



## COMMUNITY FORESTS IN DRC: A SOLUTION FOR A 'SOLUTIONS COUNTRY'

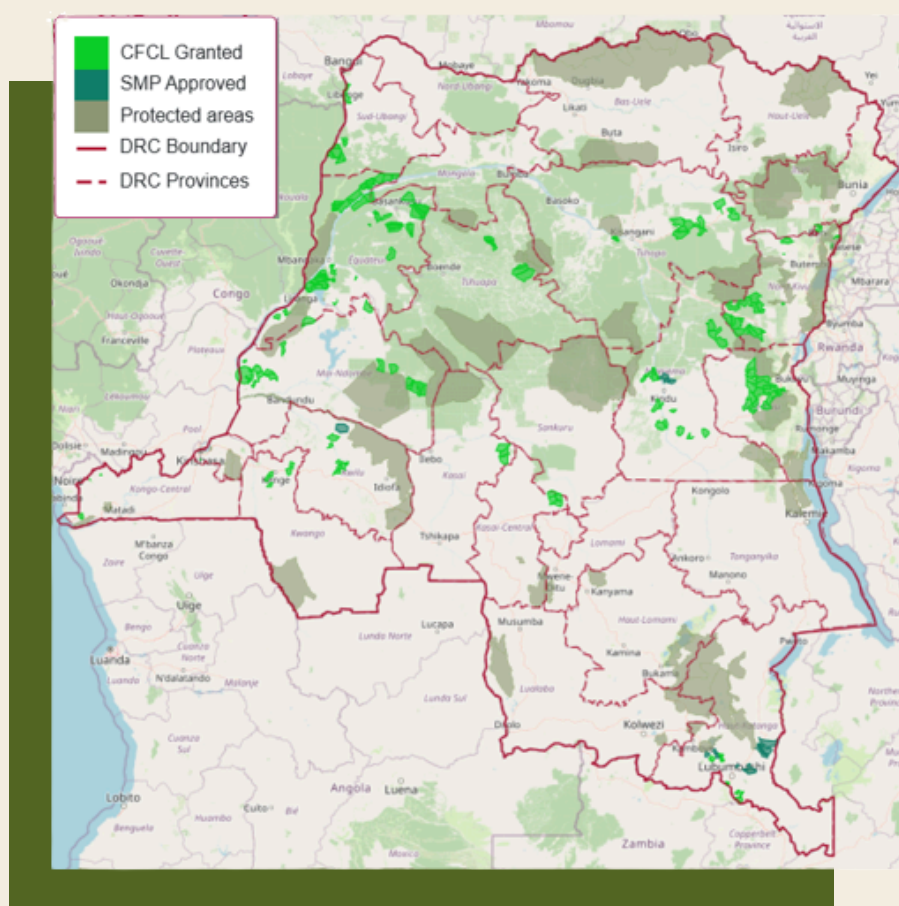
As the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) delegation enters crucial negotiations at COP30 in Belém - the "Rainforest COP" - this briefing aims to inform policymakers of the vital role DRC's leading community forestry model can play in achieving its ambition to be a "solutions country" in addressing the climate and biodiversity crises. It was prepared by Congolese civil society, Indigenous organisations and solidarity partners, through the Thematic Working Group n°7.<sup>1</sup>

The DRC holds 60% of the world's second-largest rainforest and its largest terrestrial carbon sink. What happens here affects tens of millions of people and has global climate implications. Reversing deforestation and restoring degraded ecosystems is thus critical, and growing evidence shows that the most effective (and just) way to achieve this is by strengthening the rights of Indigenous and local communities who depend on and protect these forests.<sup>2</sup>

# Community Forest as a solution to climate change, biodiversity loss and poverty

Forest communities in the DRC have historically lacked legally recognised rights over their customary lands, limiting their ability to manage and benefit from natural resources. In recent years, however, the country has emerged as a pioneer in community-based forest management through the development of community forestry. Major milestones came in 2002 and 2016 with the adoption of the Forest Code and the Ministerial Decree No. 25, which completed the legal framework enabling communities to secure collective rights over their forests for the first time.

