



SECURING LANDS, SUSTAINING LIVES

COMMUNITY FORESTS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

SECURING COMMUNITY RIGHTS
AND PROTECTING LOCAL LIVELIHOODS

MARCH 2017

INTRODUCTION

This brochure provides information about a three-year project implemented by the Rainforest Foundation UK and its partners in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Groupe d'Action pour Sauver l'Homme et son Environnement (GASHE), Réseau Ressources Naturelles (RRN) and Centre d'Appui à la Gestion Durable des Forêts Tropicales (CAGDFT).

The project will implement an experimental approach to community-based natural resource management in order to secure forest-dwellers' rights to land and natural resources and to ensure that forests in DRC are managed in a sustainable and equitable manner.

In order to achieve this goal, the project has four objectives:

1. Set up pilot projects to show that community forest concessions in DRC are a viable model of forest management;
2. Help finalise the legal and political framework for community forests, identify and build the institutional capacities needed for successful community-based forest management in DRC, and help build the capacities of the Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development (MECNDD) to record geo-referenced data and monitor the administration of pilot sites;
3. Strengthen the organisational and advocacy capacities of Congolese civil society organisations, enabling them to participate effectively in the political and institutional reforms needed to promote models of community forest concessions, and document and address the threats to their development;
4. Build and maintain multi-stakeholder consensus around sustainable community-based forest management and integrate it into territorial development and land reform processes in DRC, particularly by consolidating Community Forestry Round Tables.

COMMUNITY FORESTS IN DRC
Securing community rights, sustaining livelihoods

BACKGROUND



Yakata, DRC: Community forest concessions are a promising model for aquatic as well as forestry activities.

SECURING AND FORMALISING CUSTOMARY LAND TENURE SYSTEMS IN THE FORESTS OF THE CONGO BASIN

Participatory mapping in the Congo Basin, and more specifically in DRC, has shown that communities have a long history of defining and implementing clear, locally recognised customary land tenure systems.

However, recent efforts to formalise community-based forest management face a number of challenges, largely because the institutional and legal frameworks for formalising and securing customary tenure systems are patchy or ill-suited to the needs and realities of local communities and customary rights regimes.

There is growing consensus that formalising customary land tenure systems could be one of the most effective strategies for

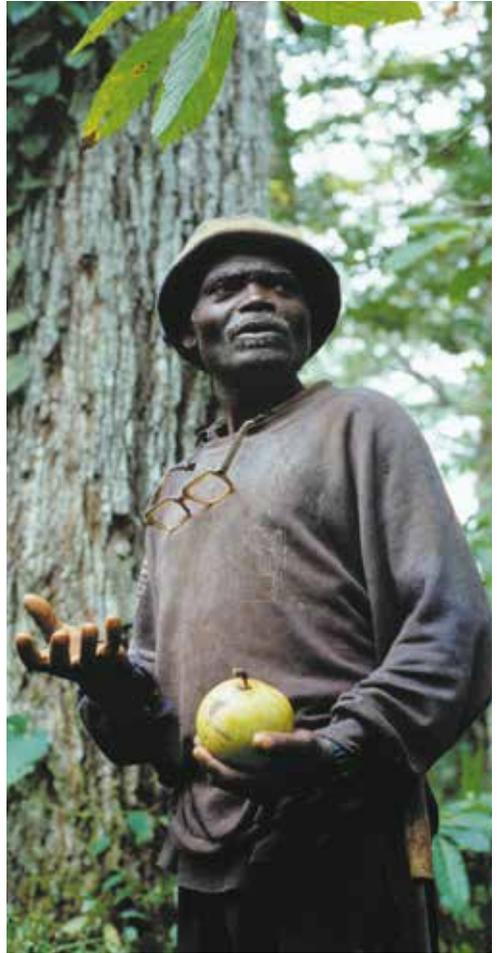
protecting forests and reducing poverty. It is particularly important to formalise these systems in DRC, as this could have an impact on the millions of people who depend on forests and the tens of millions of hectares that are potentially available to develop models that will benefit the most vulnerable communities.

PROJECT CONTEXT

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY AND FAVOURABLE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK TO DEVELOP COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN DRC

'Informal' community-based forest management is widespread in the Congo Basin. However, there are few formal measures covering this type of management, and those that do exist are heavily bureaucratic and ill-suited to local needs and realities.

DRC recently completed its legal framework for community forestry, with the Decree on local community forest concessions in August 2014, and Order 025 on the allocation and management of local community forest concessions in February 2016. The country's new legislation allows communities to manage resources according to their own customs and modes of governance, and permits multiple uses that local people can define themselves. The law has established a system of community concessions held in perpetuity for up to 50,000 hectares of land – ten times more than the maximum amount authorised in any other country in the region.



Non-timber forest products are an important activity for local communities, and may be included in the list of specific uses for forest concessions.

'MULTI-USE' COMMUNITY FORESTS IN DRC

Unlike the 'single model' vision for community forests seen in other countries, Congolese law allows not only for flexible customary management styles, but also specific objectives and uses for forest concessions.

This innovative aspect of community forestry legislation offers communities an unprecedented opportunity to develop forest management models that are inclusive, participatory and adapted to customary management styles.

