



**The Heads of State declare:**

- their commitment to the principles of biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of Central Africa's forest ecosystems
- the right of their people to be able to rely on forest resources in support of economic and social development
- their early identification of the need to reconcile the requirements of economic and social development with biodiversity conservation within the framework of well-understood sub-regional and international co-operation.

Source: Yaoundé Declaration by the Heads of State of the Congo Basin Countries (17 March 1999)



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# COMIFAC, the Central African Forests Commission: A region is linking poverty reduction with biodiversity conservation

The Congo basin is the world's second largest contiguous tropical forest area after the Amazon basin. In geographical terms, it takes in six Central African countries: the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa), the Republic of Gabon, the Republic of Cameroon, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and the Central African Republic. In political terms, four additional countries have a stake: the Republic of Burundi, the Republic of Rwanda, the Republic of Sao Tomé and Principe and the Republic of Chad. The forests are vital to the region – ecologically, economically, in terms of peace and conflict, and as areas of human settlement. Yet the forests are endangered by uncontrolled and unsustainable forestry operations and by pressures placed on their biological diversity, notably those of illegal hunting. In addition, there are open, violent and armed intra-state and inter-state conflicts in the eastern Congo basin.

By signing the Yaoundé Declaration in March 1999, the heads of state of the Congo basin countries agreed a joint initiative to preserve the region's forests and biodiversity. The ministers in

charge of forests in the countries concerned were given a mandate to implement the declaration and to set up a coordinating body for that purpose – COMIFAC, Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale – with a binding, transboundary programme of action. The programme aims to valorise the forestry sector – e.g. through the further processing of wood – while combating poverty at the same time. It underscores the importance of sustainable forest management and forest conservation as a key factor of regional development in the Congo basin.

Meanwhile, the transboundary programme of action has been adopted by the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) as a common framework for intervention. This means that the more than 30 international partners of CBFP have recognised COMIFAC as the supra-regional coordinating body.

Together with the national authorities, COMIFAC will ensure implementation of the action plan and steer the complex process of consultation among all stakeholders. In dialogue with the population, the private sector, civil society and representatives of other

sectors, COMIFAC identifies and realises concrete measures to conserve ecosystems and reduce poverty in the region.

Up to now, both COMIFAC and national forestry administrations have lacked the capacity to tackle these new and exceedingly demanding tasks. Therefore, Germany and France – through a joint advisory office – support the work of COMIFAC and that of the national forestry administrations until 2009.

- Advisory services concentrate on:
- regional and national planning and consultation processes
  - governance (e.g. initiatives to combat and monitor illegal practices in the forestry sector, such as poaching and illegal logging)
  - regional monitoring of tropical forests
  - dialogue among all stakeholders
  - awareness-raising and communication
  - establishment of an autonomous financing mechanism for the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat.

## What did we achieve?

Ten governments and 20 international environmental and development organisations have joined forces for a joint programme of action for development and poverty reduction through sustainable forest management, and are implementing it in the countries and across borders. **1 7 8 G**

Governance in the forestry sector has improved: certification of sustainable forest management in an area of more than 1 million ha; phased introduction of an African certification label; legality attestation for wood products as a prerequisite for their export; and strengthening of control in the forestry sector by independent observers. **7 8 G**

The principles of development-oriented and equitable use of forest resources are now recognised: free access to local wood and non-wood products for the Congo basin population (more than 50 million people in the entire region); participation of the population in decision-making processes and in forestry tax revenues (up to 50% of revenue); increase in added value and employment through regional processing and marketing initiatives. **1 3 7 G**

Two transboundary national parks have been established, and ten further ones are planned as a regional network of conservation areas. In total, 10% of the region's forests have gained protected status; this corresponds to an area of approximately 18 million hectares. Three-fourths of the forests may be used with specific restrictions. Approximately 14% of the forests are currently unprotected and could be legally deforested in extreme cases. **1 7 G**

International environmental conventions, e.g. on biodiversity, climate change and desertification have been ratified. Negotiation positions and implementation strategies are now elaborated and represented jointly in order to better assert the interests of the region at the international level. **7 8 G**

The development of the forests of the Congo basin is monitored jointly. An initial forest state survey is now available. It indicates a relatively low annual deforestation rate of 0.19%. **7**

Communities and organised sections of the population increasingly gain access to resources through the establishment of community forests and communal hunting zones and/or have a share in the benefits arising from the use of such resources. They can tap forest tax revenues to foster local development activities such as building of schools, health-care facilities and water supply systems. **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 G**



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## The Millennium Development Goals

- 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
- 2 Achieve universal primary education**
- 3 Promote gender equality and empower women**
- 4 Reduce child mortality**
- 5 Improve maternal health**
- 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
- 7 Ensure environmental sustainability**
- 8 Develop a global partnership for development**

**Good governance**

Good governance is about how decisions are taken and implemented in a state. Originally, the connotations of this notion included an efficient public sector, accountability and controls, but also decentralization and transparency. Today, good governance means more: It is not just confined to government action alone but also encompasses the interaction between government and civil society.

