

## THE SYMPOSIUM TO COMMEMORATE 38 YEARS OF THE KORUP NATIONAL PARK

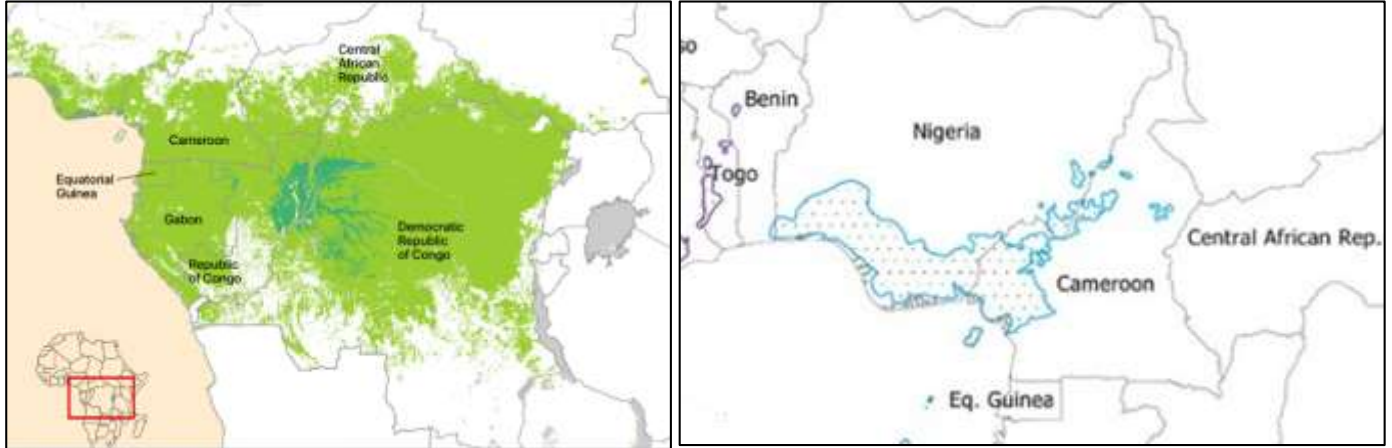
### *"Cultivating Resilience: supporting community livelihoods and promoting innovative biodiversity conservation in the Lower Guinea-Congolian Forests".*

#### 1. The Lower Guinea-Congolian forest landscape

The natural territory of Cameroon is often described as “Africa in Miniature”. This is not a colloquial denotation, but one founded on the geo-ecological significance of the ecosystems linking West, Central Africa and the Sahel. Of the ecological formations characterizing the African continent, two; (i) the Guinea (predominant in west Africa) and (ii) the Congolian (predominant in central Africa) forests intersect in Cameroon.

Significantly, no landscape in Cameroon captures both ecological and cultural characteristics of these ecological formations like the **forest continuum of South-eastern Nigeria and Southwestern Cameroon**. Due to overwhelming international considerations, the lowland Congolian rainforests (Congo basin) has consistently received much more attention and resources, at the expense of this intersection of Lower Guinea and Congolian forests which have created unique refugia like the Korup National Park<sup>1</sup>.

We find prominent Lower Guinea Forests in Cameroon stretching from the Korup-Rumpis, Mount Kupe, Mount Manengouba, Mount Cameroon (Southwest Region), Tofala-Mount Bamboutous highlands (Southwest – West Regions), Mount Oku, Kilum-Ijim (Northwest Region), and Ebo forest (Littoral Region) and other areas in-between (see map 1 below).



Congo Basin Ecological & Political Context

Lower Guinea Ecological and & Political Context

Figure 1: The Congo Basin Forests, the Upper and Lower Guinea Forest continuum of Africa

Both the Congo Basin and the Guinea Forests share many similarities, but differ in size, species composition, endemism, ecological functions, and extent of human impact.