In order to seize this unique opportunity, the process of creating community forest concession sites should start with an experimental phase in a limited number of targeted pilot sites, and then use the lessons learned in the field to scale up the project and extend it across the whole territory.

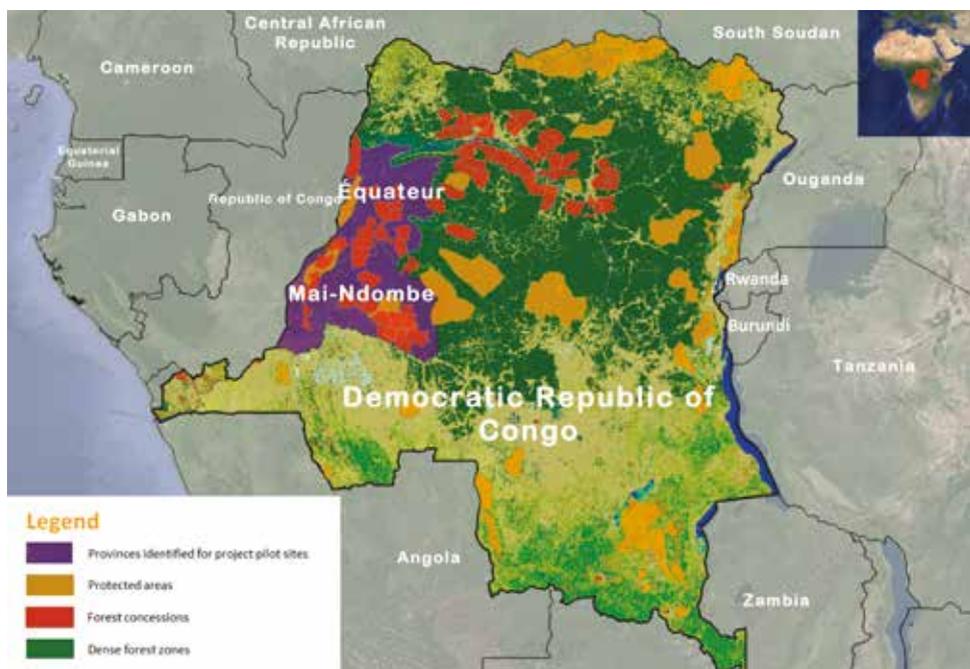


Community forest concessions should enable women to participate in forest activities and management, facilitate traditional and artisanal activities, and provide access to markets.

Articles 65 and 67 of Ministerial Order 025¹, which sets out procedures for the management and use of local community forest concessions, open up the possibility for these concessions to be used as indigenously managed community conservation spaces that could help the Government of DRC achieve its objective of setting aside 17% of the national territory as protected areas. In theory, community forest concessions could also be used to centralise the local benefits generated by REDD+ and other payment for environmental services (PSE) initiatives.

¹ Ministerial Order 025 regarding specific provisions for the management and exploitation of Local Community Forest Concessions.

APPROACH, METHODOLOGY AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES



Note: With an estimated forest cover of 103 million hectares, there could be millions of hectares available for community forestry in DRC after existing allocations for industrial forestry and protected areas are taken into account. This figure does not include other categories of forest, such as dry and mixed forest savannah. Sources: ESA Land Cover data 2010, World Resources Institute.

The expected long-term impacts of the project are to reduce poverty, improve the livelihoods of communities that depend on the forest, and reduce deforestation in the Congo Basin.

THE GENERAL METHODOLOGY OF THE PROJECT IS BASED ON A MIXED APPROACH, USING:

- Experimental activities in pilot community forestry concessions, with different phases to evaluate local needs and capacities, prepare for implementation and execute, monitor and evaluate activities;
- A monitoring and evaluation process that will learn from these experimental activities and develop best practices in order to replicate and scale up successful models across the territory and possibly the whole region;
- Shared experiences with pilot activities (case studies) between sites and with other actors piloting initiatives in the country and sub-region;
- Participatory methods that enable local communities to play an active role in decision-making, be represented and establish forest management models that use their own governance systems;

- Capacity building activities for local communities, NGOs, the Congolese authorities and project stakeholders;
- Involvement of government representatives at the local, provincial and national levels to support their efforts to establish and monitor processes;
- Maintaining multi-stakeholder dialogue through Community Forestry Round Tables that are recognised as a national forum for discussion, and incorporating community forestry initiatives into a broader territorial development process.

ACHIEVING CHANGE THROUGH AN APPROACH THAT COMBINES ACTION AT SEVERAL LEVELS:

- Strengthening civil society capacities to analyse and use relevant national laws to establish community forests;
- Setting up pilot community forestry concessions;
- Developing activities to monitor pilot initiatives in collaboration with the local authorities;
- Developing strategies for advocacy to tackle the challenges facing the forestry community;
- Permanent dialogue between all actors, including government bodies, civil society organisations, donors and academia, to build and maintain consensus and progressively establish and monitor community forestry in DRC.



The DRC's second national Community Forestry Round Table was held in Kinshasa in May 2016. It was attended by about 90 actors from the government, civil society and the donor community, who reaffirmed their commitment to join discussions on implementation of the very first community forestry initiatives.

RAINFOREST FOUNDATION UK

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