

Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC)

Briefing and Orientation Report



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Executive Summary

The Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) is the principal political and technical forum for guidance, coordination, harmonization and decision-making in the conservation and sustainable management of forest and savannah ecosystems in Central Africa. Created in 1999 by the Yaoundé Declaration, COMIFAC is composed of the Forestry Ministers of its 10 member countries and has an executive secretariat (ES) based in Yaoundé, Cameroon. COMIFAC is recognized as primary coordinator for partner activities of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), a type II voluntary partnership whose primary aim is to enhance natural resource management and improve the standard of living in the Congo Basin. The COMIFAC Convergence Plan, last revised in 2005, has the vision of sustainable and joint management by Central African States of their forest resources for the wellbeing of their people, the preservation of biodiversity and the protection of the global environment. The Convergence Plan thus defines regional intervention strategies for governments and development partners concerning the conservation and sustainable management of forest and savannah ecosystems in the region.

COMIFAC authority is derived from the 1999 Yaoundé Heads of States summit which designated ministers to represent their respective countries in the COMIFAC Council of Ministers. COMIFAC convened a subsequent Heads of State summit in 2005, which resulted in its current Convergence Plan and organization, and plans another in 2012. The 2005 summit also resulted in COMIFAC becoming a treaty based organization, transforming COMIFAC into a legal entity empowered with full responsibility to coordinate all conservation initiatives in the Congo Basin. The treaty also provides a strong legal framework for negotiating with bilateral and multilateral funding agencies to establish long-term funding mechanisms for these initiatives. The COMIFAC Ministers Council meets on average twice a year to approve high level COMIFAC decisions, budgets, plans, and results.

Since 2007, COMIFAC is a Specialized Institution of the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC or ECCAS). The move was made with the goal of securing a more sustainable financing mechanism for COMIFAC from the member states, which would be managed by CEEAC. Despite this move, the sustainable financing mechanism is not yet operational and COMIFAC still receives its funds directly from the states under the old mechanism.

Day to day operations of COMIFAC are managed by the Executive Secretariat (ES) based in Yaoundé Cameroon. The ES is tasked with coordinating the implementing activities of COMIFAC and to implement the decisions of the Council of Ministers. These tasks are represented in the COMIFAC Convergence Plan and in the Annual Work Plans. The ES is supported by National Coordinators situated in the partner ministries of each country who themselves are tasked with facilitating relations and communications between the member states and the ES. COMIFAC also has Treaty Sub-Regional Partner Institutions which support its mandate. Recently added among these is the Forest Observatory of Central Africa (OFAC), which primarily compiles data and publishes the State of the Forest Report. Another active Treaty Sub-Regional Partner Institution is RAPAC (Network of Protected Areas of Central Africa), which coordinates activities related to protected areas in the region, and implicated in the EU supported ECOFAC project and African Development Bank PACEBCo project. (see section 3.0 for details)

COMIFAC Briefing and Orientation Report

The COMIFAC ES is involved in numerous activities regarding the coordination of regional projects and programs, the attendance of international forums, and the dissemination of information. The primary method in which COMIFAC operates is to convene, through its National Coordinators, representatives from each country for the relevant technical matter of the project/program/forum. The most regular groups of representatives, or “working groups”, have been officially defined and are related to Climate Change (focused on REDD+ projects, tools, and international negotiations), Biodiversity (focused around the Convention Biological Diversity – CBD), Forest Governance (FLEGT),¹ Desertification (UN Convention to Combat Desertification - UNCCD), and the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF).

Under its current organizational plan since 2005, COMIFAC has grown in both scope and scale in the region, becoming an increasingly respected actor on the international stage for issues that concern forests, the environment, biodiversity, and climate change. This recognition, along with an increased awareness of the importance of global forests in the face of a changing climate (see REDD+), has brought heightened interest by international and regional actors to more directly support the Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC and the implementation of its mandate. USAID/CARPE has started to more directly engage COMIFAC through technical assistance provided by the USDA Forest Service (USFS) as a first step.

