



## COMMUNITY-BASED LAND-USE PLANNING IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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# INTRODUCTION

Land-use planning is increasingly recognised as a being a key tool to encourage better management of natural resources and as a basis for local development in the Congo Basin.

In 2018, the Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK) launched a new participatory mapping and land-use planning project in Maniema province, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The project is funded by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and led in partnership with Kinshasa-based consultancy firm, GeoFirst SARL, a local pioneer in mapping technologies and geographic information systems (GIS). It builds on RFUK's **MappingForRights** initiative, which has already helped over 900 local communities in the Congo Basin to map over seven million hectares of mostly forested land.

RFUK's land-use planning project is engaging nearly 100 communities across two sectors in Maniema province: the sector of Balanga and the Bangengele "chefferie". It aims to develop a community-driven model that will inform land-use planning at the local and national level, serving as an example for a more sustainable and equitable approach to land management.

Specifically, the project's objectives are to:

- Contribute to the land-use planning processes in Maniema by publishing participatory maps and land-use scenarios;
- Ensure that communities' development needs are incorporated at the sector and province levels;
- Inform DRC's ongoing national land-use planning reform, launched in 2015;
- Provide guidelines and share best practices for a more sustainable and equitable land management regime in DRC.



# ABOUT LAND-USE PLANNING

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Access to land and natural resources is essential for the survival of forest communities and indigenous people in the world's tropical forests. Yet, while forest communities have a central role to play in land management, their actual participation in land governance is often non-existent. As a result, communities' land rights and livelihoods risk being undermined by extractive industries, protected areas and other interests.

Participatory land-use planning empowers local people to manage natural resources in a sustainable and organised way. Above all, it involves looking at land use in a comprehensive way and from the perspective of local land users, taking into consideration physical, socio-economic, legal and cultural factors, as well as any prevailing official planning processes.

In practical terms, land-use planning can be used to identify areas suitable for locally-based forest management or to establish co-management arrangements and equitable benefit-sharing schemes where there are overlaps with existing formal land designations, such as protected areas.

If applied in a true participatory manner, land-use planning has the potential to harmonise broader development and conservation objectives, ensuring that customary systems and local knowledge are captured in government and private sector decision-making.



*Community members in Bafundo, Maniema participate in land-use planning with the help of high-resolution satellite imagery. Credit: GeoFirst*

# DRC CONTEXT

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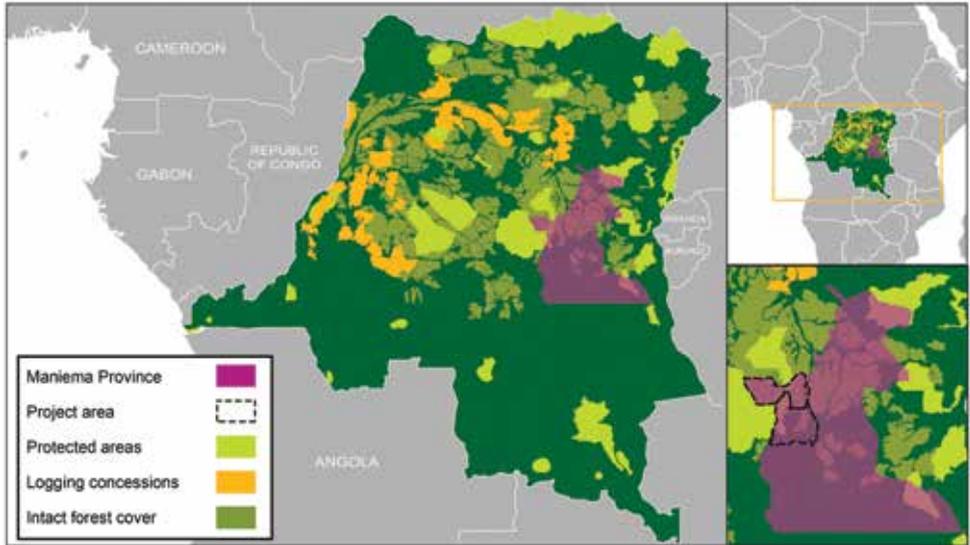
DRC is currently engaged in an ambitious reform of its approach to land management. By 2020, the country aims to complete a national policy and framework on spatial planning, as well as guidance for provinces and decentralised territories to develop local land-use plans with direction from the Ministry of Land Use Planning and Urban Renovation (MATRV). This represents a significant opportunity for local development, provided that local communities' views and needs are incorporated and a purely top-down approach is avoided.

If well-implemented, participatory land-use planning can incorporate customary tenure and resource use patterns into official planning, thereby providing a more comprehensive and reliable picture of communities' activities on the ground. This can be especially beneficial where communities lack land rights and where reliable information on customary occupation of forests is absent.

In recent years, there has been an important shift in DRC towards government decentralisation, with more power devolved to provincial and local levels, such as the sector level. Local political and administrative levels provide an interface for communities to engage in wider policy decisions.



