



**Rainforest
Alliance**



Cameroon & Community Forestry in the Congo Basin

Project Outline

Introduction: Rainforest Alliance & Community Forestry

Since 1987, the Rainforest Alliance has pioneered an innovative approach to solving environmental crises by advocating for the implementation of sustainable management practices that conserve biodiversity and improve livelihoods. We work up and down the supply chain, from indigenous communities to multilateral corporations, to deliver the tools and information necessary to mitigate climate change, empower communities, and prevent deforestation.

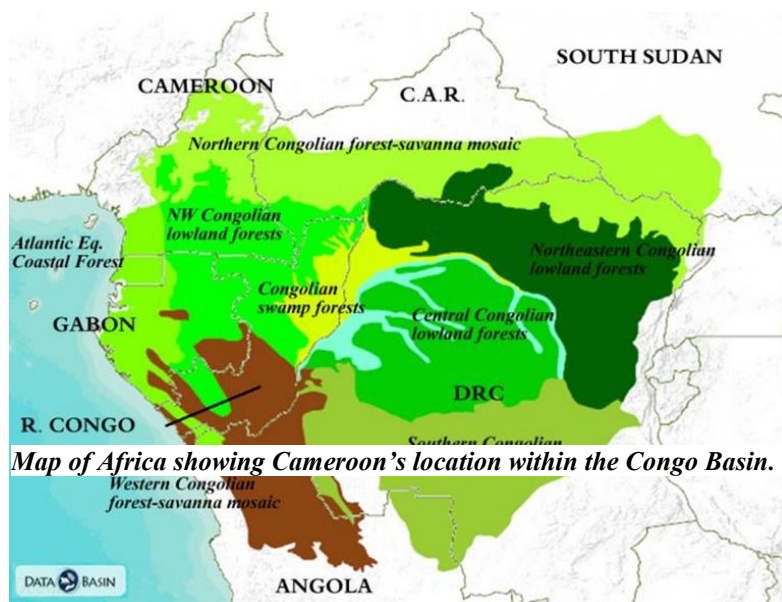
However, the last few years have seen a sharp increase in threats to forests, especially from the establishment of large-scale agricultural and mining operations. Land grabbing by multinational companies – abetted by government agencies – in forest areas under ancestral tenure is quickly destroying large areas of forest in the conversion to monocrop plantations producing rubber and oil palm. Such development has been widely documented as severely undermining local livelihoods and biodiversity.

In the face of mounting threats a promising alternative is emerging. Year to year, globally across the tropics, increased responsibility over natural forest areas is being given to local communities. Evidence from across Latin America – where the Rainforest Alliance has been working for 15 years to support community forestry shows clearly that community-managed forests can outperform strictly protected areas in maintaining forest cover, while providing economic development opportunities for marginalized groups. For example, a recent analysis of the Maya Biosphere of Guatemala showed that community-managed forests had deforestation rates close to zero, whereas adjacent protected areas experienced forest conversion above regional averages.

While in Africa this approach is still in its nascent stages, the country of Cameroon offers significant hope for demonstrating the potential of community forestry to save the Congo Basin's forests and empower locally-owned enterprise.

Congo Basin Background

The forests of the Congo Basin span eight countries and are home to some 90% of Africa's remaining tropical forest. This vast, still largely intact, forest expanse is the second largest tropical rainforest in the world after the Amazon. Its biodiversity endowment is stunning, approximately 10,000 species of tropical plants – nearly a third of which are endemic – can be found here. The region's forests are also home to an array of endangered wildlife species including: lowland and mountain gorillas, chimpanzees, drill, bonobos, and forest elephants. Additionally, 400 other species of mammals, 1,000 species of birds, and an estimated 700 species of fish also inhabit the Congo Basin's forests.



Moreover, for tens of thousands of years these forests have supported the livelihoods of human populations that today number roughly 75 million across the Basin. They come from over 150 ethnic groups – the Baka, Bambuti, and Efé among them (often referred to collectively as Pygmies). Like most forest-dependent groups, they have tremendous knowledge of biodiversity and forest products, whether consumed domestically or traded for cash, these products play a critical role in household income strategies. Forestry also represents one of the best opportunities for sustainable economic growth.

Rainforest Alliance & Cameroon

More than anywhere else in the Congo Basin, Cameroon has allowed for community forests to be established in high-biodiversity natural forest. Since the revision of its forestry law in 1994; 267 community forests have been recognized, covering an area of about one million hectares. Although the model has been in existence for more than 20 years, progress in realizing community forestry's promise in the country has been slow. Limited capacity to comply with complicated forest management regulations, organize competitive enterprises, and access responsible forest products markets has hindered growth of the model.