USAID/CARPE agreed to provide funding for the USFS to support CARPE objectives through USFS technical assistance. USFS, subsequently signed a Letter of Intent with the COMIFAC ES in 2009 to provide technical assistance within the framework of the Convergence Plan. Specifically USAID through USFS technical assistance agreed to support COMIFAC activities through the provision of technical advisors in the following Convergence Plan Themes: Harmonious forest and fiscal policies (Theme 1); Knowledge of the resource (Theme 2); Ecosystem development and reforestation (Theme 3); Biodiversity conservation (Theme 4); Sustainable forest resource development (Theme 5); Capacity building, actor involvement, information, and training (Theme 7); Research and development (Theme 8); Development of financing mechanisms (Theme 9); and REDD+ areas: Reference scenarios on emissions linked to deforestation and forest degradation; Measures to monitor greenhouse gas emissions (measurement and monitoring); and Reporting – Information communication. To better initiate the execution of this Letter of Intent, USAID/CARPE agreed to finance a USFS technical activity coordinator to be placed in the COMIFAC ES 50% over one year to further identify specific opportunities for technical assistance and facilitate communication and collaboration between the COMIFAC ES and USAID/CARPE program. Since June 2010, USFS has supported COMIFAC in a variety of technical areas, most significantly concerning a regional approach to land-use planning within the COMIFAC/CBFP priority landscapes² and elaborating more intimate communication and collaboration lines between COMIFAC and CARPE through reports and representation.

In addition to USAID via the USFS, a large number of new donors have approached the COMIFAC ES to offer technical and financial support. Significant programs from the German (GIZ) and French (AFD)

¹ FLEGT is the action plan focused around a Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and timber exporting countries that regulates the importation of timber and wood products to the EU. Many Central African countries have signed on to FLEGT. See section 2.4 for more information.

² See section 2.1 for more information on the COMIFAC/CBFP landscapes.

governments were begun in 2006 to support the COMIFAC ES. Since 2010, Canada (ACDI) and Japan (JICA) have made new support commitments. Furthermore there are several large projects with a focus at the regional level that will or do significantly implicate COMIFAC ES: from the African Development Bank (PACEBCo project), Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF – to be implemented by FAO), Global Environment Fund (GEF – to be implemented by World Bank to name a few.

This surge of new projects, programs, and offices has accentuated growing pains for COMIFAC. If COMIFAC is to become a viable regional organization and effectively realize its mandate, it needs to address many of the growing pains, most notably in financial and administrative organization.³ More human resources, and more importantly, more effective human resource management through clearly defined and adhered to roles, responsibilities, and procedures are a clear and immediate need. COMIFAC is subject to the financing and political will of its member countries who themselves sometimes are at odds with the interests of their own regional organization. Financial contributions by member countries are significantly behind, making financial sustainability and long-term planning difficult.

COMIFAC operates in a region rich in natural resources where governance is often riddled with corruption; this is compounded by dense rainforest which itself inhibits the development and proliferation of transparency, communication, and infrastructure. COMIFAC is striving to fill its mandate as the centralized hub where differing development, management, and conservation philosophies converge; and it often lacks the technical expertise to effectively sort and direct these approaches at a regional level, let alone within each country. The COMIFAC National Coordinators are a crucial link, yet notable weak point, for COMIFAC interactions with their member states. While their positions are not explicitly defined in the treaty, COMIFACs success requires a more active engagement of these National Coordinators to represent COMIFAC and effectively communicate between the member states and COMIFAC.⁴

Despite these challenges, COMIFAC has managed to find small successes and is slowly advancing towards fuller functionality and the more effective direction, harmonization, and monitoring of forest and environmental policies in Central Africa. With support, COMIFAC regularly convenes technical meetings for its working groups in biodiversity, climate change, forestry, and desertification to prepare and coordinate member countries for international dialogues and conventions. Despite continuing financing difficulties and a shortage of human and capital resources for the recent increase in demands of their job, the COMIFAC ES is comprised of a respected and knowledgeable core staff, becoming more effective in the coordination of activity implementation given their resource limitations, and responding directly to the decisions of the Council of Ministers. Additionally, some countries, like Cameroon and CAR, do contribute regularly to the COMIFAC budget. Other regional programs, like those implemented by the partners of USAID/CARPE, have made laudable advances in the sustainable management of natural resources in the region across borders, providing a base to capitalize upon for the COMIFAC Convergence Plan, most notably in the COMIFAC/CBFP transboundary landscapes.

³ An institutional audit was executed under the PACEBCo project which details specifics of COMIFACs organizational challenges.

⁴ See section 2.4 for more information on the COMIFAC National Coordinators.

