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PREFACE

The need for a periodic report on the state of the forests of Central Africa was first recognized by the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) in 2004. The intent was to provide the various CBFP members (States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, private sector companies, research organizations, and international and civil society) a reliable basis of information to support both political and technical decision-making, with the overall objective of improving the living conditions of populations and conserving biodiversity through improved forest management.

In the second strategic axis of its convergence plan, the Commission for the Forests of Central Africa (COMIFAC), a member of the CBFP and the regional body in charge of orienting and harmonizing forestry and environmental policy in the sub-region, also expressed the need to form a monitoring structure in order to establish base-

lines and produce regularly updated information on forest resources.

Wide recognition of the need for reliable and timely information on forests inspired the idea for a permanent Observatory for the Forests of Central Africa (OFAC). One of the principal duties of OFAC would be to periodically prepare a report on the state of the forests in Central Africa. The idea for the Observatory was taken up by the European Commission (EC), which launched the FORAF project in April 2007. The main objective of FORAF is to dynamically build OFAC through the process of preparing the 2008 and 2010 State of the Forest (SOF) reports.

The 2008 SOF report would not have been possible without the financial, technical and scientific support of many CBFP partners. This document reflects a strong desire for collaboration from partners that transcends institutional divisions and ideologies. We are grateful to them all.



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FOREWORD

The idea for a report on the state of forests in Central Africa progressed from concept to reality at the 2005 Heads of States Summit in Brazzaville. At the Summit, a preliminary report based largely on experience and data collected through the USAID-funded Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) was released. The development of the preliminary report laid the groundwork for the preparation of a more comprehensive report in 2006: "Forests of the Congo Basin: State of the Forest 2006".

The 2006 report was jointly funded by the European Union, France and the United States and involved the work of over a hundred individuals. The development of the 2006 State of the Forest report consolidated the practices established during the advancement of the 2005 preliminary report. The production of the 2008 report has consolidated the process even further, while also providing an opportunity to welcome new partners and contributors.

Recognizing the broad interest generated by the 2006 report and the evolution of a dynamic process, Germany, the ECOFAC Program and UNESCO joined existing financial partners to support the 2008 report. The number of institutions and individuals contributing to the report grew with the keen engagement of the forestry administrations in Central African countries.

This principal objective of the SOF report remains to detail the status of dense moist forest in Central Africa. Its focus comprises the six Central African countries containing this type of forest: Gabon, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic. As such, unless otherwise specified, the term "Congo Basin" in the 2008 SOF refers to the area occupied by these 6 countries.

Preparing the 2008 SOF

The process of drafting the SOF 2008 began with the definition and selection of indicators for monitoring the state of forests in Central Africa. These indicators are structured around three themes: (i) status and trends of forest cover; (ii) management of production forests; and (iii) conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. The indicators are presented in a hierarchical structure at three levels: regional, national and management unit (specifically logging concessions and protected areas). The indicators were validated by

a representative panel of stakeholders in the management of Central Africa forests during a workshop held in Kribi in February 2008.

Based on established indicators, national groups of four to ten individuals working within the forestry administration collected data between April and August 2008. The data were primarily from 2006 and 2007, and were subsequently validated in national workshops attended by government officials as well as representatives of environmental NGOs, the private sector and development projects. Finally, the data were provided to the authors of the chapters in the report. The entire report was reviewed by a scientific committee of international renown.

The SOF beyond 2008

The first two editions of the SOF report (2005 and 2006) exist in paper and digital forms. The 2008 version is also available in paper and digital forms, but is it being complimented with an interactive internet version. On the Observatory website, users will find dynamic links to additional information. Data on individual sites and management units are only accessible via the Observatory website at www.observatoire-comifac.net.

The practice of collecting, harmonizing and disseminating data on a regular basis is most meaningful if it is part of a long-term process. The production and release schedule for future reports will depend on the efforts and willingness of COMIFAC and its partners to continue the work that has been started.

INTRODUCTION

Central Africa is the second largest continuous block of rainforest on the planet after the Amazon Basin. Although disturbed in places, forest cover is relatively well preserved overall. While annual deforestation rates have been comparatively low, between zero and one percent, there are strong indications that Central African forests are at a critical turning point for the future.

