and the **Regional Programme for Environmental Information (PRGIE)**.

Lessons learned

Despite many deficiencies in the exploitation of natural resources, especially forest resources, the study showed that all five countries are presently endowed with forestry and legislative policies that favour the sustainable management of forest resources. However, the real problems lie with their implementation in the field, especially because most countries have not developed the necessary human resources, strategies, tools and financial mechanisms to implement these policies.

The study also noted:

- a marked difference between the development of forest management tools by the administration and their application in the field by logging companies;
- a general tendency to move towards the adoption of certification as a tool for sustainable management and for combating illegal exploitation (although certification processes are not well advanced in the region);
- the control and monitoring of management work (the function of states) is inadequate because of the poor organisation of some forest administrations and the lack or poor quality of human, financial and material resources;
- forest management as presently being practiced has positive and negative impacts which must be understood; and
- the idea of partnerships for sustainable forest management is relatively new in Central Africa and their implementation should be monitored.

Recommendations

The recommendations given here are not exhaustive, but indicate the kinds of actions that were proposed by the regional workshop in Douala. At the national level, participants recommended:

- the development of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for forest management in Congo Basin countries;
- the development of a coordination mechanism for partnership and conflict management at all levels in each country;
- the establishment, development and capitalisation of management tools;
- the strengthening of the role of the private sector and civil society in partnerships for the sustainable management of forest ecosystems; and
- adapting the management of forest concessions to the sub-regional and regional context of establishing transboundary protected areas.

At the sub-regional level, the workshop proposed that:

- sub-regional institutions like COMIFAC and CEFDHAC should be supported to develop key areas of sub-regional cooperation such as forest policies, conservation-development programs, respect for the rights and interests of local and indigenous populations, etc. Similarly, these institutions should be supported to establish thematic regional working groups on issues such as transboundary conservation reserves, critical sites for conservation and development, the management of transboundary animal populations, and the management of fragile ecosystems, including the Atlantic and montane forests and coastal ecosystems;

- regional forest training programs should be strengthened, especially in the domain of forest management, woodworking and industrialisation, the community management of natural resources, conflict resolution linked to the management of forest resources, the domestication of valuable forest species, the study of medicinal plants, the promotion of good governance in forest management, and the development of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism in all five countries;
- mechanisms that favour the promotion of partnerships and strategies that will attenuate conflict linked to natural resource management should be supported;
- forest management tools should be developed, resourced and implemented;
- the role of the private sector and civil society in sustainable forest management should be strengthened; and
- the development of ecotourism should be supported, especially through the establishment of regional consultation mechanisms between partners to develop a common strategy for tourism development (although not before evaluating existing natural and human potentials).

Future directions

The study has paved the way for the development of new projects to promote partnerships for sustainable forest management. One of these would focus on the management of forest concessions in the context of a transboundary conservation area. In addition to achieving goals in international relations and nature conservation, such cooperation would help create an environment in which experiences in the development of management plans and the definition of sub-regional norms could be shared and harmonised. For example, through its project work, ITTO could assist the 42 concessions contiguous to the Odzala-Minkébé-Dja National Park—a tri-national park shared by Congo, Gabon and Cameroon—to move towards sustainable forest management. Another project to help build the institution capacity for sustainable forest management in some specific countries (such as the Democratic Republic of Congo) would complement the ITTO project (PD 124/01) now being implemented by ATO.

References

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