Cameroon’s new Forest and Wildlife Law No. 2024 008 of 24 July 2024, and her Law No. 2021/014 of 09 July 2021 on genetic resources access, fair and equitable benefits sharing from their utilization, and the

<sup>1</sup> The Korup National Park and adjoining forest massif are one of Africa’s oldest Rainforest (estimated to be over 60 million years old) and has been designated as one of Africa’s ONLY TWO Pleistocene Refugia

2030 national development and green growth strategy are all helping prioritize the ecology, economics, bio-Innovation, culture and development in landscape management across Cameroon. Clearly, national and regional development policies and strategies strongly point to the importance of enhancing inherent values and diversity of the ecosystems to power regional development and green growth.

As a starting point, this Symposium is using the 38<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Korup National Park within the context of the Lower Guinea Congolian forests of the administrative region of the Southwest as a model to depict the inclusive perspective to nature conservation and green growth. The symposium therefore seeks to educate participants and the broader audience on the landscape and ecological significance of the Lower Guinea Forests of Cameroon, focusing on the four major sub biomes of the Lower guinea – conglonian forest landscapes will be covered, comprising; (i) Korup – Ndongere, (ii) Mount Cameroon, (iii) Bakossi – Banyang Mbo and (iv) Takamanda Mone (see map 2).

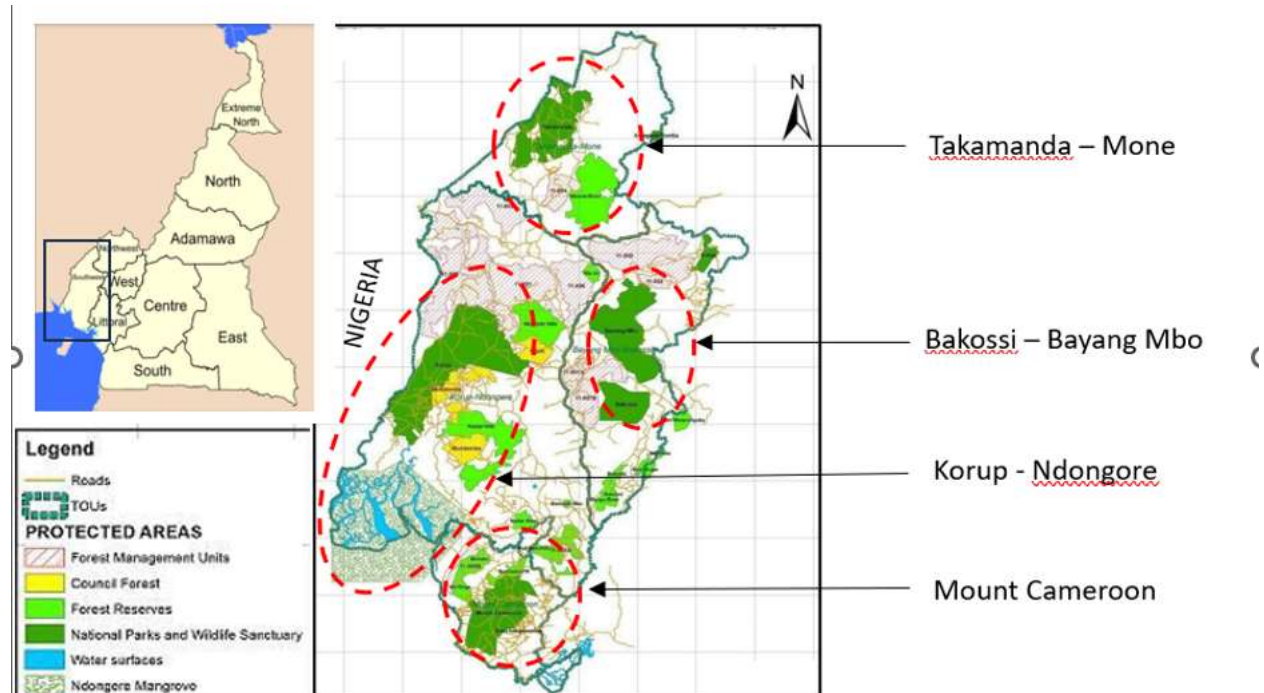


Figure 2: Lower Guinea – Congolian forest Landscapes of the South west region Cameroon