COMIFAC represents a unique opportunity for USG to increase regional stability and promote sustainable management of natural resources. It has a regional scope mandated by its member countries which provide important opportunities for economies of scale and coordination of USG activities. While each country in the Congo Basin certainly has its unique qualities, there are also many commonalities across borders, especially when it comes to forests and protected areas. Furthermore, the existing, large regional USG investment of the CARPE program already facilitates a coordinated regional approach working in the COMIFAC/CBFP landscapes, most of which have a transboundary nature which then requires regional coordination and harmonization. It follows that COMIFAC is a natural partner to institutionalize much of the CARPE investment. While COMIFAC certainly is far from a viable and fully functioning institution, this should not preclude collaboration and support of its efforts towards such an end. US representatives in individual Central African states should encourage their host-country counterparts to actively engage in COMIFAC activities when appropriate. The coming years will be defining of COMIFAC's success as they adapt to the increase in their responsibilities and partner interest to engage with them.

The political, economic, and cultural importance of the Congo Basin Forests (both within the member countries and the world) necessarily link COMIFAC's success to the security, stability, and health of the Central African region. US government officials need a solid understanding of COMIFAC, its institutions, its partners, its programs, and its projects to appropriately engage with the Executive Secretariat and support its efforts at the national level.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Objective

The objective of this report is to succinctly present, and examine the organization, activities, and cooperating partners of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), to increase understanding within the US government (USG) and partners, to better orient and design engagement and partnership with COMIFAC in future activities.

The report will start by examining COMIFAC's related institutions, the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat, member countries, working groups, and sub-regional partner organizations. Through this examination, the mandate, organizational structure, and institutional capacity of COMIFAC can be better understood.

Next the report will summarize the activities of the wide array of partners that work with and through COMIFAC. This includes international government assistance, NGOs, development bank projects and programs, and research institutions. By understanding who the cooperating partners are, the reader can assess gaps and needs of COMIFAC relative to their own objectives and anticipated results.

The report will then present the activities of USG organizations that work with COMIFAC, primarily the US Forest Service (USFS) through funding from the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE). The report will discuss the evolution of the support and workplan, and present plans for FY2011 cooperation.

1.2 Background

The US Forest Service (USFS), through the Office of International Programs, is an implementing partner in the USAID's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), providing targeted technical and capacity building assistance aimed at improving forest management in the Congo Basin. In an effort to focus this assistance in a manner which capitalizes on the relative strengths of the agency, the USFS has concentrated their efforts towards the land management planning processes and national forest inventory and monitoring systems with CARPE partners and the host country governments.

COMIFAC is the primary authority for decision-making and coordination of sub-regional actions and initiatives pertaining to the conservation and sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests across the ten Central African countries.⁵ COMIFAC has developed a convergence plan followed by an operations plan which identifies COMIFAC priorities for sustainable management of the Central Africa forests. The Convergence Plan:

- Is organized around the following vision: "The Central African nations manage their forest resources in a sustainable and concerted manner for the welfare of their populations, biodiversity conservation, and the global environment.";
- Has an overall objective as follows: "The Central African nations manage in a sustainable and concerted manner the sub-region forest resources, as well as a network of protected areas representative of the biodiversity and ecosystems for the welfare of their populations and for the global equilibrium."; and
- Provides ten strategic themes aimed at moving Central Africa toward this ambitious vision.

Recognizing the need for broad-based technical cooperation and coordination and the previously described institutions, programs, and partnerships, in December 2009, the USFS and the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat (ES), worked together with USAID/CARPE to initiate a partnership through which USFS will provide technical support to the COMIFAC ES for the Operations Plan for the Convergence Plan 2009-2011, as well as its Climate Working Group.

In June 2010, USFS mobilized a technical coordinator to work with the COMIFAC ES and liaise with other regional projects/partners to identify and execute specific activities for collaboration, support, and technical assistance in the upcoming year.⁶ During that period, the technical coordinator worked on a daily basis at the COMIFAC premises with the COMIFAC ES staff and supported the implementation of the USFS/COMIFAC letter of intent and its associated workplan.⁷ This briefing and orientation report is an output of the initial USFS mobilization.

⁵ The ten countries are Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Congo, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, and Sao Tome & Principe. However the primary forested or six core countries are Cameroon, CAR, Congo, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.