Crucially, this allows both Bantu and Indigenous groups to obtain perpetual rights to their traditional lands up to 50,000 hectares. Guided by five-year Simple Management Plans (SMPs), communities can manage their forests for a range of purposes, including conservation, agroforestry, sustainable agriculture, fishing and other types of sustainable productive activities, as well as and payments for environmental services, ensuring both ecological protection and local development.



*Map of community forests in DRC (as of October 2025)*

Today, over **227 community forests** have been established across the DRC, covering nearly **4.5 million hectares** - an area larger than mainland Denmark<sup>3</sup>. Yet the potential is far greater, with tens of millions of hectares potentially available for rights-based, pro-poor conservation rooted in customary land tenure. This presents a unique opportunity to move beyond extractive, top-down development models<sup>4</sup>, the harmful impacts of fortress conservation<sup>5</sup> and unregulated carbon markets<sup>6</sup>, towards inclusive, locally led forest protection.

# A Pathway to Delivering DRC's Climate and Biodiversity Commitments

The DRC, with its vast forests and peatlands, is playing an increasingly prominent role in global climate and biodiversity negotiations, positioning itself as a "solutions country" to ecological crises.<sup>7</sup> Community forestry and other rights-based approaches offer practical, scalable pathways to deliver on this ambition across multiple international frameworks:

- **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC):** DRC's updated NDC includes commitments to reduce emissions. Community forests offer a proven mechanism to reverse deforestation and restore degraded ecosystems, contributing directly to these targets.
- **Forest and Climate Leaders Partnership (FCLP):** DRC is expected to announce specific land tenure targets at COP30 as part of the Intergovernmental Land Tenure Commitment. Community forests provide a ready-made, rights-based model to meet these goals.
- **Congo Basin Compact:** The DRC has committed to scaling up the recognition of community tenure rights as part of a Congo Basin-wide pledge that by 2030 millions of hectares of new Indigenous and community lands will be legally recognised and sustainably managed in the region.
- **30x30 Biodiversity Target:** As a signatory to the Global Biodiversity Framework, DRC has committed to protecting 30% of its land by 2030. It can reach this target by moving away from the strictly protected area model and towards community forests and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs).
- **Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor (CVKK):** In January 2025, the government launched the "Couloir Vert" - the world's largest community reserve, spanning from Beni to Kinshasa. By combining secure tenure and local governance, community forests offer an ideal mechanism to channel investment into rights-based conservation and development.
- **Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF):** Announced at COP30, this facility aims to mobilise \$3–4 billion annually to keep tropical forests standing, with at least 20% earmarked for IPLC-led mechanisms such as community forestry.
- **Baku–Belem Roadmap:** An initiative launched at COP29 in Baku, aimed at scaling up climate finance for developing countries<sup>8</sup>. Community forestry is a suitable Indigenous and community-based management model that should be supported and strengthened within this framework.
- **Other Forest Protection Commitments:** Community forestry supports DRC's engagement in key initiatives including the IPLC Pledge 2.0, the CAFI Letter of Intent and the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use.



*Ilebo community forest, Lukolela territory, Equateur province, RDC, during a community assembly. @RFUK.*

## Unlocking the Full Potential of Community Forestry in DRC

Evidence shows that community forestry works: it secures rights, improves livelihoods and protects forests. To fully realise its potential, the following priorities must be addressed:

### A) Expansion of Community Forests

- Set clear and ambitious national targets to scale up community forestry as a mainstream land-use model.
- Ensure access for all forest-dependent communities, aligning with DRC's climate and biodiversity commitments.

### B) Consolidation of Existing Community Forests

- Support communities in the drafting and implementation of their management plans. 227 community forests covering nearly 4.5 million hectares have been granted, but only 20% have approved management plans.
- Invest in economic development activities to strengthen implementation and impact, including through the Community Forest Fund.

### C) Building the Economic Case

- Demonstrate the value of community forests to the Congolese state through improved livelihoods and Payment for Environmental Services (PES).
- Position community forestry as a contributor to national development and climate finance strategies.

## D) Legal Reforms and Policy Harmonisation

- Align community forestry with other laws and policies including the Indigenous Peoples (2022) and land-use planning (2025) laws and with going forest, tenure and agricultural reforms.
- Establish safeguards to prevent land grabs and elite capture through a coherent, cross-sectoral legal framework.
- Streamline allocation processes to make community forestry more accessible and enhancing communities' capacity to secure and manage forests independently.

