

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the report

Since 2000, various regional and international treaties and agreements have been signed, aimed at supporting the rational management and good governance of the Congo Basin's forests. Much of this has suggested large scale zoning of the region's forest, dividing it up into concessions, conservation areas and areas for community use. In 2002, the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) was launched, putting much emphasis on key "landscapes" of high conservation value. The sub-regional Ministerial Declaration on Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG) of October 2003 placed significant emphasis on mechanisms for tackling illegal logging. In 2005, signature of the COMIFAC (Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale) Treaty by Central Africa's Heads of States boosted efforts to harmonise forestry law with a systems approach to managing the forest environment.

Many Central African governments' forest management policies are based on forest zoning, with most of the forest being put under industrial forest concessions. For example, in Cameroon, around 60% of the land under forest is given over to concessions. However, the forest concessions system often fails to deliver sustainable conservation and management. Evidence from other parts of Africa indicates that opening up forests to industrial logging almost invariably leads to massive deforestation with no possibility whatsoever of any tangible social or economic benefits being generated locally.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is also experiencing rapid change in terms of its forest sector's legal and administrative framework. The government is trying to apply the new Forest Code published in 2002, though it seems that the country is going down the usual path of setting up a geographically extensive concessions' system. The DRC has an estimated 135 million hectares of forest, or around 50% of all of Africa's tropical rainforests and 7% of the world's tropical forests<sup>1</sup>.

However, without any strict framework for their management and without any means of controlling their sustainable management, the future of these forests is seriously threatened.

For these reasons, the authors of this report believe that it is time to examine more closely the industrial logging concessions system and to analyse whether it constitutes the most effective approach to managing Africa's forests sustainably. In their efforts to be constructive, the authors also propose a series of recommendations for improving the Congo Basin's management policies.

### Aim of the report

This report addresses the issues surrounding the sustainability and the impacts of the industrial logging concession system in several Central African countries and elsewhere. Based on the contributions of experts from various backgrounds (NGOs, research bodies, government organisations), the report aims to bring these issues to the attention of national decision-makers and international community representatives. The report highlights the system's pitfalls, which various countries have experienced, as well as the policy options available that could avert or remedy some of these problems.

Through this report, the authors hope to:

- initiate a constructive debate on the issues surrounding the sustainability of the logging concessions system in Africa;
- ensure that international dialogue and initiatives, such as the EU-Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade programme, take account of the known failings of the present system;
- directly influence change in the legal and political processes of the Central African industrial logging system and, more specifically, that of the DRC.

<sup>1</sup> FAO (2001) Governance principles for concessions and contracts in public forests. FAO Forestry Paper 139.