



Good land use decisions

can help protect Central African forests

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The Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI) supports reform processes and investments on the ground in sectors that drive forest loss, and aims to provide a foundation for institutional and sectoral changes needed to address deforestation. CAFI's approach is based on integrated multi-sector response and land use planning. It supports national coordination structures to make sure that consensus is found among all different stakeholders, sectors and line ministries.

by Berta Pesti

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Tackling slash-and-burn and intensification agriculture without considering land use and land tenure issues can result in rebound-effects and an increased expansion into forests.

The specific direct and indirect drivers of deforestation are different in the various countries of Central Africa. However, some general trends point to the particular nature of forest loss in the region, especially when compared to other forest basins. Perhaps the most important is that Central Africa has historically contributed little to global emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. However, in some countries forest loss is accelerating, especially in Cameroon and DR Congo. In the latter country, which boasts a giant forest, most of forest loss is attributed to small-scale farming and wood energy. In Cameroon it is subsistence as well as commercial agriculture that are causing massive forest loss. Where small-scale human activities have such

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an impact, actions should focus on meeting human needs more sustainably by improving production systems and helping societies benefit from the increasing share of those of working age among their population.

SHIFTING CULTIVATION Because of the sheer size of DR Congo, the main cause of deforestation in the region is slash-and-burn agriculture combined with wood energy and artisanal logging. Shifting cultivation has been the predominant farming practice in Central Africa for centuries, where soil quality is poor and farmers do not have access to alternatives such as fertilizers. After clearing the land and farming for a short period, farmers allow secondary forest to grow and soils to regain productivity during the fallow period, before clearing and replanting the land. This system results in the “rural complex,” a mosaic of forest patches, cleared land, active fields, fallow fields and land used for other purposes, including logging.

Slash-and-burn agriculture does not necessarily impact forests negatively if population densities are low and fallow periods are long enough. However, in the DR Congo the fallow periods are shortened because of the high population growth and increasing demand for food. Since 1950 the population of DR Congo almost quadrupled. It now exceeds 80 million people¹ and it may, towards 2050, have the world’s 3rd largest growth and reach 379 million in 2100, making DR Congo the world’s 5th most populous country.² At the same time, the current population requires more food: chronic malnutrition affects 43% of children under the age of 5, therefore over 7 million children. Under these circumstances the land cannot regain its productivity and it requires more efforts to produce the same amount of food. Recent studies³ have shown that the rural complex is expanding into intact forests because of these dynamics. In addition, other factors such as the expansion of road networks into high value forest areas for mining or logging, wood collection for energy, artisanal logging are also shown to have high impact.

DYNAMICS OF DRIVERS Reducing the pressure on forests and achieving the nation-wide emission reductions as expected by the Paris Agreement, requires an integrated multi-sector response led by governments and coordinated with many different stakeholders. This is because the drivers of deforestation span several economic sectors (direct drivers such as agriculture, wood energy, forestry and infrastructure/mining) and indirect drivers (such as lack of land use planning and insecure land tenure, poor governance and rapid population growth). As a result, focusing exclusively on the forest sector will not be sufficient to tackle forest loss. Small scale project-based approaches to REDD+ do not deliver results on a national level, because they too often address only one driver, while ignoring links to others (such as the slash-and-burn agriculture and the wood energy nexus) or cannot prevent leakage of emission to nearby areas. (REDD+ stands for efforts to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, and to foster forest conservation,



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Monkoto, west central DRC. Women carrying leafs and stems of manioc and firewood to cook them with.

sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks, ed.)

CROSS-ROADS Similarly, tackling slash-and-burn and intensification agriculture without considering land use and land tenure issues can result in rebound-effects and an increased expansion into forests. Central African forests are at a crossroads, where the historically present small-scale activities are now compounded by existing or planned agro-industrial plantations. Response measures must therefore address both historical causes and new trends. To sum up, an integrated multi-sector response is required through the coordination of a government agency with a multi-sector coordination mandate, which is capable of convening and influencing all sectors behind forest loss. This response should cover policies on land tenure, land use planning and allocation (such as forest governance, sustainable agriculture, sustainable mining etc.) as well as ambitious programs on sustainable productive activities in deforestation hot spots (sustainable agriculture, charcoal plantations, sustainable logging, sustainable harvest of non-timber forest products) or encouraging economic activities outside forests (savanna-based agriculture, reforestations, agroforestry etc.).

In partner countries such as Gabon and the Republic of Congo that have maintained low levels of deforestation, the objective is to support this trend and support the governments’ efforts to invest outside forests. It is also important to continue to provide incentives to good forest stewardship as well as prevent future risks.