**To guide these processes, we are calling for:**

- **An evaluation of the experimental phase of community forestry, as requested by the 'National Strategy on Community Forestry in DRC';<sup>9</sup>**
- **The participatory revision and adoption of a new National Strategy;**
- **The scaling up of the national roundtable process to build consensus and best practice across the country;**
- **Increased support for civil society and Indigenous organisations, and for central, provincial and local administrations to accompany this process.**



*Equateur province, DRC. @RFUK*

At COP30 in Brazil, the credibility of climate commitments and the urgency of transforming economic and energy systems are under scrutiny. This must be a COP of action and climate justice, one that integrates ecological transition, social inclusion, and respect for Indigenous and traditional forest guardians. Community forestry in the DRC embodies this vision. By securing property rights for Indigenous and local communities, it empowers them to protect one of the world's largest carbon sinks and biodiversity hotspots.

## Organisations that have approved the content of this note:

- ABED - Action for Biodiversity, Environment and Sustainable Development
- ACDEH - Action Congolaise pour l'environnement et les Droits de l'Homme
- ADDPFA - Acteurs pour le Développement Durable et la Préservation des Forêts en Afrique
- ADR - Actions for Integrated Rural Development
- ANAPAC RDC - National Alliance for the Support and Promotion of Indigenous and Community Heritage Areas and Territories in the DRC
- APEM - Actions Pour la Promotion et la Protection des Peuples et Espèces Menacés
- AMAR - Action Massive Rurale
- BVGRN - Bureau de Veille et de Gouvernance des Ressources Naturelles
- CAGDFT - Centre D'Appui à la Gestion Durable des Fôrets Tropicales
- CTIDD - Centre des Technologies Innovatrices et le développement durable
- CLFEDD - Coalition of Women Leaders for Environment and Rural Development
- DYJEDD - Youth Dynamics for Environment and Rural Development
- IGED - Initiative pour la Gestion Durable de l'Environnement et de la Défense des Droits humains
- GASHE - Groupe d'Action pour Sauver l'Homme et son Environnement
- GeoFirst - GeoFirst Development
- NRN - Natural Resources Network
- OCEAN - Organisation Congolaise des Ecologistes et Amis de la Nature
- RFUK - Rainforest Foundation UK
- RCREF - Réseau pour la Conservation et la Réhabilitation des Ecosystèmes Forestiers
- PREPPYG - Association Paysanne pour la Réhabilitation et Protection des Pygmées
- VAPYBA - Voices of the BATWA Pygmy Indigenous Peoples

## Footnotes

[1] The Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) are permanent forums linked to the Multi-Stakeholder Roundtables on Community Forestry in the DRC. The TWGs aim to develop, through a participatory process, concrete proposals to promote community forestry and ensure its success. This includes identifying and promoting best practices, building consensus to drive legal and policy reforms, and mobilizing funding to support large-scale implementation across the country. Eight groups were established in 2021. TWG7 is titled “The Contribution of Community Forestry to Climate and Biodiversity Goals.”

[2] FAO & FILAC, 2021: Forest Governance by Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Food and Agriculture Organization & Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC).  
<https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/361a142c-ba6f-49bc-89e9-7f7153adffac>

[3] See, <https://rdc.geocfcl.org/applications/>

[4] Earth Insight et al. 2025: Forests to Frontlines: Oil expansion threats in the DRC  
<https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/English-Compressed-Forests-to-Frontlines.pdf>

[5] Rainforest Foundation UK, 2016: Protected Areas in the Congo Basin: Failing People and Biodiversity?  
<https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/media.ashx/protected-areas-in-the-congo-basin-failing-both-people-and-diversity-english.pdf>

[6] Rainforest Foundation UK, 2025: The Great Green Rush: the exponential rise and social impacts of forest carbon offset projects in the DRC  
<https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/JA-605-The-Great-Green-Rush-FINAL.pdf>

[7] [https://medd.gouv.cd/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/magazine\\_COP\\_env1.pdf](https://medd.gouv.cd/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/magazine_COP_env1.pdf)

[8] <https://unfccc.int/topics/climate-finance/workstreams/baku-to-belem-roadmap-to-13t>

[9] Available here: <https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/cfdbmedia/documents/SNFCVersionFinaleJuin2018.pdf>