



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 PARLIAMENTARIANS ON THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF CENTRAL AFRICAN FOREST ECOSYSTEMS: WEDNESDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2006

The First International Conference of Members of the Parliament on the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystems continued on Wednesday, 25 October, in Yaoundé, Cameroon. In the morning, participants explored the conference's second theme "Working out strategies for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of sub-regional biodiversity policy," through country and regional case studies. In the afternoon, participants divided into three working groups on forest taxation, partnerships, and national legislation and international agreements. In the evening, delegates convened into three parallel sessions to hear presentations on forest certification, women's participation in natural resource management and innovative tools in forest management initiatives.

SUB-THEME 2: STRATEGIES FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SUB-REGIONAL BIODIVERSITY POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Salah Mahamat Nour, Chad, discussed the harmonization of policies, forest legislation and the sustainable management of transboundary resources in Chad. Nour stressed the role of parliamentarians in implementing financial plans and their importance as advocates for raising funds for development.

Claus-Michael Falkenberg, GTZ, discussed strategies for the monitoring and evaluation of the sub-regional biodiversity policies and their implementation. He noted the existence of clear political will for monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation in the Central African region, as well as operationalizing a common vision through the Convergence Plan. Falkenberg summarized a range of monitoring and evaluation initiatives, including activities undertaken by NGOs. Stressing that new approaches were not necessary, he noted the need to consolidate existing data and build upon this. He underscored that quality data motivates continued development activities and helps donors to assess whether financial resources are being used efficiently.

Roger Ngoufo, Cameroon Environmental Watch (CEW), outlined how his organization seeks to contribute to setting standards and developing forestry legislation. Highlighting methodologies for tracking transportation of wildlife to major urban centers, he said that a significant proportion of hunting and transportation activities were conducted outside the legal framework. He elaborated on survey frameworks to chart hunting activities and trace marketing networks for game, lamenting the lack of sufficient data at control and check points.

René Oyono, Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), discussed the role of the environmental legislators in Central Africa. He drew attention to interstate violence, decentralization of forest management and increased trade with China, factors which must be taken into account when formulating forestry management strategies. He underscored the necessity of legal reforms to promote local communities' access to and ownership of forestry resources, emphasizing that parliamentarians should be the instigators of these reforms.

Nicolas Shuku Onemba, DRC, discussed reducing environmental impacts in forested areas, and promoting sustainable development in Central Africa. He outlined the legal requirement for pre-project environmental impact assessment. He noted the need to implement SFM in the Congo Basin, pointing out forest concessions and certification as important issues.

Angeline Ndo Engolo Evina, National Assembly, Cameroon, described the role that parliamentarians can play within a multi-actor partnership, citing the case of Campo Ma'an Model Forest. She noted the presence of conflicts due to forest concessions and the need to promote dialogue and transparency. Ndo Engolo Evina indicated that the innovative approach to involving stakeholders early in the process ensures community ownership and highlights the value of forests in local, national and international levels.

Bradley Kinder, World Resources Institute, introduced an initiative to monitor the environmental performance of legislative institutions. He explained the objective was to increase accountability of parliaments and parliamentarians to their constituents. Clement Kalonga, Malawi, summarized the methodology of the study which involved analysis of Handsar, papers, committee reports, engaged attendance and media reports.

Shamisa Mtisi, Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association, outlined the findings, including that parliamentarians have limited environmental knowledge and tend not to ask questions or debate in parliament. He noted the constraints of the study, including poor record keeping of activities in parliament. Mtisi outlined the next steps to engage in policy dialogue and ensure parliamentarians understanding of their role.

Abunaw Rose Makia, Caucus of Parliamentarians for Environment Protection, discussed Cameroon's experience of building capacity for effective representation of the environment by parliamentarians. She noted that the Caucus promotes good governance and is committed to improving the performance of the legislative power and strengthening the relationship between parliamentarians and their constituents. She concluded by stating that she expects this conference will contribute to broadening the knowledge base of parliamentarians and allow them to make concrete and informed decisions on environmental issues.

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DISCUSSION: In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed the importance of promoting the use of impact studies and reducing the costs. Arthur Bainomgisha, Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), reiterated parliamentarians should support the institutionalization of the Parliamentary Caucus, even after leaving office.

SUB-THEME 3: FINANCING MECHANISMS AND THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

Martine Billanou, Netherlands' Development Organization (SNV), explained the sub-theme was divided into two issues: parliamentarians and mustering of financial resources for the implementation of the Convergence Plan; and natural resources conservation and the fight against poverty. She summarized SNV's activities on forestry, good governance and partnerships.

