

Foreword

After a hiatus of several years, the time was ripe to produce a 7th edition of the State of the Forests report: SOF 2021. The first edition of 2005 was a preliminary assessment of the state of biodiversity, while SOF 2006 focused on developing a clear vision – essential for policy orientation and strategy development – of the state of the forest areas. SOF 2008 took stock of forest types in six countries: Gabon, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Central African Republic. Two years later, the 2010 edition provided information on regional synthesis of monitoring indicators, forest landscape management and related challenges. SOF 2013 was more comprehensive in terms of the themes that were addressed (climate change, forest management, biodiversity conservation and land use). The most recent edition, SOF 2015, was published prior to the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris; it dealt with climate change, with a focus on forest and climate dynamics, adaptation, vulnerability and mitigation.

This 2021 edition is therefore a welcome addition in view of the emerging new themes which are stirring up increasing interest among stakeholders, against a backdrop influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. SOF 2021 is made up of 4 parts and 13 chapters.

Part 1 is entitled “Central Africa’s Forests: resource status and management” and is made up of five chapters. Chapter 1 covers the distribution of forest types and Chapter 2 the evolution of the timber sectors in the Congo Basin. Chapter 3 examines plantations in Central Africa, and Chapter 4 analyses the balance between international financial flows and the implementation of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. The final chapter of Part 1 (Chapter 5) addresses the implementation of REDD+ activities in Central African countries.

Three chapters make up Part 2 that is entitled, “Congo Basin Forests in International Discussions.” The first chapter (Chapter 6) of this part deals with mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals into forest management in Central Africa, the second (Chapter 7) deals with international commitments by Central African countries in response to climate change, and the third and last chapter (Chapter 8) of Part 2 focuses on fighting imported deforestation and making commitments to zero deforestation.

Part 3 analyses emerging themes for Central African forests, including Central Congo Basin peatlands (Chapter 9) and the emergence/re-emergence of infectious agents and risks (Chapter 10).

The fourth and final part deals with the issues and challenges facing Congo Basin forests and is made up of three chapters. The first chapter (Chapter 11) analyses spatial planning and impacts on the sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa. Chapter 12 focuses on the restoration of forest landscapes, and the final chapter (Chapter 13) examines the rights of local and indigenous peoples in the light of forest and conservation policies.

The SOF 2021 report was produced with financial support from the European Union, through the Strengthening and Institutionalization of the Central African Forest Observatory (RIOFAC) project, which is implemented by a consortium of scientific and technical organizations (CIFOR-ICRAF, CIRAD, FRMi and UCL). The German technical cooperation agency (GIZ), via the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), provided additional financial support for translation of the report.

Some 152 authors, recruited from among experts on forestry issues in the Congo Basin, were involved in writing SOF 2021. These authors come from research institutions, technical and financial partners, international organizations, civil society organizations, development organizations, State bodies and independent researchers.

We wish to thank these authors for the great effort they put into the publication, under the supervision of the chapter coordinators. Thanks to them, reference documents that will be widely consulted in the coming years have been produced.

This report is intended for all stakeholders involved in the conservation and governance of tropical forests in general and those interested in the forests of Central Africa in particular. It will be valuable reference for policy makers, research institutions, civil society organizations, technical and financial partners, and all other stakeholders interested in forest management. It is a scientific publication, as the data and information contained in it are accurate and up to date.

The production of SOF 2021 has given rise to many interactions and meetings between all stakeholders, both in person and online. The death of Dr. Hiol Hiol François, a member of the editorial board, was a great loss to the team and created an immeasurable void. We pay heartfelt tribute to his memory and to the work he accomplished not only in SOF 2021, but also previous editions, in particular those of 2010 and 2013.

Richard Sufo Kankeu

Introduction

The report on the State of the Forests (SOF) of the Congo Basin is published by the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) through its technical unit, the Central African Forest Observatory (OFAC). Over the years, it has become a reference document at regional and international levels, for all those who are interested in the management of Central African forest ecosystems, their role in the planet's equilibrium and the issues that guide their future.

This 2021 edition, the seventh in a series published since 2005, comes at a time when the forests of Central Africa and of the whole world are attracting attention for several reasons. The first is the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw its peak during the writing of this report and affected its production process. The pandemic, yet another zoonosis, is a reminder of humanity's fragility and of our common destiny. It has highlighted the fact that the relationship between humans and their natural environment must be given the utmost importance and be paid special attention to by decision-makers and resource managers.

Second, there is growing awareness of the need to adopt nature-based solutions in which the management of natural or plantation forests plays a prominent role. This renewed interest in nature-based solutions is gradually making the Congo Basin forests once again the focus of researchers' work, policy priorities and the commitments of technical and financial partners. An example could be seen at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Glasgow, United Kingdom, in November 2021. This COP was an opportunity for international donors to make statements in favour of protecting not only the world's tropical forests in general, but also those of the Congo Basin in particular, and above all their local and indigenous populations.

For their part, COMIFAC member states, which hold rights over the Congo Basin forests, have taken a further step in their commitment to the sustainable management of those forests – good news considering that they are a common good for humanity because of the goods and services they provide through global climate regulation.

The renewed and very formal commitments of COMIFAC member countries are illustrated by the “Declaration of ECCAS/COMIFAC countries on Congo Basin forests and their vicinity,” which was presented to the entire world at the Berlin symposium of September 2021.

It is up to the international community to find compromises with Central African countries in order to develop just and equitable solutions to promote the sustainable management of the basin's forests, within the context of a legitimate quest for economic and social development.

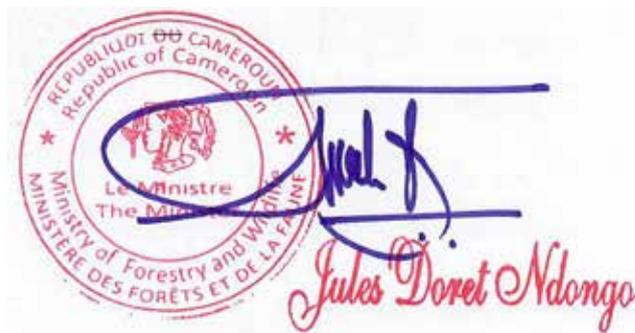
SOF 2021 is rich in the most recent scientific and technical data on Central Africa's forest resources and their management. It addresses all the issues faced by these ecosystems and opens up perspectives for their improved contribution to human well-being.

The quality of the information and reflections presented in this SOF 2021 is backed up by the reputation of its experts, who come from some of the most renowned institutions in the world, under the unprecedented auspices of African specialists.



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