

## INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

Of the project:

***CoNGOs: NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests***



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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGDRF	Agence de Gestion Durable des Ressources Forestières
CAFI	Central African Forest Initiative
CAR	Central African Republic
CED	Centre for Environment and Development
CIEDD	Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable
CJ	Comptoir Juridique Junior
CoNGOs	Consortium: NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests project
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FGDH	Forum pour la Gouvernance et les Droits de l'Homme
FLEGT	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
FPP	Forest Peoples Programme
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
ILLUCBF	Improving Livelihoods and Land Use in the Congo Basin Forests
MEFP	Maison pour l'Enfant et la Femme Pygmées
MINPMESSA	Ministère des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises, de l'Economie Sociale et de l'Artisanat
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Product
ODDHC	Organisation pour le Développement et les Droits Humains au Congo
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGDF	Plateforme de Gestion Durable des Forêts
PDRSO	Projet de Développement Régional du Sud-Ouest
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, plus the sustainable management of forests, and the conservation and enhancement of forest
REPALCA	Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers de Centrafrique
RFUK	Rainforest Foundation UK
RoC	Republic of Congo
SMP	Simple Management Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TFRD	Tropical Forest and Rural Development
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement
WG	Well Grounded

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### **Disclaimer**

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of IIED or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

## Executive Summary

CoNGOs: NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests (simply called *CoNGOs*) is a project led by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). The other partners of the project include Well Grounded, Forest Peoples Programme, Fern, ClientEarth, and Rainforest Foundation UK. The project was implemented in five Congo Basin countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Republic of Congo (RoC) and Gabon. In each of those countries, with the exception of Gabon, at least one local organisation executed project activities. The project had as its overall objective to contribute to the achievement of sustainable and secure community livelihoods in the Congo Basin, as part of the Department for International Development's (DFID) Improving Livelihoods and Land Use in the Congo Basin Forests (ILLUCBF) programme.

This report assesses the performance and achievements in relation to the project's overall goal, specific objectives, outputs and activities. It captures the main findings of an independent evaluation conducted by a multi-disciplinary team of consultants with long experience on community forestry, forest governance, and related topics. As per the Terms of Reference of this independent evaluation, an emphasis was put on four OECD- DAC criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability. The consultants used a mix of approaches in order to both assess the current situation and explore the potential future of community forestry in the sub-region.

**Relevance:** The project sought to address two pressing and strongly connected issues in the Congo Basin: the insecurity of land and forest rights for local and indigenous communities and unrivalled levels of poverty. As useful as it may be to address these issues, community forestry (CF) still has a low profile in the region. Little knowledge and capacity exist to harness its full potential. The project was therefore timely and appropriate as it targeted all key stakeholders who can play a role against these issues. In order to prevent challenges associated with the number and diversity of partners, three important measures were undertaken: (i) flexible and bottom-up approach –giving priority to local and national contexts; (ii) designing tools to ensure good coordination between partners, including a “delivery chain” diagram to frame accountability relations; and (iii) robust management tools. However, some the tools and approaches, notably with regards to gender mainstreaming and community leadership, were not owned by all partners. Consequently, some partners developed very good practices, while others maintained business as usual approaches in implementing project activities.

**Effectiveness:** The project overachieved its set impact, outcome and outputs. It supported communities to secure or initiate securing process over some 90,000 hectares of forest lands. CAR, Cameroon and DRC registered the most significant successes, with two major innovations that may be duplicated across the region. In CAR, the allocation of CF within a forest concession opened the way for thousands of communities whose ancestral lands have been occupied by concessions, and which disposed no leverage to claim back certain portions. In DRC and Cameroon, the business model proposed by the project started yielding both financial and social benefits. At political level, the project gathered and stimulated strong collaboration between Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) across the region, strongly influenced legal reform processes in CAR, DRC and RoC, and, contributed to the elaboration of the Brazzaville Roadmap on CF. The enabling factors to these successes include, among others, strong internal coordination among partners, work with national platforms to increase the voice, and prior trust relationships between country partners and

communities involved in the project. The evaluation also observed some non-achievements, especially on the actual surface of forest land secured and policy influence. The conflict between large-scale investments and community priorities as well as weak leadership with national platforms of NGOs constitute some factors to those non-achievements.

**Efficiency:** The project was very efficient in the use of resources to achieve project objectives. The systems put in place by IIED ensured that funding was managed in an efficient manner. The fact that all financial and technical reports were always submitted on time is in itself an achievement, considering the number of partners. Frequent (monthly, quarterly and annual) meetings were organised at different levels (UK, implementing country, overall project) to deal with management issues, but also prioritise and draw key lessons from implementation. In addition, the project set in place systems such as the Risk management framework, which help dealing with issues as they happened.

**Sustainability:** There is no doubt that some of the achievements of this project will endure beyond the initial project period. Key sustainability factors include the availability of a strong body of evidence on diverse topics in relation with CF, innovative capacity building approaches especially the Market Analysis and Development to strengthen community enterprise and forestry entrepreneurship, the set-up of a small-grant scheme which permitted that community cooperatives and members learned to apply for funding, and actually obtained funding. The engagement of state officials at various levels, even if it has not yielded substantial results, may prove benefits in the long-run. The project's engagement and contributions to the Brazzaville road map and successes in the Central African Republic to secure community forests and mapping for rights in DRC have all laid the framework for lesson learning and scaling up of community forestry in the Congo Basin.

The evaluation team suggested recommendations to take advantage of the achievements of the project, and identified priorities for scaling up community forestry in the sub-region.

#### *Recommendations*

- The project strongly contributed to mainstream community forestry in Cameroon, CAR, DRC and Congo, and at the regional level. However, there is need for sustained debate around the topic. IIED and partners should continue pressing for law reforms that really capture the lessons from the project.
- In CAR and Republic of Congo, future advocacy efforts should focus on removing the obstacle in the forest code that hinders the attribution of CFs to communities in forest concession or community development areas respectively.
- The entrepreneurship component of the CoNGOs project was highly innovative especially through facilitating access to productive resources, markets and external support networks for community enterprise and entrepreneurship. This is very relevant for promoting rural development and aligns with the mission of the government of the Congo Basin countries to drive inclusive growth and to become emerging economies. Hence, IIED and partners should encourage the established cooperatives to work closely with the relevant decentralized government structures as these structures could constitute a source of technical and financial support necessary for sustaining the activities and overall functioning of the enterprises. There must be sustained long term funding and technical support for this type of initiative as it is likely to have benefits beyond forestry to other areas such as climate change and REDD+.

- Many of the enterprises created could be considered to be just beyond incubation and there is need to sustain support through growth and development. For sustainability, this requires development of bespoke business support organisations or community entrepreneurship hubs adapted to different country contexts particularly concerning issues of ownership, leadership, power and institutional frameworks. This could be informed by much stronger lesson learning with ICRAF DRYAD project outcomes and future exchanges with other countries with demonstrated success of community forestry entrepreneurship support.
- IIED and Cameroonian partners should support in the elaboration of a transparent, effective and equitable benefit sharing mechanism within the community enterprises, in order to prevent future conflicts.
- CoNGOs has started reversing the bad reputation of CF, based on Cameroon experience, by bringing up good cases in all countries. However, IIED and partners need to keep collecting evidence on the successes of community forestry and share it with wider audience.
- IIED and partners should strongly encourage each partner organisation to use and monitor the usefulness of the innovations brought through organisational development. The recent publication on organisational development may help achieving this recommendation. In projects of this size and complexity, dedicated gender advisors or teams could further strengthen gender considerations in project delivery.

Seven Priorities have been identified to keep raising the profile of CF in the Congo Basin.

1. *Community Forestry is a necessity and should be quickly scaled-up:* there is a need to multiply the number and quality of CFs across all countries.
2. *Increased revenues within communities developing CF is a high priority:* CFs would gain from being developed with an economic perspective, along with its social and land security dimensions.
3. *Improved evidence should be compiled in the final project briefings of how CF contributes to fight more systemic issues: forest governance, gender inequality, poverty, and climate change.*
4. *Investments should be made to facilitate stronger CF organisations and networks in all five countries:* those organisations and networks need to have a higher voice in political and decision-making processes.
5. *More fluid synergies can be built at regional level through further peer-to-peer learning.*
6. *More support from donors and other stakeholders for CF is needed:* CF is inherently a cross-cutting issue, therefore a wide range of actors should be associated to current debates.
7. *There is a need to continue to work towards more innovative and simplified legal frameworks:* This should facilitate local community ownership and leadership ensuring the forest dependent communities drive CF processes that benefit them.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Project Description

The project “NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests (CoNGOs)” is a three-year (2016 to 2019) Department for International Development (DFID) funded project designed to improve the livelihoods of forest dependent communities in the Congo Basin through better governance and practice<sup>1</sup>. Facilitated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), CoNGOs is a consortium of in-country teams and international partners currently active in five countries of the Congo Basin. The project had as its overall objective to contribute to the achievement of sustainable and secure community livelihoods in the Congo Basin, as part of the Department for International Development’s (DFID) Improving Livelihoods and Land Use in the Congo Basin Forests (ILLUCBF) programme (See Annex VII: project publications). In order to achieve the project’s goal, the international partners collaborated with more than 10 in-country NGO partners to advance community forestry rights and enterprise in: Cameroon, CAR, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, and the Republic of Congo.

**Outputs:** The project was designed to contribute to achieving the anticipated impact of the DFID programme of support to the development of sustainable and secure community livelihoods in the Congo Basin. The initiative intended to pursue country-specific actions and a trans-country learning and capacity-building approach to achieve the following outputs:

- ❑ ***Improved evidence on viable options for community forestry, including strengthening of rights***, generated and verified by relevant stakeholders in the Congo Basin countries.
- ❑ ***Stronger capacity of community organisations to pursue resource rights security and commercial forest and farm production options, and articulate policy changes*** in national forest governance and land use planning processes.
- ❑ ***More effective policy engagement and implementation in support of sustainable and profitable community forestry*** through collaboration of rights-holders, civil society organisations and national institutions in sub-national, national, regional and international policy processes.

## 1.2. Context

The Congo Basin is the second largest tropical forest basin in the world and is of global significance in terms of carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and global water cycles. It extends over 300 million hectares and is spread over 6 African countries, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo (RoC), Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Cameroon and Gabon. These forests make up almost 70% of Africa’s forests (91% of Africa’s moist forests) and are home to an extraordinary biodiversity that represents an immeasurable potential for regional socio-economic development.

The Congo Basin forests are home to about 40 million people and support livelihoods for more than 75 million people from more than 150 ethnic groups who rely on local natural resources for food,

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<sup>1</sup> See the main project document.

nutritional, health, and livelihoods needs. Development needs in Congo Basin countries are also great with between one and two thirds of the population beneath the national poverty line. These forests constitute an important safety net in countries where poverty and undernourishment are highly prevalent. They provide crucial protein sources to local people through bushmeat and fisheries. Forest products, whether directly consumed or traded for cash, also provide a substantial portion of local peoples' income. These forests also perform valuable ecological services at global level. The Congo Basin forests represent about 25 percent of the total carbon stored in tropical forests worldwide, mitigating anthropogenic emissions.

Since the colonial era, the model of state-centred forest management has been the most common in South East Asia, parts of the Amazon and especially in West and Central Africa<sup>2</sup>. It has been argued that one of the consequences of state controlled forestry or 'forest government'<sup>3</sup> has been the overexploitation of forest resources often in conflict with local forest dependent communities and state conservation objectives<sup>4</sup>. Due to numerous market failures, missing markets and governance and institutional shortfalls, forests in the Congo Basin are under increasing pressure from commercial and subsistence agriculture, timber harvesting, extraction for fuelwood or charcoal, mining and road-building, and general encroachment on community territories. The failure of forest government to achieve sustainable forest management has led to calls for multi-stakeholder forest governance processes beyond government<sup>5</sup>. Community forestry has been one avenue through which stakeholders in the Congo Basin have sought to address the failures of state controlled forestry as a means to support sustainable resource management and development. While there is good evidence that community forestry has had a proven impact on reducing deforestation and improving livelihoods across a range of countries, such as in Brazil, Nepal and Guatemala, the "community forestry" concept remains a contested idea in the Congo Basin.

The huge number of small scale producers, working on farms and in the forest, whose economic aspirations might unleash much more equitable and sustainable growth, are not adequately supported. Communities are being increasingly marginalised from mainstream economy participation in decision making about use of natural resources, and face increasing threats of dispossession, due to longstanding tenure insecurity. State agencies in the region generally limit community forestry subordinate subsistence rights, supported by redistribution of revenues from forest and other resource exploitation carried out by third parties in the customary domains involved. Women's control of land in the Congo Basin remains at particularly low levels. Women continue to face deeply entrenched discrimination and have little decision making power over forest resources - being largely limited to usage rights over non timber forest products.

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2 KARSENTY, A., DRIGO, I.G., PIKETTY, M-GA and SINGER, B. 2008. Regulating industrial forest concessions in Central Africa and South America. *Forest Ecology and Management* 256 (2008) 1498–1508

<http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/368/1625/20120300.short>

3 ARTS, B. 2014. Assessing forest governance from a "Triple G" perspective: Government, governance, governmentality. *Forest Policy and Economics* 49(2014) 17-22

4 BOSE, P., ARTS, B. and VAN DIJK, H., 2012. "Forest governmentality": a genealogy of subject-making of forest-dependent scheduled tribes in India. *Land Use Policy* 29 (2012) 664 - 673.

5 CASHORE, B. and STONE, M. 2012. Can legality verification rescue global forest governance? Analyzing the potential of public and private policy intersection to ameliorate forest challenges in Southeast Asia. *Forest Policy and Economics* 18 (2), 13- 22

The project was designed to address these issues by bringing together a wide consortium of international and national NGOs with experience in the Congo Basin to work directly with a range of key stakeholders in forest dependent communities, such as forest and farm producers, indigenous peoples, and women groups, to help build the foundations for a more inclusive and equal forest and land use sector in the Congo Basin.

### 1.3. Purpose of the Independent Evaluation

The specific objective of the evaluation is to assess the performance and achievements in relation to the project's overall goal, specific objectives, outputs and activities (Annex I : ToR for the Evaluation). The selection process for the consultants in charge of this evaluation was led by IIED which invited experts through a call for expression of interest. The team selected is constituted of three consultants from the Congo Basin, with expertise in a wide range of topics pertaining to the management of forests (community forestry, land tenure, forestry, environment management, gender mainstreaming, and organisational development, among others) in all five countries of the project. The evaluation provided an independent assessment of the project design, implementation, management and administration. The evaluators also assessed the performance of the project with respect to the extent to which the different activities realized over the project's period (2016 to 2019) were able to contribute or not contribute towards attaining the goals and objectives of the project. The evaluation compared the baseline situation prior to the commencement of the project to the existing situation following the implementation of the project's activities with a focus on identifying relevant sustainability factors beyond the project's life.

Different from traditional evaluation exercises, the evaluators sought to document best practices, lessons learnt as well as identified models which could be scaled up, adapted or replicated. Key to this focus was to situate and reflect on the future of community forestry not only within the community land rights debate but also within the international donor community debate on the role of community forestry in inclusive sustainable development. It is expected that these issues will facilitate learning amongst partners and provide the evidence needed for evidence-based programming and policy engagement.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Approach/Methods employed

#### *Overall Approach of the final evaluation*

The evaluation complied with the Organisation for Economic Co-operations and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability. Gender mainstreaming and poverty reduction were considered as cross-cutting themes during the whole process. The assessment also entailed the identification of good practices generated so far from the implementation of the project in the different project countries.

#### *Phases employed in the final evaluation*

The methodology considered a three-stage approach: (i) Inception phase, (ii) Data collection and analysis phase and (iii) Close out phase and reporting.

#### *Inception phase*

The objective of the inception phase was for the evaluation team and IIED to agree on the scope and expectations regarding the evaluation of the CoNGOs project. Two meetings were held between the evaluation team and IIED CoNGOs's project manager and IIED's Forest Team Leader. These inception meetings enabled the team to have a better understanding of the objectives of the evaluation from the programmatic and strategic/forward looking view. Through these meetings potential key respondents were identified including project partners and beneficiaries in the different project countries. The inception phase terminated with the evaluators elaborating and submitting an inception report to IIED.

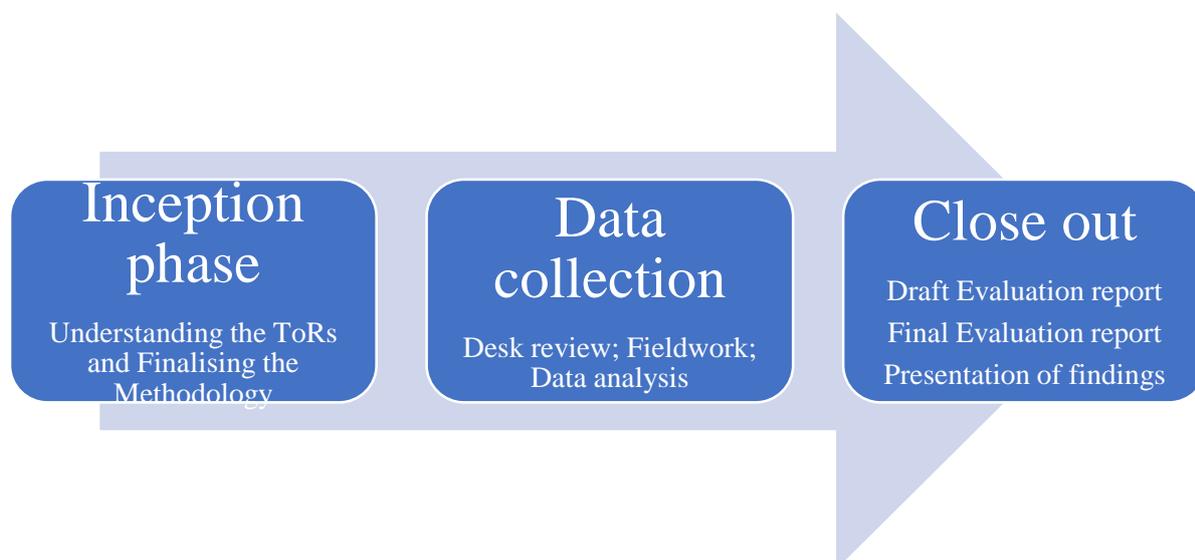


Figure 1: Phases of the Evaluation

#### *Data collection and analysis phase*

Two major types of data were collected:

*Qualitative data:* This permitted an understanding of the context on which the CoNGOs project operated in each of the project countries, how it aligned with other national or regional projects and

the challenges it has faced so far. The collection of qualitative data was aimed at drawing lessons learnt as well as challenges encountered in the course of project implementation. The obtained data was then used to draw inferences on the lived experiences of project partners and beneficiaries as well as their views about ways forward regarding community forestry in the Congo Basin.

