

# CoNGOs: NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests



# In brief

Countries in the Congo Basin are at a crossroads in managing their lands and forests. Governments in the region have the ambition to transform their countries to ‘emerging economy’ status within the next two decades, and national strategies aiming for economic growth focus on the exploitation of natural resources including forests, and the rapid development of agribusiness and energy infrastructures, often at large scale.

But the huge number of small scale producers, working on farms and in the forest, whose economic aspirations might unleash much more equitable and sustainable growth, are not adequately supported. Community forestry has been one avenue through which stakeholders in the Congo Basin have sought to support participatory sustainable resource management and development. However, “community forestry” is also a contested idea. There is an urgent need, not only to clarify, recognise and secure customary rights of forest-dependent communities, but to ensure that policies and laws as well as services aiming at supporting implementation offer real opportunity for those communities to participate in, and contribute to, sustainable economic progress in line with their own development visions.

## Outputs

This project will work directly with a range of key stakeholders in forest dependent communities, such as forest and farm producers, indigenous peoples, and women groups, to help build the foundations for a more inclusive and equal forest and land use sector in the Congo Basin. The project is designed to contribute to achieving the anticipated impact of the DFID “Improving Livelihoods and Land Use in the Congo Basin Forests (ILLUCBF)” programme to support the development of sustainable and secure community livelihoods in the Congo Basin. Over a period of three years this initiative will pursue country specific actions and regional learning exchanges to achieve the following outputs:

- 1. Improved evidence on viable options for community forestry, including strengthening of rights**, generated and verified by relevant stakeholders in the Congo Basin countries.
- 2. Stronger capacity of community organisations to pursue resource rights security and commercial forest and farm production options, and articulate policy changes** in national forest governance and land use planning processes.
- 3. More effective policy engagement and implementation in support of sustainable and profitable community forestry** through collaboration of rights-holders, civil society organisations and national institutions in sub-national, national, regional and international policy processes.

# Who's who

The consortium includes organisations with combined expertise to provide a solid basis for work with communities in the Congo Basin.

## International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

As lead organisation for this project IIED brings much relevant experience. It combines inquiry, research and collaborative action, generating robust evidence and know-how that is informed by a grounded practical perspective. Partnership is at the heart of IIED's approach: it has built lasting partnerships with local communities and organisations in more than 60 countries, based on mutual learning and shared goals, and with a strong track record of innovation and impact. This includes experience of working with socially excluded groups in both urban and rural environments and in the context of policy and rights based approaches. More recently, IIED has taken steps to improve its expertise on gender. In 2016 it made a range of changes in response to a gender audit in 2015, improving gender equality issues within the institute itself as well as improving gender mainstreaming across IIED's programmes of work.

## ClientEarth

ClientEarth concentrates on legal and policy reform issues, and will contribute to implementation in the Republic of Congo and Gabon with a view to build the legal capacity of civil society to participate in law and policy reforms around community forestry and communities rights. It will work closely with local and national civil society partners.

## Fern

Fern excels at strengthening CSO and community engagement in policy processes related to land tenure and forest governance. Fern's interventions in the project will focus primarily on three countries: Central African Republic, Cameroon and the Republic of Congo. It will also run some activities in Gabon and enable the project to include Gabonese

stakeholders in some regional and international activities. Specific attention will be given by Fern to the participation of women in political processes.

## Forest Peoples Programme (FPP)

FPP will focus in particular on legal and logistical support at the community-level, in three countries: Central African Republic, Republic of Congo and Cameroon. Building on FPP's existing work with communities (including indigenous peoples and other local communities), FPP will work to: develop inclusive, participatory and accountable community level governance; strengthen communities' knowledge of, and capacity to claim, their tenure and resource rights; participate effectively in land use planning and law reform processes; and pursue community-led development, including community forestry where desired.

## Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK)

RFUK has strong experience in the Congo Basin and will contribute in two main areas: (1) Bringing about the finalisation and adoption of the legal texts and manuals of procedure for community forestry in CAR and completing the preliminary work in locations to test these, in conjunction with the CAR authorities. (2) Building on RFUK's experience in the region, provide input, expertise and information on community mapping, and its use as a basis for both community forest development and wider integrated land-planning initiatives.

## Well Grounded

Well Grounded will focus particularly on organisational development of civil society organisations and community based forest organisations. Organisations can be formal or informal, officially recognised or not, but they are the spaces in which people come together to make things happen and their effectiveness will largely determine the overall impact of the initiative. Well Grounded bring strong expertise and partnerships in the Congo Basin on these issues.

The consortium members named above also work with in-country partners, as follows:

**Association OKANI.** OKANI is a community-based indigenous NGO located in the east region of Cameroon, staffed by a small team and governed by a committee of Baka peoples. OKANI works to secure the rights and promote sustainable livelihoods of indigenous communities in Cameroon's forests.

