



Photo: M. Sathoud

Heads of state discuss Congo Basin forests

2nd Summit on Forests for Heads of State of Central Africa

5 February 2005
Brazzaville, Congo

At the 1st Summit on Forests for Heads of States of Central Africa, which was held in March 1999 in Yaounde, Cameroon, the heads of state of six Central African nations signed the Yaounde Declaration in the presence of representatives of the international community. The 2nd Summit was convened to assess what has been done so far in the implementation of the Yaounde Declaration and to define new directions and commitments for Central Africa in the conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems.

The following heads of state attended the 2nd Summit: Paul Biya (Cameroon); François Bozize (Central African Republic); Denis Sassou Nguesso (Republic of Congo); Joseph Kabila (Democratic Republic of Congo—DRC); Omar Bongo Ondimba (Gabon); Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (Equatorial Guinea); Idris Deby (Chad); Eradique Bandeira Melo de Menezes (Sao Tome and Principe); and Jacques Chirac (France). The Summit was also attended by official representatives of African, American, Asian and European countries, as well as by representatives of international organisations and non-governmental organisations.

At the opening ceremony, statements were made by the representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme) and the heads of state of Cameroon, Gabon, DRC, France and Congo. In the afternoon, statements were made by Kenya's Nobel Prize-winning Ms Wangari Muta Maathai and by representatives of the following countries and international organisations: Rwanda, South Africa, Italy, USA, ITTO, FAO, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Worldwide Fund for

Nature, the Wildlife Conservation Society and the United Nations Forum on Forests.

One of the noteworthy actions taken at the Summit was the signing by the heads of state of a treaty giving legal backing to the Conference of Ministers in Charge of Central African Forests (COMIFAC). COMIFAC is a sub-regional institution designed to coordinate and supervise initiatives and actions in matters relating to the conservation and sustainable management of Central African forest ecosystems. Three countries—Sao Tome and Principe, Rwanda and Burundi—became new members of COMIFAC by signing the treaty. The Summit also adopted a sub-regional 'convergence plan' and COMIFAC was mandated to coordinate the implementation of this plan; in addition, the heads of state pledged their commitment to combating illegal logging and bushmeat trade.

The heads of state also approved the COMIFAC Year 2015 Objective, according to which all forests of the permanent forest estate in the region will be sustainably managed by the year 2015. The process will be based on the guidance provided by the African Timber Organization/ITTO *Principles, criteria and indicators for the sustainable management of African natural tropical forests*.

During the preparatory meetings for the 2nd Summit, the Dja-Odzala-Minkebe (TRIDOM) Agreement was signed by the ministers in charge of forests from Cameroon, Gabon and Congo. Covering about 14.6 million hectares and representing an estimated 7.5% of the Congo Basin, this transboundary conservation area spans the three signatory countries.

The third meeting of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) took place on 4 February 2005 in conjunction with the 2nd Summit on Forests. It was decided that facilitation of the CBFP would be undertaken by France for the next two years. The framework of cooperation between partners involved in the CBFP and the terms of reference for the French facilitation were also approved. The focus will be on three main areas:

- strengthening regional cooperation at all levels;
- capacity-building in conservation and sustainable forest management; and
- strengthening governance by harmonising forestry laws and promoting the fight against illegal logging within the framework of the European Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) initiative and/or the African FLEG initiative.

Forests on the table in Venezuela

IV Venezuelan Forestry Congress

19–26 November 2004
Barinas, Venezuela

With its slogan 'forests, life and development', this event was attended by nearly 400 people from different parts of Venezuela, including foresters and professionals in other related disciplines, industrialists, the private and public sectors, and teaching institutions.

Congress discussions covered five thematic areas—environmental services, environmental management, silviculture and forest management, watershed

conservation and management, and forest industries—which made up the framework for the presentation of more than 100 papers and posters in two parallel sessions. Ten keynote speeches, given by international guest speakers from ITTO, FAO, Italy, France, Costa Rica and Brazil as well as by distinguished professionals from Venezuela, highlighted the significance of Congress topics. One day of the Congress was devoted to technical field trips to observe forest plantation management, agroforestry, wildlife management and fish-farming practices.