*Quantitative data:* This provided information to support the identification of trends and enable cross-country comparison as well as triangulation of data sets to ensure quality control. The evaluation team gathered detailed and critical primary and secondary data from three sources:

#### **a. Desk review and research**

Findings were identified through document review and validated through interviews with stakeholders and project partners. Sources of documented information included inter alia:

- Project documents and communication products: work plans, progress reports, evaluation reports, policy analysis documents, tools and advocacy outputs;
- Quarterly and annual reports submitted by IIED and partners to DFID;
- Media coverage and project partner social media presence including blogs;
- Grey/published literature/research on community forestry generally and the Congo basin more specifically;
- Conference reports, presentations, keynote statements
- Literature on Congo basin context and donor environment and perspectives regarding the future and models of support to inclusive sustainable forest management.

The list of documents consulted and reviewed is in Annex VII of this report.

#### **b. Data collection**

We collected primary data through face to face interviews and discussions as well as Skype and telephone calls. As agreed with the client, field visits were organised to two out of the five project countries (Cameroon and Central African Republic – CAR) during which interviews were carried out with project partners, beneficiaries and national stakeholders. The aim of the field visits was to consult a wider group of stakeholders and project beneficiaries in order to assess the relevance and impact of the project. It was also an opportunity to capture the lived experiences of project partners and beneficiaries and their perspectives of community forestry beyond the project initial period. In collaboration with the various country project teams, the evaluators conducted interviews and group discussions with selected project beneficiaries and stakeholders and held group discussions with community members in Cameroon (Mayos, Nomedjoh and Koundi) and CAR (Moloukou and Modimaba). Project partners and beneficiaries in the remaining three project countries (Congo and DRC) were interviewed via Skype or telephone. A list of actors consulted as part of the evaluation exercise is presented in Annex V while the data collections tools used for primary data collection are presented in Annex IV.

#### **c. Data analysis**

Qualitative data collected through interviews and group discussions was transcribed, cleaned and processed before analysis. In line with the evaluation questions, the transcripts were then coded which allowed the team to draw together major emerging themes and perspectives. Quantitative data collected through semi structured interviews were also cleaned and Microsoft Excel used to analyse and present the information in simple descriptive statistics. Secondary data collected was analysed using content analysis. Content analysis allows evaluators to make replicable and valid inferences from text. The process involves moving from the key issues being investigated and researcher's expertise in the area to scan the text. This enabled the evaluation team to identify broad subjects in line with the

evaluation and then to carry out a closer evaluation of the different issues addressed in line with the context under which this action was implemented. The evaluators built on these findings to draw out initial lessons learned and best practices and complemented this with expressed live testimonies from respondents and key informants.

### *Close out phase and reporting*

Once data analysis was completed an initial draft evaluation report was elaborated and submitted to IIED for feedback and contributions.

## 2.2. Limitations

The timing of the evaluation was the main limiting factor which affected data collection. In the first instance, many of the potential respondents and stakeholders were on leave during the evaluation period resulting in a lower rate of response and participation than was initially expected based on sampling size. To address this situation, follow up emails and skype/telephone calls were sent to those who were on holidays. This increased the number of responses received slightly. The same approach was however not possible for indigenous peoples' and local communities in Cameroon. August is the time of the year when communities go into the forest to harvest Non Timber Forest Products. This resulted in lower participation of project beneficiaries in group discussions organised.

Field work in communities in CAR was very challenging due to the poor state of roads leading from Mbaiki to Moloukou. For this reason, the planned visit to Lokombe community was cancelled given that the car got stuck on the road several times. With the prevailing security situation in the country, a decision was made not to pursue the journey considering the time that was allocated to the field visits.

Given the limited scope of the project activities in Gabon, the project team was unable to collect any primary data. ClientEarth contracted Gabonese consultants between 2017 and 2018 for short-term studies, including an analysis of the legal framework highlighting gaps and opportunities to upscale community forestry and, subsequent recommendations. Reports produced were reviewed by the evaluation team.

## 3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### 3.1. Relevance of project design

#### *Timeliness and appropriateness of the project*

The project sought to address two pressing and strongly connected issues in the Congo Basin: the insecurity of land and forest rights for local and indigenous communities and unrivalled levels of poverty. In the five project countries, land management remains highly centralised and is characterised, *de facto*, by a dualism wherein customary and positive systems are enforced. Under customary tenure system, communities use and claim ownership rights over more than 60% of the national territories. However, as per the law, communities own no land, and only control an average of 2% of national land areas<sup>6</sup>. Community forestry has so far constituted the main opportunity to close the gap between claimed and controlled lands. In Cameroon where it was pioneered more than twenty years ago, communities control 9% of the national territory, while in other countries, the level of control oscillates between 0% and 1%. In addition to enabling land security, community forestry is also a lever to improve internal cohesion within communities, strengthen their capacities, and open space for their participation in decision-making processes. In spite of these strong points, it is yet to achieve its main goal which was to reduce poverty and support development initiatives.

Several challenges have been identified<sup>78</sup> in advancing community forestry. Firstly, the lack of a comprehensive legal framework recognising community forestry in countries such as RoC and Gabon. In the second place and where the law exists, long, complex and administrative processes and costs required for obtaining and managing a community forest title made it easy for capture by elites, NGOs, and state agents. Hence, communities were unable to benefit from the revenues generated by their forests. Thirdly, the governance and revenue management structures within community forest (CF), were generally described as being undemocratic, poorly capacitated and opaque. Fourthly, social constraints such as lack of understanding and ownership of the concept of CF itself in its legal and administrative forms meant that in most cases CF processes were most often externally initiated. Fourthly, gender barriers and constraints to access and use of the resource due to marginalisation of women, lack of capital, equipment etc., limited the potential of CFs. The fifth challenge is that the development model behind most CFs was characterised as biased towards timber exploitation which greatly under looked other opportunities beyond timber in the communities. Finally, the type of rights secured through community forestry –management right, for a limited period of time – and the maximum surface area permitted was not in adequacy with community land claims –ownership right, in perpetuity and over larger surface areas.

Despite these challenges, in the establishment of community forestry in Cameroon, the concept has proved robust and has inspired all countries in the region. At the regional level, the Brazzaville Roadmap, elaborated under the auspices of FAO, is a perfect illustration of this interest<sup>9</sup>. Aligned with COMIFAC Convergence Plan's priority on the need to improve community involvement in the

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6 Rights and Resources Initiative. 2015. Who Owns the World's Land? A global baseline of formally recognized indigenous and community land rights. Washington, DC: RRI. <http://www.rightsandresources.org/publication/whoownstheland>

7 Macqueen, D., Harty, E. and Bolin, A. (Editors) (2017) Opportunities and approaches to supporting: Community forest enterprises - proceedings of the first CoNGOs learning event, Kribi, Cameroon, 18 – 20 July 2017. IIED, London, UK

8 Moutoni, L.2019. Community Forestry in Cameroon – an overview of the community perspective

9 FAO. 2018. *Rendre la foresterie participative plus efficace en Afrique centrale dans le contexte de l'agenda 2030* - La feuille de route de Brazzaville. [Série.] Libreville. 36 pp

management of forest resources, this roadmap was prepared with support of more than a hundred experts from nine countries in the region and international institutions.

The CoNGOs project was designed in a regional context characterised by government efforts to improve the governance of natural resources, notably through processes such as reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD+), Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT). It is also important to mention commitments taken by regional governments to contribute to the achievement of climate change objectives under the Paris Climate Agreement. Governments in target countries have developed nationally determined contributions as well as national climate change strategies all geared towards adaptation and mitigation of climate change impacts. These national contexts aligned and fed an international setting where the role of locally controlled forests, notably community forests, in ensuring community land security and poverty reduction was gradually recognised.

The CoNGOs project was also designed in a context characterised by weak organisational and institutional capacity of key private sector and civil society actors which was generally considered as limiting their ability to influence and participate effectively in national forest policy issues<sup>10</sup>. Taking into consideration this context, the relevance of the project was confirmed by all respondents as timely and meeting the needs of the target groups. Respondents thought that CoNGOs clearly captured the complex context in the Congo Basin providing an opportunity to draw on experiences in Cameroon, to further ongoing initiatives in Gabon, CAR and DRC and inspire the development of CF in Congo while avoiding past errors.

All respondents agreed that the CONGOs project stimulated debates and created the space for the emergence of a more robust community forestry in the region while complementing other ongoing initiatives such as *DRYAD: Financing Sustainable community forest enterprises in Cameroon* led by ICRAF and *MappingForRights* implemented by RFUK. As for the latter specifically, the CoNGOs project, through RFUK, supported national partners to raise the profile of community mapping in the region through the organisation of national workshops and the update of its database with data from all countries. The link between both projects was therefore more than complementary – the CoNGOs project literally incorporated components of MappingForRights.

Overall, CONGOs combined three essential components: securing CF land rights, supporting sustainable income-generation from those rights, and enabling learnings at all stages, and for all relevant stakeholders. The design of the project also acknowledged that NGOs acting in the forest sector often lack of some fundamental enterprise development and organisational development capacities. For the first gap, it proposed the very successful *Market Analysis and Development* methodology; while the second gap, the project rightfully included a component on the organisational development for NGOs working on community forestry, and connected topics.

### *Approach and project design of the CoNGOs initiative*

CoNGOs was designed by all six European partners, with inputs from national organisations in the Congo Basin. It provided an opportunity to nurture and strengthen partnerships between national and

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<sup>10</sup> Mbzibain, A and Ongolo, S. 2019. Complementary, substitution and rivalry in the governance of forests. Lessons from Independent forest monitoring in Cameroon. Forest Policy and Economics.

international partners while drawing on complementary areas of expertise and experience. IIED is specialised in policy research and their Forest Team have expertise in community enterprise development, while Well Grounded are skilled in organisational capacity development, FPP and ClientEarth in legal empowerment, RFUK in the securing of community land rights notably through mapping, and FERN in forest governance. FPP and RFUK work closely with local and indigenous communities, while the others mainly work with organisations supporting those. In addition, most of those had had bilateral or tri-lateral collaborations before this project, and had therefore been able to build a considerable amount of social capital and trust relationships. Not to forget that even those that had little interactions in the past had come to work in the same areas (Africa, Latin America and Asia), and often with the same partners.

Prime facie, this diversity of expertise and the past collaboration constituted strong assets for the project. Yet, the design process proved to be one of the most cumbersome. According to the senior staff in all the consortium partner organisations who took part to the design process, it was “painstaking”. As pointed out by an RFUK senior staff, DFID’s requirement for this funding was that only consortiums, with complementary expertise could apply. The initial discussions with European organisations involved some fifteen different groups. Even after this consortium of six organisations was constituted, three of the prominent questions that were brought forward related to the ideas, leadership, and the coordination. As we will show below, a robust theory of change, allowing both alignment on a general objective and flexibility to enable innovations was designed in relations to the first issue. As per second and third, IIED played a central role from the outset of the design process. As suggested by the same RFUK senior staff, *“IIED was probably the best middle-ground between too conflictual approaches to community forestry, and could therefore link together those different views”*. Indeed, the issue of leadership was both related to willingness to coordinate the efforts of all partners, and capacity to unify divergent voices. IIED’s experience and past relations with all the partners was in that sense an invaluable asset.

The inception phase proved instrumental to set the grounds for good coordination among partners. Agreements were signed between IIED and consortium partners, and between all those partners and most of their counterparts in the five project countries. This meant designing and validating important tools including due diligence procedures, a more detailed and updated logframe and work plan including country-specific work plans, a Risk Management Matrix (comprising concrete mitigating actions for identified risks), and a plan of communication. In addition to these essential tools, and still to ensure cohesive internal communication, a delivery chain diagram was designed establishing accountability relationships between UK-based partners, UK-based partners and Congo Basin partners, and among the latter. Finally, still during the inception phase, an Advisory Committee was established in order to *“provide strategic advice, links, and outreach with key national, regional and international processes that will contribute to achieving the purpose of the CoNGOs project<sup>11</sup>”*. The committee is constituted of 4 men and four women, from the research world, international NGOs and African Commission. Refreshingly, each of these members’ profile shows that they were highly qualified to effectively upscale the project. While the terms of the reference of this Committee suggested that they may operate as a think tank, IIED and project partners later considered it as a pool of experts from whom they sought advice mainly on publications and new research ideas.

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<sup>11</sup> CoNGOs Team. 2016. Advisory Committee. Terms of Reference.

CoNGOs partners developed a robust theory of change, with a good flow between inputs, outputs and assumptions. The theory of change proposed by this consortium was based on the assumption that creating effective, equitable, sustainable and genuinely community-based management of resources was possible through proactive and participatory approaches addressing the several challenges faced by communities. Secured communities, equipped with good evidence about their options, it was argued could claim their rights and participate effectively in their own sustainable development. It acknowledged the impact of external constraints such as access to financial resources, technological know-how, organizational and business capacity that could influence social, economic and ecological sustainability. It also acknowledged the role of power relationships and their potential to shape access to natural resources and opportunities for their development as well as the potential role of robust evidence to influence policy and choice of intervention options. It must be highlighted that CONGOs project was developed in response to the wider DFID agenda of supporting the development of sustainable and secure community livelihoods in the Congo Basin.

Respondents strongly appreciated the flexible nature of this project which acknowledged that community forestry was at different levels of development in the region. Country partners and targeted communities were strongly supportive of this approach which gave them a margin of manoeuvre for site selection and type of support provided. The actions were built on initial diagnosis carried out in project countries ensuring that activities were grounded on field realities. Another strong point in the design of this action was the explicit role of communities, vulnerable groups, women and indigenous groups specifically, as a precondition for the achievement of each of its outputs. The extent to which existing community forestry structures would be built on could have been better articulated as well as the explicit role of communities themselves in the implementation of the project. As per an assumption for the attainment of Output 3, the strengthening of community forests to have a voice in decision-making processes could only be achieved through *“more effective horizontal and vertical collaboration between CSOs, community forest groups and forest and farm producer organisations”*.

The project adopted a participatory approach which overall ensured that the project responded to community needs were taken into consideration. In the case of the work involving enterprise development with local communities in Cameroon and the DRC, this was designed following the MA&D methodology, which guides potential entrepreneurs through a clear participatory process to plan and develop their enterprises. In Cameroon, it involved local community forest users and in the DRC members of artisanal loggers' associations, most of whom are members of communities with customary community forestry rights. In the case with Okani and FPP, the communities were in the process of planning for and applying for a community forest. Where institutional structures for the CF already existed, such as the CF management committee, members and the chair were included from the start. However, in all cases but Nomedjoh village, these members chose not to follow through with the enterprise development process. Although at least one timber enterprise was identified as a potential, in reviewing both its financial viability and on-going legal challenges with the local government related to their permits, it was decided not to follow through with this enterprise. This did not help in strengthening linkages between the CF enterprises being established and the CF management committee, even if they were included and aware throughout. While the principle of such horizontality and participation seems to have constituted a pillar of the project, it appears that in Cameroon, some organisations (FPP and Okani) developed approaches strongly grounded on Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) at all stages of the project, while others did not. In Nomedjoh for

example, it emerged that some community forest members were unaware of key options in their simple management plan, whereas this plan is currently in the pipe for validation by the Ministry of forest. It can be said that despite these issues, the project was successful in finding a fair balance between capacity building and avoiding an interventionist neo-colonial narrative.

It emerged from interviews that some respondents didn't think that there was a clear strategy for using the evidence generated from the project to influence policy and the level at which change was being promoted. For instance, in Cameroon, a lot of work was done with cooperatives but little coordination between national partners for engaging with high level government agencies and officials was demonstrated. Additionally, although there were on-going engagements with the revision of the Forest Code, the project suffered from the lack of consistency within the leading advocacy organisation in Cameroon which affected the efficiency in the coordination and linking between partners and to advocacy agendas. The Brazzaville road map for instance demonstrated a potential high level process but it emerged that project partners didn't always adopt a joint up approach in the process<sup>12</sup>. Though these shortcomings are highlighted, in CAR and, to a smaller extent in RoC, CoNGOs partners coordinated successfully amongst each other for the Ministry of Forestry and private sector companies to approve piloting of CF inside already allocated logging concessions. In CAR this was done in coordination with the on-going land law reform. Ultimately in CAR resulting in the arrêté no 14 « portant attribution des forêts communautaires pilote de l'ombre en république centrafricaine » and in RoC recognition for community forestry in the draft Forest Code. In DRC Tropenbos-DRC were involved in both national and provincial level CF roundtables to bring in their experiences of using the MA&D approach in both the artisanal logging and LCFC's context. In June 2018 the government adopted the national community forestry strategy including with contributions from the MappinforRights project partners and CoNGOs partners.

### *Approach for mitigating gender imbalance*

Gender imbalance, it has been argued, is one of the main obstacles to sustainable community forestry. Women who are the main users and carers of the forest are very often excluded from the decision-making processes. The evaluators found evidence that gender was taken into consideration during the project delivery including through gender balanced teams, allocation of budgets for gender-informed activities, gender-sensitive activities, capacity-building and advocacy for more equitable policies. In addition, six-monthly coordination meetings served to assess gender-balance results. As demonstrated by an IIED senior staff, IIED developed *“quite sophisticated [approaches], involving deliberate selection of businesses led by women, gender sensitive business training, working to establish a gender champions network, analysis of how best to incubate women's businesses etc.”* However, there was little evidence that there was a clearly articulated overarching and understood gender strategy for the project. Each partner seems to have been given the liberty to follow their own approach. The evaluation team was unable to identify any gender analysis tools applied in the country diagnosis though most country reports strongly indicated the role women play in sustainable forest management and in improving household livelihoods. The lack of such tools resulted in discrepancies from the earliest stages of the project. The diagnosis reports for instance, differ in the way they each addressed gender imbalance –which in all cases was only a very minor component. Furthermore, even when women exclusion was observed as an urgent issue in a report, the actions suggested to address

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<sup>12</sup> Kamkuimo, P. 2018. Suivi de la mise en oeuvre des recommandations de l'évaluation interne a mi-parcours du projet CoNGOs en République du Congo.

it were either minimalist or non-existent. The diagnosis report of Cameroon is a perfect example. It observes that “*women, indigenous peoples and youth often have no or limited say in the management of community resources, and limited or no access to such resources*”. However, none of the four “Options to enhance community-based forest management” makes direct reference to gender.

