

**International Expert Meeting on Addressing Climate Change through Sustainable
Management of Tropical Forest
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COMIFAC POSITION ON THE INTERNATIONAL ISSUE ON REDD

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1. Introduction

Climate change has been a major global environmental concern over the past decades. Indeed, several parts of the global have witnessed major climate changes. Reported climate change generally arises from unusually high emissions of green house gases (GHG) into the atmosphere as a result of anthropogenic activities. Among the human-induced activities, the forest sector accounts for between 20 to 25% of total global GHG emissions. These emissions are essentially engendered by deforestation in tropical countries.

To address this challenge, the international community established a binding legal framework on climate change (CCCC) and took a batch of measures under the Kyoto Protocol to reverse the trend. It should be recalled that these measures generally refer to commitments of Annex I countries to reduce their GHG emissions by 5% of the 1990 levels during the first commitment phase of the Protocol.

The measures outlined in the Protocol do not however consider the role of tropical forests in addressing climate change. Yet, these forests play a critical role in regulating the climate through carbon sequestration and stocking. Nonetheless, in addressing climate change, deforestation control and sustainable management of tropical forests afford a genuine opportunity to significantly reduce emissions in a **cost-effective manner**. It is estimated that the opportunity cost of halving deforestation in tropical countries totals USD5 to 10 billion (source: Stern Report).

The threats posed by climate change command further effort to actually reduce emissions from deforestation. Accordingly, developing countries, specifically those from Central Africa, during COP 11 of December 2005 in Montreal, engaged in negotiations to incorporate Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) into the Kyoto post 2012 regime.

2. Contribution of Congo Basin countries to climate change efforts

2.1 Characteristics and specificities of Congo Basin forests

With a total forest area of 235 million hectares, the Congo Basin ranks as the second largest tropical forest in the world after the Amazon. It abounds with biodiversity and plays a key role in regulating the global climate, specifically through carbon storage and sequestration. These forests are however prone to deforestation and degradation as a result of anthropogenic activities. *The State of Central African forests* 2006 estimates deforestation and degradation levels in the Congo Basin at 0.20% and 0.10% respectively. However, statistics on these

levels of forest deforestation and degradation are relatively low, as these two scourges seriously threaten the sustainability of Central African forests.

2.2 Political commitment of Central African countries: vision and strategy

In a bid to address these threats and protect this universal heritage, Heads of State of Central Africa pledged, in a declaration on forests known as the Yaounde Declaration, to collectively promote conservation and sustainable management of their forest ecosystems.

To crystallize this vision, a sub-regional body, namely COMIFAC, responsible for guiding, harmonizing, and monitoring forest and environmental policies was established. Furthermore, a common platform for priority actions undertaken at the sub-regional and national levels, commonly called the Convergence Plan was adopted by the Heads of State. The Convergence Plan addresses, under its first strategic component, actions to monitor the implementation of international conventions on the environment in the sub-region, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Kyoto Protocol. The commitment of Central African Heads of State was further concretized by the signature and ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

2.3 Sub-regional efforts to mitigate climate change

The political commitments of Central African countries were translated on the ground by concrete actions to conserve forest ecosystems. These actions entailed sustainable forest management and forest conservation.

Regarding sustainable management, the following actions were undertaken:

- Adoption of ATO/ITTO Principles, Criteria and Indicators (PCI) on sustainable forest management and mainstreaming at national level;
- Revision of Country Forestry Codes to introduce mandatory design and implementation of management plans for production forests;
- Introduction of management plans for 20% of production forests of the Congo Basin with a target of implementing management plans for all production forests within five years;
- Furtherance of the certification process for forest concessions in several countries, including Cameroon, Congo and Gabon. Certified forests are estimated at 1,742,000 hectares and other forest stakeholders of the sub-region have signed up to the process, which could increase this surface area to 7 millions hectares;
- Sustainable management of non-permanent forests, notably community forests.

The tables below reflect progress by COMIFAC countries in respect of sustainable management and certification.

Table 1: Progress report on forest management plan in Central African countries

	Cameroon	CAR	Congo	Gabon	DRC	Eq. Guinea	Congo Basin
Total under MP process	4.300.000	3.000.000	7.100.000	6.400.000	9.700.000	55.000	30.500.000
% forest area	36	86	47	29	10	4	20

Source : FRM

Table 2 : Progress report on certification in Central African countries

Country	Certified area	Number of certificates	Certification system
Cameroon	446.186	06	FSC
Congo	296.000	01	FSC
Gabon	1.000.000	01	KEURHOOT

Forest conservation actions have primarily consisted in the creation of new protected areas over the last decade, thereby raising protected forest areas in the sub-region to about 44 million hectares, representing an estimated 10% of the total area of the sub-region. COMIFAC's target for 2012 is to increase protected forest areas to 15%, representing 60 millions hectares.

3. Development and support of the REDD initiative by COMIFAC countries

On account of the role of Congo Basin forests in abating climate change and scientific evidence on the impact of emissions from deforestation and degradation in developing countries, COMIFAC countries fully support the incorporation of REDD in the next regime of the Kyoto Protocol. In fact, the biome of tropical forests, which accounts for 10% of the earth's surface (most of which is found in developing countries) hold about 25% of total global carbon found in the atmosphere and soils. Moreover, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggests that changes in land use, dominated by tropical deforestation, declined between 0.8 and 2.4 GT C/year in the 1990s, which represents 10 to 25% of anthropogenic emissions. From the foregoing, abating tropical deforestation seems critical in stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations and mitigating the impact of global climate change.