**Centre for Environment and Development (CED).** CED has been a partner of Fern and IIED for more than 10 years and is one of the leading civil society organisations with a long term experience in the forest and land use sector in Cameroon. CED has carried out numerous research projects, led various forest related campaigns and supported other smaller emerging CSOs in Cameroon.

**Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD).** Since 2010, CIEDD has been actively involved in awareness raising and providing information on the FLEGT VPA to local and indigenous communities and lobbying decision makers to advance forest governance.

**Comptoir Juridique Junior (CJJ).** CJJ is a Congolese NGO created in 2000 by junior lawyers in response to widespread lack of legal rights awareness, various human rights violations, mistrust towards legal and political institutions as well as challenges in the governance of natural resources. Its aim is to enhance communities' understanding of the law to enable them to defend their human rights, effectively monitor good governance of natural resources and development of public policies that are necessary for their well-being.

**Forum pour la Gouvernance et les Droits de l'Homme (FGDH).** FGDH is located in Brazzaville, in the Republic of Congo and works with forest communities at the national level. As well as conducting participatory research and advocacy involving forest communities from around Congo, FGDH are a key player in the civil society platform for the national REDD and FLEGT-VPA processes.

**Institut Africain pour le Développement Economique et Social (INADES).** Inades-Formation Cameroon is an NGO that has been recognised as a National Association since 1994. INADES' work aims to improve the socio-economic self-reliance of rural populations, placing an emphasis on the participation of women and ethnic minorities in the development process of their communities. INADES advocates for an egalitarian and supportive society in Cameroon.

**Organisation pour le Développement et les Droits Humains au Congo (ODDHC).** ODDHC is a national NGO that promotes peace, nonviolence and reconciliation in Congo. They will work with FPP at the local level to raise awareness and support in at least two communities in the Sangha region (Kabo and Pokola) in order to increase their access to land and resources as well as build participatory processes to claim their rights.

**Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers de Centrafrique (REPALCA).** REPALCA is a network comprising around 15 indigenous peoples' associations which are active in the Central African Republic. Created in 2011 and headquartered in Bangui, it works with communities particularly on issues of sustainable and inclusive natural resource management. It is a member of the regional network REPALEAC.

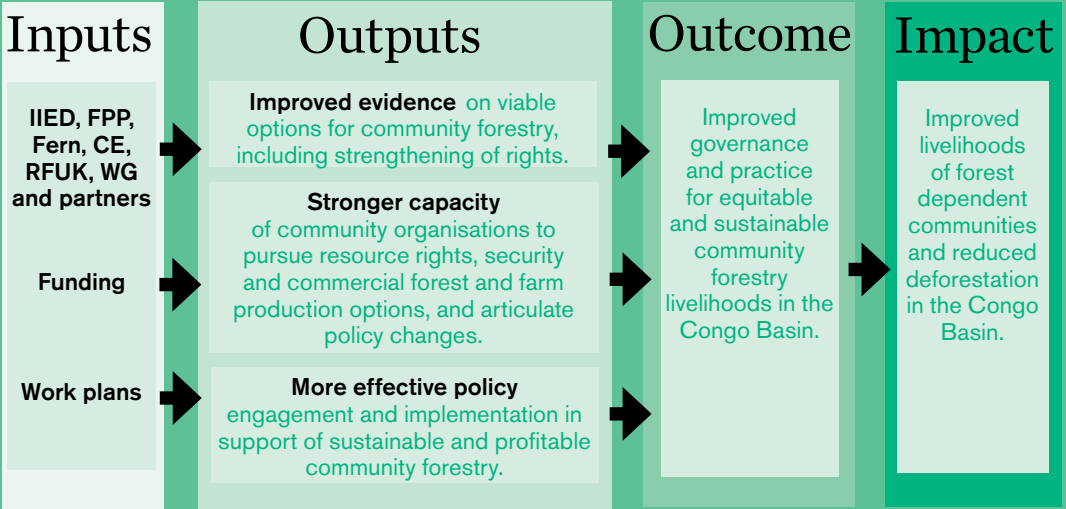
**Tropenbos International.** Tropenbos International (TBI) is an international NGO established in 1986 in Holland. TBI's main area of work focus on knowledge and capacity building support to improve the governance and management of tropical forests. In DRC TBI is based in Kisangani in the Oriental Province. TBI is a member of the Forest Connect Alliance managed by IIED.

# Geographical focus

The initiative will focus on Cameroon, Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with some policy and legal reform engagement work in Gabon, and region-wide dialogue, learning and advocacy activities.



# Theory of change



# Work with us

This is an initiative finding its feet. We welcome ideas, contacts and suggestions so please do get in touch. You can contact one of us mentioned below and we can respond directly or connect you with others in the CoNGOs group where relevant.

## Get in touch

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## Project Materials

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**Theme** Forests

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