

Addressing Internal Issues: A Sustainable Way to Ensure Better Management of the Congo Basin Forests

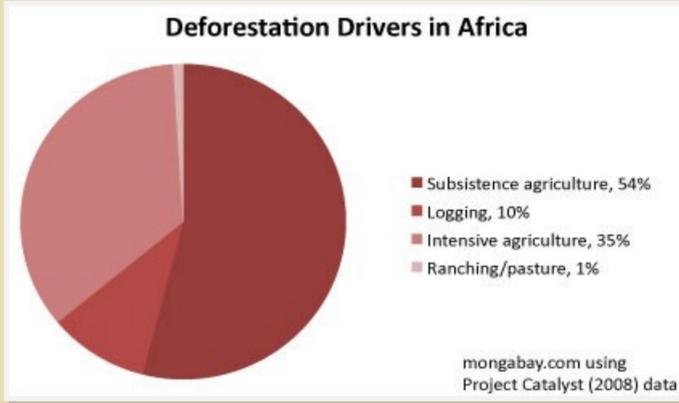
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Introduction: The Congo Basin forests constitute the world's second largest tropical rainforest after the Amazon. These forests host about 400 species of mammals, 1000 species of birds, 200 species of amphibians, 300 species of reptiles and more than 900 species of butterflies (Frost,2006). Can the forests be sustainably managed? The mismanagement of the forests coupled with subsistence food commercial logging, clearing for subsistence agriculture and widespread civil strife has devastated forests, displaced forest dwellers, and resulted in one of the world's most threatened ecosystems. The member countries governments ought to strengthen national laws and regulations and put in place more developmental programs to alleviate poverty and set their goals in forest management.



Deforestation Drivers in Africa (Guineo-Congolian Region), 2008
http://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation_drivers.html

Causes of Deforestation

- Population Growth : Increasing population pushing population migration to populate remote forested areas and transform forests into agricultural fields
- Logging, Mining, Biofuel Trend: Foreign and national companies overexploiting timber for exportation
- Administration Mismanagement: Existence of illegal timber harvesting and mining.
- Lack of strong regulation: Impoverished nations with insufficient tools to enforce policy

Table 1: Forest surface, Deforestation and Land Use in the Basin

Countries of the Congo Basin	Forest Surface (ha)	Total Land Surface (ha)	Gross Deforestation Rate (1990-2000)	Part of the GDP for Timber Product
Cameroon	16,876,143	47,544,200	0.14%	6.00%
Congo	18,493,992	34,182,100	0.07%	5.60%
Democratic Republic of Congo	98,912,205	234,500,000	0.21%	1.00%
Equatorial Guinea	2,002,464	2,805,100	0.10%	0.20%
Gabon	21,086,856	26,766,700	0.09%	4.30%
Central African Republic	4,616,199	62,298,400	0.19%	6.30%
Total	161,987,859	408,096,500	0.17% (average)	3.80% (average)

The end of the 20th century is characterized by social unrest, political instability and high poverty levels. The most concerned countries are Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR). However, stable and less political troubled countries (Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo and Cameroon) are among those countries where the deforestation dynamic is still relatively low to the Congo Basin average rate. (COMIFAC, The State of the Forests, 2008)