In fact, it goes without saying that in a project of this size, covering different realities, implemented by more than 15 organisations, each with their own appraisal of gender dimension, a perfect alignment was out of reach. A dedicated gender advisor or team could have provided much needed support to less competent partners in the areas of gender mainstreaming.

### 3.2. Project effectiveness in terms of achievements

#### *Progress towards achievement of overall impact, outcome, and outputs*

##### *Impact*

While it is premature to talk about the impact of the project, initial evidence suggests that substantial ground work has been done and reasonable progress has been achieved by the project in achieving the overall impact, outcome and outputs. In general, the project has achieved or over achieved what it had set out to attain. The project succeeded in attaining the target of three (indicator 1, 3 and 4) of its four impact indicators as presented in Figure 2. With regards to indicator 2, it is worth mentioning that the 4 community forests not yet allocated in CAR connected to the work of FPP and REPALCA, as well as the attempt on establishing a community forest in Cameroon which did not go through due to the heightened conflicting interest of attributing the land to Biopalm, all constituted estimated targets that were unattained. This in part, explains why indicator 2 was underachieved (28%). Concerning improvement in land use governance that supports forest dependent communities in the Congo Basin - impact, the project assessed the improved inclusion and adoption of civil society consultation and recommendations in the multi-stakeholder process of land tenure reform in CAR and Republic of Congo. The consortium partners are continuously involved in the forest code and land reform processes in all countries.

*Outcome: Improved governance and practice for equitable and sustainable community forestry livelihoods in the Congo Basin.*

A total of 7 processes were influenced by the project including: four national legal forestry and land law reforms in Gabon (forest code), RoC (forest code), CAR (land law) and DRC (national community forestry strategy); and one regional process for the Congo Basin (CAFI). An additional national process for the NDC’s in Cameroon was influenced by the community forest civil society platform while a regional roadmap (Brazzaville Roadmap) for participatory forest management in the Congo Basin was led by FAO with inputs from forest ministries and civil societies in the region.

Also, the project has attained some progress in the light of securing CF rights for communities. In Cameroon, 2 CF committees in Nomedjoh and Nkolenyeng with 1800 inhabitants and 2,972 ha of forest were supported by CED in the revision of their simple management plans. The former has been validated, while the second was rejected. In Congo, the CoNGOs project supported communities through trainings and institutional capacity building to manage a total of 10,772 ha of CF. In CAR, three villages (Moloukou, Moalé and Lokombé) secured a pilot CF of 14,975 ha, the very first to have been attributed in the country. Additionally, in Cameroon, FPP and OKANI supported 8 community groups

in 4 villages with a total population of 3,000 inhabitants (38% women/62% men and 35% Bagyeli/65% Bantu) in an attempt to secure 3 CF areas (22,000 ha) in the Ocean Division of the South Region but the process has been hampered by the issuance of a presidential decree for the allocation of the same land to an oil palm company. To support the CF application process, 4 CF bureaus have been established with three already legalized.

In CAR, the project (FPP and RFUK) supported a total of 28 villages of approximately 55,000 inhabitants to secure 4 CFs of about 60,000 ha (15,000 ha each). FPP provided support towards securing rights to 2 CFs of 15,000 ha each for the Bayanga and Belemboke villages. Three villages - Moloukou, Moalé and Lokombé and 11 villages in the Ngotto-Bomango area were supported by RFUK for the establishment of two CF pilots through advocacy and community sensitizations but only the Moloukou pilot CF has been formally approved while communities in the Bomango area were still going through the procedure to draft and validate, in a participatory manner, their CF application (including a Simple Management Plan) in order to secure 13,920 ha. Over 75 individuals (including 14 women and 61 men) were trained in the Mouloukou and Ngotto-Bomango areas. Furthermore, at the request from women in the two pilot sites, the project supported the establishment of women's councils as a fourth type of decision making body, alongside the customary councils, indigenous councils and within the CF management committees, ensuring that the interests or views of women are captured in the management of the CFs.

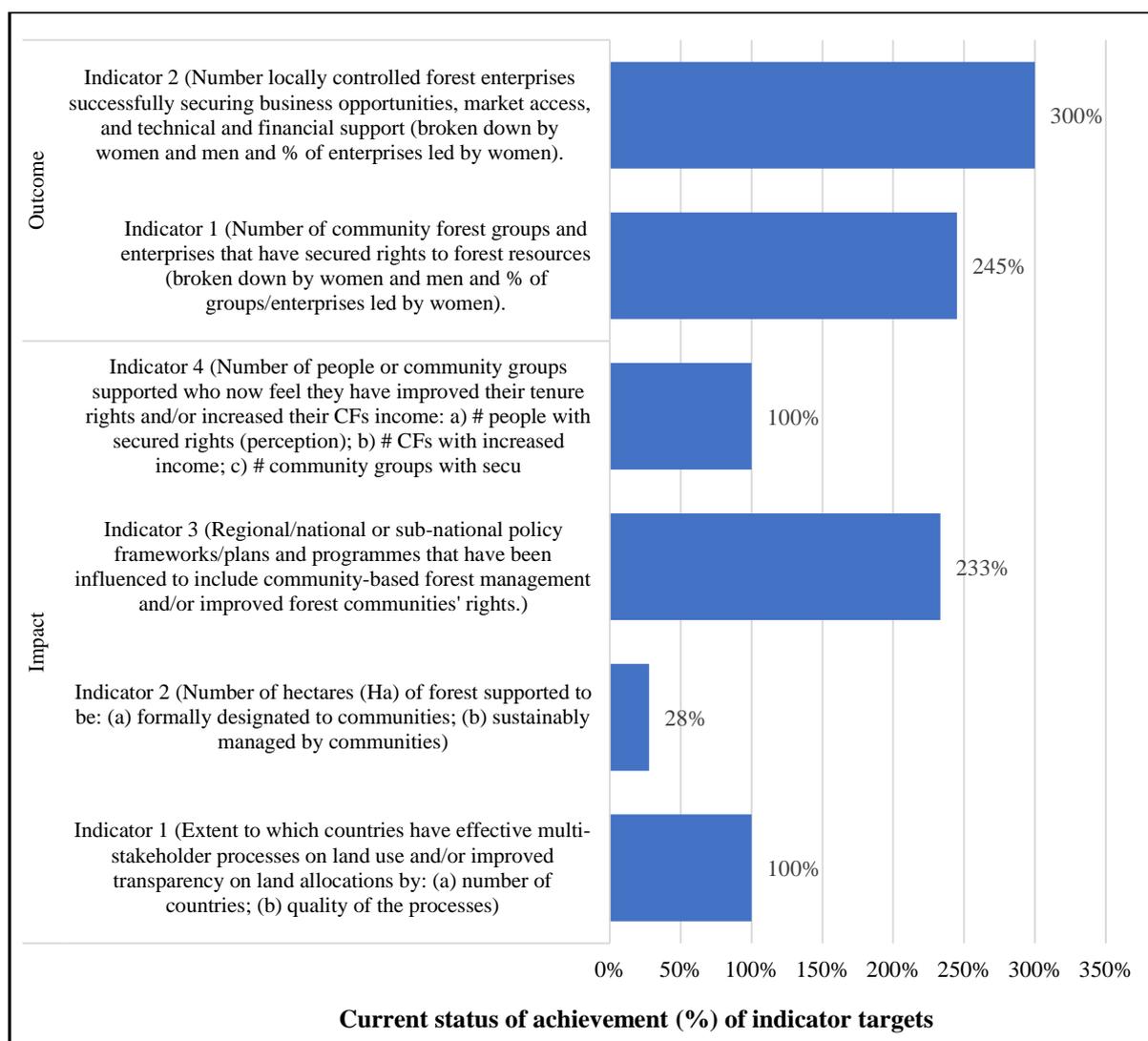


Figure 2: Analysis of progress made towards attainment of project impact and outcome (based on actual achievement of indicators versus the 2020 target). Source: compiled by authors based on review of updated (2019) project logframe

In DRC, the project supported artisanal loggers association members (135 members constituting 7 platforms) to obtain annual harvesting permits (varying from 10 to 100 ha) in customary CFs in order to support sustainability. In the domain of entrepreneurship promotion, the project established 30 group enterprises including 14 in Cameroon and 16 in DRC with access to start-up financing for their business, with some of them in the process of increasing their income by virtue of improved products and better access to markets. The products of enterprises in the DRC ranged from timber and non-timber forest products including medicinal plants. Several cooperatives and group enterprises were provided start-up capital and coaching and over 70% of these groups have been formally registered and created bank accounts with support from the project. As a result of increased productivity and diversification, the enterprises witnessed an increase in monthly turnover. In Cameroon, the established enterprises comprised of 185 members including 172 women (92%) and 10 of the 14 (70%) enterprises are led by women. In the DRC, the 16 enterprises comprised of 73 members including 25 women (34%) and half of the enterprises are women-led.

In Cameroon as a result of their market study entrepreneurs identified a way to sell directly to Nigerian linked traders, tripling the price they receive for bush mango. All enterprises have improved the quality and quantity of their produce as a result of the trainings and have now also started to organise amongst themselves when opportunities arise with a specific buyer and product. Regular interactions between the members of the enterprises either through trainings or exchange visits have resulted in the creation of a marketing cooperative led by members from 4 enterprises in Mayos, Baktala, Koundi and Nomedjoh. This was entirely on their own initiative based on the recognition that in order to benefit from some of markets identified they needed to increase both volume and standardise quality of their produce. Such locally driven initiatives demonstrate the replication of skills learnt during the trainings resulting in the creation of new enterprises. These 4 enterprises increased their production by 100 to 150% and introduced novel techniques for the amelioration of their primary processing and harvesting. Moreover, they have registered as simple cooperatives and created savings and loans accounts with MC2 microfinance and enjoy services from five private and public agencies: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER - extension services); MINPMEESA- enterprise registration and advisory services; the Mayors' office (provincial rural development programmes); MC2 (Microfinance institution for financial services) and Help the Children (agriculture extension).

In the DRC artisanal loggers are now targeting provincial and the national market in Kinshasa instead of the local market to increase their profits. Market studies and trainings in cash-flow analysis have allowed them to in a more systematic manner target and plan for selling at higher value markets and to organise themselves within the association to share transport costs. It may seem as quite straight forward choices to make but this was not happening prior to the trainings. Another unexpected result has been the impact of the trainings on organisation in the region. At the start of the project artisanal loggers associations were only formed in Ituri and Tshopo provinces, not Mongala. But as a result of the trainings and regular follow-up activities by Tropenbos DRC as part of both CoNGOs and another project (Green Livelihoods Alliance - GLA) Mongala now also has its own artisanal loggers association with members committed to sustainable and legal production. Tropenbos DRC also extended the training to one of its CF concession activities (also GLA) which has also led to the establishment of agroforestry enterprises surrounding the forest. After the MA&D training, the community planned for using the profits generated by cocoa to finance a mix of individual and community businesses identified by the community. It will also reduce the time and dependence on the forest for food and subsistence crops, which will reduce some of the current pressure on the forest. In discussion with the governor in each of the three provinces (Ituri, Tshopo and Mongala) there is a strong interest to link enterprise development support activities with provincial efforts to implement various forest sector regulations for community forestry concessions and artisanal forest management units. This is an on-going advocacy effort that Tropenbos DRC will be pursuing beyond the lifetime of the project. In addition, Tropenbos DRC has elaborated a technical brief to encourage provincial governors in Tshopo, Ituri and Mongala to commence preparing for the implementation of the Artisanal Forest Management Units (AFMU's). While the AFMUs are required to enhance sustainability of forest resources in the country, the plans for their implementation according to the arrêté no 85 were due to take effect as from 2018 but as of time when this evaluation was conducted, no AFMU had been allocated in any of the targeted pilot provinces (Tshopo, Ituri and Mongala).

### *Outputs*

**Output 1:** Improved evidence on viable options for community forestry, including strengthening of rights

The project supported the revision and updating of 5 country workplans and conducted the capacity needs assessments for mapping for rights in the five project countries. Pertaining to research products, the project generated 18 research products related to existing legal and practical constraints hindering the upscaling of commercial community forestry in the Congo Basin and relevant options for addressing the challenges. Three videos on community forestry, and one on the impacts of the enterprise development component of the project in the DRC, were also produced by the project. Of the 18 research outputs, 9 were validated/presented at national and regional thematic dialogue events. The project recorded a 100% achievement of indicator 1.1.

**Output 2:** Stronger capacity of community organisations to pursue resource rights security and commercial forest and farm production options, and articulate policy changes

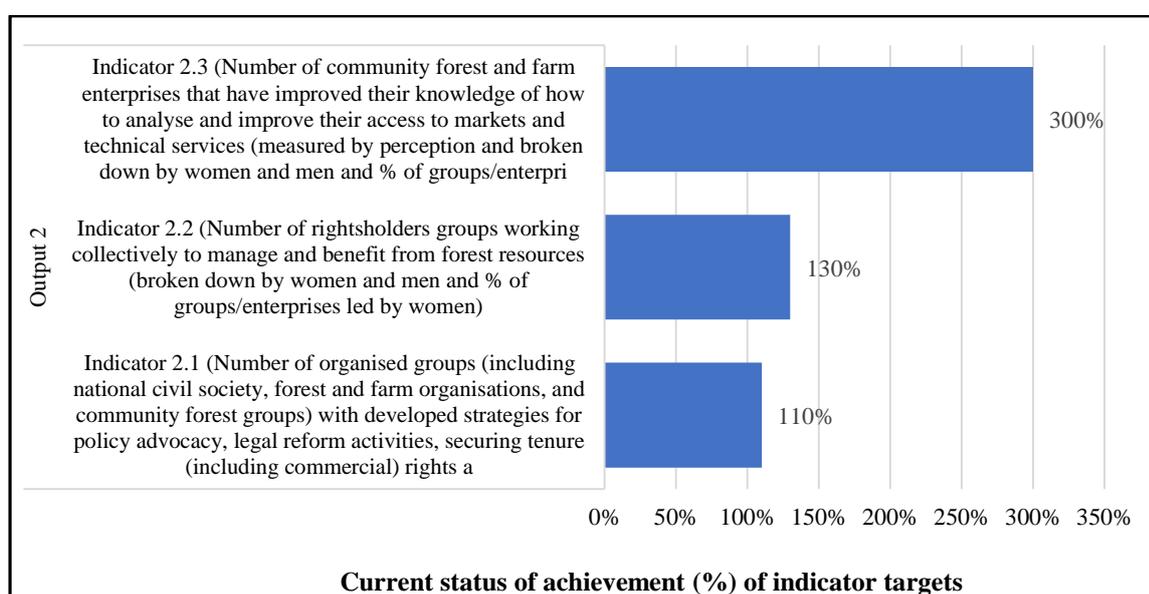


Figure 3: Analysis of progress made towards attainment of output 2 (based on actual achievement of indicators versus the 2020 target) Source: compiled by authors based on review of the updated (2019) project logframe.

The project achieved the target for all the indicators under output 2 with one of the indicators (3.1) having its target achieved by 300% (Figure 3). A total of 33 groups in the region received support from the project in presenting coherent policy priorities/support needs.

- In the Republic of Congo, three communities in the Sangha region presented their livelihood priorities through field dialogues with government and private sector actors.
- Enterprises (14) in Cameroon presented their support needs and priorities to: the regional MINPMESSA representative in the course of the sub-national enterprise exchange; and to both regional and national MINPMESSA representative during the annual CoNGOs meeting.
- In CAR, 11 local communities were engaged in joint field missions and local dialogue on community forestry related issues. Two national platforms/networks (GDRNE and REPALCA) and three CSOs (MEFP, I3D and CIEDD) were supported by the project in the area of organizational capacity strengthening (documenting strategy, resource mobilization, implementation skills – communication, leadership development and participative processes for inclusion and diversity). GDRNE has developed a 5-year strategic plan with several

advocacy initiatives embedded its 2019 workplan and this has enhanced the advocacy potential of the platform.

Concerning the establishment of rightsholders group working together to manage and benefit from forest resources, the CoNGOs project a total of 13 regional clusters: six in Cameroon (with a total of 25 groups) and seven (artisanal loggers associations) organized across eight sites in DRC. A total of 30 Enterprise Development Plans (EDPs) were selected by the project in the DRC (16) Cameroon (14) for small grants support to enable the enterprises to obtain start-up funding from the project.

**Output 3:** More effective policy engagement and implementation in support of sustainable and profitable community forestry

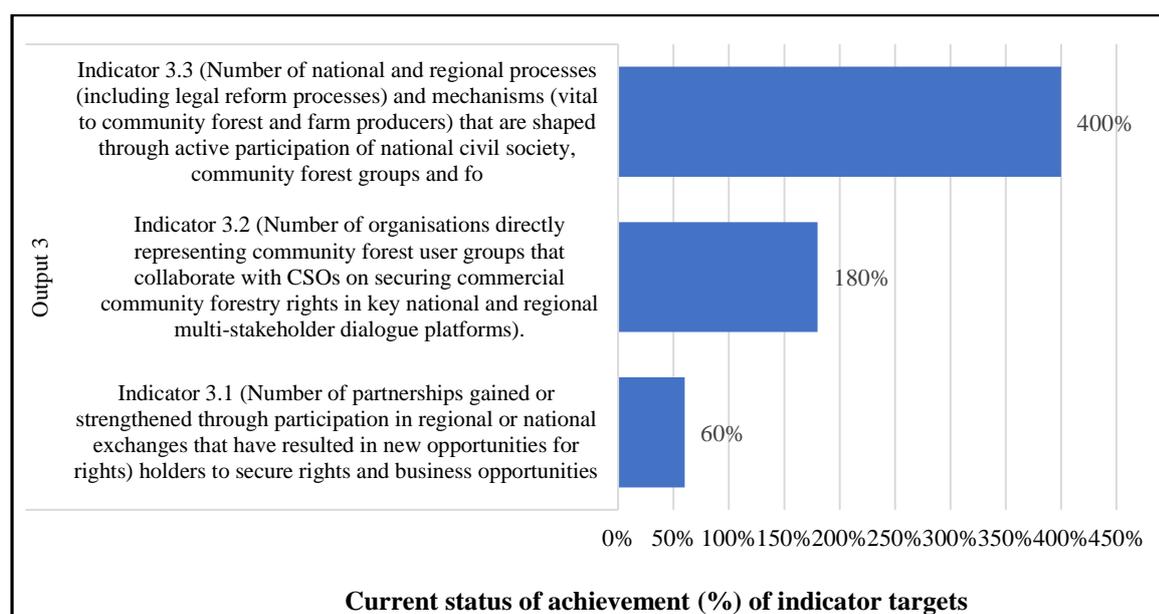


Figure 4: Analysis of progress made towards attainment of output 3 (based on actual achievement of indicators versus the 2020 target). Source: compiled by authors based on review of the updated (2019) project logframe.