The Rio del Rey (Ndongere proposed protected area) is the biggest continuous block of Mangrove on the West and Central African coastline; represents over 50% of Cameroon’s mangroves and home for the emblematic and critically endangered manatees and sea turtles. To the southeast is the mount Cameroon landscape with a buoyant population of forest elephants, an isolated population of mountain chimpanzees, a hotspot of flora and fauna biological diversity and endemism. Just north of the mountain is a forest continuum that spreads to the iconic Korup national park and adjoining massif with forest elephants, red colobus, drills, the flamboyant pelican birds as emblematic species. Southeast of Korup is the sub montane Rumpis, and Bakossi to the far west; both lower Guinea forests and Important Birds Areas (IBAs). Rumpis is also the most important water watershed in this landscape. Banyang Mbo is an Elephant sanctuary while Takamanda and Kagwene are important sites for great Apes, particularly the critically endangered and endemic Cross River Gorilla and mandrills. Scattered between this core areas are community habitations, agro-forestry use zones, community forests, council forests, forest management

units, ex-situ conservation areas; 14,000 ha of Oil Palm (PAMOL), 20,000 ha agriculture lease area (SGSOC) and 48,000 Agro-industrial Plantations (CDC).

A flagship of this Lower Guinea – Congolian forest Landscape has been the Korup Rainforest reserve, established in 1937 by the colonial Administration, modified and upgraded by Presidential Decree in 1986 into the first IUCN Category I, rainforest national park in Cameroon. Through the efforts of the Government of Cameroon (through MINFOF), the World-Wide Fund for nature (WWF), and later the European Union, that brought together: UK-Overseas Development Administration/Assistance (ODA), the German Development Agency (GIZ) and US Department of Defense (DoD), the Korup project obtained needed financial and technical resources to implement its mission. By 2003 however, funding for the Korup project dwindled; and with the creation of new protected areas, and later the 2016 political crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions, MINFOF has continued to maintain biodiversity conservation and promote rural development in this Lower Guinea-Congolian landscape, through the Programme for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Southwest Region (PSMNR-SWR) funded by the German government through KfW. Yet, despite the pioneering Collaborative Management of Protected Areas (CMPA) programme instituted by WWF in 2013, the landscape has still struggled under multiple constraints of funding and insecurity to realize the vision of Community-based Conservation envisaged through the CMPA. In July of 2023 however, the long-awaited UNESCO Korup Rainforest Man and Biosphere reserve was created and early in 2024 Cameroon and Nigeria signed a Transboundary Agreement to promote people-focused conservation of biodiversity and green-growth in this Lower Guinea -Congolian forest ecosystem.

There are 26 National Parks in Cameroon, of which 6 are wildlife sanctuaries; 5 are wildlife reserves, 3 biosphere reserves, 3 sites recognized as World Heritage, and 7 Ramsar sites dedicated to bird protection. Only two of the World Heritage Sites (WHS) are of a Transboundary nature; (i) the Tri National Sangha (TNS) UNESCO WHS in southeastern Cameroon and (ii) the Korup Rainforest UNESCO Man and Biosphere. It is important that Korup now, receives the attention it deserves.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) further emphasizes the critical role ecosystems play to sustain life on Earth and power economic development. The convention outlines three policy pillars on biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and just and equitable sharing of benefits accruing from sustainable use. The Nagoya Protocol outlines the principles and fundamentals of benefit sharing on use of genetic resources and/or traditional knowledge associated to the resources. The Global Biodiversity Framework (Kunming-Monreal 2022) further enshrines targets on benefit sharing, including considerations on Digitally Sequences Information (DSI) of proteins obtained from biodiversity and used in industries. Bio-Innovation principle distinguishes itself as a new opportunity for the private sector, indigenous and local communities as well as other related stakeholders to fully engage in breaking silos that hamper the building of a broader perspective on research and development, introducing novel molecules and products into markets, sharing accrued benefits and invest in biodiversity conservation as a joint universal patrimony. The GBF further paves the way for countries to mainstream both biodiversity and benefit sharing into country third generation National Biodiversity Action Plans (NBSAP III).