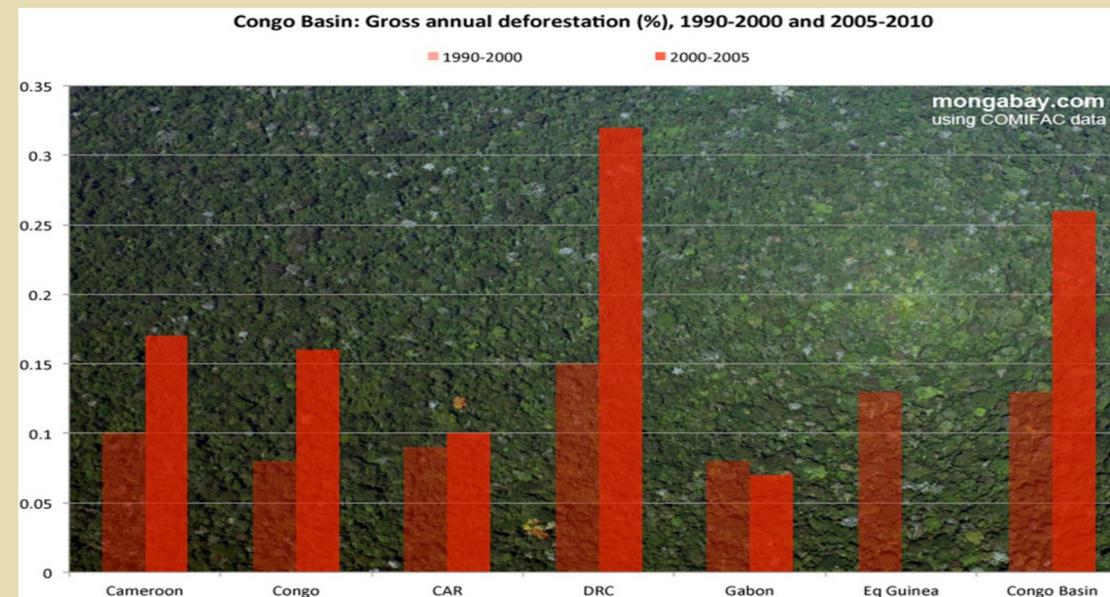
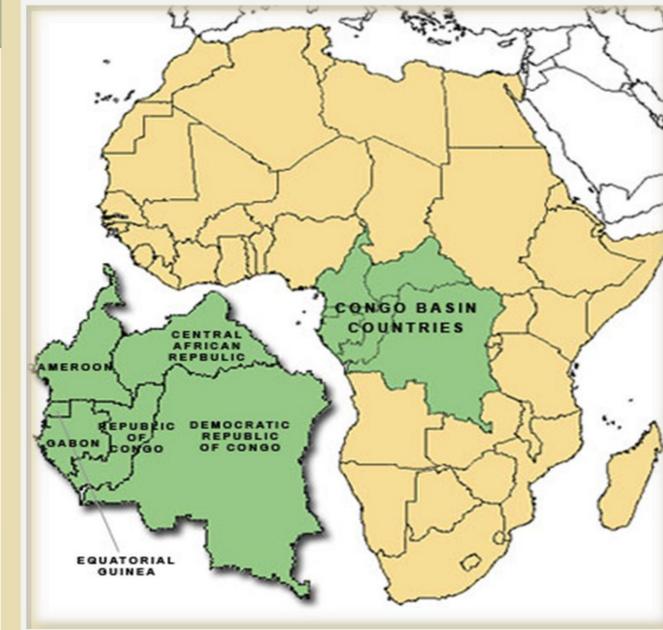


Table 2: Congo Basin Gross Annual Deforestation in percentage (1990-2005)

Five years after the 2000 data, because of good governance, developmental programs and more legislation, Gabon, Central Africa Republic, and Equatorial Guinea have kept their rate either lower or at the same level as the previous ten years. In addition, DRC's deforestation rate is higher than any of the member countries and the Congo Basin average rate. COMIFAC, http://news.mongabay.com/2012/0320-congo_basin_deforestation.html, 2010



Source: <http://forestpolicyresearch.com/2009/03/07/congo-gov-decides-to-ramp-up-genocide-exploitation-of-indigenous-peoples-territory/>

Methods: The research encompassed literature review and qualitative analysis of data collected mainly from the World Bank, regional entities like the COMIFAC and different government reports. The classification and evaluation of each country's political (environmental agenda and legislation, level of corruption and governance) and socio-economic (level of poverty and mining and timber exportations) situation allowed to arrive to conclusions on forest management. Moreover, current forestry policy reports and government's environmental agenda were reviewed to determine present and future forestry plans. A comparison of different countries' policies and implemented tools including REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) permitted the understanding of the forest situation.

Conclusion: The uncontrolled expansion of subsistence agriculture, logging and mining, and development of other sectors including industrial, transport and energy have modified the forest. By addressing the unsustainability due to mismanagement, lack of education, social unrest, corruption and governance, governments in the Basin would better preserve their forests. Countries in the Basin ought to establish stronger local, national and regional laws to avoid flaws in legislation conducting to poor management system.

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