



WWF

FACTSHEET

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## FOREST AND CLIMATE PROGRAMME

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# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

## Maintaining the Green Heart of Africa's forests for people and the planet

### MAÏ-NDOMBE, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The rainforests of the Congo Basin are among the largest on Earth, second only to the Amazon<sup>1</sup>. Yet, unlike the Amazon's rainforests, the forests of the Congo Basin have so far been spared high deforestation rates. Because of this, vast forests still stand in this region, often called the Green Heart of Africa.

Spanning more than 12 million hectares<sup>2</sup> in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Maï-Ndombe landscape encompasses diverse ecosystems, including tropical moist forests interspersed with savannas. Human population densities in the region are low, and a large proportion of the residents practice traditional lifestyles based on hunting, fishing and collecting products from the forests. These forests are also home to the endangered bonobo (*Pan paniscus*), the closest animal relative to humans and one of the four great ape species found wild nowhere else on Earth.



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<sup>1</sup>. "World Heritage in the Congo Basin." UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2010.

<sup>2</sup>. <http://bit.ly/1GVazpK>, <http://bit.ly/1fAEQnQ>, and <https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/DRC%20Program%20Design%20Launch>

## FORESTS UNDER PRESSURE

While the current rate of deforestation is low in DRC, it is relatively much higher in Mai-Ndombe, due to slash and burn agriculture, uncontrolled bushfires, charcoal production for local and regional markets, industrial forestry, cattle ranching, and illegal artisanal logging. The resulting forest loss is projected to increase as populations grow and development pressures mount. Unless a balance can be struck now between development and forest protection in the region, deforestation rates will rise, threatening the forests upon which people and wildlife depend.

## REDD+ - A PROMISING SOLUTION

If we can find a way to halt forest loss in the region, not only will a vital part of the Congo Basin's rainforests be conserved, but the carbon held in the plants and soil of these forests will remain sequestered – which is key to fighting climate change. Efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and to conserve, sustainably manage and enhance forest carbon stocks (together referred to as REDD+) while building economic benefits are underway in DRC.

WWF, along with partners from the national and provincial government, community organisations and private sector, is working in Mai-Ndombe to establish a green development program that supports the visions of all the stakeholders affected by forest loss in the region. Our aim is to collaborate with local peoples and governments to protect the region's forests and the biodiversity they sustain while at the same time supporting sustainable forest uses and improving local livelihoods.

## OUR WORK IN MAÏ-NDOMBE

The inclusion of forest-dependent communities is essential to any forest conservation effort. They stand to lose most from deforestation and are often best placed to act as stewards and defenders of forests. Therefore, WWF's goal in Mai-Ndombe was to create a landscape-scale program, which covers an entire province and incorporates communities across the area, for protecting forests while creating livelihoods and rights for local and indigenous peoples.

As part of this landscape-scale work, WWF and its partners provided and continue to provide training for community-based monitoring and measuring of carbon stocks, with the aim of supporting improved involvement of communities in the REDD+ process. Community members engaged in a transparent, participatory micro-zoning process to gain

recognition for their land use and tenure. A total of 25 communities and hundreds of community members have mapped their lands in this way to date, with many more due to participate in coming years. WWF is also working on community-level fire management activities to help reduce further threats to forests. Starting this year, communities will receive payments as rewards for protecting their forests in line with these micro-zoning plans. This will be one of the first examples of community-level payment for performance in the world, and an important test of the REDD+ approach.

Community members have also claimed a voice in the national and international dialogue about REDD+ and its implementation in the Congo Basin by joining other stakeholders in developing a plan for the process. This engagement with REDD+ produced a roadmap—an Emission Reductions Program Idea Note, or ERPIN—for a large-scale programme to spur green development and reduce greenhouse gas emissions through payment for performance and other results-based incentives. The programme will cover 12.3 million hectares, reaching 300,000 families and sustainably reducing deforestation and forest degradation by half<sup>3</sup>.

To further support this landscape-wide initiative, the DRC government secured pipeline and committed funding from the Carbon Fund and the Forest Investment Program to develop and implement this programme over the next five years. WWF and partners will keep working with stakeholders in the region to design the activities, safeguards and incentives necessary to implement this programme on the ground, and it will provide financial and technical support to local and indigenous communities throughout the process. This will be one of the first emissions reduction programmes in the world to reach implementation stage.<sup>4</sup>

## MAKING REDD+ WORK FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE

If we get it right, REDD+ could reduce greenhouse gas emissions while protecting biodiversity, supporting sustainable development, and strengthening rights and livelihoods that benefit forest-dwelling communities. WWF's Forest and Climate Programme is initiating REDD+ demonstration activities in the world's key forest landscapes, including the Amazon, Borneo and the Congo Basin, by working at scale with communities and governments to test approaches for getting REDD+ right.

***We are working to ensure that REDD+ delivers on its promise of maintaining forests for the benefit of people and nature.***

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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<sup>3</sup> REDD+ For People and Nature: A case study of an integrated approach to REDD+ readiness in Mai Ndombe, DRC. WWF, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> "Progress on Mai-Ndombe Emissions Reduction Programme." WWF Forest and Climate News, April 14, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1LOX1nv>