On account of these challenges, COMIFAC countries joined the bandwagon of countries of the "Coalition for Rainforest Nations (CfRN)" to support the REDD initiative. This support has been lent through the following actions:

- Active participation of COMIFAC experts at sub-regional and international preparatory meetings on negotiations on the REDD initiative;
- Tendering of four submissions on this issue in May 2006, March 2007, August 2007 and March 2008 respectively to the Secretariat of the Convention;

- Active participation of Congo Basin countries in discussions on REDD during the recent Conference of Parties (COP13) of the Convention in December 2007 at Bali, Indonesia.

COMIFAC countries have maintained their approaches and proposals in international debates on REDD. Their positions, which were reaffirmed in the submission of March 2008, addressed the following methodological issues:

- Factoring of degradation as much as deforestation in emission calculations;
- Consideration of the specificities of Congo Basin forests engaged in the sustainable management process through forest management plans and protected areas;
- Establishment of a market facility on the basis of the commitments of Northern countries to fund the opportunity costs of forest conservation for the purpose of preventing deforestation;
- Establishment of funding facility to support or reward the current efforts of Congo Basin countries to maintain standing carbon stocks;
- Etc.

Similarly, a consensus on some key principles has been reached, namely: real benefits for the climate, shared but distinct responsibility, sovereignty of States and sustainable development, equity, etc.

3.1 Estimating and demonstrating reduction of emissions from forest degradation

Although the definition of degradation suggested in IPCC guidelines is not yet standardized, it is established that forest degradation is a dynamic process that gradually diminishes carbon stock per surface unit and eventually leads to deforestation.

Calculating degradation involves measuring changes in carbon stocks in the remaining pristine forests. In this respect, initial emissions from the exploitation of forest concessions under sustainable management should not be considered.

Emission reporting should be distinguished from calculation; otherwise it might compromise sustainable management efforts.

3.2 Incremental changes due to sustainable forest management

The establishment of sustainable management schemes seeks to conserve forests and prevent emissions arising from lack of management schemes. Preventable emissions should be taken into account. However, initial emissions caused by exploitation of forest concessions under sustainable management are not expected to be factored in. In the same vein, improved forest management may help mitigate emissions which ought to be estimated and compensated.

Similarly, enhanced forest carbon stocks achieved through sustainable management should also be estimated and compensated.

3.3 REDD mechanism market options

Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation requires huge investments in terms of sustainable forest management and others. By way of example, the opportunity cost of forest protection in the 8 countries responsible for 70% of emissions caused by changes in land use, is estimated by the Stern report at between USD 5 and 11 billion yearly.

Efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries can generate additional benefits for the climate only after a request from Annex I countries, based on a Cap and Trade market mechanism, where genuine commitments of countries of the North exist. A carbon market mechanism alone can generate such resources and sustain funding by consistently imposing obligations on developed countries to reduce their GHG emissions.

The expected funding facility should generate predictable, stable and adequate funds.

3.4 Funding Facilities

Congo Basin forests, as a major global carbon reserve, play a key role in climate regulation. In this respect, countries of the Congo Basin hold a crucial responsibility in climate regulation and strive to conserve and manage their forests in a sustainable fashion.

Consequently, countries of the Congo Basin propose the establishment of a funding facility to compensate carbon stocks. The fund should be predictable and sustainable and thrive on:

- a tax on emission permits,
- top up funding provided by Annex 2 countries,
- a tax on carbon-intensive products and services in Annex I,
- other financial instruments,

Replenishment of the funding facility may be allocation driven, in addition to carbon stocks, using criteria such as managed areas and protected areas, which recognize remarkable efforts in the sustainable management of forest ecosystems. Rating systems should be envisaged to prioritize some of the aforementioned criteria.

4. REDD challenges and opportunities

Like every process, REDD bears several challenges and opportunities.

4.1 Challenges

Challenges to include REDD in the upcoming Kyoto post 2012 regime pertain to a number of issues, including inter alia:

- Developing and adopting appropriate methodologies to calculate emissions from forest degradation;
- Developing and adopting methodologies to calculate baseline emissions;
- Developing and adopting methodologies to measure changes in forest cover, carbon stocks and associated GHG emissions;
- Opting for national approach or sub-national approaches in the calculation of GHG emissions;
- Reaching a consensus between the Parties on various ongoing issues under negotiation: baseline scenario, sustainable management and funding facility, action approaches and levels, opting for a REDD market or fund, etc.
- Choosing or compromising between effective conservation and social justice;

4.2 Opportunities and way forward

REDD affords opportunities that can be summarized as follows:

- Direct involvement/participation of developing forest countries in reducing carbon emissions through averted deforestation and sustainable forest management;
- Contribution to poverty reduction in developing forest countries by funding various REDD projects.

By the same token, the way forward will require:

- development of REDD pilot projects to refine methodologies on emissions from deforestation and forest degradation;
- increased mobilization of sub-regional stakeholders (policymakers and experts) in REDD negotiations and consideration in the future Kyoto regime;
- building capacity of all stakeholders to improve their knowledge on REDD process;
- local study to identify the actions which can reduce deforestation and degradation relating to firewood exploitation around the cities;
- capitalization of existing data and improving synergy between actors;
- creation of REDD-COMIFAC scientific council inside the central African forest observatory.

5. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it is safe to say that REDD is a genuine opportunity to halt deforestation in developing forest countries as well as compensate virtuous countries like ours in their forest conservation efforts. It is our collective responsibility, countries of the North and developing countries, to establish such a tool that will undoubtedly help in mitigating climate change that threatens global environmental balance.