



DRC's Forest Reforms:

What progress for Indigenous Peoples and local communities?

Following months of [advocacy](#) by civil society organisations, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has adopted its first ever National Forestry Policy (NFP), setting out the Government's vision for reducing deforestation and poverty in the world's second-largest tropical forest over the next decade. Although it has yet to be published on the Environment Ministry's website, an analysis of the version adopted by the Council of Ministers on 10 July 2026 reveals several significant advances for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, if well implemented.

This policy brief by the *Forêts d'Avenir* consortium⁷ highlights some of the key provisions, persistent concerns and the steps that lie ahead. Crucially, the NFP should lay the foundations for further reforms, notably a draft amendment to the 2002 Forestry Code, which the Government plans to submit to Parliament during the September 2026 session. Despite this tight timetable, we argue it is essential to ensure consistency between this policy and the law, to translate these advances into tangible benefits for forest ecosystems and for the communities that depend on them.

1. The main advances of the National Forestry Policy

Community consent and participation in forest governance: the NFP stipulates that any granting of land titles must be subject to the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of local communities. More broadly, it enshrines their effective, inclusive and informed participation in decisions likely to affect their rights, their land, their natural resources, their livelihoods and their cultural heritage. If effectively implemented, these commitments represent major progress.

Allocation of forests: the policy states any future allocation of forests must comply with land-use plans at national, provincial and local levels and mandates the establishment of an institutional framework to assess and ensure compliance with allocation procedures. These important measures can promote integrated landscape management and help prevent cross-sectoral conflicts that may arise. This is particularly important as geographical programming of new industrial logging concession areas is a precondition for any lifting of the [national moratorium](#).

Community forests and local entrepreneurship: the NFP demonstrates a strong commitment to DRC's growing community forest movement, notably by identifying the revision of the National Strategy on Community Forestry (NSCF) as a priority. It also aims to expand access to community forests by simplifying the process for establishing Local Community Forest Concessions (CFCLs).

In addition, the policy promotes such community-based models of forest management as key instruments for achieving the government's target of restoring eight million hectares of forest. It also seeks to foster a more inclusive forest economy by improving access to finance, markets and innovation for cooperatives, small and medium-sized enterprises, and community initiatives, while diversifying forest use, including non-timber forest products, the bioeconomy and local timber processing.

Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs): the NFP recognises and promotes community-led conservation initiatives and calls for the establishment of a clear and harmonised legal framework for Indigenous and Community Heritage Areas and Territories (APACs). This recognition, if enshrined in law and combined with the expansion of community forests, could make a significant contribution to the DRC's pledge to protect [30 per cent of its territory by 2030](#) (the '30x30' target) and delivering its [Intergovernmental Land Tenure Commitment](#) to place more than 50 million hectares under Indigenous and community control.

Strengthening the management of protected areas: the NFP includes significant commitments to improve the management of existing protected areas, many of which have been linked to severe [human rights impacts](#) on neighbouring communities. It calls for strengthening the co-management of these areas, recognising community rights to land and FPIC, establishing grievance and redress mechanisms and supporting sustainable livelihoods.

The policy also designates the [Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor](#) - the world's largest tropical reserve, established in January 2025 - as a flagship initiative for conservation, ecological connectivity, green economic development and peacebuilding.

Forest monitoring and law enforcement: the NFP sets out notable measures to strengthen transparency, accountability and compliance in the forest sector. It provides for a National Plan to combat illegal logging and corruption, supports public reporting and community participation through [digital tools](#) and [early warning systems](#). It also requires the regular publication of key information on forestry operations and proposes a national digital traceability system covering the entire forest product value chain, from concession allocation to processing, transport and sale.

2. Weaknesses and implementation concerns

While the National Forestry Policy offers many reasons for optimism, it also has important limitations. Despite welcome efforts to strengthen alignment with the land-use planning framework, **policy coherence** remains a major challenge. Even before the policy was adopted, the Government had approved a controversial draft bill on carbon markets. Around the same time, reports emerged that 48 conservation forest concessions covering more than 13 million hectares had been allocated unlawfully.

A further weakness is the policy's ambiguous position on **log exports**. Although it reaffirms the commitment made by ECCAS member states, including the DRC, to ban log exports from 1 January 2028, it blurs the distinction between a complete ban and a gradual reduction in exports. Clarifying this position is particularly important given the DRC's obligation to implement the regional commitments it has endorsed.