⁶ It should be noted that this draft report was written at the end of the 12 month mission.

⁷ The letter of intent and the draft workplan are found in the appendix.

2.0 COMIFAC Organization

2.1 Congo Basin Forest Partnership

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) was launched by the United States and other partners at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa to implement the 1999 Yaoundé Declaration. It is a Type II partnership⁸ with over 40 members including the 10 Central African countries, other international governments, civil society non-governmental organizations, scientific institutions, the private sector, and development organizations. It is facilitated in two-year rotations; starting with the US, then France, then Germany, and now Canada.

The primary role of the CBFP is to facilitate dialogue and promote cooperation between members in the implementation of the COMIFAC regional Convergence Plan. COMIFAC, with its treaty status, regional mandate and Convergence Plan, has become the primary coordinating and monitoring organization of CBFP regional activities of governments and partners aimed at implementing the Yaoundé Declaration in the region.

The CBFP and its partners, in collaboration with COMIFAC, puts out the biannual “State of the Forest” Report⁹, which provides a comprehensive examination of Congo Basin Forests by country and by priority COMIFAC CBFP landscapes.¹⁰

2.2 COMIFAC Governance Organs

Created by the Yaoundé Declaration in 1999¹¹, COMIFAC is the primary authority responsible for decision making and the orientation, coordination, and harmonization of political and technical issues that concern conservation and sustainable management of forest and savannah ecosystems in Central Africa. In 2005, COMIFAC adopted its current Convergence Plan that is the basis for its activities of intervention in the region. When people speak of “COMIFAC”, most often they are referring specifically to the Executive Secretariat, which is the “day to day” operational unit of the organization, however there are many organs within and above the broader COMIFAC structure.

CEEAC

The *Communauté Économique des États d’Afrique Centrale* (Economic Community of Central African States -ECCAS) is the lead organ that promotes and supports the cooperation and harmonization of economic and social activities in the ten Central African states. In 2007, it was decided that COMIFAC

⁸ Type II partnerships are voluntary and multi-stakeholder initiatives contributing to the implementation of an intergovernmental commitment. More information can be found here:

http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/csd11_partnerships_decision.htm

⁹ Published in 2005, 2006, and 2008, the 2008 and 2010 “State of the Forest” Report are coordinated by OFAC, supported by the FORAF project. The 2005 study and 2006 report were supported by primarily by USAID/CARPE and later versions by a consortia of donors, including USAID/CARPE. <http://www.cbfp.org/Stateoftheforest.html>. For more information on FORAF, see OFAC in section 3.0 COMIFAC Partners.

¹⁰ There are 12 CBFP landscapes that are recognized as priority areas for conservation based on their relative taxonomic importance, their overall integrity, and the resilience of ecological processes represented.

<http://carpe.umd.edu/Plone/where-carpe-works/landscapes>

¹¹ Originally named the *Conférence des Ministres en charge des Forêts d’Afrique Centrale*, the name was changed in 2002 to COMIFAC, or *Commission des Forêts d’Afrique Centrale*.

would be better sustained financially if it was situated within CEEAC as a Specialized Institution¹². A significant change resulting from this move concerned the financing of COMIFAC which will be switched from a fixed amount paid by member countries directly to COMIFAC to a variable amount of 0.01% of each country's forest tax revenues paid to CEEAC through the member countries' central banks which is then transferred to COMIFAC. However, complete member state payment of dues is a problem with the current fixed dues system and the variable amount system has yet to be implemented. In theory, the switch to a variable due system will increase COMIFAC revenues by four billion CFA (about \$8 million). CEEAC's goal is to allocate the dues that it gets from the member countries to its specialized institutions to fund a basic level of operation. Until a time when dues are paid in full, CEEAC seeks the support of partners to fund the activities of its specialized institutions. For COMIFAC, these activities are what are laid out in the Convergence Plan.

Heads of State and Council of Ministers

The meeting of the Heads of State represents the supreme governing organ of COMIFAC, and within CEEAC, and has final say over COMIFAC strategy and activities. The Heads of States met to create COMIFAC in 1999, again in 2005, and plans to meet in 2012 for the "Yaoundé plus 10" meeting in Kinshasa.