In total, the project partners have established and strengthened partnerships at various levels. At local level, FGDH worked with 5 CSOs, and Tropenbos DRC supported a network of artisanal loggers. At national level, project partners in CAR established partnerships with the central administration over the Lomba and Bomango CFs. In Cameroon, CAR and RoC, all the partners maintained strong links respectively with the Community Forest Platform, Plateforme de Gestion Durable des Ressources Naturelles et de l'Environnement, and Plateforme de Gestion Durable des Forêts. At regional level, FGDH strengthened its engagement with the African Community Right Network. FERN initiated dialogue with NORAD and CAFI secretariat while the project partners attended and delivered presentations at various events in Africa, Europe and Asia. All these initiatives enabled sustained experience-sharing, as well as raising the profile of CF and maintaining on the political agenda.

The project conducted organisational development activities with 6 organisations in CAR and in RoC, including developing strategic and advocacy plans. In CAR and Cameroon, the project supported the participation of indigenous and local community representatives in national VPA committees. Advocacy work was also carried out in DRC by artisanal loggers, and in RoC, FERN and partners

organised a community advocacy tour over forest management and benefit-sharing. This tour followed-up a dialogue organised with 300 community members in order to identify key issues for advocacy.

With support of the civil society platforms, project partners in the five countries submitted 12 inputs with regard to community forestry and community rights in forest management within the framework of legal reform processes. In RoC, CAR and Cameroon, the project partners also strongly interacted with VPA and REDD+ processes, notably by attending meetings of the implementing committees of these processes.

The project recorded massive over-achievement (400%) for indicator 3.3 (targeted:3 and achieved: 12) while indicator 3.1 was underachieved as presented in Figure 4. Overall, analysis of the logframe indicators (targeted vs achieved) revealed that the project has made considerable progress in the achievement of its outputs although to varying degrees. The project recorded massive over-achievement (greater 200%) for some output indicators (indicator 2.3 and 3.3) while some other indicators were underachieved (indicator 3.1) as presented in Figure 4.

**Box 1: Some success stories of the CoNGOs project**

**CAR**

RFUK and local organizations in CAR supported the community forestry initiative through advocacy and the provision of technical support to communities. Over 80% of the rainforest in CAR has been attributed to logging companies and communities in the country have been striving for community forests to be attributed to them. Through the support of the CoNGOs project, the Mouloukou, Moale and Lokombe jointly applied to take control of almost 15,000 ha of the Lomba forest as a community forest. In April 2019, the community forest application of the three communities was approved by the Ministry of Forests, representing the first official community forest that has been allocated in CAR (RFUK, 2019). The Lomba forest in question is part of a logging concession held by an industrial company where until recently, was legally impossible to allocate a community forest since it falls under the permanent forest domain area. This success represents the first known time in the Congo Basin region where communities regained rights to forests that had initially been under the control of loggers.

**Cameroon**

As a result of the market study realised, entrepreneurs identified a way to sell their product (bush mango) directly to Nigerian traders at triple the price at which it was initially sold at. Enterprises have improved the quantity and quality of their produce thanks to the training provided by the project and have now commenced to organise themselves when opportunities arise with a specific buyer and product. Regular interactions between the members of the enterprises either through trainings or exchange visits have culminated in the creation of a marketing cooperative led by members from the 4 enterprises in Mayos, Koundi, Baktala and Nomedjoh. This initiative came from them and it was informed by the recognition that it is imperative to increase both volume and standardise quality of produce in order to benefit from some identified markets. Such a locally driven initiative is a demonstration of the replication of skills acquired from trainings delivered by the project.

**DRC**

Artisanal loggers are now targeting provincial and national market in Kinshasa instead of local market so as to increase their profits. Market studies and trainings in cash flow analysis provided by the project allowed artisanal loggers to be more systematic in targeting and planning for selling their products at higher market value and to organise themselves in an association to share transport cost. The trainings delivered by the project also had an impact on the organisation of loggers in the region. At the commencement of the project, artisanal

loggers' associations were only formed in Ituri and Tshopo provinces but not in Mongala. But due to the trainings conducted under the project and follow-up activities by Tropenbos DRC as part of the CoNGOs project and another project (Green Livelihoods Alliance - GLA), Mongala set up its own artisanal loggers' association with members that adhere to sustainable and legal production practices. The training was also extended by Tropenbos DRC to one of its community forest concession and this gave rise to the creation of an agroforestry enterprise around the forest.

### *Factors that influenced achievement and non-achievement*

Enabling factors for project achievements and non-achievements vary from partner to partner and from country to country depending on national circumstances.

#### **Enabling factors**

##### *Cameroon*

- ✓ MA&D trainings have had very positive impacts on the capacity of local entrepreneurs to analyse and benefit from higher value markets for their products. The MA&D trainings in Cameroon was conducted by IIED together with other NGOs (e.g. Okani, CED) linked to other consortium partners, and an experienced trainer who commenced the process and an excellent national partner (INADES) very committed to follow the methodological approach with an embedded gender inclusion, in supporting local people in analysing their forest products and market opportunities and then developing an enterprise plan with different strategies to address different problems. INADES coordinated activities with other NGOs and consortium partners such as CED, Okani and TFRD as part of a community of practice of organisations receiving training and implementing the MA&D approach in their respective intervention areas. INADES is a training organization and capacity building is at the core of their activities, making it possible for them to take to the heart this training from the very start and to be able to also support other organizations in doing so. The experience and dedication of the national MA&D partner is a factor that contributed to the establishment of community enterprises in Cameroon.
- ✓ The prior experience of IIED and Tropenbos DRC in supporting forest MSMEs was also usefully transferred considering that there is limited experience of successful enterprise creation in CFs in Cameroon. Through bottom up engagement with forest dependent communities, the project was able to identify the business aspirations of IP communities and to craft ways of providing needs driven support<sup>13</sup>. More needs to be done in terms of business incubation support in this area<sup>14</sup>.
- ✓ The approach employed in Cameroon by FPP is a factor that promoted success. FPP managed to build trust and established a good relationship with the communities (Nkollo, Gwap and Mougue) in the Ocean Division that were very hostile as a result of the attribution of their land to the BioPalm agro-industry<sup>15</sup>. FPP and OKANI managed to work with these communities, supporting them in submitting their documents to the administration for the obtention of the provisional convention.

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13 Macqueen, D. 2017. Project blog Cameroon's real indomitable lions are in the forest <https://www.iied.org/camerouns-real-indomitable-lions-are-forest>

14 Mbile, P and Macqueen, D. 2018. Options for sustainable business incubation that services Cameroon's community forests, IIED.

15 Interview with a staff of FPP (Cameroon)

- ✓ Respondents in Cameroon suggested that the project made efforts to implement a participatory multistakeholder approach drawing on established networks on national partners. This was demonstrated through participation of government officials and several national NGO partners (beyond those with whom lead consortium partners had subcontractual arrangements) in various project activities including in regional lesson learning events organised in country<sup>16</sup>.

#### CAR

- ✓ Success achieved in CAR regarding the attribution of pilot CF to three communities in the Mouloukou area has been as a result of concentrated efforts of all national partners<sup>17</sup>, despite the opposition of one of the northern project partners. National civil society groups were on the one hand involved in the land reform process and at the same time, advocating for the piloting of community forestry in communities. RFUK was very pushful and together with the national civil society groups/platform invested a lot of effort into advocacy that ensured buy in by different stakeholders which culminated in the approval of the pilot CF site in CAR.
- ✓ In the domain of gender, a lot of focus was placed on awareness and capacity building at the local level for decision making for leadership and throughout this process, it emerged from the local women that they are going to be better involved in the management of their CFs should they have a formal representation in the decision making bodies<sup>18</sup>. It is as a consequence of this that the women in both pilot sites were able to establish women councils.
- ✓ RFUK had an established relationship working with the communities in the Mouloukou area in CAR through a past participatory mapping project and this won the confidence of the communities. The CoNGOs initiative came to cement the existing relationship and to build on the previous mapping project. Also, the community members in the Mouloukou area were very engaged in the process and demonstrated motivation and determination in the entire process to the extent that some community members could cover up to 32 km on foot just to attend meetings related to their CFs. This determination exhibited by the concerned community members is as well recognized as a factor that enhanced success<sup>19</sup>.
- ✓ The dynamic nature of the Minister of Forestry of CAR was an important factor for success. The Minister was of the opinion that the Law was meant to help humans and for this reason, he decided to attribute CF to three communities in the permanent forest domain area which is not currently accepted for by the law, which is meant to be revised.

#### DRC

- ✓ The project usefully furthered existing initiatives. It built on a partnership that had already been established as part of the Forest Connect alliance between IIED and Tropenbos DRC and on work already being advanced by RFUK under the parallel DFID funded ILLUCBF programme in DRC, respectively on entrepreneurship and on community mapping.
- ✓ The fact that Tropenbos DRC supported a mix of business models was conducive of success. Indeed, they supported both individual and collective businesses, therefore enabling each individual to fully commit without concerns that “free riders” may take advantage of their

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16 Macqueen, D., Harty, E. and Bolin, A. (Editors) (2017) Opportunities and approaches to supporting: Community forest enterprises - proceedings of the first CoNGOs learning event, Kribi, Cameroon, 18 – 20 July 2017. IIED, London, UK  
<https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G04184.pdf>

17 Interview with a staff of IIED

18 Interview with a staff of IIED

19 Interview with a consultant of RFUK based in CAR

work. Market studies and trainings in cash-flow analysis allowed entrepreneurs to target high value markets and to reduce transaction costs through cost sharing arrangements. Through engagement with the governors in three provinces (Ituri, Tshopo and Mongala) there grew a strong interest to link enterprise development support activities with provincial efforts to implement various forest sector regulations for community forestry concessions and artisanal forest management units.

#### *RoC*

- ✓ Main success in RoC has been on the contribution of project partners to the legal reform process. National NGO partners FGDH, OCDH and ODDHC organised community exchanges and dialogue with government authorities, the private sector and law makers, including the Forest Code legal working group convened by Comptoir Juridique Junior (CJJ) and ClientEarth, as well as new engagement and partnership with the parliamentarians. These dialogues also led to constructive interactions with marginalised groups. It has also helped make the reform process better linked to the lived realities of local communities.
- ✓ Respondents also highlighted capacity building support provided to the national civil society platform including strengthening communication on ongoing actions of the platform provided additional value to the project.
- ✓ The previous collaboration between CJJ and ClientEarth, notably their extensive work on the revision of the Forest Code was instrumental in the success obtained in the Forest Code review and work with the Parliamentarians.
- ✓ The work with the Plateforme pour la Gestion Durable des Forêts (PGDF), to which all country partners belong, was instrumental. The CoNGOs partners generally simply triggered debates which were then left under the responsibility of the platform.

#### *Cross-cutting*

- ✓ Three noteworthy examples of successful regional collaborations have been the regional learning events, engagement with the Congo Basin Forest Partnerships, regional forest governance forums and the collaboration behind the Brazzaville Roadmap. They managed to bring together a range of NGO's and other stakeholders on a number of occasions to share lessons learnt but also to maintain community forestry on the regional agenda. Individual project partners made contributions to the Brazzaville road map. It has been argued that strong impact could have been achieved if all project partners developed internal position notes and contributions together instead of making sometimes individual and divergent contributions<sup>20</sup>. The last CoNGOs learning event in February 2019 resulted in a strong joint 'Yaounde declaration' that precipitated a number of collaborative efforts to fundraise for community forestry as a coalition of NGOs in the region<sup>21</sup>.
- ✓ At international level, Fern and Clientearth were instrumental in engaging with Parliamentarians and law makers in Europe and in the Congo basin to main community forestry on the agenda. Strong engagement with the Congo Basin Forest Partnership ensured that community forestry was on the agenda 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of parties held in Brussels in November 2018 with presentations from project partners<sup>22</sup>.
- ✓ In the absence of a cross country strategy to use the evidence generated through the project for advocacy, partners used different levers in country to stimulate debates on community

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20 Kamkuimo, P.2018 cited above

21 CoNGOs partners (2019). Yaoundé Declaration: Statement concerning community forestry in the Congo Basin Region, 4 pages  
<https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G04413.pdf>

22 [ccr-rac.pfbc-cbfp.org/rac-2016-news/items/Land-Use-Mop18.html](https://www.ccr-rac.pfbc-cbfp.org/rac-2016-news/items/Land-Use-Mop18.html)

forestry. These include the VPA-FLEGT and REDD+ processes, the NDC (Nationally Determined Contributions in the framework of the Paris Agreement) and implementation of the Bonn Challenge (forest landscape restoration).

### ***Constraining factors***

#### **Cameroon**

- ✓ The government of Cameroon has allocated several sales of standing volume (ventes de coupes) on the 14,000 ha of forest land that was expected to be attributed as CF and a presidential decree has allocated the land of the villages Bella, Nkollo and Gwap to Palms Resources Limited (BioPalm). These developments hampered the attribution of CFs to the three communities concerned. Also, internal governance problems within the Bella community prevented the community from submitting their application for CF<sup>23</sup>.
- ✓ CED supported the renewal of the SMP of Nomedjoh which had been finalized, printed and submitted to MINFOF for approval. However, the submitted SMP is yet to be approved due to a change within the Ministry of Forests – the commission charged with the validation of SMPs has not met for a long time. Also, there was five changes in CED project staff and one of these changes was as a result of the tragic demise of the serving officer.
- ✓ The civil society platform CFP in Cameroon which historically was effective in championing forest governance issues has been embroiled in internal governance quibbles. The inability to work with a strong civil society platform led to limited advocacy objectives being achieved in the country.

#### **CAR**

- ✓ The poor state of the roads leading to the communities where CFs were established is a major factor that slowed down achievements under the project as more would have been accomplished in the existence of more accessible roads. FPP and REPALCA project teams were unable to work with communities as expected which led to several actions happening in Bangui. In addition to the inaccessible roads, the prevailing insecurity situation in CAR during the implementation period of the project was yet another constraining factor.
- ✓ The law forbids the creation of CFs in permanent forest domain in the country and this constituted a challenge for the project. While pilot CFs have been attributed, the Agency for the Management of Natural Resources (AGDRF) is calling on the Minister to revoke the decision for the creation of the pilot CFs<sup>24</sup>. It may be worth mentioning that, following more advocacy work carried out by national CSOs in collaboration with RFUK, the legal department of the Forest ministry rendered an opinion in favour of the pilot CF allocation. A similar situation was highlighted in republic of Congo where there seemed to be a mismatch between government aspirations of community forestry and the options being proposed by capacity building NGOs and external experts<sup>25</sup> Institutional instability at the level of the ministry emerged as a challenge under the implementation of the project in CAR. Personnel in the ministry are frequently transferred to other services and the advent of their replacements slows down implementation of project activities as they need to fully understand the project.
- ✓ Several capacity building challenges were identified through the midterm review of activities CIEDD-led activities<sup>26</sup> including insufficient strategic collaboration between project partners

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23 Interview with a staff of FPP (Cameroon)

24 Interview with a staff in the Ministry of Forest in CAR

25 Kamkuimo, P. 2018 Suivi de la mise en oeuvre des recommandations de l'évaluation interne a mi-parcours du projet CONGOs en ROC

26 Kamkuimo, P. 2018. Evaluation interne à mi-parcours de la mise en oeuvre au Congo et RCA du projet CONGOs

and decision makers involved in key processes, limited technical capacity and positioning of CIEDD, limited consideration and mainstreaming of gender in project activities and gaps in the ability of partner to align activity plans with overall project objectives.

#### *DRC*

- ✓ Like in CAR, the poor state of the roads leading to the communities was a major constraint in DRC. The only alternative was to fly project staff on the field but this was very expensive. For this reason, there was a general slowdown of activities during the rainy season.
- ✓ The slow decision-making process in the local administration often delayed their engagement in any project activity.
- ✓ The heightened tensions around the elections observed in the country hampered several practical aspects of the project including: the procurement of equipment for the small grants as companies were hesitant to arrange for transport during such unsecure moments; the holding of the annual learning meeting and travel to project implementation sites. Also, armed militias in the eastern part of the country and the outbreak of the Ebola disease all constituted constraints to the implementation of the project activities in DRC.

#### *RoC*

- ✓ The departure of one national partner (FGDH) from the consortium following leadership and technical disagreements with its international partner (FERN) meant that processes already started were interrupted. However, a solution was found to replace the departing partner by the Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH).
- ✓ Much advocacy work depended on the promulgation of the new forestry code. Until the end of the project, this law was still under revision, and it is therefore difficult to measure the effectiveness of the project in influencing it.
- ✓ Evidence generated during the project showed that there were a number of additional challenges<sup>27</sup> including insufficient strategic collaboration of the consortium for optimal influence of forest policy processes and agendas citing specifically the fact that throughout the project period, the issue of community forestry didn't get into the agenda of the VPA implementation committee meetings, internal partnership management constraints, and a mismatch in some cases between the civil society advocacy options and the expressed views of government with regards to the objectives of community forestry. On the last issue, this was understandable considering the embryonic stage of development of community forestry in the Congo.

### *Complementarity and synergies with public, private and civil society organizations*

The partnership established by the project with different stakeholders performed at varying degrees in the different project countries.

#### **Public**

In CAR, RFUK had been collaborating with some actors in the administration since 2009 and this collaboration continued in the course of the implementation of the CoNGOs project. Staff from the Ministry of Forests were involved in project field missions together with the RFUK consultants and these gave an opportunity to these actors from the administration to better comprehend the problems of the communities directly from them. Embarking on the joint field missions enhanced the

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<sup>27</sup> Kamkuimo, P 2018 cited above

collaboration between the administration and the CoNGOs project team in CAR. In the Republic of Congo, senior technical staff from the Ministry of forest participated in the activities of the project including the Director General of Forest and members of the parliamentary commission among others. In Cameroon, the administration (the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social and Artisanal Economy – MINPMEESA) actively participated in the implementation of the project activities relating to supporting entrepreneurship and cooperatives<sup>28</sup>. The regional director of MINPMEESA actively participated in several trainings and other events organized by the project and has always been supportive, facilitating the registration process of enterprises that decided to pursue formal registration as cooperatives<sup>29</sup>. The Director of Forest in Cameroon participated in some activities of the project such as the learning event on community forest enterprises organized in Kribi, in 2017 (Macqueen et al., 2017). In the DRC, local authorities were invited to participate in the enterprise development trainings and the relationship established with them as well as the outcome of the trainings were used to engage with the governor of each of the provinces where the project intervened in order to discuss the way forward with regards to the implementation of the decree for establishing artisanal CF management units. Figure 3 highlights the views of respondents concerning the level of stakeholder engagement by the project consortium.

