



## First Parliamentarians Conference on SFM in the Congo Basin Bulletin

### A Daily Report of the First International Conference of Parliamentarians on the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystems

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#### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ON THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF CENTRAL AFRICAN FOREST ECOSYSTEMS: TUESDAY, 24 OCTOBER 2006

The First International Conference of Members of Parliament on the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystems commenced proceedings Tuesday, 24 October, in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Attended by parliamentarians and issue experts from inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the conference focuses on good forest governance and poverty alleviation, with the objective of further defining the role of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) and sub-regional parliaments regarding the sustainable forest management (SFM).

In the morning, participants attended the opening ceremony with speeches delivered by the Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon, government delegations and a range of intergovernmental organizations. In the afternoon, participants explored the conference's first theme, "Harmonization of Forest Policy and Laws, and Sustainable Management of Transboundary Areas," through country case studies. In the evening, participants broke into working groups to discuss issues concerning forest governance.

#### OPENING CEREMONY

Ibinda Clôbert, Coordinator of the Parliamentarians Network for the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystem (REPAR), stressed that the conservation and sustainable management of Central African forest ecosystems remains a major concern for all stakeholders. He highlighted the importance of economic development in the region and improving local communities' living conditions while respecting conservation standards. Clôbert said parliamentarians should play a greater role in establishing partnership agreements on natural resource conservation in Central Africa.

Teodoro Obiang Nguena, COMIFAC, noted that COMIFAC provides orientation and coordination for planning conservation and sustainable management of forests in Central Africa. He said the involvement of parliamentarians can foster the implementation of COMIFAC's Convergence Plan, enhancing the conservation of forests and their contribution to national economies.

Cavaye Yeguie Dijibril, Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon, welcomed delegates and remarked that the strong attendance was indicative of the interest in SFM. Outlining the actions undermining the preservation of forest resources, including illegal exploitation, poaching, shifting cultivation and slash and burn agriculture, he explained that the challenges are considerable and that the responsibility of parliamentarians is great.

Jonas Nagahuedi, COMIFAC, described the development of COMIFAC and its role in coordinating forest policy development in its member countries, namely: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Congo, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Príncipe. He described COMIFAC's sub-regional Convergence Plan, including the harmonization of forest policies, noting the financial contributions made by member countries and partners. He highlighted the important role of parliamentarians within this process, including ratification of relevant international treaties and conventions and requested that they act as advocates in this regard.

Giuseppe Topa, World Bank, noted that the Bank recognizes the importance of engaging the legislators in reforming processes, and that without such reforms, progress remains fragile. Samuel Nguiffo, Centre for Environment and Development (CED), summarized the survey findings from a sub-regional survey, including an analysis of the perception of forestry in each country and an action plan. Nguiffo detailed the three components of their action plan: strengthening the Network of Parliamentarians; increasing their involvement in follow-up activities; and addressing transboundary forest crime. He highlighted challenges associated with involving parliamentarians, such as: ensuring coherence between policy and reality; the sustainability of management activities; promotion of equity and governance; and improving quality of information.

Jean Yves Pirot, IUCN, said that the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the most relevant multilateral environmental convention to forests, including the management of transboundary protected areas. He also noted the relevance of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), due to the pivotal role that forests play within the global carbon cycle. He lamented that despite these conventions, biodiversity loss and climate change have not been adequately addressed, and called upon parliamentarians to ensure that international commitments legislations are adopted and actively supported. He underlined the importance of supporting the COMIFAC Convergence Plan, and reconciling inter-sectoral conflicts.

Niels Marquardt, US Ambassador to the Republic of Cameroon, gave an overview of the Central Africa Regional Programme for Environment (CARPE) approach to natural resource management, observing that the programme was informed by the premise that conservation of Central African forests can only be effective within the framework of good governance at all levels. Regarding CARPE's role in strengthening and supporting governance, he explained how it supported legislative processes by also facilitating regional dialogue for parliamentarians.

Elaborating on the forestry law adopted in 2002, René Sébastien Bofaya-Botak-Baende, Senator, DRC, discussed innovative strategies such as concession contracts which allow local communities to exploit forests attributed to them under the law. He highlighted the importance of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), such as medicinal plants.

Mike Packer, Global Legislators Organizing for a Better Environment (GLOBE), explained that GLOBE facilitates high-level dialogue among legislators on key environmental issues. Referring to the illegal logging dialogue launched in September 2005, he said that markets were a potent way to resolve the problem of illegal logging by creating barriers for the entry of illegal timber into consumer countries. He stressed GLOBE's status as an informal legislative-driven process operating outside the governmental negotiating process, which could potentially feed into the G-8 dialogue for illegal logging.

Christopher Besacier, PFBC, stressed the need to identify activities and costs in order to mobilize financial resources for implementing the convergence plan. He urged parliamentarians to exchange views and experiences on debt relief and access to financial resources for the environment.

Clare Brogan, Department for International Development (DfID), said DfID activities focuses on ensuring that natural resources are exploited in a sustainable manner, outlining indirect support provided to projects in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). She highlighted DfID work in Ghana for enhancing parliamentarians' ability to understand international agreements on the environment, forests and partnerships before ratifying them.