PARLIAMENTARIANS AND MUSTERING OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVERGENCE

PLAN: Christophe Besacier, CBFP, outlined the role of parliamentarians in the mobilization of resources for the Convergence Plan. He indicated that COMIFAC will establish a financial mechanism to implement the Convergence Plan, which will receive governmental and voluntary contributions. Besacier said COMIFAC also recommended the establishment of a harmonized tax, with a percentage to be earmarked to fund the activities under the Convergence Plan.

Shandrak Eketete Ondoua, National Agency for the Support and Development of Forests (ANAFOR), discussed forestry renewal strategies in Cameroon and explained how renewal activities were being implemented by local communities and the private sector.

Zac Tchoudjeu, World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), indicated how local communities were enhancing their incomes and undertaking SFM by cultivating high-level indigenous NTFPs to address the price vulnerability of cash crop species such as coffee and cocoa.

Karl Morrison, WRI, introduced the study on redistribution of forest benefits to local communities. René Oyono, CIFOR, presented the results and explained how forestry can reduce poverty, increase involvement of stakeholders and promote decentralization of forestry taxation. He recommended that parliamentarians review mechanisms for managing forest royalties to increase benefits to local communities.

Jean Marie Mindja, African Women's Network for Sustainable Development (REFADD), said that REFADD facilitates the involvement of women in sustainable management of natural resources, and underlined strategies that were related to the Convergence Plan and the exploitation of NTFPs.

Divine Foundjem, ICRAF, presented an innovative approach to conservation and management of natural resources for poverty alleviation, which mobilizes farmers to sell NTFPs, enhances their negotiating skills and enables them to develop viable market strategies. Highlighting the constraints faced by farmers in marketing NTFPs including poor organization, limited market knowledge and inadequate storage facilities, he emphasized the need to promote partnerships between farmers and traders.

Senator William Mu Nyembabazi, Burundi, and Salvador Ndabirorere, Enviro-Protéc, Burundi, presented joint projects against poverty in Burundi. Senator William Mu Nyembabazi underscored the need to reconcile development and sustainable management, involving all stakeholders and promoting partnerships for carrying out socially and environmentally

friendly activities to combat poverty. Ndabirorere said that Enviro-Protéc focuses on promoting environmental education, awareness and stakeholder participation to promote conservation, sustainable management of natural resources, as well as fighting against poverty.

In the ensuing discussion delegates discussed the possibilities of compensating local communities for conservation of forests and for the use of NTFPs, the national adjustments needed for implementing the Convergence Plan and the importance of financial resources for carrying out SFM activities.

WORKING GROUPS

NATIONAL LEGISLATION: Moderated by Bofaya Botaka-Baende, DRC, this working group met to consider national legislation, sub-regional initiatives and international conventions. After deliberating at length on the definitions of terms, the group identified sub-regional initiatives for forest management such as COMIFAC, AFLEG, and FLEG. Questioning whether these initiatives contributed to the implementation of the Convergence Plan, delegates drew attention to the treaty ratification status of COMIFAC, lamenting that few countries had ratified it and called for a recommendation that the process be fast-tracked. Regarding the role of parliamentarians in the implementation of national legislation and conventions, participants raised the issue of consistency of forestry legislation with land tenure laws, addressing the fact that national and sub-regional laws did not always reflect the provisions of international conventions.

FOREST TAXATION: Moderated by Timothee Fomete Nembot, Cameroon, the Forest Taxation working group discussed the impact of taxation on SFM, mechanisms to collect and redistribute taxes, and the elaboration of an action plan for parliamentarians to make better use of budgets. Debate focused on the issue of Cameroon Annual Forestry Fees (RFA) and the role of parliamentarians. Fomete Nembot summarized the three recommendations from the deliberations. The first recommended increased sharing of information amongst parliamentarians on the modalities of taxation legislation with regard to local and sustainable development. The second involved increasing the capacity for parliamentarians to use tax revenues efficiently for local development. The third, specific to Cameroon, recommended updating the legal framework to involve parliamentarians in local governance of tax revenue.

PARLIAMENTARIANS AND PARTNERSHIPS: The session on parliamentarians and partnerships for sustainable development of forest resources was moderated by Matsembe Appohinaire, Gabon, with Salvador Ndabirorere, Enviro-Protéc, Burundi, acting as rapporteur. Appohinaire highlighted the group's mandate to discuss: the elements of a list of partners to work with the parliamentarians; an action plan for promoting partnership among parliamentarians and other actors; obstacles and opportunities for REPAR-CEFDHAC to promote partnerships with other identified actors; the ways to assess partnership opportunities among REPAR-CEFDHAC, GLOBE, CBFP, donors, and other relevant organizations; and obstacles and opportunities to link development and partnerships for promoting SFM. Delegates debated the appropriate methodology, strategy and format to obtain such outcomes. A few delegates highlighted the need to identify the indicators for the list of partners. There was a general consensus within the group that social, political, technical and scientific partners need to be identified at all levels. Several delegates suggested such partners should assist in implementing the Convergence Plan.