

## Energy conservation central africa

The Central African subregion, which mainly comprises the Congo Basin, is home to one of the world's largest expanses of tropical rainforest. It is a haven for an exceptionally diverse range of plant and animal species and provides essential ecosystem services.

According to the State of the Forests (SOF) 2021 report published by the Central Africa Forest Observatory (OFAC), these forests sequester around 40 gigatons of carbon annually. That's roughly equivalent to the total carbon emissions that humans produce annually.

These ecosystems face numerous challenges. Deforestation, primarily driven by slash-and-burn agriculture, illegal logging, infrastructure expansion and agro-industrial development, threatens the region's biodiversity. Population growth, poaching and inadequate conservation measures also endanger fragile habitats and endemic species. The SOF 2021 report warns that 27% of these forests could disappear by 2050 without urgent intervention.

"The challenges of linking biodiversity conservation and sustainable economic development are enormous. Local communities often depend on natural resources for their livelihoods; overexploitation and poor management can deplete these resources at an unsustainable rate," says Richard Eba'a Atyi, the Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF)'s regional coordinator for Central Africa.

Preserving Central Africa's forests and managing their ecosystems sustainably are central to high-level discussions, such as the Meeting of the Parties to the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. At the 20th Meeting, held in June 2024 in Kinshasa, Atyi was named Scientific Forester of the Year 2024 for his contribution to the development of a technical framework for forest management and his support for the subregion's institutions in leading the science-policy dialogue.

"To address these challenges, CIFOR-ICRAF collaborates with OFAC to develop and implement sustainable management policies based on reliable, current data and supporting countries' sustainable development," says Atyi. "Such data can only be provided based on credible, up-to-date research carried out by specialist organizations in partnership with government, the private sector and civil society actors."

Established in 2007, OFAC, a specialized unit of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC), supplies timely and relevant data on the region's forests and ecosystems to inform political decision-making and promote better governance and sustainable management of natural resources.

Despite the unit's efforts, gaps remain in producing and using scientific data on African ecosystems. These include limited capacity-building in universities and research centres in the subregion and low financial

investment to deliver better information and knowledge produced within the scientific community not adequately shared among practitioners and policymakers.

To highlight the contribution of scientific research to the sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests, a hybrid forum entitled "What is the state of Central African forests" was held in Bonn, Germany. Hosted by OFAC and organized by the Global Landscapes Forum, the event gathered over 700 experts, practitioners, and policymakers. Discussions at the forum highlighted the vital importance of Central African forests, the need to view their conservation as a global priority, and the resources and tools available to policymakers on OFAC's digital platform.

"Conservation is not just an end in itself; it supports the livelihoods and well-being of local communities and Indigenous Peoples," says Dr Aur?lie Flore Koumba Pambo, the Congo Basin Forest partnership facilitator. "These forests still stand today because people care for them."

Through these collective actions, it is hoped that decision-making based on reliable and regularly updated information for COMIFAC countries will contribute to the preservation of Central Africa's forest ecosystems and the well-being of the people who depend on them.

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