**DISCUSSION:** Participants discussed, *inter alia*: a proposed synergistic approach to tackle illegal logging in partnership with the EU, to be managed by the Central African Parliament; the need for capacity building; calls for pledges and commitments from development partners to strengthen the network of parliamentarians; and the need to compensate local communities for protecting their forests.

### ***SUB-THEME 1: HARMONIZATION OF FOREST POLICY AND LAW***

René Sébastien Bofaya-Botak-Baende, Senator, DRC, moderated a session on the harmonization of forest policy and management of transboundary protected areas.

Syaka Sadio, FAO, and Roger Roteur, FAO, described a joint initiative between COMIFAC and FAO to harmonize forest policy in the region, noting the importance of engaging parliamentarians. He identified benefits of harmonization, including hindering the movement of unscrupulous forest companies.

Gerald Ozagiriza, Burundi, observed his country's forests have been degraded due to bush fires, clearing for agriculture, the 1993 political crisis and the over reliance on wood for fuel. He outlined strategies undertaken to mitigate these threats, including: awareness raising; improved management of transboundary areas; and the development of alternative income generating activities for forest dwellers. Noting that the COMIFAC treaty is currently before Parliament for adoption, he elaborated on initiatives undertaken to harmonization environmental laws and the management of transboundary resources. He also mentioned the environmental officers who engage in dissuasive dialogue to prevent degradation of the natural resource base.

Fotabe Basoua, Cameroon, described his country's action plan for managing forest resources, noting the synergy between the Cameroon parliament and the Ministry of Forestry. Observing the effective decentralization of forestry management and the right of communities to manage their forests, she lamented setbacks suffered due to illegal logging, corruption and lack of capacity. She highlighted Cameroon's efforts to facilitate sub regional cooperation, such as hosting the present conference and ratification of the COMIFAC treaty.

Jean Marie Mokole, Central African Republic, said that forests account for approximately 16% of the Central African Republic's gross domestic product (GDP). He noted the need to harmonize conservation strategies and balance protection of natural resources with development. Mokole summarized national efforts to promote cooperation and to establish transboundary resource management partnerships.

Ibinda Clôbert, Congo, summarized the development of Congo's national forest legislation, which aims to promote transparency in administration, fulfill community needs and generate State revenue.

René Sébastien Bofaya-Botak-Baende, Senator, DRC, proposed a declaration asserting the commitment of countries present to strengthen the network of parliamentarians and create a more permanent organization to coordinate and sustain the network.

Boussengue Joseph Marie, Gabon, outlined the international agreements ratified by Gabon and the transboundary conservation projects. He detailed Gabon's participation in an FAO survey on harmonization of fiscal processes, and discussed Gabon's desire to increase the involvement of local populations in forest management.

Teodoro Obiang Nguena, Equatorial Guinea, stressed that the sustainable use of natural resources must result in benefits to local communities. He noted national legislation protecting biodiversity and fostering the importance of rational exploitation of wood.

Jaime José da Costa, São Tomé and Príncipe stressed that environmental legislations in Central Africa are not well enforced, noting the absence of a common forestry strategy, and effective monitoring of forest resources.

**DISCUSSION:** Participants expressed concern over the need for international assistance to strengthen the parliamentary network, and noted the destructive environmental impact of armed conflict.

### ***PARALLEL SESSIONS ON FOREST GOVERNANCE***

**EBOWA FORUM:** In a session on the Ebolowa Forum: Multi-Actor Dialogue on Forest Concession 1050, the IUCN, the Ministry of the Environment and Forest Cameroon, FIFCAM, local councilors and NGOs made presentations detailing the experiences of the Ebolowa initiative. Delegates discussed Ebolowa, agreed it was an excellent pilot project, and whether it could be replicated in other areas.

**FOREST CONCESSION MONITORING SYSTEMS:** A session on forest concession monitoring systems, anti-poaching operations and control for the legality of timber in Cameroon was coordinated by Claus Falkenberg, GTZ. Florent Dirk Thies, GTZ, outlined the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) strategy in Cameroon for combating poverty and promoting judiciary security in the forest sector. Karl Morrison, World Resource Institute (WRI) stressed that certification is a step towards sustainability and legality, and highlighted the importance of verification. Elie Hakizumwami, WWF-Central Africa Regional Programme Office (CARPO) presented the results of a project to define legality within the timber trade, used to prepare guidelines to verify the legality of timber products in 10 countries across Africa and Asia. Caroline Happi, IUCN-BRAC, outlined activities resulting from a joint partnership between the government of Cameroon and CAMRAIL to combat anti-poaching and the control of timber legality.

**REFADD:** Delegates met in a session on African Women Network for Sustainable Development (REFADD), chaired by Bashige Eulalie. Participants were given an overview of REFADD, projects implemented, achievements and constraints, and focal points from Cameroon, Burundi and the Central African Republic shared experiences. Yigbedek Bissek highlighted how REFADD, a network of NGOs consisting mainly of women, works towards the sustainable management of natural resources as well as implementing and monitoring conservation projects in Central African sub-regions. She underscored that the main areas of intervention include lobbying and advocacy on law enforcement and good governance in the management of natural resources.