



FINAL COMMUNIQUE OF THE YOUTH FORUM FOR THE FORESTS OF CENTRAL AFRICA May 31 - June 1, 2024, Kinshasa, DRC

The Youth Forum for the Forests of Central Africa took place in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on May 31 and 1 June 2024. This event was co-organized by France and Gabon with the support of the DRC, host country, as part of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP). The Youth Forum was held ahead of the 20th Meeting of Parties of the CFBC (MOP20) held from June 3 to 5 in Kinshasa. In total, more than 200 young people aged 18 to 35 committed to forest preservation met over these two days. To ensure diversity of perspectives and experiences, 50 young people from Angola, Sao Tome, Burundi, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo Brazzaville, Chad and France were supported to attend the Forum. The rest of the participants came from the DRC, mainly from Kinshasa. These two days were an opportunity for young people from various countries to create links, get inspired and think about initiatives to protect the Congo Basin forests.

The Forum's objectives were:

1. Highlight the links between the mobilization of youth and the preservation of forest ecosystems, in particular ahead of the three COPs in Rio (climate, biodiversity and desertification), which will be held in the second half of 2024;
2. Facilitate intergenerational exchanges between young people involved in civil society and representatives of States, international organizations, research actors and the private sector involved in the preservation of forests and the environment;
3. Bring out innovative ideas and proposals for the protection of forests, intended to be integrated into the MOP20, thus strengthening the influence of young people on decision-making.

This event was organized with the support of the following organizations:

- Central African Forestry Commission (COMIFAC)
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- France Volontaires
- Youth Network for Central African Forests (REJEFAC)
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- One Forest Youth Initiative (OFYI)
- Francophonie Institute for Sustainable Development (IFDD)
- Action des jeunes pour la protection de l'environnement et le développement durable (AJPEDD-RDC)

At the end of the Youth Forum, participants met in groups to develop recommendations on different themes related to forest preservation. These recommendations were promoted during the MOP20 and may be taken up at future international meetings on forests.

YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Workshop 1: Support the network of protected areas in Central Africa to achieve the Kunming-Montreal objectives (30x30)

Context: The forests of Central Africa are home to very rich biodiversity, and protected areas are created to achieve the global objective of 30% of terrestrial and marine areas protected by 2030. These areas, however, remain threatened by poaching, bush fires, deforestation linked to mining and agricultural exploitation.

- **Harmonization of regional strategies:** Adopt a coordinated regional approach that includes all Congo Basin countries, by developing common monitoring indicators.
- **Cross-border collaboration:** Improve cooperation between countries to manage protected areas in a more integrated way.
- **Benefit sharing:** Ensure that local communities and indigenous peoples benefit from conservation benefits, supporting local development initiatives.
- **Youth involvement:** Strengthen the capacities of young people, enable their active participation in decision-making and promote the sharing of experiences of young people involved in their communities. Encourage and support networks of young people who work for the management and preservation of forests.

Workshop 2: Ensuring effective and sustainable land use planning

Context: Land degradation and desertification affect biodiversity and the livelihoods of local populations. Land degradation refers to the deterioration of the quality of soil and terrestrial ecosystems, often due to inappropriate agricultural practices, deforestation and industrial exploitation. Desertification, on the other hand, refers to land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, resulting from various factors, including climate change and human activities.

- **Land management policies:** Develop and implement policies that integrate land management and forest conservation, while respecting the rights of local communities.
- **Participatory monitoring mechanisms:** Install systems that allow local communities to actively participate in land monitoring and management, to ensure that conservation practices are well-monitored and effective.
- **Promotion of agroforestry and agro-ecology:** Support mixed cultivation practices, such as permaculture that mixes food crops (cassava and acacia).
- **Youth engagement in land monitoring and management:** Involve young people in training programs, data collection, and representation in decision-making bodies.

Workshop 3: Consolidate sustainable value chains in Central Africa

Context: The sustainable management of natural resources and the development of agri-food, wood and non-wood forest products sectors are key elements of the economic growth of Central African countries, in a context where climate vulnerability increases risks for producers and populations. The lack of transparency and traceability complicates the identification of unsustainable practices, and the diversity of actors makes the coordination and implementation of sustainable practices complex.

- **Assessment and training:** Regularly evaluate the links in the value chains of forest products and ensure continuing training of the actors involved.

- **Promotion and labeling:** Identify and promote sustainable products for labeling and marketing, in order to improve their visibility on the markets.
- **Strengthening cooperation frameworks:** Strengthen public-private cooperation frameworks to support innovation in value chains.
- **Network of experts:** Create and maintain a network of experts to technically and strategically support value chains, ensuring integration of local and international expertise.
- **Involve young people:** Establish specific programs for youth engagement, including exchanges and training, with particular support for young entrepreneurship.

Workshop 4: Combating environmental crime

Context: Environmental crime poses a threat to Central Africa's forests, encompassing illegal logging, poaching, and unregulated mining. These illegal activities compromise biodiversity, destabilize local communities, and cause considerable economic losses.

- **Strengthening laws and regulations:** Support the establishment of strict laws and regulatory measures to effectively counter environmental crime.
- **Increased resources for surveillance:** Allocate sufficient funds for surveillance and law enforcement operations, including funding for advanced technology such as drones and satellites.
- **Training and awareness:** Organize awareness campaigns to inform local populations of the devastating effects of environmental crime and train them to participate in monitoring.
- **Cross-border cooperation:** Encourage collaboration between Congo Basin countries for common management and coordinated action against criminal activities.
- **Support for local initiatives:** Promote and support local and regional initiatives that aim to protect the environment, such as community patrols and watch groups.
- **Creation of youth networks:** Establish networks of young people engaged in the fight against environmental crime and systematically integrate a volunteer component into projects to enable active engagement of youth.

Workshop 5: Promoting scientific and academic cooperation and dialogue

Context: Central African forests lack robust locally generated scientific data. This inadequacy hampers the formulation of effective policies. It is important to break down barriers between scientists, researchers and local communities to promote sustainable and inclusive forest management.

- **Promotion of local research:** Support and finance research carried out by local scientists; establish programs that integrate traditional and scientific knowledge, promoting a balanced exchange between researchers and local communities.
- **Improved communication:** Develop strategies to popularize research results to local populations, using accessible languages and formats.
- **Training and awareness:** Create training programs for young people, allowing them to actively participate in research and environmental management.
- **Strengthening cooperation:** Establish collaboration networks between universities, research institutes, and local communities to improve knowledge sharing and the development of innovative solutions.
- **Youth engagement:** Encourage the involvement of young people in research projects through scholarships, internships and mentoring programs, online training, and encourage the publication of their work in scientific journals.