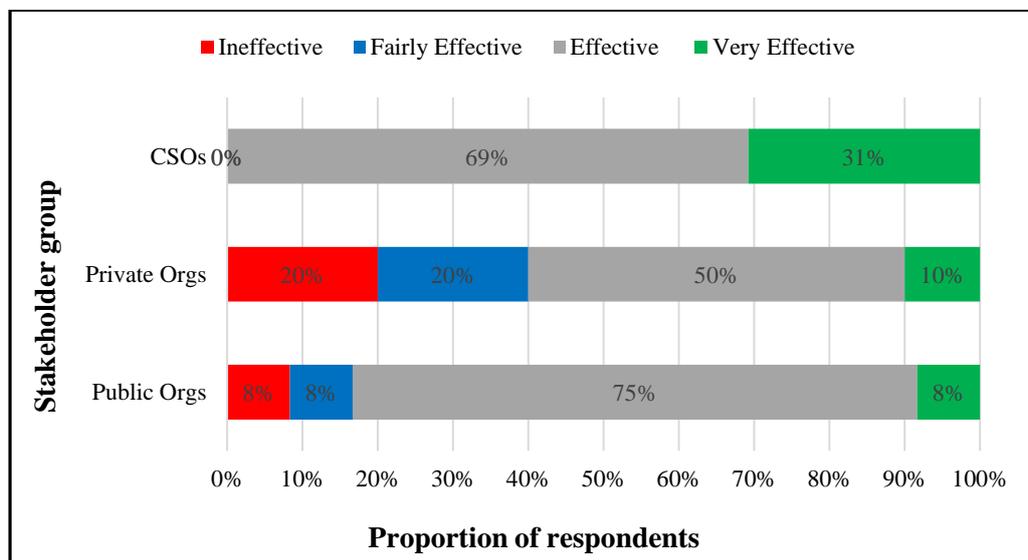


Figure 5: Respondents’ opinion relating to the performance of partnerships established by the project

Figure 5 shows that CSOs considered the project to be highly participatory with close to 70% ranking the project as very effective. Though over 60% of private sector respondents thought that the partnerships established where effective, 40% reported them as being either ineffective or fairly effective compared to 16% for government officials. This assessment could be expected as it provides an overview of the degree of engagement of different actors in this project ranging from primarily civil society, government agencies and to a lesser extent private sector.

28 Interview with a staff of INADES

29 Interview with a staff of IIED

## Private organizations

The collaboration with the private sector was mixed and this is expected as the implementation of private sector project related activities differed among the project countries. In CAR, the logging company SCAD collaborated with the project team after having understood that the attribution of CFs to communities would not affect the timber resources in their logging concession. On the other hand, the *Projet de Développement Régional du Sud-Ouest* (PDRSO) attempted to hinder the advancement of the project in CAR through criticisms, despite efforts to consult with and involve PDRSO in project activities. In the Republic of Congo, effective dialogue transpired between project actors and logging companies who gave their accord to collaborate in the two-pilot initiative in the SCD of the Pogola and Ngombe forest management units<sup>30</sup>. In Cameroon, INADES was able to link the established enterprises to a micro-finance institution (community mutual credit – MC2) which assisted the enterprises in the creation of savings accounts and the provision of other financial services to them. In DRC, the collaboration between Tropenbos-RDC and the private sector was ineffective at national, but very effective at local level. The project hired a financial consultant to work with Tropenbos DRC to design an investment profile and offer for international and local financial institutions. Information on access to loan (for artisanal loggers) was solicited from 13 investors of which 4 were providing financial services locally. This enabled some of the registered enterprises to establish bank accounts with one of the financial institution.

## Civil society organizations

CIEDD, REPALCA and MEFP were project partners in CAR and are all members of the Gestion Durable des Ressources Naturelles et de l'Environnement (GDRNE) platform. The fact that these organizations are members of the civil society platform made it possible for the project to have a good collaboration with CSOs in the country. While the CSO platform in the Republic of Congo has internal problems, the project had a good relationship with the platform members and these members were well involved in the activities of the project. In Cameroon, the project collaborated well with national CSOs in the implementation of project activities.

Generally, majority of respondents opined that the performance of the relationship established by the project with the administration (public actors), the private sector and CSOs was effective as presented in Figure 2.

### 3.3. Project efficiency

#### *Efficiency of project activities in meeting outputs and specific objective*

The project was very efficient in the use of resources to achieve project objectives<sup>31</sup>. International project partners attested that the project made available sufficient funds for the implementation of project activities in addition to sufficient and qualified human resources for project implementation. When compared to the level of delivery of the project outputs as highlighted in Figure 3 and Figure 4, it demonstrates that the project was very good value for money. Clearly the project benefitted from working with well-established partners and networks on the ground which ensured that the project hit the ground running. While the in-country project partners shared the same view like the international partners with regards the efficient nature of the project activities in responding to the

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with a staff of FGDH

<sup>31</sup> Interview with a staff of IIED

outputs, their views on the availability of sufficient financial and human resources for project implementation were mixed. Some in-country project partners expressed concerns over the fact that funds made available to them were insufficient and the human resources hired compared to the workload expected could have been improved<sup>32</sup>. The system of transfers of funds to national partners was on a performance basis which ensured that partners received funds in order to deliver agreed deliverables.

Concerning financial management of project funds, quarterly and annual narrative and financial reports from partners were further analysed and written-up into a single report by IIED before submission to DFID. Partners reported that project finance management was well coordinated by the lead organization and that payments were made on time for project activities bar occasionally due to security concerns in DRC. The achievement of timely reporting and fund disbursement across a consortium of over 16 NGOs is indeed a heroic success of the project relating to the domain of efficiency.

### *Impact of identified risks/assumptions on the project*

The CoNGOs was a project implemented in a quite risky and challenging context. Almost all of the risks identified during project design were realized during project implementation – and it was known from the outset that risk management had to be a central part of the project<sup>33</sup>. For instance, identified political risks were realized in Cameroon, CAR, Republic of Congo and the DRC which could have effective the implementation of the project. The comprehensive risk management system put in place as well as regular monitoring of project activities and context enabled the project to achieve its objectives. The only unforeseen negative events worth highlighting were the loss of life of the project lead in CED Cameroon as well as a high turnover of project staff. This unfortunate event slowed down activities temporarily up to when a replacement was in place.

### *Management and administration of the CoNGOs initiative*

IIED assumed the overall responsibility for managing the CoNGOs initiative , from the inception phase with the elaboration of plans and systems for the management of the project partners, through to the implementation. An annual project meeting was held in each country in the region which brought together project partners and constituted an avenue for planning and knowledge exchange. The consortium partners also held quarterly meetings including in country meetings. Overall, two meetings involving all project partners were organised in 2016 and 2019, respectively to identify key priorities and gather lessons learned from the implementation. In addition, IIED had annual programmatic meetings with DFID as well as monthly meetings. Respondents reported that IIED was strong at the management and coordination of the project including project communication and visibility. Managing and coordinating a project like CoNGOs that involves 16 partners operating in five countries is in itself challenging. It therefore goes without saying that the leadership role played by IIED was instrumental to all the achievements listed above.

One of the strong points of this initiative was the fact that the consortium brought together rich and complementary expertise for the delivery of the action. For instance, RFUK demonstrated a significant experience on forestry issues particularly on mapping for rights while ClientEarth and FPP supported legal review processes in Congo and Cameroon respectively. Fern has a long and demonstrated expertise in the area of advocacy for local communities and indigenous peoples' rights in the Congo

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32 Interview with an in-country project partner in CAR

33 Interview with a staff of IIED.

Basin while Well Grounded was in charge of organizational capacity building while IIED brought in CF enterprise development expertise. The consortium also benefitted from highly trusted and credible national partners with long experience in their areas of expertise. Overall respondents highlighted that a good collaboration existed between IIED and the other consortium partners which was instrumental in the delivery and success of the project.

### 3.4. Project sustainability

#### *Contributory factors to long-term impact and sustainability*

This project was designed to pursue country-specific actions and a trans-country learning and capacity-building approach to achieve better evidence on viable options for community forestry, including strengthening of rights, generated and verified by relevant stakeholders in the Congo Basin countries; stronger capacity of community organisations to pursue resource rights security and commercial forest and farm production options, and articulate policy changes in national forest governance and land use planning processes; and more effective policy engagement and implementation in support of sustainable and profitable community forestry through collaboration of rights-holders, civil society organisations and national institutions in sub-national, national, regional and international policy processes.

The project generated a significant amount of evidence on several aspects of CF management ranging from capacity needs assessments for mapping for rights, research products related to existing legal and practical constraints<sup>34</sup> hindering the upscaling of commercial community forestry in the Congo Basin, options papers for addressing the challenges as well as videos on community forestry. Most of the knowledge products were published online and centralized on IIED's project website. It is expected that this information will continue to be available for researchers, practitioners and policy makers beyond the project initial period. The decision by consortium partners to work together to mobilise future funding for community forestry means that these products can provide the background and foundation for future work. For donors, the evidence generated demonstrates several potential options and challenges for supporting community forestry in the Congo Basin and therefore very useful in informing future support. While the evidence generated was specific to the Congo Basin, such evidence is also available for other actors internationally interested in investing or exploring community forestry as an option for sustainable forest management and inclusive sustainable development. This is key for replicability and scaling up of lessons learnt during project implementation.

*Capacity building* was a key component of this project seeking to strengthen the skills, knowledge and tools needed by different stakeholder groups to pursue resource rights security and commercial forest and farm production options, and articulate policy changes in national forest governance and land use planning processes. The demand driven approach adopted by the project ensured that capacity building activities addressed specific identified needs which strengthened ownership of the learning by beneficiaries. Engagement of external actors such as local government authorities, technical extension services and other local organisations is critical for sustainability of the action. In CAR for

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34 IIED, ClientEarth and Comptoir Juridique, 2019. Republic of Congo: five priorities for developing community forestry laws, Briefing note August 2019. AND. Faure, N., Venisnik, T. and Ichou, B. 2019. *Communities at the heart of forest management: How can the law make a difference? Sharing lessons from Nepal, the Philippines and Tanzania.* ClientEarth..

instance, all the activities of the project relating to mapping or awareness raising for community forest management and the setting up of institutions within communities was realised together with local forestry staff. In the DRC and in Cameroon in particular, there has been regular engagement with the local Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social and Artisanal Economy and they facilitated links with other regional and divisional level authorities. In organizing market fairs, MINPMESSA sends invitations directly to the enterprises established under the CoNGOs for them to participate in the market fair. This relationship established by the project between MINPMESSA and the community based enterprises is very likely to continue beyond project initial period.

In addition to working at meso level with local NGOs, the project developed actions directly with project beneficiaries. RFUK's work with national partners and communities has been hailed as landmark in CAR resulting in the creation of CFs and relevant management committees and related councils. In Cameroon, FPP and CED accompanied communities in the Ocean Division in Cameroon to acquire their CF. A learning by doing approach was adopted which allowed community leaders took the lead and worked with minimal intervention from external agencies. So rather than elaborating the required documentation for the concerned communities, the communities were supervised how to go about the process and this enabled the capacity of the community members to be built as they were highly engaged in the process. CED's experience supporting the Nomedjoh community in the establishment of the revised simple management plan for the CF clearly demonstrates that capacity building was effective. It is expected that the skills, tools and knowledge acquired will be used beyond the end of the project.

To ensure financial and economic sustainability, the project established a small grant scheme to support viable enterprises. The small grant scheme was introduced to enable the established enterprises in Cameroon and the DRC to obtain start-up funding from the project for the implementation of their respective activities or business plans. This is very innovative approach adopted by the consortium with the support of DFID. Access to capital remains a key challenge for community entrepreneurship in the Congo Basin. By having a multistakeholder selection committee of the grant (committee of 5-7 members including IIED, Tropenbos DRC, INADES Cameroon and external representatives from government, civil society and private sector) the project ensured its appropriation and buy-in. It is commendable that INADES Cameroon and Tropenbos DRC were designated to administer the grant ensuring that the support was readily available to local entrepreneurs<sup>35</sup>. A key innovation introduced by the project was financial literacy training and access to finance brokerage for artisanal logger associations<sup>36</sup>. Building on the Market Analysis and Development (MA&D) trainings provided by the consortium, this approached facilitated much needed linkages to potential investors and sponsors of community projects. As a general remark, investors were interested in knowing if DfID, funder of the project, was also available to invest in those enterprises, either by providing part of the required loans or by guaranteeing the loans. After several consultations the investors potentially interested are Equity Bank, Finca, Trust Merchant Bank, SMICO and Mrecrekis. Advans was interested but does not work in Tshopo. The enthusiasm generated by this initiative clearly suggest that it is possible to create viable public private partnerships for sustainable enterprise development and that donor funds can actually serve as seed funding allowing community

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35 IIED. 2019. CoNGOs sustainability strategy for forest resource use by small forest enterprises in Tshopo, Mongala and Ituri provinces, the DRC

36 Nugnes, F. 2019 final report - Financial literacy training and access to finance brokerage for artisanal logger associations, pp 16

enterprises to leverage other types of funding. Other suggestions formulated by the investors are worth exploring for future support and partnerships with private sector actors<sup>37</sup>.

In terms of *policy engagement*, as a pilot initiative, the CONGOs experience has raised the issue of community forestry and land use rights in the national, regional and international agenda. Advocacy work the consortium with the CBFP, the Brazzaville road map, the contributions to the forest code in Congo are examples which demonstrate the institutional sustainability of this action<sup>38</sup>. Engaging with the CBFP has been particularly useful for regional learning and advocacy purposes. In 2017 the ACRN became one of the co-facilitator of the CSO constituency of the CBFP. This is thanks to support from Fern to ACRN's participation in CBFP event and lobby work with the EU which was the previous CBFP facilitator. It is expected that the spaces created through this action and commitments made in the national policy processes will prosper beyond the project period and that lessons learnt can inform future practice especially regarding the use of evidence for policy engagement in the Congo basin and what works for sustainable capacity building of rights claimers and other actors in the region.

### 3.5. Lessons Learnt

A number of key lessons emerged throughout the evaluation process. Secondary data collected and testimonials from the lived experiences of partners and stakeholder, allowed the evaluation team to draw out the following:

#### *On community forestry itself*

- In remote almost ungoverned locations, and in the absence of laws recognising community land ownership, **Community forestry remains the most valid option** for securing lands rights for local communities and indigenous people. None of the cases seen in the Congo Basin argue for complete ownership by communities of lands and forests considering the ownership status of forests in the region. In effect, this may suggest that the rights secured through CFs in the region are below ownership but at least they provide the framework for communities to carry out long term plans on how to use their forests and lands and to be able to oppose external threats to their livelihoods. In the short to medium term, it is unlikely that governments in the region will change these regimes because of political economy considerations. In effect, this might even take longer if governments in the region continue to get the impression that this agenda is driven by national or international professional NGOs on behalf of communities. Communities need to be mobilised and supported to lead advocacy actions themselves and bring their issues to the table.
- Securing rights through CF is a landmark. But it is only the beginning. **Communities need sustained long term support to implement their Simple Management Plans.** Without such support, there are high risks that the newly acquired permits may rather lead to more conflictual issues within the community.
- Community enterprises are **an innovative approach to secure the implementation** of the Simple Management Plan. They offer immediate revenues to communities and can therefore serve as a direct incentive to communities to effectively enforce sustainable approaches for the management of their forest. The group cohesion generated in group businesses can also

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<sup>37</sup> See Nugnes 2019 cited above

<sup>38</sup> IIED Congos six monthly report October 2017 – March 2018

help to sustain progress. But the sustainability of those enterprises also depends on the **links that are developed between the enterprise and the rest of the community**, starting with the CF Committee. The modalities for such links should be defined from the outset of the creation of the enterprises, and guide its functioning.

- An enterprise is first and foremost the result of personal choices, and is guided by principles of efficiency and profitability. While in remote areas, collective enterprises are often necessary to aggregate product in sufficient volumes to attract buyers, a mix of **individual and collective enterprises** can help to spread entrepreneurship. Those enterprises can create a snowball effect within the entire community, and henceforth lead to transformational change. However, it is crucial to start by identifying, between individual and collective models, which models is more suited for specific communities. It is not one size fits all. Externally imposed models are unlikely to succeed. A key example is illustrated by Moutoni (2019) suggesting that the legal bodies with the ability to operate CFs such as cooperatives, economic interest groups amongst others are less adapted to the realities of indigenous peoples. From an anthropological point of view<sup>39</sup>, evidence suggests that collective action in IP communities is more likely to succeed when built on links of family and kinship considering the horizontal power structures as opposed to communities governed by hierarchical power systems.
- Community forestry so far has been made into a highly technical process, often by Forest Departments that act first and foremost as enforcement agencies, rather than extension services. Even for communities that have gone through the process, updating the Simple Management Plan is generally out of reach. NGO support has proved useful for a wide variety of reasons, but dependence on NGOs is also detrimental to communities. It is therefore **of utmost importance that legal procedures for CF are even more simplified**, and beyond, that easier approaches are used to recognise management or ownership rights to communities. Procedures are inevitable, but countries from the Congo Basin may learn from other countries where the recognition of community rights is rendered much straightforward. Some of those countries include Burkina Faso, Ghana, Uganda or Botswana<sup>40</sup>.
- As the process for obtaining a CF title is long, several barriers may emerge between the beginning to the end of the process. Such barriers could include disengagement of some community members, pressures on forest resources by outsiders with or without the support of community members, lack of financial resources, and competition over land for large-scale investments by outsiders. Successful CFs are those that have **assessed those risks in a dynamic manner**, and addressed them with appropriate measures. IIED and partners have developed community-level risk management toolkits but have only provided training in their use in the DRC, which was given a priority due to time constraints within the project but also due to the entrepreneurs having slightly longer experience in running an enterprise (in Cameroon they have just gotten started). The key players of any community forestry process are the communities themselves. They can, with external support, effectively act against each of those.

### *On Gender mainstreaming*

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39 Moise, E.R.2019. Pour des forêts communautaires efficaces et bénéfiques aux populations autochtones et communautés locales en RCA: Perspectives anthropologiques pour des stratégies d'intervention – un rapport de la série – sous la Canopée, RFUK.

