

Declaration on the Future of Central Africa's Forests, Conference on Sustainable Forest Management in Central Africa, 22-23 May 2013: Yaoundé, Cameroon.

The Center for International Forestry Research and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife of the government of Cameroon have invited a group of forest scientists, academics, government representatives, and leaders from the private sector and civil society to gather in Yaoundé, Cameroon, for a Conference on Sustainable Forest Management in Central Africa. In this meeting, held 22-23 May 2013, we have discussed developments, challenges and priorities for science and policy in sustainable management of the forests of the Congo Basin. We hereby:

RECOGNIZE that:

1. Central Africa is home to the second-largest continuous block of rainforest on the planet, and that the forest cover remains relatively well-preserved;
2. these forests will continue to play a critical role across numerous sectors, including livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, food and nutrition security, and carbon sequestration and the creation of a Green Economy;
3. although annual deforestation rates have been comparatively low, there are strong indications that Central African forests are at a critical turning point toward increased land-use investments;
4. population growth, agriculture, agro-industry, and resource extraction threaten to increase the rate of deforestation in this area if not sustainably managed;
5. the sustainable utilization and economic development of forest resources, and the role of forests in the wider landscape, have become integral to the sustainable development of the region;
6. given the increase in demand for livelihoods and the growing effects of climate change, maintaining forest cover and sustainable landscapes in the region will be a major challenge in the coming decades.

REAFFIRM:

our commitment to advancing the extensive progress that has been made in the research, development, promotion and execution of sustainable forest management practices in Central Africa since the Rio summit of 1992.

CONCUR that:

1. the forests of the Congo Basin will play a key role in broader development goals across the landscape, as well as in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts;
2. Central Africa's forests can be effectively and sustainably managed only through proper assessment and consideration of the full range of their uses and potential benefits;

3. critical issues of unsustainable management and poor governance of forests remain real concerns despite the many positive changes in political commitments and policy frameworks in the Central African region;
4. land acquisition for extractive and agricultural industries could adversely affect ecosystem services and rural people in the Congo Basin's forests if not properly managed;
5. increasing societal demands for non-timber forest products has illustrated the need to consider new and varied strategies, and markets, in the forestry policies of Central African countries; and
6. the concept of sustainable forest management must be flexible, to fit society's needs and to account for informal sectors, and should be based on clear, achievable objectives.

Therefore, by this declaration, we CALL FOR:

1. a concerted effort to focus on sustainable forest management practices in Central Africa where resources and sectors are not managed in silos but are viewed as a "landscape" of intertwined parts;
2. intensified high-level collaboration and communication among scientists, governments, and the public and private sectors, in raising awareness of, and developing evidence-based policies that add value to, timber and non-timber forest products, particularly the many and important foods and ecosystem services that are derived from Central Africa's forests;
3. new or improved national and regional laws and policies, based on the best available evidence, that are sufficiently flexible to balance development goals, forest conservation goals, and the needs and rights of all people (with special consideration to indigenous and gender issues);
4. greater efforts to formalize the informal sectors associated with Central Africa's forests, particularly in artisanal logging and community forestry, establishing regulatory frameworks that provide them the role that reflects their importance in national economies;
5. a redoubled campaign to strengthen the capacity of Central African institutions, governance and policies – on all levels – to mainstream climate-change issues into development and conservation strategies, and to meet international standards for accessing climate financing; and
6. stronger monitoring and evaluation of Central African forest management outcomes that are based on objectives that are achievable and that have been established through consultation with all stakeholders.