Concerns about the drastic changes that have been taking place in the country's western lowlands region, where the Congress was held, were raised in an open-ended roundtable. Large areas of forest in the region have been converted into agricultural lands and pastures, and the remaining forests are becoming degraded. The roundtable canvassed possible alternatives to the current situation based on community management, ecotourism and agroforestry development.

Efforts are also being made partly by the government but mostly by the private sector towards the gradual rehabilitation of these lands through plantations using introduced species, a combination of agricultural and forestry techniques, the participation of forest communities in sustainable forest management activities, and the implementation of innovative activities that contribute to food security in the country. Agroforestry is clearly an important mechanism for the restoration of forests in these lowland areas; such restored forests will admittedly be different to the original forests but will nevertheless create a healthier landscape in that part of the country.

Among its most relevant conclusions, the Congress underlined the need to redirect both public and private actions and strategies to take into account Venezuela's new environmental priorities. Forests are an important focus of these priorities because they play a key role in the conservation of biodiversity and in meeting the growing demand for goods and services derived from these forest resources.

The Congress also recommended that the government should pay more attention to the promotion of sustainable forest management in the South Orinoco region. These forests, with their heterogeneous forest mix and high biodiversity, are unique in the world and should be conserved and managed under a system that is: i) consistent with forest certification standards to ensure their sustainable management over time; ii) economically viable for effective timber and NTFP utilisation; and iii) aimed at meeting the needs of the population.

Such recommendations and developments imply a need for change in forestry education, because the world of forestry is now much broader than just ensuring the maintenance of timber production. Capacity-building in government, the private sector and civil society will be essential for the implementation of this new, holistic vision of forestry in Venezuela. Government will need to work with those sectors concerned with forest and environmental education, with the participation of civil society and forest communities.

The proceedings of IV CONFORVEN have been published in CD format and the conference presentations and papers can be seen in: www.conforve.ula.ve

Reported by Osvaldo Encinas O.

Repairing the damage

Rehabilitation of tsunami-affected forest ecosystems: strategies and new directions

7–8 March 2005

Bangkok, Thailand

This regional coordination workshop, which was convened by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), brought together 15 government representatives from seven countries (Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand) affected by the 26 December 2004 tsunami in Asia. They were joined by about 30 representatives of international, regional and sub-regional organisations, including ITTO. The workshop provided participants with the opportunity to share information, collectively assess initial findings related to rehabilitation needs and opportunities, share plans and proposals for future rehabilitation work, and develop mechanisms for collaboration and joint activities.

After a welcome and introduction, four invited speakers set the scene with presentations covering: the role of mangroves and other vegetation in protecting against tsunamis and tidal surges; the role of trees and forests in integrated coastal-zone management; the latest assessment of the impacts of the tsunami on coastal vegetation; and the assessment of wood use and needs for reconstruction in the region.

During an open forum, participants from the affected countries described rehabilitation and reconstruction activities related to trees and forests. Representatives of the international organisations also had the opportunity to outline ongoing and planned activities. Based on the presentations, discussions and ideas expressed, participants were divided into three working groups to draw joint conclusions and elaborate a common vision and principles to guide forest-related rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in the region.

The workshop made a number of recommendations. In particular, participants recommended the establishment of a regional partnership to foster collaboration and coordination of forest-related initiatives in rehabilitation efforts. The partnership would include affected countries, international and regional organisations, NGOs, research organisations and other stakeholders including donors. The objective would be to support a forestry response to the tsunami that is cost-effective, comprehensive, technically sound and developed within the context of integrated coastal-zone management and sustainable livelihoods. The immediate activities of the partnership would be oriented towards tsunami-affected areas in Asia but would also be relevant to other affected areas and to mitigation and rehabilitation efforts in future coastal disasters.

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