If current rates of demographic growth remain constant, the population of the Congo Basin will double between now and 25 to 30 years time. According to key socio-economic indicators, the population is characterized by a high level of poverty and under-development, with subsistence farming and the use of forest products often representing the only means for survival. For most of the population, forest resources represent the buoy keeping them above the survival threshold.

Agriculture represents a main threat to the forest since farming is primarily carried out through unproductive traditional techniques and slash-and-burn cropping practices that can occupy significant forest area. Furthermore, the potential development of agro-industry and agricultural units to produce biofuels or oil may threaten forests.

Extensive logging in the sub-region has not generally led to significant loss of forest cover, and does not compromise forest sustainability directly. Nevertheless, forest roads associated with logging open up and penetrate previously untouched forest areas, increasing accessibility and opening up forests to more indirect threats.

Firewood harvesting far exceeds timber extraction in terms of volume of wood harvested. However, it rarely impacts rainforest except close to large urban centers (e.g. Kinshasa, Brazzaville, Bangui, Yaoundé) where deforestation circles, which can only be contained by firewood plantations, often form.

In this context, the sustainable utilization and economic development of forest resources are important development issues. Forests represent a major source of economic revenue for countries both in the formal sector (i.e. industrial, semi-industrial timber logging) and the informal sector (e.g., non-timber forest products, artisanal timber extraction, fuelwood collection). Gradually, countries are becoming better organized to manage the logging of their forests and to administer the income generated by such activities. On the other hand, the forests of the Congo Basin are subject

to increasing pressure and use, which continues to result in net deforestation and degradation.

Maintaining forest cover in both production and conservation forests will be a major challenge in the coming decades. Addressing this challenge involves solving a series of other challenges related to improving governance, the modernization of the agricultural sector, population growth and the informal sector, improved management, widespread forest certification and management plans, payment for environmental services, national zoning of land use, etc.

The new trend of paying for environmental services provided by forests is discussed in detail in this report and may be essential if we want to make economic and social choices to maintain forests. New financing mechanisms for the payment for environmental services are galvanizing Congo Basin around this idea, clearly demonstrated by the robust and proactive negotiation dynamic.

New trends and challenges necessitate greater knowledge and understanding of the Congo Basin forests. Current data are often partial, fragmented and relevant only at a local scale; at the level of the Congo Basin available information is generally based on estimates and extrapolation. The collection of data and information that are accurate, objective and relevant to the three scales considered is a major challenge. The 2008 SOF report summarizes information at the country and regional levels, with local issues being covered in the CBFP landscapes.

While the reports in 2005 and 2006 focused largely on the CBFP landscapes, the component dedicated to reporting on national approaches to Congo Basin forests is greatly strengthened in the 2008 SOF and is reflected in the new structure of the indicators.

The report is divided into three major sections: national and regional summaries; thematic chapters; and landscape chapters. The six national chapters are structured in a similar fashion. Each chapter starts with a brief presentation of the macro-economic and political context of the country in question. The authors then analyze forest cover and its progression since 1990. The chapters also describe the legal and institutional framework for managing biodiversity resources and recount the results of data collected on the status of and value added through biodiversity, logging and the timber industry. A regional chapter summarizes the six country chapters and provides the reader with a synoptic perspective of the information.

The second part of the report is devoted to six thematic chapters presenting more detailed information on a series of issues pertaining to environmental goods and services. The first chap-

ter addresses a new tool for sustainable forest management in Central Africa: payment for environmental services (PES). The second chapter gives an overview of water resources and their role in the sub-region. Biodiversity as a source and means of maintaining environmental services is covered in the third chapter. The fourth chapter provides a historical overview of the position of Central African countries in Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) negotiations, while the fifth chapter gives a first estimate of carbon stocks and variations in the region. Finally, the sixth and final chapter raises the issue of peri-urban forests and fuelwood in Central Africa.

The third section of the report is comprised of 12 chapters detailing progress in the CBFP landscapes. Each chapter begins with a description of land use planning activities, followed by a description of human activities. The chapters also include a brief analysis of forest cover and its evolution as well as reports on large mammal and human sign monitoring. Finally, the chapters conclude with a brief presentation of a topic of special interest in the landscape.