40 African Natural Resources Center. 2016. *Review of land tenure policy, institutional and administrative systems of Botswana*. AND, Nkuintchua. 2016. The State of Community Land Rights in Africa. African states can better protect community land rights. ACRN

- Gender mainstreaming works effectively when **planned ahead and coherently** among all partners in an initiative. One-off activities may be of help to raise awareness, but are incomplete and ineffective.
- The recruitment of women among project teams is far from enough to ensure that they play a strong role in implementing project activities. Likewise, having women in local institutions does not **guarantee that they can play a leadership role**. There are issues of critical mass in organisational membership and leadership that have been taken into the account of in enterprise support processes – but that need further support.
- Innovation, even at the community level, **can trigger significant changes**. The creation of a Women Council in one specific area may inspire political reforms in the entire country.
- The use of a mix of different gender-tailored tools – indicators, attendance lists, methodologies for data collection – can make the difference. Mainstreaming gender in projects require **dedicated human resources** (gender advisors or staff) but projects tend to assume that consultants are sufficient to lead gender issues within projects. Projects tend to commission gender studies most of which often end with the same conclusions that women are marginalised and that much needs to be done.

#### *On Capacity development and business incubation support*

- Organisational and institutional capacity development is **as important as more technical developments**. It is a process, takes time and resources and demands full organisational commitment especially at high leadership levels. The Congo basin is full of very technically qualified individuals working for organisations with very weak internal capacities. Legitimacy is also central. Many of these organisations have positioned themselves strategically as intermediaries and implementing partners of international organisations. This seeming professionalization of national NGOs often with little local community mandates means that international development projects are unlikely to succeed. Future efforts must explore ways of working directly with more representative structures at community level that have the mandate from their communities. This appears to a costly proposition but initiatives to promote community forestry and secure rights driven by national NGOs in capital cities have lesser chances of success than those championed through the voices of those directly affected by the issues needing redress.
- Engaging local and central government staffs in capacity building actions yields several benefits including knowledge and skills transfer, buy-in and trust building. Trust building is critical as it allows those seeking to influence policy to gain insides into the inner functioning of government. Such understanding can **allow communities and their supporters to tailor their messages and advocacy actions** accordingly.
- Even complex topics as **entrepreneurship can be taught at the lowest level**, both to literates and illiterates, as far as good approaches are used. The trainers' capacity matters. Working with organisations which have strong experience in designing and delivering training courses for adults in rural areas can help secure higher impacts. CoNGOs was particularly innovative in linking regional NGOs that have historically mapped and advocated for rights with NGOs that are more business-minded which created a network of practitioners<sup>41</sup>. Past NGO-

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41 Macqueen, D. et al. 2017. *Opportunities and approaches to supporting: Community forest enterprises. Learning event report.*

community forest business support efforts lacked a strong market focus that is required to make business work<sup>42</sup>.

- Donor funds can play a key stimulating role in providing seed funding for sustainable enterprise development. However, **strengthening the capacities of local actors to leverage additional resources** is critical for successful capitalisation and profitability of community business enterprises. There needs to be sufficient capacity to broker, establish and nurture the relationships between established enterprises and new investors. **Seed funding is critical for female entrepreneurs** considering they face additional barriers to accessing credit services from mainstream lending institutions.

#### *On building networks*

- Collaboration with government is fundamental to ensure scaling-up and sustainability of actions implemented. It can fasten otherwise slow processes and enable to untie impasses such as where the law is unfavourable to community rights (such as in CAR) or provide concrete opportunities for communities (such as the case of marketing fair, organised in Cameroon). It is however essential that such **collaboration is directly concluded with** (or in the presence of) **communities**. Therefore, spaces for exchanges between key stakeholders can be organised at various levels.
- Partnership with private sector can also prove to bring significant impacts. In the entrepreneurship sector, such institutions may include banks and microfinance institutions. By offering capital to community enterprises (often as a means to secure sustainable supply of useful products), those **contribute to the sustainability of local enterprises**.
- Networking is matter of both individuals and their institutions. It is important to consistently build the capacities of the **same individuals who may later become allies to processes engaged**, within their respective, governmental and business, sectors. Partners of this project have built on key individuals they have been collaborating with since up to 12 years.

#### *On the work with communities*

- **NGOs should request FPIC to communities** before and all along their engagement in complex processes such as community forestry. Before the initiative, NGOs officers should be clear on the goals and capabilities of the project, and seek how much of it is accepted by the community. They should avoid making false promises. During project implementation, they should seek community's consent on any options that is decided. The management plan of a CF is a long-term commitment, and yet the process is very often totally new to communities. Supporting NGOs should therefore take sufficient time to inform and train community members to design the plan in itself, to implement it, and to update it, when expired.
- Innovative mechanisms for information-sharing between communities and their supporting NGOs should be maintained during and beyond the period of the project. In really enclaved countries such as DRC and CAR, NGOs may consider sharing, as much as possible, information on any happenings in the forest sector, to communities. Working with local organisations, **just as with common people such as transporters or small traders**, is often enough to share some types of information.
- NGOs engaged in various projects should build on past experiences, and **avoid starting afresh**. The case of the collaboration between Molokou and MEFP is eloquent. With the support of

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<sup>42</sup> Mbile and Macqueen 2018 – Options for sustainable business incubation that serves Cameroon's community forests

RFUK and other partners, MEFP has been working in Molokou for about 15 years, building people's capacities on laws, and then helping with community mapping. Such previous efforts were instrumental in setting-up the Lomba CF. However, it goes without saying that experience gathered in one community provide learning which can inform similar actions in other communities.

### *On Influencing*

- Collaboration between a critical mass of influential and credible organisations, as was the case in the ConGOs consortium, helps to guarantee that influence will be achieved. At national level, it is crucial that all key advocacy processes are supported by members of wider platforms. However, there is a **balance to strike between the number and quality of partners** in an initiative.
- Beyond the borders, this initiative proved that civil society can play a critical role at the sub-regional scale. Their influence on the Brazzaville Roadmap and the recent regional Forest Governance Forum **set the pathway for future initiatives**.
- Influence is easier to achieve when **balancing between credibility and legitimacy**. International and national organisations may bring in quality and synthetic data, and forest right-holders (communities) bring in their life experiences. Successful advocacy is achieved through smooth collaboration between those various layers of actors.
- The use of a mix of different approaches can multiply the effectiveness of influence endeavours. Along with the classic approaches such as workshop events in capital cities, policy briefs and proposal writings, civil society and communities are stronger when **piloting on the ground what they are actually aiming for**. The fact that communities obtained a CF within a forest concession is a perfect illustration. Advocacy built upon such experience may have more impact than through classic approaches.
- Ultimately, it is important to acknowledge that advocacy takes time, resources and, measuring its effects is the most cumbersome process. As suggested by an FGDH staff, advocacy organisations cannot be considered as "*caterers*"; they cannot be "*expected to deliver a one-off service and leave. Advocacy takes time, and request patience*". The momentum and trust relationships might be lost in periods when such policy projects end because of the unstable political environment characterised by sometimes high levels of turnover in government departments and ministries. It is also a case of being able to pursue existing advocacy initiatives, instead of re-starting afresh.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this evaluation has observed that CoNGOs has made significant achievements as per its set impact, outcome and outputs. The project team assessed the project as highly relevant, efficient and demonstrated great value for money in a context of community land insecurity in the region and slow state engagement. The project partners in Europe and in the Congo Basin have the longest experience of work in the region, each with a large network and important level of influence. Considering the number and quality of partners, a central achievement of the project is certainly the Yaoundé Declaration through which they all commit to keep implementing and supporting CF initiatives. Despite a relatively strong presence at policy level, the project had not been able to influence major political reform, notably because of its timeframe which was very short comparatively to legal and political reforms in the region.

The project team developed an approach which may secure, on the medium to long term, most of the achievements. Most notably though, there was a general consensus across all project partners, allies, and targets, that community forestry is too big an issue to be dealt with in one single short-term project. The evaluation of CoNGOs may therefore serve as an invite to look at the bigger picture of community forestry in the Congo Basin today, but also to imagine its future. All respondents suggested some priorities for scaling-up community forestry.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

In the light of the evaluation findings, the following recommendations can be proposed that might help CoNGOs partners and strategic support partners to sustain the achievements.

### 5.1. Recommendations

- The project strongly contributed to mainstream community forestry in Cameroon, CAR, DRC and Congo, and at the regional level. However, there is need for sustained debate around the topic. IIED and partners should continue pressing for law reforms that really capture the lessons from the project.
- In CAR and Republic of Congo, future advocacy efforts should focus on removing the obstacle in the forest code that hinders the attribution of CFs to communities in forest concession or community development areas respectively.
- The entrepreneurship component of the CoNGOs project was highly innovative especially through facilitating access to productive resources, markets and external support networks for community enterprise and entrepreneurship. This is very relevant for promoting rural development and aligns with the mission of the government of the Congo Basin countries to drive inclusive growth and to become emerging economies. Hence, IIED and partners should encourage the established cooperatives to work closely with the relevant decentralized government structures as these structures could constitute a source of technical and financial support necessary for sustaining the activities and overall functioning of the enterprises. There must be sustained long term funding and technical support for this type of initiative as it is likely to have benefits beyond forestry to other areas such as climate change and REDD+.
- Many of the enterprises created could be considered to be just beyond incubation and there is need to sustain support through growth and development. For sustainability, this requires development of bespoke business support organisations or community entrepreneurship hubs adapted to different country contexts particularly concerning issues of ownership, leadership, power and institutional frameworks. This could be informed by much stronger lesson learning with ICRAF DRYAD project outcomes and future exchanges with other countries with demonstrated success of community forestry entrepreneurship support.
- IIED and Cameroonian partners should support in the elaboration of a transparent, effective and equitable benefit sharing mechanism within the community enterprises, in order to prevent future conflicts.
- CoNGOs has started reversing the bad reputation of CF, based on Cameroon experience, by bringing up good cases in all countries. However, IIED and partners need to keep collecting evidence on the successes of community forestry and share it with wider audience.
- IIED and partners should strongly encourage each partner organisation to use and monitor the usefulness of the innovations brought through organisational development. The recent publication on organisational development may help achieving this recommendation. In projects of this size and complexity, dedicated gender advisors or teams could further strengthen gender considerations in project delivery.

## 5.2. Future priorities for scaling up CF in the Congo Basin

The CoNGOs project was very successful in maintaining the subject and the role of community forestry as an inclusive model of forest management in the Congo Basin. It built on long experience of community forestry in Cameroon to support and promote this agenda in other project countries. The future of community forestry in the region however remains uncertain and the perspectives from the evaluation are mixed despite the successes of the project and other ongoing initiatives on the same topic. In Cameroon, there are more requests every year for new CFs, and yet the topic is almost absent from the debate on wider forest (except when it comes to name and shame the failures of this model) and land governance issues. It is only on rare occasions that the issue of community forestry being debated during VPA implementation committees or in national REDD+ processes. In RoC, the fact that some strands of civil society and government are investing much effort to have community development areas transformed into CF is problematic for a number of reasons. In fact, those areas, mainly constituted of secondary forest and very poor in NTFPs and timber, are only located at the outskirts of managed forest concessions. In a country where less than half of the forest concession surface is under management, such approach may mean leaving aside about 70% of community territories. In addition, those areas are put in place through ill-designed approaches, and only represent a very small portion of the customarily claimed community territories<sup>43</sup>. In Gabon, five years after the implementing texts on community forestry were passed, only 1% of the territory is under community control. The complexity of the procedures and the lack of support from the government call to little optimism. DRC and CAR on the contrary are haven of hopes as the initiatives developed in those countries over the past 4 years reached levels where the respective governments are willing to incorporate community forestry in their legal frameworks. We brought together the shared priorities as suggested by respondents for the future of CF in the region.

*Community Forestry is a necessity and should be quickly scaled-up.* It goes without saying that this argument is backed by the lack of any regulations in the region supporting land ownership. Today, more than three years ago, communities across the region are plagued by poverty and threats over their land. The recent fall in global oil prices has placed significant pressure on national government budgets considering that crude represents about more than 60% (Cameroon, Gabon and RoC) of exports. In such contexts, it is foreseeable that the current rush over the land for large-scale investments may quickly increase. Adding to this is the fact that other sources of pressures such as elite investments or state privatization are increasing realities. Though the experience of community forestry in Cameroon is often discussed in negative terms, the successful cases demonstrate that it provides communities with rights over their lands and territories. With the progress made in DRC and CAR, increased communication about the successful cases in Cameroon to communities in other countries is likely to spur a rush for CFs in those countries. Lessons learnt through the CoNGOs project and the evidence generated on potential pathways for sustainable community forestry and forest businesses provide the pathways for scaling up in different contexts<sup>44</sup>.

*Increased revenues within communities developing CF is a high priority.* The efforts initiated in the frame of CoNGOs and similar initiatives will yield results in the years to come. It can be expected

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<sup>43</sup> Koné, L. and Pichon, M. Securing customary rights is key to sustainable community forestry. IIED Briefing. IIED, FPP, and RFUK. <https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17724IIED.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Mbile and Macqueen, 2018 above cited; and Moise, E.R. 2019 above cited

that the number of communities with increased means of life will improve. It is however unsure whether such improvements are likely to lead to poverty alleviation for the rest of the community. In the current environment, benefit sharing arrangements and focus on business options beyond timber remain limited. The current entrepreneurship models promoted around legal acceptable forms of CF business are built around individuals with potential for marginalisation of certain fringes of the population as already observed before. Some respondents argued that this was in order suggesting that there was need for a critical number of people to increase their incomes in the communities before the benefits trickling down to other members of the community. Others also argued that successful entrepreneurs could encourage and motivate other community members to join/adhere to the community business initiatives.

*Improved evidence should be compiled of how CF contributes to fight more systemic issues: forest governance, gender inequality, poverty, and climate change.* There is so far little data on how much community forestry contributes to alleviate these issues in the Congo Basin. Respondents on the basis of their own experiences agreed that CF:

1. Empowers communities who act as active agents in the debate on forest management and uncover potential illegal operations in their forests;
2. Enables women, especially when supporting NGOs are not gender-blind, to engage in decision-making on aspects of most strategic importance within the community;
3. Supports infrastructures that can be used for income-generating activities, and generates capital that can be used economic purposes within a community.
4. Sequesters carbon, through either sustainably managed or conserved forests, and reduces risks of erosion.

*Investments should be made to facilitate stronger CF organisations and networks in all five countries.* Respondents felt that NGOs working on forest governance, and leading the work on CF, will gradually expand their areas of expertise to include business and organisational development. On the one hand, they will better familiarise with enterprise creation procedures, techniques to ensure its profitability and fair impact on people's life and environment. On the other hand, they will increasingly develop their own organisations (stronger procedures, strategic planning, gender strategies and actions, etc.) and, duplicate such development to community-based and led organisations. Others argued for the need for national level structured value chain and performance based approaches including engagement with traditional business incubation services. So far it was argued that the role of national forestry training institutions was ignored and represented a missed opportunity for the project.

*More fluid synergies can be built at regional level through further peer-to-peer learning.* The momentum around CF has probably never been so high in the Congo Basin. The coincidence of DFID's ILLUCBF programme and FAO's support to COMIFAC for better participation of local and indigenous people in the management of Congo Basin forest, has made possible many encounters and experience-sharing across the region. The Brazzaville Roadmap, culminating point of those initiatives, has traced the road that states, civil society, donors and other key stakeholders may use to reach sustainable CFs across the region. In just about 7 years' time, the Roadmap will be evaluated. And while it remains uncertain that it harvests substantial successes, it seems clear that synergies between all stakeholders will have improved. More mutual learning will have happened, and will have permitted stronger actions on the ground. As a result of this engagement through the Roadmap, it is

also expectable that Community forestry has a more prominent role in the next Convergence Plan of COMIFAC.

*More support from donors and other stakeholders for CF is needed.* We noted that whilst significant international funds and technical support is flowing into forestry in the region - such as for REDD+, 'sustainable forest management' (industrial logging) and strict nature conservation - very little is being made available for CF development, despite its proven long-term developmental and climate benefits in many forest areas. There were unanimous calls on the region's national leaders, working alongside the international community, to advance and support legal and policy reform processes to create an enabling environment for community and locally-controlled forestry.<sup>45</sup> In addition to the direction and strategic focus of donor funding, respondents raised the prospects of public private partnerships in the promotion of community forestry drawing on the brokerage experiences of the CoNGOs project.

*There is a need to continue to work towards more innovative and simplified legal frameworks<sup>46</sup>.* CoNGOs, DRYAD and MappingForRights, along with FAO and other initiatives have yielded an impressive wealth of knowledge, capacities and attitudes towards CF in the region. However, the absorption capacity of legal reform processes remains very weak, thereby creating a gap which needs to be closed with innovative approaches. First and foremost, the CF process is inherently political, involving as it does the devolution of power to manage valuable resources, and negotiating this is always difficult. Further, there is a need to balance the rigidity of formal rules and regulations with the flexibility needed to ensure that forest management can adapt to changing circumstances. Experience suggests that, in general, legal frameworks need to be enabling rather than constraining so that the rights of communities to manage forests are not overwhelmed by onerous responsibilities. There are also potential dangers in moving too fast to formalise a legal framework. In the early stages of implementing community forestry in any setting there is much to be learnt from the key stakeholders, particularly the government and community groups. Importantly, a degree of trust has to be built between these two groups, often in a situation where past interactions were characterised by considerable mistrust, or even violence. Community forestry is predicated on changing institutional roles of these two groups. In most countries, the government needs to move from a predominantly policing/licencing role to one that emphasises community facilitation, while community groups become active forest managers. These shifts in institutional mandates do not come about by fiat, and benefit from external facilitation.

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45 Yaoundé Declaration: Statement concerning community forestry in the Congo Basin Region, (2019) 4 pages <https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G04413.pdf>

46 ClientEarth (2019) Communities at the heart of forest management: How can the law make a difference. Sharing lessons from Nepal, Philippines and Tanzania. 64 pages <https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G04396.pdf>

## 6. Annex

### 6.1. Annex I. Terms of Reference for the Terminal Evaluation

## Terms of Reference

### Evaluation of the work of the CoNGOs Consortium: NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests, 2016 – 2019

#### 1. Background to the initiative

NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests (CoNGOs) is a consortium of in-country teams and international partners, currently active in five African countries, facilitated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). It was launched in 2016 in the Congo Basin, home to the second largest tropical rainforest in the world covering over 2 million km<sup>2</sup> and crucial to future climate stability. More than 40 million people depend on the Congo Basin's forests for their livelihoods – many are desperately poor – and their population is growing. The project aims to improve the livelihoods of forest dependent communities through better governance and practice. To achieve this goal the consortium have collaborated with at least 10 in-country NGO partners to strengthen community forestry rights and enterprises in Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, and the Republic of Congo. These countries are at a critical point seeking to transform their economies to 'emerging economy' status through the exploitation of natural resources, including forests, and the large scale development of agribusiness and energy infrastructures are a key strategy. Within this context, the promotion of the concept of "community forestry" as a more inclusive and sustainable development path has for years been a challenging but important priority for civil organisations in the region. For the past three years the CoNGOs project has sought to address this urgent need to not only recognise and strengthen rights-security but also to improve opportunities for forest-dependent communities. So that they too can participate in, and contribute to, economic progress but in line with their own development visions.