# PROJECT BACKGROUND



*RFUK and GeoFirst are working with dozens of communities across Balanga sector (project area, top) and Bangengele sector (project area, bottom) to develop participatory maps and land-use plans. Notably, both sectors border Lomami National Park, which was established in 2016.*

In 2016, RFUK and its partners successfully implemented land-use planning pilots in Cameroon and DRC, building on a wealth of participatory maps created by local communities through our **MappingForRights** initiative.

In Cameroon, participatory mapping work in the Nguti Council area, in South-West region, marked the first time all the communities in a single administrative unit mapped their lands. Meanwhile, in the Balanga sector, in DRC's Maniema province, a pilot project led to the participatory zoning of an entire "groupement", namely Basilwamba. RFUK is also working in Equateur province to embed community forestry development in a wider land-use planning efforts.

RFUK's current project in Maniema works at the sector and "groupement" level, supporting community participation in spatial planning and development priority-setting. The project is active in two sectors: Balanga and Bangengele.

In Balanga sector, the project is helping communities to develop village-level land-use plans. In Bangengele sector, we are supporting the production of participatory village-level maps, laying the groundwork for more sustainable land management.

By using a community-based model to inform local and provincial land-use planning, the project is promoting long-term, sustainable development by enabling communities to gain greater control over their traditional lands and resources. In doing so, the project also supports communities in understanding relevant policy issues and empowers them to advocate for their rights and local priorities.

# OUR WORK

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## OUR METHODOLOGY

Local participation is at the heart of our approach to land-use planning, which consists of three essential stages:

### 1. COMMUNITY MAPPING

Communities map their lands according to a specific methodology. Trained community mappers are equipped with easy-to-use, low-cost mobile technologies, which enable them to accurately record geographical features they themselves define as important, such as clan tenure boundaries, fishing and hunting areas, sacred sites and the state of local infrastructure.

In order to maintain local ownership and reduce costs, the data is held in a portable, open-source database in the village where it can be validated both within the village and between neighbouring communities. Community maps are then printed and also uploaded to an online interactive map as part of RFUK's **MappingForRights** initiative. This provides important insights into the nature and extent of customary claims and usages, which are well-defined and accepted locally – even if they are absent from official government records.

### 2. LAND-USE PLANNING

Communities are supported to plan into the future. Multi-disciplinary teams of land specialists and facilitators compile data from various sources, such as government land-use planning schema, high-resolution satellite and other remote-sensing imagery, geo-physical data (when available), and official land allocations in the area (e.g. logging concessions, protected areas). This ensures spatial planning is based on objective information and shows where land conflict could occur. Household surveys are also conducted in order to collect data on socio-economic conditions and development needs.

All this information is then broken down into "land units", which are classified according to geo-physical and socio-economic features. Different land-use and development scenarios are played out by communities, taking into account traditional practices, demographics, other land users, access to markets, economic-conservation trade-offs, etc.



Areas suitable for sustainable farming practices, agroforestry, gathering of non-timber forest products, alternative income-generating activities, and community conserved areas are examples of possible land uses captured by community management plans.

### 3. SCALING UP

The village-level land-use plan is then scaled up to inform the creation of a master plan for the entire sector. This requires facilitation on two fronts:

1. Between communities, to ensure consistency among the different village-level plans in terms of development priorities, environmental sustainability objectives, infrastructure needs, etc.
2. Between communities and the sector authorities, to promote formal recognition of the newly mapped community lands and to harmonize communities' land-use plans with higher-level planning processes.

## OUR ACTIVITIES

Since the project began, in 2018, dozens of community mappers and planners have undergone specialist training, empowering them to take a central role in local land-use planning. In its first year alone, 15 villages in Bangengele sector were supported to produce maps of their traditional land tenure and resource uses, and 20 villages in Balanga sector produced their own draft land-use plans.

Overall, the project aims to produce around 100 participatory maps across the two sectors, as well as around fifty land-use scenarios, which will be scaled up to develop a sector-level land-use plan.

## NEXT STEPS

- Explore the potential benefits of supporting communities in obtaining community forest concessions to secure resource rights and therefore be in a better position to realise their land-use plans;
- Expand participatory mapping in the region to further document communities' customary tenure and resource use, using the resulting maps to inform community forest applications;
- Continue expanding community-based land-use planning and collaborating with the DRC government to ensure that community needs and perspectives inform planning and management decisions at different administrative levels;
- Support local communities in their pursuit of new sustainable livelihood activities, as per local land-use plans, by helping them liaise with actors specialising in relevant fields.

## PROGRAMME PARTNERS:

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## SUPPORTED BY:

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## CONTACT US:

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For further information, please contact:

**Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK):**  
2-4 The Atelier, Old Dairy Court,  
17 Crouch Hill, London, N4 4AP, United Kingdom  
+44 (0)207 485 0193  
info@rainforestuk.org  
www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/

**GeoFirst Consulting SARL:**  
105, Avenue Université N°105, Quartier Livulu,  
Commune de Lemba, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo  
+243 813 527 510 / +243 847836974  
GeoFirstrdc@gmail.com  
www.geofirstitl.org