## **2. Overview of Symposium**

In order to maintain and significantly scale-up the momentum of national and international conservation interest in policy, and contribute to reconstruction and peace-building, the ex-staff of the Korup project came together in 2024 as “Korup United”, with the objective to: *“Unite former Korup Project staff and other actors, to promote the area's biodiversity, support community-led conservation to enhance access and benefits sharing, introduce innovative sustainable development approaches, and enhance the profile of this unique Lower Guinea-Congolian rainforests with the Korup National Park as a center-piece”*.

As a first activity, Korup United plans to organize a knowledge management symposium on lessons learned from agriculture, culturally sensitive conservation education, bio-prospection and bio-innovation through R&D, equitable benefit sharing on use genetic resources, community-based sustainable financing, and non-intrusive conservation approaches ongoing in the areas around Korup National park and where relevant, in the wider Lower Guinea - Congolian forest ecosystem in Cameroon.

### **3. Significance, purpose and logic**

Despite the 7-years long socio-political crisis, ordinary people and communities remain determined to carry-on living, relying on their wits, skills and sheer determination; and hoping to thrive. A reliable source of livelihoods has remained the ecosystems services of the area; soils, water, and other natural resources. Despite the insecurity and rural poverty, driven by isolation and uncertainties, some local actors of the public and private sector, CSOs, NGOs, experts, (some of them ex-staff of the former Korup project) have continued with various activities. The drastic decline and near closure of biomonitoring, research, nature conservation and development measures in the broader landscape has exposed previous nature conservation efforts to collapse, paving the way for lawlessness and illegality to become widespread. This symposium has been conceived just on time to enable a broad-based reflection on capitalizing on the gains of previous efforts and coin out strategies to cope with the prevalent situation.

The symposium will also help raise the profile of ongoing community-driven sustainable development activities and hopefully, attract targeted support to them by engaging with other actors sharing their aspirations, and facing common constraints.

In order to achieve these goals, the Symposium logic will be sensitive to the current context of unresolved security challenges constraining the implementation of activities at the desired scale. This logic is a precautionary one, partly based on the **incremental theory**, discussed by Dye (2013) suggests that; *“a multitude of small, locally-owned actions in increments, carried-out in the direction of desired improvement to existing processes; initiatives, programs or projects, can produce cumulatively bigger, positive impact, under circumstances in which larger, sudden policy or transformational actions may not be feasible”* (Dye 2013<sup>2</sup>).

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<sup>2</sup> Dye TR (2013) Understanding public policy, 14th edn. Pearson, Boston

## 4. Stakeholders' engagement

To achieve the momentum required for a viable Symposium, a stakeholder engagement process to analyze the interests and required incremental actions of the stakeholders is ongoing. These stakeholders are in three categories:

- (i) Stakeholders interested in the Symposium on development and conservation in the Korup Forest Landscape;
- (ii) Stakeholders with ongoing initiatives and who can benefit from incremental pathway,
- (iii) Stakeholders with the interest, resources and wherewithal to invest in, and support incremental activities of committed and viable local actions.

## 5. Date and Venue

**Date:** The date of the Symposium has been fixed for the 31.10-01.11.2024 at the University of Buea which coincides with the 38<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the creation of the Korup National Park and to fit with the schedules of participants.

**VENUE:** University of BUEA, AMPHITHEATRE/HALL

Further instructions regarding access and participant identification, including Symposium badges will be provided subsequently.

## 6. Organizers & sponsors

This Symposium is being organized by the ex-staff of the Korup Project brought together as the “Korup United” Association. The main financial sponsors are the German Cooperation through the BioInnovation Project Africa Project, the Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and Pamol Plantations LTD. Participants are also expected to support allied costs associated with their participation in the symposium.