*The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable and secure community livelihoods in the Congo Basin, as part of the Department for International Development's (DFID) Improving Livelihoods and Land Use in the Congo Basin Forests (ILLUCBF) programme.*

In each country, partners deliver the following three outputs to achieve these objectives/this objective:

- ❑ **Improved evidence on viable options for community forestry including strengthening of rights**, generated and verified by relevant stakeholders in the Congo Basin countries;
- ❑ **Stronger capacity of community organisations to pursue resource rights security and commercial forest and farm production options, and articulate policy changes** in national forest governance and land use planning processes, and;
- ❑ **More effective policy engagement and implementation in support of sustainable and profitable community forestry** through the collaboration of rights-holders, civil society organisations and national institutions in subnational, national, regional and international policy processes.

The project works directly with a range of key stakeholders in forest dependent communities, such as forest and farm producers, indigenous peoples, and women's groups, to help build the foundations for a more inclusive and equal forest and land use sector in the Congo Basin.

The initiative is managed and coordinated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). IIED is an independent policy research organisation established in 1992 which

works with partners on five continents to tackle key local and global issues. The mission of IIED is to build a fairer, more sustainable world, using evidence, action and influence in partnership with others. This initiative is part of the projects implemented by the Forest Team which is part of the Natural Resources Group. The team focuses on locally controlled forestry and sustainable livelihoods and implements projects such as the Forest Farm Facility (FFF) run in collaboration with FAO and IUCN, which aims to improve livelihoods and decision-making processes over forest and farm landscapes for smallholders, communities, indigenous peoples, and women's organisations. Previous work has included China-Africa Forest Governance, Forests in the Green Economy, Forests and Sustainable development Goals, Inclusive REDD+ (funded by the UK Government), Testing REDD+, Forest Connect and demand side measures for reducing deforestation.

The main consortium partners involved in the CoNGOs initiative are:

- ❑ International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) – facilitates the consortium and is responsible for overall management of the project. It also leads the work on enterprise development in community forestry and artisanal logging contexts in Cameroon and the DRC.
- ❑ ClientEarth – leads legal analysis and advisory work in RoC and Gabon with national legal working groups.
- ❑ Fern – leads civil society engagements and coordination with key forestry governance processes (e.g. REDD+ and FLEGT VPA) at the country level in CAR, RoC and Cameroon and at the regional and international level with the Congo Basin Forest Partnership and the EU.
- ❑ Forest Peoples Programmes (FPP) – leads indigenous peoples legal support and capacity building efforts in community forestry contexts in RoC, CAR and Cameroon.
- ❑ Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK) – leads the piloting and implementation of the community forestry manual of procedures in CAR and regionally the Mapping for Rights mapping tool and web platform.
- ❑ Well Grounded – leads the work on civil society organisational development in CAR.

The website for CoNGOS, where news, reports and details of events can be found, is:

<https://www.iied.org/congos-ngos-collaborating-for-equitable-sustainable-community-livelihoods-congo-basin-forests>

An independent evaluation is now required under the terms of DFID funding, which will evaluate the achievements of the project over the last 3 years.

The extent to which steps have been taken to improve sustainability over the life of the initiative and beyond will be an important issue for the evaluation.

## **2. Objective of the evaluation**

The objective of the independent evaluation is:

- ❑ To assess the performance and achievements in relation to the project's overall goal, specific objectives, outputs and activities

More specifically, the evaluator will assess the project design for addressing the stated goal, purpose and output; the project's performance and achievements; project implementation, management and administration; and lessons learned. The evaluation will liaise closely with consortium and in-country partners. The aim of the evaluation is to support IIED in identifying relevant learnings from the project for the design of future initiatives. A secondary objective is for accountability purposes to provide and independent project review to DFID. The main users of the evaluation will be IIED and the CoNGOs

consortium partners but DFID and other donors seeking to support similar initiatives in the region are also likely users of the main findings and recommendations.

### 3. Tasks for the evaluation

The evaluation will involve gathering and analysing data to answer 4 main questions:

- How relevant was the design of the project?
- How effective was the project in terms of its achievements (both expected and unexpected)?
- How efficiently was the project delivered?
- How sustainable is the project?

An indication of the relative time and effort expected to be devoted to each is given below. A more precise balance of the evaluator's effort across these evaluation questions will be worked out with the evaluator. Similarly, the balance between collecting data for the project as a whole and within each country context will need to be discussed and agreed upon.

#### 3.1 *How relevant was the design of the CoNGOs project? [about 15% of the evaluation effort]*

- Reflect on the context of forest governance and sustainability action and discourse in the countries involved in the CoNGOs initiative and internationally since 2016 and assess the general premise, political timeliness and appropriateness of the approach of the initiative.
- Assess the approach and design of the initiative – its theory of change, objectives, outputs, objectively verifiable indicators and their means of verification. This will include explorations of **sustainability**, relevance and flexibility, specificity, efficiency, effectiveness, creativity, innovation, impact, and institutional relationships.
- Assess the approach of IIED and partners to mitigate gender imbalance and the potential marginalising impacts of community forestry initiatives (including implications of in-country teams and/or external visitors).

#### 3.2 *How effective was the project in terms of its achievements (both expected and unexpected)? [about 50% of the evaluation effort]*

- Assess what progress has been made to date in achievement of the project's overall impact, outcome, and outputs.
- Assess how effective the project has addressed gender issues and how it has ensured that both women and men will benefit from its activities and outputs.
- Assess how effective the different partnerships that the programme has forged with public, private and civil society organisations has been in terms of overall performance.

#### 3.3. *How efficient was the project delivered? [about 15% of the evaluation effort]*

- Assess the efficiency of the activities undertaken by the project in terms of meeting the outputs and specific objective.
- Determine the extent to which identified risks/assumptions have impacted on the project or have been mitigated by the project (and assess whether the right risks were identified).
- Assess the management and administration of the initiative: how efficiently IIED coordinated and led the initiative; the capacity of IIED and its key partners (including the international partners and consultants) to implement the initiative; collaboration between IIED and its partners, and amongst partners, through the initiative; administration, including finance, by

IIED and its partners; reporting within the initiative and by IIED to DFID and others on the progress of the project.

### **3.4 How sustainable was the project? [about 10% of the evaluation effort]**

- ❑ Identify actions that have contributed to the long-term impact and sustainability of CoNGOs - which cases illustrate this best?
- ❑ How sustainable and replicable are the results of the CoNGOs project without the consortium partners input in countries and the region?

### **3.4 Make recommendations based on the evaluation [about 10% of the evaluation effort]**

Based upon the assessment of the approach, performance and lessons learnt on project management and the consortium model of working, innovation in approach and delivery, and sustainability. Make recommendations to IIED and its partners as appropriate, with a focus on what a subsequent initiative should focus on delivering, if adequate funding were secured for a subsequent phase or similar initiative.

## **4. Evaluation methodology**

The evaluator will provide independent opinion and assessment. The evaluator will have the assistance of IIED and CoNGOs consortium staff (and in-country teams where appropriate) to:

- ❑ Undertake a thorough review of all the project documents and communication products. This will include the work plans agreed between IIED and its partners, and all progress reports, policy analysis documents, tools and advocacy outputs (a Drop-Box will be set up where all electronic material will be stored).
- ❑ Review quarterly narrative reports submitted by IIED and partners to DFID.
- ❑ Review annual reports submitted by IIED and partners to DFID.
- ❑ Visit country teams in at least two of the following countries: Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Republic of Congo. Country teams will facilitate appropriate field and stakeholder visits for the evaluator.
- ❑ Using the experience from the site visits the evaluator will engage remotely with the other country teams and project partners where a personal visit was not possible.

## **5. Deliverables**

- ❑ Inception report with agreed methodology, schedule and budget for carrying out the evaluation.
- ❑ The evaluation will be presented as a single report and will be comprised of:
  - One page outlining the key conclusions and recommendations for IIED's director and strategy team;
  - A three-page executive summary.
  - No more than 25 pages for the full report which will include a section that provides a clear description of the methodologies used both to gather and analyse information
  - Annexes and references to be appended to the full report as appropriate
- ❑ The evaluator will prepare an accompanying PowerPoint presentation that highlights the key findings of the report.
- ❑ The evaluator will present her/his evaluation findings to a meeting that will include DFID and IIED representatives. This meeting may occur in either Edinburgh or London.

The evaluator will consider comments on the draft report (and presentation) in preparation of the final report.

## **6. Management and coordination of evaluation**

Anna Bolin (the manager of the project) will oversee and facilitate the evaluation.

## **7. Qualifications / experience of the evaluator**

### **Essential**

- I. Excellent working knowledge/ fluency in French
- II. Theoretical understanding of the challenges facing community forestry / improving forest governance in African countries
- III. Broad experience of undertaking evaluations of similar types of programmes in the developing world
- IV. Working experience in some of the five African countries where the project was initiated
- V. Post-graduate degree

### **Desirable**

- Post-graduate degree in forestry, international development, anthropology or similar
- Experience of implementing and / or advising multi-country forestry/natural resource management programmes with a range of partners organisations
- A good understanding of DFID policy on forest governance / management in developing countries

## **8. Timeframe for evaluation**

The evaluation will take place between June and September 2019. A work plan and timetable will be agreed by the IIED project manager and the evaluator. The estimated input from the evaluator will be 28 days.

Visits to the countries are likely to take place to two of the following (TBD):

- Cameroon (TBD)
- Democratic Republic of Congo (TBD)
- Republic of Congo (TBD)
- Central African Republic

The draft report will be due 30/08 2019. Comments on the draft report from in-country teams, IIED and others will be delivered to the consultant by 07/09 2019. The final revised draft is due on 14/09 2019.

Subject to availability of those attending, the consultant will be asked to make a presentation on the evaluation during the week of [date to be confirmed]. The evaluation will be completed (and final payment made) once any comments from the presentation have been taken into account in the final report, and once that report has been accepted by IIED.

Potential candidates are encouraged to respond with the following:

- A draft methodology
- Schedule
- An indicative budget and breakdown of costs (not including flights and hotels as these will be covered by IIED)
- CV outlining relevant qualifications and experience

Please forward to Emma Gibbs, [emma.gibbs@iied.org](mailto:emma.gibbs@iied.org) and Anna Bolin, [anna.bolin@iied.org](mailto:anna.bolin@iied.org)

**Evaluation of the work of the CoNGOs Consortium:  
NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable  
community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests, 2016  
– 2019**

**Inception Report**

**Evaluators: Teodyl Nkuintchua, Kevin Enongene & Aurelian Mbzibain**

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## □ Introduction

This Inception Report covers the earliest phase of the evaluation of the work of the *CoNGOs Consortium: NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests*, a project implemented by IIED and partners between 2016 and 2019. The report is based on Skype and face-to-face meetings with two senior officers at IIED, email exchanges with five UK-based projects partners, and formal and informal conversations with four national partners based in the Central African Republic (CAR), Cameroon and Republic of Congo, as well as a quick review of the project documentation. It summarises the Consultant team understanding of the objectives and scope of the evaluation, IIED's main expectations, and key aspects of the methodology that will be used for the mission.

## Background

The project "NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests (CoNGOs)" is a three-year (2016 to 2019) Department for International Development (DFID) funded project designed to improve the livelihoods of forest dependent communities in the Congo Basin through better governance and practice. Facilitated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), CoNGOs is a consortium of 6 UK-based organisations currently active in the Congo Basin. The project had as its overall objective to contribute to the achievement of sustainable and secure community livelihoods in the Congo Basin, as part of the Department for International Development's (DFID) Improving Livelihoods and Land Use in the Congo Basin Forests (ILLUCBF) programme. In order to achieve the project's goal, the consortium members collaborated with more than 10 in-country NGO partners to advance community forestry rights and enterprise in the following countries: Cameroon, CAR, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, and the Republic of Congo. It is important to note that these countries all seek to achieve economic emergence through the exploitation of their natural resources including forests, and the establishment of large-scale agribusiness as well as the development of energy infrastructures. Within this context, the community forestry concept which is argued to represent a more inclusive and sustainable development pathway has been challenging for years but constitute a priority for civil society organizations in the region. There is limited evidence of what works and pathways for delivering community forestry in the region in ways in which contribute effectively to inclusive sustainable development.

## Context and purpose of the evaluation

The specific objective of the final evaluation is to assess the performance and achievements in relation to the project's overall goal, specific objectives, outputs and activities. The evaluation shall provide an independent assessment of the project design, implementation, management and administration. The evaluators will also assess the performance of the project with respect to the extent to which the different activities realized over the project's period (2016 to 2019) have been able to contribute or not contribute towards attaining the goals and objectives of the project. The evaluation will compare the baseline situation prior to the commencement of the project to the existing situation following the implementation of the project's activities with a focus on identifying relevant sustainability factors beyond the project's life.

Different from traditional evaluation exercises, we will seek to document best practices, lessons learnt as well as identify models which could be scaled up, adapted or replicated. Key to this focus will be to situate and reflect on the future of community forestry not only within the community land rights debate but also within the international donor community debate on the role of community forestry in inclusive sustainable development. It is expected that these issues will facilitate learning amongst partners and provide the evidence needed for evidence based programming and policy engagement.

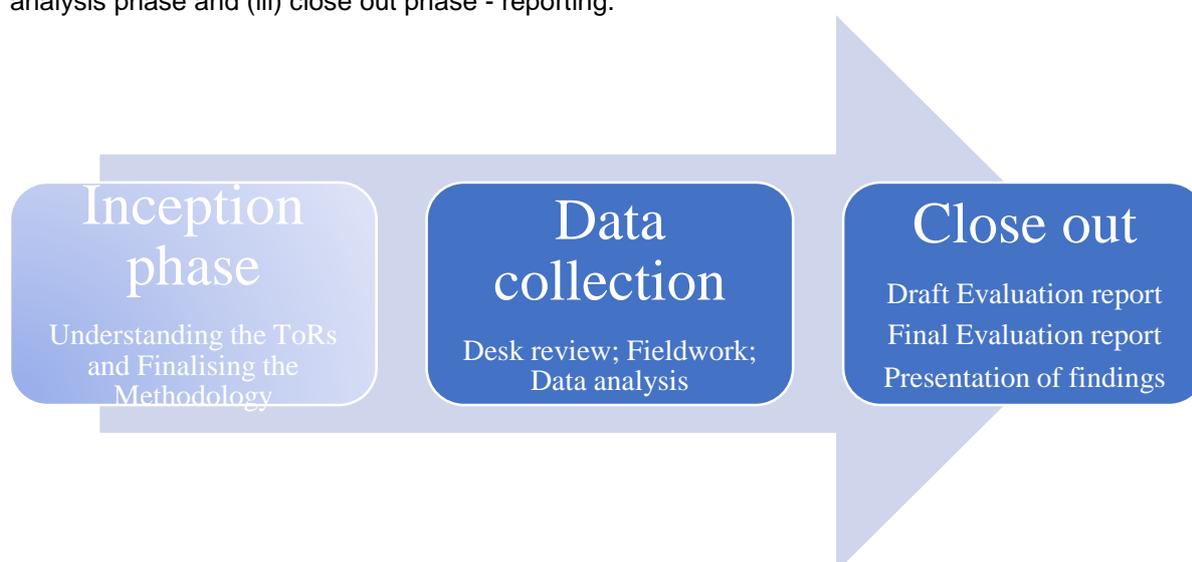
## □ Methodology

### Overall Approach of the final evaluation

The evaluation will comply with the Organisation for Economic Co-operations and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability. Gender mainstreaming and poverty reduction will be considered as cross-cutting themes during the whole process. The assessment will also entail the identification of good practices generated so far from the implementation of the project in the different project countries. The evaluation will analyse the project logical framework and assess how the national, regional and international context influenced project implementation and performance.

### Phases of the final evaluation

The methodology considered a three-stage approach: (i) Inception phase, (ii) data collection and analysis phase and (iii) close out phase - reporting.



#### *Inception meetings and scope definition*

The objective of the inception phase was for the evaluation team and IIED to agree on the scope and expectations regarding the evaluation of the CoNGOs project. Two meetings were held between the team and IIED CoNGOs's project manager and IIED's Forest Team which allowed the team to better understand the objectives of the evaluation from the programmatic and strategic/forward looking view. Through these meetings potential key respondents were identified including project partners and beneficiaries. Following these meetings, project documents have been provided to the evaluation team and email contact achieved with project partners in all project countries including a series of phone and skype calls with partners in CAR, Republic of Congo, DRC and Cameroon. These initial discussions were also useful to inform the data collection instruments attached in the annexes.

#### *Data collection and analysis phase*

Two major types of data will be collected:

*Qualitative data:* This will give an understanding of the context on which the CoNGOs project operates in each of the project countries, how it links and coordinates with other national or regional projects and the challenges it has faced so far. It will also seek to draw out lessons learnt but also challenges faced during the implementation of this project. We will use this data to understand the lived experiences of

project partners and beneficiaries as well as their views about ways forward regarding community forestry in the Congo Basin

*Quantitative data:* This will provide information to support the identification of trends and enable cross-country comparison as well as triangulation of data sets to ensure quality control.

The evaluation team will gather detailed and critical primary and secondary data from three sources:

□ **Desk review and research:**

Findings will be identified through document review and validated through interviews with stakeholders and project partners. Sources of documented information will include inter alia:

- Project documents and communication products: work plans, progress reports, evaluation reports, policy analysis documents, tools and advocacy outputs;
- Quarterly and annual reports submitted by IIED and partners to DFID;
- Media coverage and project partner social media presence including blogs;
- Grey/published literature/research on community forestry generally and the Congo basin more specifically;
- Conference reports, presentations, keynote statements
- Literature on Congo basin context and donor environment and perspectives regarding the future and models of support to inclusive sustainable forest management.

□ **Field visits:**

The team will make field visits to the two selected countries (Cameroon and Central Africa Republic) during which face-to-face interviews will be conducted with identified project partners and stakeholders (as agreed upon with IIED). In collaboration with the various country project teams, the evaluators will conduct interviews and where possible, meetings (e.g. group discussions) with the selected project beneficiaries and stakeholders. A list of proposed actors to be interviewed as part of the evaluation exercise is presented in **Annex C**. The field visits will aim at consulting a wider group of stakeholders and project beneficiaries on the relevance of the project as well as its impact. Project partners and beneficiaries in the countries where field visits will not be conducted would be interviewed virtually (via Skype or telephone).

