



Network of Indigenous and Local Communities for the Sustainable Management of the Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa - (REPALEAC)

Brazzaville
23 February 2022

The Glasgow Donors

Subject: Letter of Intent from the Network of Indigenous and Local Communities for the Sustainable Management of the Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC)

With reference to the joint donor Statement on financing actions to secure, strengthen and protect the rights of Indigenous and Local Communities (IPLCs) to land, territories and natural resources¹ made at COP 26 held in Glasgow from 31 October to 13 November 2021, the Network of Indigenous and Local Communities for the Sustainable Management of the Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC) expresses its deep satisfaction and commends the unprecedented effort of the international community.

REPALEAC was established in 2003 as a sub-regional platform to promote and protect the rights of IPLCs in Central Africa. The Platform brings together over 500 indigenous organisations and local communities operating in eight countries. REPALEAC is a member of the Conference on Dense and Moist Forests Ecosystems of Central Africa (CEFDHAC), the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forest (IAITPTF) and the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC).

REPALEAC is a front-line advocate in Central Africa for the rights of IPLCs. The Platform receives support from several technical and financial partners such as the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) through its Programme for Sustainable Forest Management in the Congo Basin in support of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), of which REPALEAC is one of the partners, and the World Bank. REPALEAC's cooperation with these partners is an indication of its credibility in the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and in its various Member States. The platform has always been a strong voice for indigenous peoples at local, national and international levels. The recent participation of REPALEAC at the COP 26 reflects its commitment to defend the interests of the indigenous peoples of the Congo Basin at major international meetings and negotiations².

In 2018, REPALEAC adopted a Strategic Framework for 2018-2025³ which is in line with the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. Two of the five strategic thrusts of the framework deal with securing the lands, territories and natural resources of the IPLCs and improving their living conditions, all of which are fully consistent with the guidelines issued by the donors in Glasgow⁴.

Based on its experience and the difficulties encountered by IPLCs of the Basin in relation to their land rights and living conditions, REPALEAC is currently developing an action programme with the support of the GIZ Programme for Sustainable Forest Management in the Congo Basin, for the 2022-2027 period, estimated at USD 100 million. The overall aim of the programme is to strengthen the role of IPLCs in forest governance, enhance their customary land rights and contribute to community-based sustainable forest management. The programme hopes to ultimately improve the well-being of more than 85 million people who depend heavily on forest resources⁵ for their survival. Against this backdrop, the 1.7 billion in funding announced in Glasgow is an opportunity to foster the involvement of IPLCs in the conservation and sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests in the coming years. The main guidelines of the

¹<https://ukcop26.org/cop26-iplc-forest-tenure-joint-donor-statement/>

²https://pfbc-cbfp.org/files/docs/COP26/27b1021_Program_Pavillon%20COMIFAC%20-%20Congo%20Basin%20Initiatives.pdf

³https://pfbc-cbfp.org/actualites-partenaires/PACL-repaleac.html?file=files/docs/partners/Repaleac%202020/REPALEAC_Document%20Strategique_FR_July%2025_ZDF.pdf

⁴<https://ukcop26.org/cop26-iplc-forest-tenure-joint-donor-statement/>

⁵<https://pfbc-cbfp.org/ecosystemes-bassin-congo.html>



programme are as follows:

- Contribute to improve policy and legislative frameworks related to forest and land governance;
- Strengthen and secure the collective land rights of IPLCs;
- Foster the participation of IPLCs in forest and land governance in the Congo Basin;
- Build the capacity of traditional IPLC organisations and structures;
- Protect indigenous land rights advocates;
- Support the economic recovery of IPLCs impacted by the deterioration of their living environment and the COVID-19 pandemic.

COP 26 provided the international community with an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to limiting global warming. However, in the fight against climate change, it is impossible to limit global temperature without conserving forests, which are the world's second-largest carbon sink.

As the world's largest tropical forest⁶, the forests of the Congo Basin are central to the regulation of the global climate system, and maintaining their environmental integrity is vital for the indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) who live in and depend on them. It is noteworthy that forests play a significant social, economic and cultural role for these populations.

Over the years, IPLCs have thus emerged as key players in the search for sustainable solutions to climate change. The traditional knowledge, skills and practices of these IPLCs contribute significantly to the sustainable management and conservation of forests. IPLCs help to adapt to new situations and to balance forest ecosystems in Central Africa. Apart from being a central pillar in efforts to fight poverty, hunger and malnutrition in the Congo Basin, the forests on their ancestral lands and territories, play a key role in regional and global climate action.

However, there are several threats on these territories and, by extension, on the peoples who occupy them. The increased international demand for minerals, biofuels, food, forest products and construction of infrastructure are the main sources of pressure on the forest areas occupied by IPLCs. With little or no recognition of their rights, the land tenure situation of IPLCs in the Congo Basin is very precarious and their livelihoods are threatened. For instance, more than 71.9% of the lands and territories of indigenous and local communities in the Congo Basin are not legally recognised⁷. This situation greatly compromises the efforts of the international community to combat climate change in these areas.

Thus, efforts to combat climate change should not overlook the interests of IPLCs for secure land spaces. In this light, support for initiatives to recognise and secure their land rights and to build their capacity remains a necessity. The interest shown by donors at COP 26 in Glasgow to promote indigenous lands and territories and improve their living conditions thus appears to be one of the responses to the many calls from indigenous organisations in Central Africa for greater international solidarity with IPLCs.

With this letter of intent, REPALEAC reiterates its firm commitment to contribute to the fight against climate change and to make Central African IPLCs preferred partners in this global battle. This is also an opportunity to invite the various donors to prioritise the Congo Basin and the people living therein, in order to give a more human face to the legitimate actions envisaged in the fight against climate change.

⁶Cooper, G.S., Willcock, S. & Dearing, J.A. Regime shifts occur disproportionately faster in larger ecosystems. *Nat Commun* 11, 1175 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-15029-7>
⁷<https://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/Area-Study-French-v2021.pdf>