CAFI The Central African Forest Initiative was created in 2015 to offer a holistic solution. It is a partnership of Central African countries, donor governments and implementing agencies. Through interventions in the above-mentioned sectors it seeks to achieve emission reductions and development co-benefits. CAFI’s theory of change makes it clear that emission reductions will come from policies and measures that properly address



Children in a forest village, west central DR Congo.
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both direct/proximate drivers (such as agriculture, wood energy, forestry and infrastructure/mining) and indirect/underlying drivers (such as lack of land use planning and insecure land tenure, poor governance and rapid population growth).

Therefore CAFI supports reform processes and investments on the ground in several sectors behind forest loss, providing the foundation for institutional and sectoral changes needed to address deforestation. CAFI and its partner governments agree on a broad portfolio of programs to be implemented in a coordinated effort by different government ministries and development partners, as opposed to a piecemeal approach of approving individual programs. Through a whole-of-government approach, it also supports national coordination structures to make sure that consensus is found among all different stakeholders, sectors and line ministries. Letters of intent with CAFI are signed by ministries with coordination mandates or heads of state or government.

Through CAFI donor countries pool their financial resources, coordinate their policy dialogue and align their bilateral funding to multiply the impact of their individual contributions.

LAND USE PLANNING A backbone of CAFI's support is land use planning. In countries where 50 to 90% of the territory is covered by forests, forests are intrinsically linked to national sovereignty over the territory and land use planning has a

direct impact on forest cover. Land use planning serves several purposes. First, it is a policy process that brings different sectors together to understand their land needs to implement their strategic objectives (produce a certain amount of crops, build X kms of roads and connect specific areas, exploit a certain number of logs etc.).

Secondly, land use planning offers the opportunity to create synergies across different levels of government (national, subnational and local) that have different roles to play in the planning, legislative and regulatory processes related to the use of land. Another important facet of the consultations and consensus building process of land use planning is its potential to bring together government with stakeholders outside of government. In this context, CAFI supports dialogue processes to ensure that all the different stakeholder views are properly considered.

Thirdly, land use planning is a technical exercise where the different uses of land and their utility (to the user, but in broader terms to the community, the nation or the world) are assessed and choices are made. To this end, CAFI supports studies to determine the criteria to be used to make land use decisions and the assessments based on those criteria. More specifically, CAFI's main focus is the identification of high value forests (from carbon, biodiversity or cultural point of

CAFI supports the development of legislative and regulatory instruments that ensure that the land use plans become binding law.

view) that will require protection and the identification of human activities that are incompatible with the protection of these high value areas.

In CAFI's approach, land use planning does not stop at the development of land use plans. CAFI also supports the development of legislative and regulatory instruments that ensure that the land use plans become binding law. It is also expected in these processes that sector codes and policies such as the mining code or the agricultural code, will also be aligned with the national consensus reached on land use. To achieve the latter, CAFI also supports relevant economic sectors to align their objectives and priorities with the land use plans and offers investments in productive activities in areas based on sustainable land use and natural resource use plans.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT, MONITORING AND OVERSIGHT The rest of CAFI supported portfolio is constructed around the support on land use planning. In DR Congo CAFI funds savanna-based economic activities, and provides support to subsistence and commercial agriculture, forestry and energy in several provinces. It also helps develop and implement energy master plans for main urban centers in DR Congo and the Republic of Congo. CAFI also supports countries to monitor the implementation of the land use plans and resulting legislation in forested areas, for example through funding the national forest monitoring systems in DR Congo, Gabon and the Republic of Congo. It also supports the forestry administration of Gabon in its forest law enforcement duties.

References

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- ² According to the medium variant scenario of the updated UN population estimates
- ³ Molinario et al. (2015): *Forest Cover Dynamics of shifting cultivation in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A remote sensing-based assessment for 2000-2010* (Env. Res. Lett. 2015, 10, 094009), *Quantification of land cover and land use within the rural complex of the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Env. Res Lett. 2017, 12, 104001); and *Contextualizing Landscape-Scape Forest Cover Loss in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between 2000 and 2015* (2020 MPDI, Land, 9, 23.).

CENTRAL AFRICAN FOREST INITIATIVE (CAFI)

The Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI) is as a collaborative partnership and Trust Fund that includes:

- Central African partner countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.
- A coalition of donors: the European Union, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, South Korea and the United Kingdom.
- Brazil as South-South partner.
- Implementing agencies such as World Bank, UNDP, FAO or AFD.

CAFI supports strategic, holistic and country-level REDD+ and Low Emission Development investments while focusing on Central African high-forest cover countries. Its objective is to recognize and preserve the value of the forests in the region to mitigate climate change, reduce poverty and contribute to sustainable development.

CAFI's support focuses on:

- developing and implementing National Investment Frameworks (NIFs) endorsed at the highest level by national institutions with cross sectoral mandates;
- providing funding based on the achievement of policy and programmatic milestones that are spelled out in letters of intent;
- encouraging donor coordination and alignment of bilateral assistance to partner countries based on NIFs;
- promoting inclusive participation of all stakeholders.

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