Another concern relates to the intention to grant **paramilitary status** to sworn forestry officers, which risks damaging relations with local communities without significantly enhancing the effectiveness of enforcement. Strengthening the forestry administration should instead be based on extending the number of sworn officers, providing adequate resources and enhancing operational capacity.

Finally, for the policy to fulfil its role fully and be effectively implemented, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and civil society must have the time and opportunity to collectively analyse its provisions and contribute to the drafting of subsequent laws, regulations, strategies and other texts as well as the institutions necessary for its operationalisation.

3. A crucial step underway: the revision of the Forest Code

Our consortium has expressed concerns regarding the rushed nature of the process to revise the forest code, even though the forestry policy had not yet been finalised. If the inconsistencies between these two foundational texts are not corrected before the new law is adopted, they could jeopardise some of the progress made in the policy.

'Draft 1' of the bill amending the 2002 Forestry Code is due to be examined on 9 and 10 September 2026 during an extraordinary extended meeting of the National Forestry Advisory Council (CCNF).

Some of the advances contained in this draft are noteworthy: a) enhanced protection of customary rights, b) cross-sectoral coordination in accordance with land-use plans prior to any allocation of forests, c) recognition of both mandated and non-mandated independent monitoring, etc. However, other concerns remain, the most prominent examples of which are as follows:

Risk of circumventing FPIC through expropriation: Draft 1 transforms a general principle into a detailed procedure, requiring legitimate representatives, comprehensive and culturally appropriate information (particularly regarding expected revenues and benefit-sharing), minutes, participatory mapping, independent verification, a reasonable period for deliberation, and the possibility to accept, refuse or make consent subject to conditions. This represents a major step forward, but one that could potentially be undermined by Article 84a, which provides for expropriation in the public interest ‘in the event of refusal’. The law should expressly limit expropriation to situations of public interest that are strictly defined by law, necessary and proportionate, to the exclusion of private projects whose primary justification is commercial. It should also provide for a written statement of reasons, effective judicial review, prior consideration of alternative solutions, and the updating of compensation scales.

Grievance mechanism: Draft 1 refers only very briefly (in Article 84a) to the existence of such a mechanism, whereas the PFN specified that these must be “transparent, accessible and effective” for “the prevention, mediation and resolution of disputes”. The law should go further by incorporating the principles of independence, protection of complainants against reprisals, monitoring of redress, and access to the competent courts. It should also provide, by regulation, for the establishment of one or more specific bodies, and for measures such as the obligation to meet deadlines and to give reasons for decisions.

Obstacles to community forestry: whilst the policy seeks to strengthen community forestry, notably by simplifying procedures, the draft bill moves in the opposite direction by introducing additional administrative requirements. Article 22 would require “approval from the central administration” before any CFCL can be allocated, even though this responsibility currently falls to provincial governors. Although the measure may be intended to allow for cadastral checks and prevent overlapping land uses, such a requirement would be better addressed through secondary legislation and subject to a clear deadline, with approval deemed granted in the absence of a response.

Similar concerns arise from Article 112, which requires a Simple Management Plan (PSG) to be prepared and approved within 24 months of a CFCL's establishment. While the value of a PSG is widely recognised, imposing such a strict deadline is difficult to justify given the perpetual nature of CFCLs and could prove particularly burdensome for communities that lack long-term technical or financial support. Revocation of a CFCL for failure to meet this requirement would also raise important legal and practical concerns.

4. Other key priorities

Developing the National Forest Plan will also be essential to operationalize the policy and the law, in particular by specifying who does what, where, when and with what resources. And in line with the principle of decentralisation, the provinces are also called upon to draw up their own provincial forest strategies.

Priorities include the development of FPIC guidelines, the revision of the NCFS to facilitate community empowerment and wider-scale implementation, the revision of the REDD+ Strategy and its investment plan (2015–2020), and the development of the National Plan to Combat Illegal Exploitation of Forest Resources and Corruption.

Finally, it remains necessary to continue harmonising the policy and legal framework with other recent and ongoing reforms, particularly those relating to land-use planning, land tenure security and the rights of Indigenous Peoples.