Data collection instruments: the tools to be employed in the data collection process are presented in **Annex A**.

**Data analysis:** Primary data (quantitative and qualitative) collected from the field will be cleaned and processed. Where possible, both quantitative and qualitative data will then be subjected to statistical analysis using MS Excel. Raw and analysed data will be presented in an easy to understand manner – e.g. in the form of bar charts, graphs, infographics and tables to enhance understanding of key findings and recommendation. We will analyse secondary data collected through text and documentation using content analysis. Content analysis allows evaluators to make replicable and valid inferences from text. The process involves moving from the key issues being investigated and researcher's expertise in the area to scan the text. This will enable the project team to identify broad subjects in line with the evaluation and then to carry out a closer evaluation of the different issues addressed in line with the context under which this action was implemented. We will build on these findings to draw out initial lessons learned and best practices and complement this with expressed lived testimonies from respondents and key informants.

*Close out phase*

Based on the ToRs we foresee a report of about 25 pages (excluding annexes) and an executive summary (see **Annex D** for proposed draft outline of the evaluation report). Once data and analysis is completed we will provide an initial draft to IIED for feedback and contributions. This will be followed by the presentation of the evaluation findings in a workshop to be organised by the client. Comments received from the workshop will be used to improve on the evaluation report and the final version obtained thereafter will be submitted to the client for dissemination to the other key stakeholders.

□ **Work plan**

S/N	ACTIVITIES	Jul-19				Aug-19				Sep-19			
		W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4
<b>1. Inception phase</b>													
1.1	Preparation and submission of inception report												
1.2	Integration of comments and submission of final inception report												
<b>2. Data collection and analysis phase</b>													
2.1	Desk study/literature review & virtual interviews												
2.2	Data collection - CAR						*1						
2.3	Data collection - Cameroon							*2					
2.4	Data Analysis												
<b>3. Close out phase</b>													
3.1	Elaboration and submission of draft evaluation report												
3.2	Presentation of report in a workshop												
3.2	Integration of comments and submission of final evaluation report												

<b>LEGEND</b>	
	Duration of activity
	Review of draft deliverables by the client

\*1: Field work in CAR planned for the period August 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> 2019

\*2: Field work in Cameroon planned to take place from August 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> 2019

6.3. Annex III: Evaluation matrix

EVALUATION CRITERIA	MAIN EVALUATION QUESTIONS	Key indicators for assessing performance	DR	VI	FFI
Relevance of project design	How timely and appropriate was the approach of the CoNGOs initiative from a political perspective at the Congo Basin regional level or country levels	-Number of ongoing national and regional initiatives complemented by the CoNGOs project	X	X	X
	To what extent, were all the project partners involved the design of the project and in the design of each year's activity plans?	-Number of partners involved in project design and activity plans		X	X
	Did the project have a clear theory of change? Was the ToC used systematically in the design, management and evaluation of the project? Was it clearly connected to the key project activities?	-Proportion (%) of key project objectives linked to the TOC	X	X	X
	Was the approach taken by the consortium partners to mitigate gender imbalance as well as potentially marginalizing impacts of community forestry initiatives appropriate?	-Number of females and youths involved community forestry committees -Number of females and youths that participated in capacity building initiatives -Number of females and youths involved in the forest enterprises		X	X
Project effectiveness in terms of achievements	What level of progress has been made towards attaining the project's overall impact, outcome, and outputs?	-Proportion of results (%) achieved vis-à-vis what was planned	X	X	X
	What are some of the key achievements or success stories recorded by the project?	-Number of key achievements recorded by the project	X	X	X
	What are some of the enabling factors that fostered the realization of the key achievements and how did these factors apply to both men and women?	-Number of factors that supported achievements		X	X
	What are some of the challenging factors that contributed to non-achievements?	-Number of factors that impeded achievements		X	X
	How effective has the overall performance of the partnerships established by the project with the public, private and civil society organizations been?	-Proportion (%) of functional partnerships established by the project		X	X
Project efficiency	How efficient are the project activities in terms of attaining the project outputs and specific objective?	-Level (%) of attainment of outputs and outcomes	X	X	X
	Did the identified risks/assumptions impact on the project in any way or were mitigated by the project?	-Proportion (%) of identified risks mitigated by the project	X	X	X

Project sustainability	What are some of the actions implemented by the project that have contributed to the long-term impact and sustainability?	-Number of implemented actions that culminated in long-term impact		X	X
	Can the results of the CoNGOs project be sustained and replicated in the project countries and the Congo Basin region without the intervention of the consortium partners?	-Number of beneficiaries who share views on the sustainability of the project		X	X
	In what ways do you think the benefits of the action can continue the project lifetime? What are the enabling conditions or factors that may constrain the positive results from being sustained?	-Number of ways project benefits can be reaped after end of project life		X	X
Project Impact	To what extent has the project achieved its stated impact?	Level (%) of attaining of the impact vis-à-vis what was planned		X	X
	What are some of the manifestations of this impact? Give some examples	-Number of manifested impacts		X	X
	What could the project have done differently if you had another chance.	-Number of identified alternative options for project implementation		X	X
	What made this possible? What did you learn from this?	-Number of lessons learnt		X	X

DR: Desk review (existing documentation); VI: Virtual interviews; FFI: Face-to-face interviews

6.4. Annex IV: Data collection tools

**INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR THE CoNGOs FINAL EVALUATION**

*A. Interview Protocol – Consortium partners*

<b>Name and Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	
<b>Date of Interview/Meeting</b>	

What role did your organization play in the project?

**Relevance of project design**

- How timely and appropriate was the approach of the CoNGOs initiative from political, economic and social perspectives at the Congo Basin regional level or at the country level were your organization was involved?
- To what extent, in your view, was your organisation involved the design of the project and in the design of each year's activity plans?
- Did the project have a clear theory of change? Was the ToC used systematically in the design, management and evaluation of the project? Was it clearly connected to the key project activities?
- What was the approach taken by the consortium partners to mitigate gender imbalance as well as potentially marginalizing impacts of community forestry initiatives? How appropriate was this initiative?  Inappropriate  Fairly appropriate  very appropriate
- How relevant is the CoNGOs project in supporting national initiatives or the needs of national actors?
- What are some of the challenges (if any) experienced in the course of designing of the project and how were these challenges dealt with?

**Project effectiveness in terms of achievements**

- In your view, what level of progress has been made towards attaining the project's overall impact, outcome, and outputs?
- What are some of the key achievements or success stories recorded by your organization's work in the project?
- What are some of the enabling factors that fostered the realization of the key achievements and how did these factors apply to both men and women?
- What are some of the challenging factors that contributed to non-achievements?
- In your view, how effective has the overall performance of the partnerships established by the project with the following actors been?

Public Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Ineffective <input type="checkbox"/> Fairly effective <input type="checkbox"/> Effective <input type="checkbox"/> Very effective	Justification:
Private Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Ineffective <input type="checkbox"/> Fairly effective <input type="checkbox"/> Effective <input type="checkbox"/> Very effective	Justification:
Civil Society Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Ineffective <input type="checkbox"/> Fairly effective <input type="checkbox"/> Effective	Justification:

	<input type="checkbox"/> Very effective	
--	---	--

**Project efficiency**

- In your view, did your organization have sufficient financial resources and human resources to adequately implement the project activities? Have those resources been efficiently used?
- How efficient are the project activities (undertaken by your organization) in terms of attaining the project outputs and specific objective?

<input type="checkbox"/> Inefficient <input type="checkbox"/> Fairly efficient <input type="checkbox"/> Efficient <input type="checkbox"/> Very efficient	Justification:
--	----------------

- In your view, did the identified risks/assumptions impact on the project in any way or were mitigated by the project? If so, how and to what extent (little extent, large extent, very large extent)?
- Are there major unpredicted (not considered in the risks/assumptions) events that negatively or positively impacted on the project?
- What are your views on the following?
  - How efficiently IIED coordinated and led the CoNGOs initiative;
  - The capacity of IIED and its key partners (including the international partners and consultants) to implement the initiative;
  - Collaboration between IIED and its partners, and amongst partners, through the initiative;
  - Administration, including finance, by IIED and its partners;
  - Reporting within the initiative and by IIED to DFID and others on the progress of the project.

**Project sustainability**

- To what extent do you believe that the benefits of the project will continue beyond the project lifetime? What are the enabling conditions or factors that may constrain the positive results from being sustained?
- In your opinion, what are some of the actions implemented by your organization which in your view have contributed to sustain the benefits and achievements?
- Do you think the results of the CoNGOs project can be sustained and replicated in the project countries and the Congo Basin region without the intervention of the consortium partners?

**Project Impact**

- To what extent has the project achieved its stated impact?
- What are some of the manifestations of this impact? Give some examples
- What made this possible? What did you learn from this?
- What could the project have done differently if you had another chance.

**Perspectives/on the future of community forestry**

- Based on your experience, where do you see community forestry in the next 5-10 years in the region?
- Can you list some key actions which, if funding was available, should be strategically implemented in order to secure that future?

*B. Interview Protocol – In-country partners*

<b>Name and Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	
<b>Date of Interview/Meeting</b>	

When did you join the project and what role did your organization play in the project?

**Relevance of project design**

- How timely and appropriate was the approach of the CoNGOs initiative from political, economic and social perspectives in your country?
- How appropriate was this initiative?  Inappropriate  Fairly appropriate  very appropriate
- To what extent, in your view, was your organisation involved the design of the project and in the design of each year's activity plans?
- Are you aware of a ToC for your country part of the project? What was your understanding of that ToC?
- What was the approach taken by your organisation to mitigate gender imbalance, IP exclusion as well as potentially marginalizing impacts of community forestry initiatives?
- What are some of the challenges (if any) experienced in the course of designing project activities for your organisation and how were these challenges dealt with?

**Project effectiveness in terms of achievements**

- In your view, what level of progress has been made towards attaining the project's objectives as defined for your organisation?
- What are some of the key achievements or success stories recorded by your organization's work in the project?
- What are some of the enabling factors that fostered the realization of the key achievements and how did these factors apply to both men and women; local and indigenous people?
- What are some of the challenging factors that contributed to non-achievements?
- In your view, how effective has the overall performance of the partnerships established by the project with the following actors been, in your country?

Public Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Ineffective <input type="checkbox"/> Fairly effective <input type="checkbox"/> Effective <input type="checkbox"/> Very effective	Justification:
Private Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Ineffective <input type="checkbox"/> Fairly effective <input type="checkbox"/> Effective <input type="checkbox"/> Very effective	Justification:
Civil Society Organizations	<input type="checkbox"/> Ineffective <input type="checkbox"/> Fairly effective <input type="checkbox"/> Effective <input type="checkbox"/> Very effective	Justification:

### **Project efficiency**

- In your view, did your organization have sufficient financial resources and human resources to adequately implement the project activities?
- In your view, did the identified risks/assumptions impact on the project in any way or were mitigated by the project? If so, how and to what extent (little extent, large extent, very large extent)?
- What are your views on the following?
  - o How efficiently your UK-based direct partner coordinated the work done in your country;
  - o The capacity of your UK-based direct partner and its key partners to implement the initiative;

### **Project sustainability**

- To what extent do you believe that the benefits of the project will continue beyond the project lifetime? What are the enabling conditions or factors that may constrain the positive results from being sustained?
- In your opinion, what are some of the actions implemented by your organization which in your view have contributed to sustain the benefits and achievements?
- Do you think the results of the CoNGOs project can be sustained and replicated in the project countries and the Congo Basin region without the intervention of the consortium partners?

### **Project Impact**

- To what extent has the project achieved its stated impact: *Improved land use governance that supports forest dependent communities (through secured rights and 'viable' community forest enterprise opportunities) [in the Congo Basin]*?
- What are some of the manifestations of this impact? Give some examples
- What made this possible? What did you learn from this?
- What could the project have done differently if you had another chance.

### **Perspectives/on the future of community forestry**

- Based on your experience, where do you see community forestry in the next 5-10 years in the region?
- Can you list some key actions which, if funding was available, should be strategically implemented in order to secure that future?

### *C. Interview Protocol – External partners*

<b>Name and Position</b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	
<b>Date of Interview/Meeting</b>	

- What involvement did you have in the project?
- What did you specifically benefit from CoNGOs?
- In your view, what is unique and innovative of the CoNGOs project and how relevant is the project to national or regional initiatives in the Congo Basin?
- To what extent does the CoNGOs initiative align with or supports similar projects/initiatives in your village, area or country, including those implemented by your organisation?
- Are there any areas where you think the project could have done better?
- In your opinion, what are some of the key lessons that can be learnt from the CoNGOs project?
- Based on your experience, where do you see community forestry in the next 5-10 years in the region? Why?

*D. Group discussion protocol – Community Committees or groups*

<b>Names of community members. If more than 5, just an estimate of the number of people</b>	
<b>Supporting organisation</b>	
<b>Date Meeting</b>	

- What involvement did you have in the project?
- How did your community become engaged with the project?
- What did you specifically benefit from this project? What difference did it make from previous projects?
- Has the project help setting-up new institutions? How do they function: purpose, decision-making, procedures?
- What are the current relations between the institutions the project leaned on the most and traditional institutions?
- In case those institutions are different from Community Forest Committees, what are the current relations between the institutions the project leaned on the most and the CF Committee?
- How much has gender and indigenous people been considered in all project activities in the community? Has this had any effect out of the frame of project activities?
- Has the project responded to all the community needs in relation to land right security?
- Has the project responded to all the community needs in relation to improvement of livelihoods?
- Has the project enabled the community to have a better access to decision-making processes at local and national levels?
- In your opinion, what are some of the key lessons that can be learnt from the project?
- Are there any issues which your community should be focused on in line with community forestry?
- Based on your experience, where do you see community forestry in the next 5-10 years in the region? Why?

6.5. Annex V: Consultation/Interview Dates

S/N	Name of respondent	Organization	Country	Mode of interview
<b>International Partners and Donor</b>				
1.	Anna Bolin	IIED	UK	Virtual
2.	Duncan Macqueen	IIED	UK	Virtual
3.	James Mayers	IIED	UK	Virtual
4.	Nathalie Faure	ClientEarth	UK	Virtual
5.	Stephany Kersten	Well Grounded	Netherlands	Virtual
6.	Marie-Ange Kalenga	FERN	Belgium/UK	Via email
7.	Agata Pilarz	FPP	UK	Virtual
8.	Nsioh Macnight Ngwese	FPP	Cameroon	Face-to-face
9.	Stephen Nounah	FPP	Cameroon	Face-to-face
10.	Simon Counsell	Rainforest UK	UK	Virtual
11.	Marjolaine Pichon	Rainforest UK	UK	Virtual
12.	Samuel Dieval	Rainforest UK	UK	Virtual
13.	Stephen Mooney	DFID	UK	Virtual
14.	Henk Hoefsloot	Tropenbos	Netherlands	Virtual
<b>Republic of Congo</b>				
15.	Sylvie Mfoutou Banda	ODDHC	RoC	Virtual
16.	Nina Cynthia Alida Kiyindou	OCDH	RoC	Virtual
17.	Ntsiete Moukouagata Alban Cherubin	OCDH	RoC	Virtual
18.	Maixent Fortunin AGNIMBAT EMEKA	FGDH	RoC	Virtual
19.	Ines Gady Mouvkani	Comptoir Juridique Junior	RoC	Face-to-face
20.	Lilian Barros	Comptoir Juridique Junior	RoC	Face-to-face
<b>Cameroon</b>				
21.	Michele Danleu	CED (former)	Cameroon	Face-to-face
22.	Elizabeth Mballa Fouda	INADES	Cameroon	Face-to-face
23.	Raphael Meigno	INADES	Cameroon	Face-to-face
24.	Deputy Director of CF – CMR	MINFOF	Cameroon	Face-to-face
25.	National Director MINMESA	MINMESA	Cameroon	Face-to-face
26.	Regional Delegate MINMESA – East	MINMESA	Cameroon – Bertoua	Face-to-face
27.	Adi Nwafi	TFRD	Cameroon	Face-to-face
28.	Melanie Tassa	TFRD	Cameroon	Face-to-face
29.	Victor Amougou	CEFAID	Cameroon	Face-to-face
30.	Patrice Kamkuimo	Independent Consultant	Cameroon	Face-to-face
31.	Divine Tita Foundjem	ICRAF	Cameroon	Face-to-face
32.	Brigitte Anziom	ASTRADHE	Cameroon	Face-to-face
33.	Dieudonné Tombombo	Nomedjoh	Cameroon	Face-to-face
34.	Community forest Cooperative (5 members)	Mayos	Cameroon	Group Discussion

35.	Community forest Cooperative (7 members)	Koundi	Cameroon	Group Discussion
36.	Community forest Cooperative (6 members)	Nomedjoh	Cameroon	Group Discussion
37.	Honoré ZE Boniface	Mayor of Belabo	Cameroon	Face-to-Face
38.	Onésine Ebongue Ebongue	Mayor of Dimako	Cameroon	Face-to-Face
<b>DRC</b>				
39.	Alphonse Maindo		DRC	Virtual
40.	Theophile Gata	CAGDFT	DRC	Virtual
<b>CAR</b>				
41.	Simplice Kozo Desiré	REPALCA	CAR	Virtual
42.	N'DAKOUZOU Guy Julien	CIEDD	CAR	Face-to-face
43.	David Ouangando	Forest Ministry	CAR	Face-to-face
44.	Bienvenu Kemanda	Consultant	CAR	Face-to-face
45.	Bruce Deguene	WWF	CAR	Face-to-face
46.	Samba Zanré-Ngombala	I3D	CAR	Face-to-face
47.	Community forest Committee (14 members)	Moloukou	CAR	Group Discussion
48.	Jean Sylvain Mombe	Vice-Chair of the Customary Committee	CAR	Face-to-face
49.	Bere Cyriaque	President of Moloukou CFC	CAR	Face-to-face
50.	Rosaline Azaimi	President of the women Council - Moloukou	CAR	Face-to-face
51.	Modimaba community (12 members)	Indigenous people Committee	CAR	Face-to-face
52.	Maixent NGUINZIDA	MEFP	CAR	Face-to-face

## 6.6. Annex VI: Bibliography of the Desk Review

*This list is not exhaustive. It only captures the main documents that the evaluation team used in the course of their work. But other, smaller yet key documents, tools and briefs were also consulted.*

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6.8. Annex VIII: Photos of field missions

Sent separately.