The Heads of State designate relevant ministers to represent their countries in the COMIFAC Council of Ministers. The COMIFAC Council of Ministers in turn normally meets once or twice a year to approve broad strategic proposals, partnerships, and organizational issues of COMIFAC. The latest Council of Ministers was held in October 2010, with an extra-ordinary session planned for May 2011.

Executive Secretariat

The Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC (COMIFAC ES) is charged with the day to day operations of COMIFAC, including the primary task of coordinating the execution of the Convergence Plan, facilitating regional dialogue, supporting the advancement of the technical work groups, and managing certain regional projects. It is based in Yaoundé in a small temporary building, until the larger building provided by the Government of Cameroon is refurbished. The Executive Secretary, Raymond Mbitikon, is supported by a technical coordinator or deputy executive secretary, Martin Tadoum, and a Director of Administration and Finance, Etienne Masumbuko. There are also three (3) technical assistants¹³ and six (6) additional administrative/logistic staff. Most of the ES leadership and technical team were designated in October 2008. The PACEBCO program also provides a Climate Change expert, Michel Ndjatsana¹⁴, a communications expert, and an IT technician to support the ES.

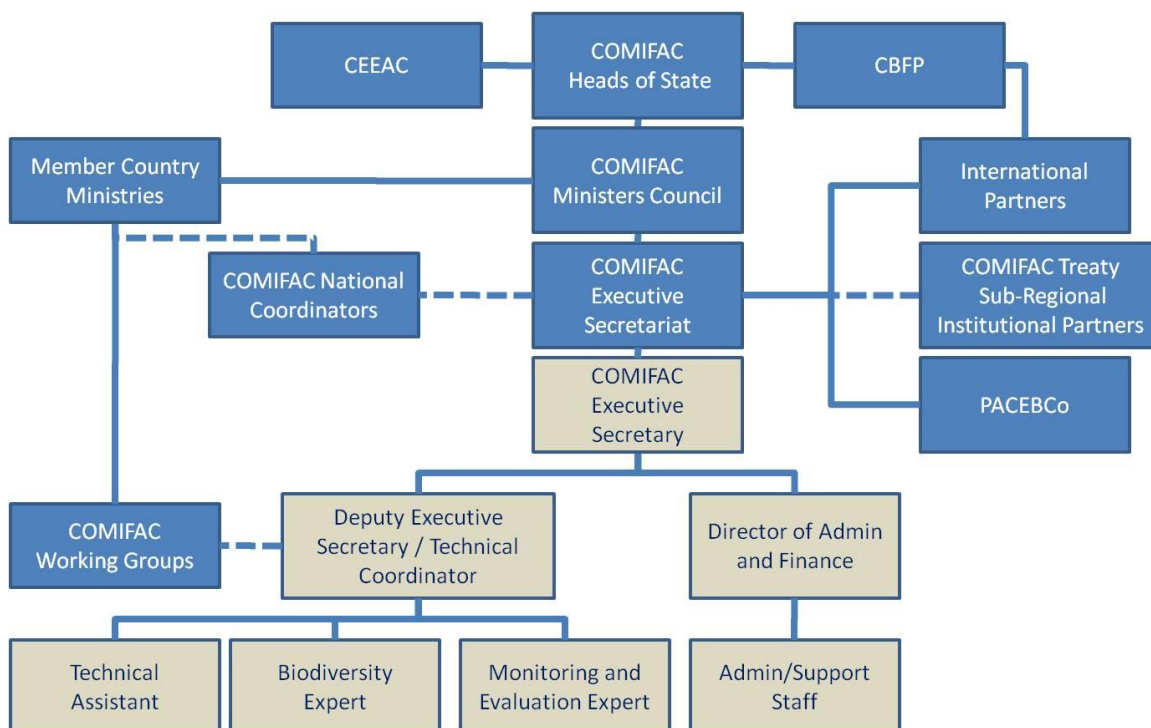
While the current structure of the secretariat and its relationship with other institutions in the sub-region is as pictured in the below figure, the African Development Bank PACEBCO project recently executed a institutional audit which could potentially rearrange the secretariat in the coming year if

¹² Other Specialized Institutions include the Central African Power Pool (PEAC) and the Regional Committee of Fishing in the Gulf of Guinea (COREP).

¹³ Two of the technical assistants are financed by the French Cooperation.

¹⁴ Formerly financed by the French Cooperation within the Executive Secretariat.

approved by the Council of Ministers and/or Heads of States. Please also refer to Annex 3: List of Contacts.



