

Regional support to COMIFAC

The Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) is increasingly fulfilling its mandates to implement the Yaoundé Declaration as a specialized agency of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) autonomously, thus contributing to the sustainable use of (forest) resources in the region.

Context

With approximately 300 million hectares of forest, the Congo Basin is the second largest tropical forest area in the world. Its forests are home to more than 50% of African animal species and 20,000 plant species, a third of which are endemic. They are home to about 100 million people, including many indigenous populations who directly or indirectly depend on forest resources for their survival. The forests of the Congo Basin with their peat bogs are of great importance for the global balance and represent the second largest lung in the world with almost 80 billion tons of sequestered CO². However, there is a tendency towards unsustainable use of these forest ecosystems, which has resulted in a significant increase in the degradation of forests and biodiversity. Between 2000 and 2015, 160,000 km² or 10% of the tropical rainforests were thus lost. In addition, drought in the savannah areas is accelerating the degradation process, leading to desertification. Several factors contribute to the degradation of forests in the Congo Basin, particularly their management without resource renewal, the growth of economic and industrial activities, overexploitation around urban areas, the sharp increase in grazing by itinerant herds in ecologically sensitive areas and shifting, slash and burn agriculture. The region is inadequately equipped to tackle these challenges and suffers from an acute shortage of qualified personnel. Development processes are not sufficiently inclusive, sometimes discriminatory against minorities (women, indigenous populations, young people), and the benefits arising from the use of natural resources are not equitably redistributed. As a result, human rights violations are on the rise and a large part of the population in the forest areas continues to live in poverty. There is an urgent need for a new

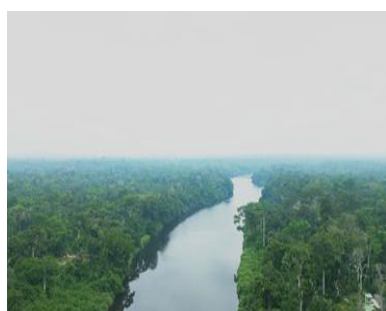
dynamic in the sustainable management of Congo Basin forests, which are at a critical juncture for their survival.

Project name	Regional Support to the Central African Forests Commission
Commissioned by	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)
Political Partner	Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC)
Project region	Angola, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Chad
Duration	01.11.2022 – 31.08.2026

Founded in 2005 by the Central African Heads of State, COMIFAC is responsible for coordinating and harmonizing all issues relating to the protection and management of the Congo Basin Forests. In collaboration with national authorities and regional civil society networks, it develops policy positions and supports their integration into national and international strategies.

Our approach

In its current phase, the GIZ project “Regional support to COMIFAC” has been providing technical support to COMIFAC in the areas of biodiversity conservation and forest governance since 2022. COMIFAC is one of the regional institutions that has the political legitimacy to bring together a large number of state and civil development stakeholders around issues related to the sustainable management of Central African forests. To this end, the German technical cooperation has defined a number of fields of action to support COMIFAC towards the



Left: The Dja River, Cameroon (East/South))

Center: Training of eco-guardians, Garoua Wildlife School
Next

Left: View of the “Living Museum” in Atok, Cameroon

Right: Giraffe, Bouda Ndjida National Park



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autonomous implementation of its steering instrument, the subregional convergence plan. Since 2007, COMIFAC has had the status of a specialized agency of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). However, the provisions for implementing this integration have not yet been adopted and have a strong impact on COMIFAC's ability to carry its missions. By supporting COMIFAC in its process of achieving financial autonomy, the project contributes significantly to improving the sustainable management of forest resources throughout the Central African sub-region. The project focused on four priority areas aimed at supporting forest policy regarding biodiversity conservation and guiding sub-regional forest governance. These include:

Strengthening the institutional and organizational functioning of the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat (SEC) and its operational thematic networks (parliamentarians, forestry training, indigenous populations, and local communities), with a view to effectively integrate COMIFAC into ECCAS as a specialized agency. The project thus aims to support COMIFAC in developing functional tools and mechanisms to ensure that all sub-regional stakeholder groups participate in dialogues and that their positions are taken account of in decision-making processes at national, regional and international levels.

Strengthening COMIFAC's political mandate of environmental diplomacy by improving its capacity to participate in international negotiations and to support member states. This implies strengthening the functioning of COMIFAC's specialized working groups (Biodiversity, Climate and Forest Governance) and building the experts' capacities in translating international and regional agreements into national law. Hence the need to support the establishment and professionalization of a group of regional negotiators mandated by COMIFAC, its member countries and civil society.

Improving vocational training in the field of protected area management and landscape restoration in Central Africa

through support to the Network of Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions of Central Africa (Réseau des Institutions de Formation Forestière et Environnementale de l'Afrique Centrale, RIFFEAC). This is done specifically by developing study programs on current topics and providing support for the integration of certain training courses related to protected area management and landscape restoration.

Strengthening COMIFAC's communication on sustainable forest management in the Congo Basin through the publication and dissemination of thematic papers of international and regional significance. Helping to improve COMIFAC's impact in the field of political and environmental communication through actions with high international visibility.

Expected Outcomes

- **The funding of COMIFAC** as a specialized organization of ECCAS is ensured on a sustainable basis,
- The position papers jointly adopted by COMIFAC member countries in the areas of climate change, forest governance and biodiversity are integrated into the content of **19 international conference decisions**,
- **50 students, including 15 women**, are enrolled in an extended university course about "Protected Area Management" based on training modules that comprise elements on human rights and nature protection,
- Central Africa has a **binding procedure** for allocating internationally mobilized funding for the promotion of the Congo Basin forests to member countries in a coordinated manner with the participation of the SEC.

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