

Yaoundé Declaration

Statement concerning community forestry in the Congo Basin region, March 2019

“We, the organisations and individuals from Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and the Republic of Congo, along with international partners from Europe, came together in Yaoundé for three days in February 2019 to discuss the lessons from the recent years of community forest development in the Congo Basin, especially in the context of the projects funded through DFID’s ILLUCBF programme. We thank DFID for the consistent support it has offered to community forestry across the region.

We believe that, in the context where land ownership is universally claimed by the state though subject to customary tenure, community forests currently represent the most effective, of currently available options, for most rural people in the Congo Basin to gain security of tenure and thereby a real chance of improving their livelihoods. Community forestry can impact the future of some 40 million people across the region – people who are currently amongst the poorest on Earth. It can provide the basis for greater community investment in natural resource management and hence a basis for sustainable and inclusive development.

From its beginnings in Cameroon in the mid-1990s, very important strides have been taken in making community and locally-controlled forestry a reality across the region. Many challenges remain. However, the combined experience of our organisations, backed up by the studies which have been undertaken through these and other projects, provides a solid body of both practical experience and policy analysis with which community forestry can continue to be advanced.

The concept of community forestry in the Congo Basin has come of age. The DRC model of Local Community Forest Concessions allows for large forest territories based on customary practices to be attributed in perpetuity. It promotes multiple uses for community forests, including cultivation of non-timber products, agriculture, conservation, as well as social and spiritual functions. These features in turn now need to be integrated in the legal frameworks and practices in Cameroon, Gabon, the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

The new concepts and practice around community forestry in the region can place it at the heart of rural development. It’s about sustainable forest landscape management, community empowerment and self-determination, rural entrepreneurship, local transformation of raw products and development of a rural service economy.

However, we note 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 community forest development, despite its proven long-term developmental and climate benefits in many forest areas. We urge donors such as the Norwegian and German governments, the EU and the World Bank to redress this imbalance and to make more resources available for community forestry on the ground and for building the institutions responsible for administering community forests throughout the region. We therefore call 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.

With these needs in mind, and taking account of the local, national, regional and global imperatives to ensure the forests of Africa are sustained into the future, we are committed to work together as the Congo Basin Coalition for Community Forests.”

Signed by:

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