Such work forms the heart of Rainforest Alliance's approach to supporting community forest enterprises globally. Across the tropics, we support community forestry to articulate sustainable, integrated management plans, apply best forestry practices in the field, build up administrative capacity, invest in strategies for value-added processing, and penetrate premium markets for wood and other products. Over the last five years, we have been adapting and applying our approach with community forests in Cameroon. The focus of our work

lies in two clusters of community forests in the southern region of Cameroon. One is adjacent to the Campo-Ma'an National Park, another abuts the Dja Biosphere Reserve. Both protected areas harbor an array of endangered species including lowland gorillas, African forest elephants, western chimpanzees, and Grey-necked Picathartes.



Women processing non-timber forest products (Njansan nut), which is then used to produce oil and body soap.

The human beneficiaries of our work make up twelve communities that are home to some 10,000 individuals, including indigenous Baka. Over five years, we have worked with these 12 communities to develop sustainable management plans, increase capacity for forest harvesting, build local organizational capacity, and access markets for a diversity of forest products. Additionally, we have facilitated the establishment of 4 locally-owned ‘second-tier’ enterprises – each with 3 members – as a strategy to achieve scale, invest in infrastructure, improve value-added capacity, and achieve high-end markets. This work was undertaken following participatory methods, working with two local NGOs, called CEPFILD and OPFCR, to build up local capacity and support CFEs in the long term.

Although we have been operating in a very difficult context, considerable achievements have been made in the 12 community forests. As a result of our support, all twelve communities have approved management plans covering some 30,000 hectares. Business alliances with buyers have been forged, and nine community forests have signed sales contracts—a major step forward for CFEs in the region. Beyond timber, we have worked to diversify forest production through the harvesting, processing, and marketing of wild mangoes and Njansang nuts. *Irvingia gabonensis* (mango) is processed into edible pastes, and the Njansang nut, a non-timber forest product from the tree *Ricinodendron heudelotii*, is processed into oil and body soap. Some 200 people are directly involved in these diversified forest activities, which substantially benefit women and indigenous households.



Community partners in Cameroon.

Our support over the last five years has yielded concrete benefits. Participating households have succeeded in significantly increasing incomes from the forest; which often represent the primary source of income for families. For example, through access to better markets and improved negotiation of contracts:

- Community incomes from timber sales (stumpage) have doubled.
- Communities have taken control of forest harvesting and are seeing a tremendous increase in revenue, which lays the foundation for investment in further responsible community forestry programs.
- Collective marketing of wild mango, moreover, has increased earnings from sales by an average of more than 75%.

Case for Support

The work in Cameroon has reached a critical crossroads. While much has been achieved, communities need more support to transform their burgeoning activities into viable, competitive enterprises that will deliver on the range of benefits responsible production can provide.

Specifically, four mobile timbermills, used for on-site processing, will be delivered to these communities during October. While these mills provide the opportunity to dramatically expand value-added production, there is limited technical capacity to operate them. Furthermore, internal enterprise capacities remain incipient, and in order to maintain market penetration achieved thus far we need to ensure timely delivery of sustainable products. Finally, communities need support to ensure the equitable use of benefits from forest products sales, including improved wages for workers, the development of social projects, and reinvestment in forest enterprise.

Meanwhile, the current funding mechanism enabling our work in Cameroon is winding down. At this crucial stage in the development of community forestry in the country – which is a testing ground for the model across the wider Congo Basin – there is a pressing need to ensure responsible practices take hold. The very future of this proven model for forest conservation and livelihood improvement hangs in the balance.

To meet this critical need, the Rainforest Alliance is seeking \$40,000 in funding.

Gifts will provide for the continuance of our community forestry activities within Cameroon and allow the Rainforest Alliance to make strategic investments as needed for the implementation of other important projects around the world.

The following activities will be made possible through this funding:

- Trainings on the use of timbermills and processing
- Follow-up trainings in enterprise administration
- Obtaining forestry inventories and harvest permits
- Costs for field staff and travel

Conclusion

As a result of our successful implementation of community forestry activities within Latin America, tools were developed for training indigenous people to cultivate the land in a sustainable way, while providing themselves with the means to improve their lives. Likewise, the model for community forestry was proven as a way to conserve biodiversity and protect forests.

The next step for the Rainforest Alliance has been replicating these successes in other areas of the world where unchecked deforestation endangers wildlife and those communities which depend on standing forests to survive. Today, the progress made within Cameroon, an entry point for community forestry within the Congo Basin, is threatened. By investing in our activities there, you will ensure that responsible forestry practices take hold and that communities are given the opportunity to thrive in symbiosis with their environment.

Thank you for your consideration.