

Preface

Central African Forests Forever

Central Africa holds the second largest continuous rainforest in the world after the Amazon: the Congo Basin rainforest. It measures more than two million square kilometres, stretching out over parts of six countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

The Congo Basin forests are very important for the well-being of many tens of millions of people who depend on them directly for their livelihood.

They are also of great value for the global community, since their huge carbon stocks help to reduce global warming and climate change. The forests are an immense source of fresh water in a world of increasing water scarcity.

The Congo Basin forests in Central Africa are very rich in biodiversity. They are home to great apes – gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos – forest elephants, colourful birds and a great variety of other enchanting animals and plants, including many species of medicinal plants.

The Congo Basin forests are still relatively intact. But for how long? Illegal, unsustainable logging, conversion of forests to unsustainable small-scale and large-scale agriculture, pressure on wood resources to meet energy needs, international pressure on natural resources and unsustainable infrastructure development are among the major threats. Rapid population growth, widespread poverty, injustice and corruption are major underlying problems.

However, the Congo Basin forests can largely be preserved when countries in Central Africa are able to take the turning to sustainable development, when people – both men and women – are empowered and their rights are respected, and when companies from outside, which operate in Central Africa, take their responsibility.

This book examines the Congo Basin forests from many viewpoints: ecologically, socially and economically. Scientists and other experts, mainly native to Central Africa itself, have contributed to the book with a number of chapters in which they point out the sustainable way forward.

There is hope, there are good and viable solutions. Many policymakers, experts from different origins, organisations, companies, NGO's, communities and individuals are working hard every day to preserve forests and biodiversity and develop a sustainable and fair economy in Central Africa. This book presents their vision, best practices, innovations, opportunities and solutions, so that everyone can benefit from: Central African Forests Forever!

*Meindert Brouwer
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