

IIED's management response to the independent evaluation of the CoNGOs project

November 2019

Overall response to the evaluation

'CoNGOs' was a UK DFID-funded IIED-led project that finished at the end of September 2019.¹ Its full name was 'NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests'. It was independently evaluated by a team led by a highly experienced Cameroonian natural resource management expert with two further team members with backgrounds in civil society, private, and academic institutions based in the Congo Basin and the UK.

In its [report](#), the team concluded that:

'The project overachieved its set impact, outcome and outputs. It supported communities to secure or initiate securing process over some 90,000 hectares of forest lands...In the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon, the business model proposed by the project started yielding both financial and social benefits. At the political level, the project gathered and stimulated strong collaboration between NGOs across the region, strongly influenced legal reform processes in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (RoC), and, contributed to the elaboration of the Brazzaville Roadmap on community forestry...'

We are very pleased with these conclusions, and many others, and with a range of very constructive suggestions about what we should learn and what we should improve in related initiatives in future. IIED will use this comprehensive evaluation to guide future work to strengthen organisations of forest producers to improve livelihoods and protect forests, considering the strengths and weaknesses identified.² This document encompasses the response of the management team within IIED who commissioned this independent evaluation.

Response to individual recommendations of the evaluation

- **The need for sustained debate around community forestry in the Congo Basin. IIED and partners should continue pressing for law reforms that really capture the lessons from the project.**

¹ The CoNGOs project was led by IIED with a consortium of NGO partners in five countries. In the UK these included: ClientEarth, Fern, Forest Peoples Program, Rainforest Foundation UK, and Well Grounded. In Cameroon there partners were Association OKANI, Centre for Environment and Development, Tropical Forest and Rural Development (TFRD) and INADES-Formation. In the Central African Republic (CAR) the partners were Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers de Centrafrique (REPALCA) and Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD). In the Republic of Congo (RoC) partners included Organisation pour le Développement et les Droits Humains au Congo (ODDHC), Forum pour la Gouvernance et les Droits de l'Homme (FGDH), and Comptoir Juridique Junior (CJJ). In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the project was implemented by Tropenbos DRC.

² By 'organisations of forest producers' we mean forest-dependent organisations of indigenous peoples, community forest users and farm smallholders

IIED will continue to research and document evidence of how community forestry can contribute to a triple win for local communities, their forest environment and the economy. An innovative element of this consortium was the weaving together of work to secure forest rights, with support for sustainable enterprise development – to improve livelihoods and further incentivise sustainable forest management. The [Yaoundé Declaration](#) affirms our commitment to spread best practice – building on the advances in community forest territories emerging from the DRC.

- **In the CAR and RoC, future advocacy efforts should focus on removing the obstacle in the forest code that hinders the attribution of CFs to communities**

IIED will continue to work with the partners in the consortium who have been advocating and strengthening the capacities of civil society, legal working groups and parliamentarians to address these issues – and will continue to track whether the recommendations and technical inputs provided have been taken into account in the revised Forest Code in RoC, and the on-going land reform in the CAR.

- **IIED and partners should encourage the established cooperatives to work closely with the relevant decentralized government structures**

Collaboration with decentralised government structures is emphasised in the enterprise development approach used by IIED within the CoNGOs project but also other on-going initiatives. For example, local forestry and agriculture extension officers are included in enterprise development training that we are involved with. Follow-up actions such as enterprise registration and marketing through trade fairs or similar is done where possible in collaboration with decentralised government structures. Such relationships have proven helpful in establishing partnerships for technical assistance but also to facilitate access to local development funds, cooperative services, and private sector contacts. More specific guidance on working with governments and multi-stakeholder platforms was documented in two publications: “[Making Change Happen? What can governments do to strengthen forest producer organizations?](#)” and “[Multi-sectoral platforms for planning and implementation - how they might better serve forest and farm producers](#)”. IIED will continue to build on these experiences to improve collaborations with decentralised government structures in the future.

