

# The Future of Independent Forest Monitoring: A Call to Action for Saving Congo Basin Forests

**Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM) has been part of global efforts to stop illegal logging, reduce deforestation and improve forest governance since the 1990s. There is a long history of IFM in the Congo Basin, but, while there have been significant improvements in forest governance, deforestation and forest degradation have nevertheless continued at an alarming rate threatening biodiversity, indigenous peoples, and both regional and global climate efforts.**

With the support of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) now the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the European Union, the University of Wolverhampton's Centre for International Development and Training has strengthened the performance and role of IFM in the Congo Basin with a growing number of national and regional civil society organisations (CSOs), developing their expertise, strengthening their organisational capacities and improving their linkages with governments, regulatory and enforcement agencies including the private sector. The recent case studies and best practices documented here, demonstrate the relevance and crucial importance of civil society in monitoring sustainable forest and wildlife management, in ensuring that the rights of indigenous peoples', national climate commitments and other institutional reform processes are respected and implemented.

To foster an even stronger role for Congo Basin civil society in protecting the region's forests for global benefit in the next decade; we call for support and strategic positioning and recognition of civil society regarding the monitoring of national and international forest, climate and biodiversity processes. As the international community meets in Glasgow for COP26 to determine the direction of key aspects of the fight against global warming. Chief among them is how well nations have implemented their commitments under the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2°C, and the extent to which they will increase that ambition.

It is within this background that we would like to highlight the direction that IFM needs to take in order to contribute to the increased ambitions that we expect to be agreed in Glasgow:

## From observation to investigation

IFM needs to expand from its traditional focus on observing infringements and infractions related to timber harvesting to more investigative and data-based analysis. Illegal deforestation and degradation is driven by a range of economic activities and these encompass many new forms of forest crime. Current IFM methodologies must therefore evolve in order to address these. New approaches and capabilities are also needed that will allow independent monitoring to investigate complex value chains and to follow the finance that is fuelling forest crime. IFM NGOs can create alliances with responsible/certified private sector companies to expose illegal networks in order to fight unfair competition and expose criminal actors driving illegal deforestation and forest degradation.

## Technology

Independent monitoring organisations must also embrace the use of new tools and equipment. Already some tools to monitor changes in forest cover have been deployed by these organisations. For example, [FLEGT Watch](#) uses radar satellite data to enable organisations in the region to monitor illegal logging and deforestation. Independent monitoring organisations also need to incorporate the use of innovative technology such as drones in their efforts to collect real-time data and credible evidence, particularly where access to areas of interest is restricted.

## Beyond forests to other sectors

There is an urgent need to extend IFM beyond forestry and to harness its investigative and analytical potential in the monitoring of decisions and actions in other sectors, including mining and agricultural commodities. There is increasing demand, particularly from consumer country stakeholders, for IFM to be extended to the monitoring of commodity supply chains and zero-deforestation commitments. IFM could also enlarge its focus to encompass CITES listed species, for example, helping to ensure that CITES permits and quotas are respected. Finally, Congo basin countries have included a range of forest-related targets in their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and IFM will also be important in monitoring the implementation of these targets.

## Legislative reforms

Legal recognition of IFM is needed in many countries so that it is more widely accepted – both by government and industry stakeholders. It is also of critical importance to help ensure access to public information and documentation and to provide protection for whistle-blowers- both essential to the implementation of IFM. The establishment of a legally-binding commitment from governments to respond to IFM reports, therefore, is needed.

## Improving quality

The development and certification of SNOIE in Cameroon has improved the quality of IFM and quality management systems should be developed and implemented in other countries in order to improve its implementation and credibility across the region. We strongly promote the quality management systems approach which will not only enhance the quality of the monitoring effort, but also ensure that independent monitoring organisations are clear about what their objectives are, i.e. why they are involved in IFM, what the change is that they want to see, and what their expectations are with regard to their stakeholders.

## National and regional communities of practice

Strong links between IFM and national and international advocacy processes is critical, particularly in the face of inertia/ lack of response from officials in ensuring that the evidence generated is used by decision-makers for law enforcement. National networks such as the RENOI network of IFM NGOs in DRC and Regional IFM platforms such as the *Plateforme Africaine de l'Observation Indépendante* (PAOI) – a pan-African independent monitoring platform which brings together IFM organisations – are well-placed to support both national advocacy networks and regional and international advocacy movements, through strengthening voice, capacity-building and participation. CIDT calls for **consistent long term support** to further strengthen the viability of these communities of practice, and thereby their ability to mobilise the voices of forest dependent communities who must be at the centre of future biodiversity, climate change and nature based solutions.



Platforms such as the PAOI and RENOI have also demonstrated their ability to channel funding to local and IP associations on the ground. This experience and expertise could be further utilised in channelling climate finance to indigenous peoples, local communities and their associations, and to drive the promotion of nature-based solutions in the Congo Basin.

## Our Call for Action on Sustainable funding

Sustainable funding for IFM remains a major challenge. So far, support has been sporadic and project-based thereby hindering efforts to build and embed the capability that is needed to ensure the sustainability of IFM activities globally. IFM, and the generation of reliable information on the state of forests and wildlife, rights of indigenous peoples etc, is a public good of global importance that requires long term funding. It can and will also contribute to national reporting processes on the implementation of forest related NDCs including MRV for REDD+ implementation. We call for a **basket fund mechanism** that would further strengthen both the independence and the reach of IFM. Ultimately, IFM plays a crucial role in fighting corruption, increasing transparency and detecting forest crimes and illegal land use. However, as an approach, IFM must continue to innovate in order to remain focused on the key drivers of deforestation and degradation. Sustained and sustainable funding will enable CSOs undertaking IFM to build new capacities and capabilities and to fulfil their watchdog role more effectively in a rapidly evolving context.

Find out more at

[cidt.org.uk/forest-governance](https://cidt.org.uk/forest-governance)