## 7. Symposium Objectives

This Symposium will foremost, announce to the local, regional, national and international audience, the existence of the Korup United Association, as a viable and engaged partner in Sustainable development of the targeted Lower Guinea – Congolian landscapes.

*Incrementalism*, the logic of this Symposium will then propose investing in **new and or viable, ongoing initiatives with results to build on, and lessons to share**; and will cover at least six (6) interconnected Thematic Areas;

- (i) **Sustainable agriculture and green enterprise** (e.g., MINADER/PAMOL Feed Mundemba Initiative, IRAD, SGSOC, Cottage Industry by CSOs, CBOS and Individuals, etc....);
- (ii) **Access and benefits sharing from genetic resources and associated local traditional knowledge and BioTrade** under the stewardship of the Ministry of Environment (MINEPDED), funded by the German Development Cooperation and the Global Environment Facility (GEF Small Grant Facility). Other ongoing initiatives **such as** CSOs/CBOs, MINFOF/PSMNR measures.
- (iii) **Conservation education** for sustainable development (by MINFOF/PSMNR, CSOs/CBOs, etc);
- (iv) **Sustainable Financing** initiatives (e.g., CAMCOF, FTNS, or community-based Initiatives, e.g. BWB<sup>3</sup> CTF);

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<sup>3</sup> Bobombi Wa Batanga Conservation Trust Fund

- (v) **Community-based conservation approaches** (e.g., MINFOF/PSMNR collaborative management, CSO/CBO-led conservation/development examples, etc.....)
- (vi) **Research and Development in-silico for industry innovation, DNA extraction and digital sequencing of proteins to shortened laboratory efforts of biodiscovery** (e.g., Academic and applied research relevant to thematic areas carried out by Institutions, such as AJESH and partners, IRAD, the University of Buea, MINFOF, CSOs/CBOs, etc.

Firstly, these thematic areas are low-hanging fruits that cover ongoing activities from which concrete lessons can be learned in an inter-connected way. Given the interconnection, the global landscape perspective, including innovative access and benefit sharing protocols between the local population and the industry the symposium will facilitate synergies between similar activities leading to the production of joint ACTION PLANS for represented landscapes, which will to be shared with existing or new donors and or investors. The Symposium will also produce an edited Proceedings/Compendium of the presentations and action plans.

## 8. Target Audience

Below are the targeted audiences for this Symposium

### **(i) Stakeholders interested in the Symposium outcomes**

- State of Cameroon and administrations
- Communities in the Lower Guinea – Congolian forest ecosystem
- Korup United Founding members
- National and International Sustainable Development Community
- *Others*

### **(ii) Some stakeholders with ongoing initiatives and who can benefit from incrementalism through the Symposium outcomes.**

- MINADER/PAMOL Feed Mundemba Initiative
- Individual Innovators in Agriculture and Sustainable Development
- Relevant MINFOF/PSMNR initiatives
- MINEPDED and partner Projects on use of genetic materials, digital sequencing information (DSI), access and benefits sharing for local development and biodiversity conservation.
- IRAD/UB and other relevant research entities
- SG SOC (Sithe Global Sustainable Oil Palm, Cameroon)
- CSO, NGOs, CBO, Private Sector Initiatives (e.g., KRCS, SORAD, NACRUDI, Red Colobus, BWB, CH, ESACAM, ESUDEV, KEOKOGAN, AJESH, CID, CAMECO, ERUDEF, Nature Cameroon, CAD, FORUDEF.....)

### **(iii) Stakeholders likely to support viable incrementalism**

- State of Cameroon & Administrations:
- The German Development Cooperation, notably GIZ and KfW
- President's Plan for Reconstruction and GND follow-up committees
- PAMOL PLANTATIONS Ltd
- SOWEDA
- MINFOF/PSMNR-SWR
- Philanthropists /Donor

- Korup United Founding members
- SG SOC (Sithe Global Sustainable Oil Palm, Cameroon)
- Red Colobus Conservation Project
- International Organizations (UN, KfW, WWF, WCS, IUCN, EU, UK-AID, CAFI, GEF, etc.)