- **IIED and Cameroonian partners should support the elaboration of transparent, effective and equitable benefit sharing mechanisms within community enterprises**

The Market Analysis and Development (MA&D) approach that was used as a methodology to support enterprise development in Cameroon and the DRC encouraged entrepreneurs to carry out two sets of analysis related to benefit sharing. One for the internal running of the enterprise and one for the management of external relationships such as those with other members of the community, or the governing body of the community forest. However, the effective implementation of these mechanisms depends to a large extent on existing relationships and practices. For example, previous experiences of benefit capture by elites, NGOs, and state agents may have affected the ability of community members to benefit from the revenues generated by their forests. And it may well affect the willingness of emerging entrepreneurs to share scarce income from their early-stage enterprises. However, even if this sense of obligation to share benefits with other rights-holders in a communally owned forest resource does not organically emerge from the outset, IIED will encourage it in future work as a practical necessity for maintaining trust and long-term sustainability.

In our current and future initiatives, IIED will also explore how the relationship, roles and responsibilities between the community forestry legal entity and emerging enterprises could be better facilitated from the outset. IIED's current work with the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) programme involves supporting various forest and farm producer organisations (e.g. the FECOFUN in Nepal) to think through what business models and benefit sharing mechanisms would best allow them to maintain their vision of community forestry whilst developing more prosperous enterprise activities within their communities. Monitoring and learnings from this approach will be captured annually to allow for sharing of lessons within the institute.

- **IIED and partners need to keep collecting evidence on the successes of community forestry and share it with a wider audience**

IIED has frequently documented evidence on successful community forest business models (e.g. [Democratising forest business](#) - a compendium on successful locally controlled forest business organisations). In order to build on some of the important achievements and lessons documented through the project IIED will engage with consortium partners and the coalition of NGO's and government representatives behind the [Yaoundé Declaration](#) to sustain the debate around community forestry in the region. IIED will also explore options for better recognising and spreading the benefits of sustainable forest management by Indigenous Peoples and Forest Communities. IIED will share at international meetings evidence collected through the project, including this independent evaluation which will be published on the project website. Opportunities to share lessons and consolidate evidence with the two other projects under the DFID funded Improving Livelihoods and Land Use in the Congo Basin (ILLUCB) programme will also be explored in collaboration with respective project leads and DFID.

- **IIED and partners should strongly encourage each partner organisation to use and monitor the usefulness of the innovations brought through organisational development**

The organisational development approach used by Well Grounded within the project, including its main benefits and lessons learnt, was captured in an IIED Briefing showing how '[Effective forest governance grows from a strong civil society](#)'. But other aspects of organisational development were also implemented in the form of the risk self-assessment training³ carried out in the DRC with managers of individual and group enterprises supported by the project. The evaluation also picked up on an important observation that "future efforts must explore ways of working directly with more representative structures at community level that have the mandate from their communities", referring to the need to ensure organisational development also reaches institutions that represent community members directly. We welcome this recommendation as a priority for any future initiatives and investment, as was also highlighted in our recent two publications exploring options for sustainable business incubation that serves Cameroon and the DRC's community forests. IIED will explore with DFID and the signatories behind the Yaoundé declaration of interest and possibility to engage in further learning exchanges on this topic and including members from community forest, artisanal loggers and farmers organisations.

- **In projects of this size and complexity, dedicated gender advisors or teams could further strengthen gender considerations in project delivery**

³ IIED in collaboration with the Forest Connect Alliance and the Forest and Farm Facility have developed specific guidance for managers of smallholder forest and farm enterprises to develop risk management techniques in the "Securing forest business: a risk management toolkit for locally controlled forest businesses" [<https://pubs.iied.org/13583IIED/>]

IIED fully recognises the need to develop a more hands-on approach to achieving the expectations of the project on gender equality and its impacts on project outcomes. While each consortium partner had its own approach to gender equality, it would have been useful to initiate an internal process together with IIED's internal gender advisor and gender equality champions network to: i) in collaboration with our partners develop a set of best practices for how a project can appropriately and ambitiously tackle gendered issues with the full support and buy-in of all partners; ii) develop a set of "benchmark" practices and tools that guide project design, facilitates implementation and monitoring throughout the project cycle (and to allow for improvements to be made). Such an approach will in the future provide guidance and support in project delivery for the institute as a whole and including its partners.