2.3 COMIFAC Member Countries

The 1999 Yaoundé Declaration was signed by seven presidents (Cameroon, CAR, Congo, Chad, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon). Burundi, Rwanda, and Sao Tome & Principe joined in 2005 along with the signing of the COMIFAC treaty. The treaty transformed COMIFAC into a legal entity empowered with full responsibility to coordinate all conservation initiatives in the Congo Basin. The treaty also provides a strong legal framework for negotiating with bilateral and multilateral funding agencies to establish long-term funding mechanisms for these initiatives. Preparations for Angola to join COMIFAC are currently in the planning stages.¹⁵ The Presidency of COMIFAC is held on a rotating basis, every two years. DRC recently took the leadership role from CAR, which will provide an interesting case study as DRC is currently over 5 years behind in their contributions to COMIFAC.

2.4 Other COMIFAC Organizations

COMIFAC Treaty Sub-Regional Partner Institutions

- **ADIE** – *Agence pour le Développement de l'Information Environnementale* – ADIE was created as centralized information institution to coordinate the collection and dissemination of forest data

¹⁵ It should be noted that Rwanda is not part of CEEAC, while Angola is. Burundi and Rwanda are part of COMIFAC, but also recently joined the East Africa Community (EAC) in 2007. Meanwhile, the Bank of Central African States (BEAC), which manage the CFA common currency zone (CEMAC), is comprised of Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Congo.

and information. ADIE has been largely inactive in recent years and is the one of the foci of the PACEBCo COMIFAC organization/institutional audit which recommended its dissolution.

- **CEFDHAC** – *Conférence pour les Écosystèmes des Forêts Humides d’Afrique Centrale* – Created in 1996 CEFDHAC is charged with bringing together all the actors (local NGOs primarily) in the forestry sector in Central Africa. COMIFAC and CEFDHAC were officially linked in 2006; however CEFDHAC is not a subsidiary organization of COMIFAC, working instead alongside COMIFAC. CEFDHAC’s primary forestry networks (*réseau*) are as follows:
 - RAAF – African Réseau of Forest Action
 - REDIFAC – Réseau of Forest Directeurs Central Africa
 - REFADD – Réseau of African Women for Durable Development
 - REJEFAC – Réseau of Young Foresters of Central Africa
 - REPALAC – Réseau of Indigenous and Local Populations of Central Africa
 - REPAR – Réseau of Parliamentarians of Central Africa
 - RIFFEAC – Réseau of Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions of Central Africa
- **OAB** – African Wood Organization – Founded in 1994, OAB’s mandate is to promote and execute the sustainable management of forests in its member states¹⁶. OAB has been largely inactive in recent years and is the one of the foci of the PACEBCo COMIFAC organization/institutional audit which recommended its dissolution.
- **OCFSA** – Organization for the Conservation of African Wildlife (OCAW) – Created in the 1980s by five central African countries (Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Chad, CAR), later joined by Sudan, OCFSA had as objective to provide assistance to members in wildlife management by creating a forum and harmonizing anti-poaching laws and strategy. DRC and Equatorial Guinea have also recently joined, solving one of the outstanding legitimacy problems, but OCFSA has been largely inactive in recent years and is the one of the foci of the PACEBCo COMIFAC organization/institutional audit which recommended its dissolution.
- **OFAC** – The Forest Observatory of Central Africa (OFAC) was recognized as an official COMIFAC partner institution at the October 2010 Council of Ministers meeting. Based in Kinshasa, OFAC’s primary role has been to produce the 2008 and 2010 State of the Forests Publication through the collection of data, reports, and synthesis of information. It has a very similar role as the non-active ADIE. OFAC is currently funded through primarily the European Commission project FORAF through 2013¹⁷. After 2013, it is envisioned that its operational costs will be covered by COMIFAC’s budget.
- **RAPAC** – *Réseau des Aires Protégées de l’Afrique Centrale* – RAPAC, based in Libreville, is a coordinating entity for the protected areas of Central Africa. It is integrally involved in the COMIFAC Convergence Plan for issues that involve biodiversity and the protected areas. RAPAC will be receiving a \$50 million project from the EU ECOFAC project in 2011 to execute.

¹⁶ Angola, Cameroon, CAR, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Tanzania et Sao Tome & Principe

¹⁷ <http://www.observatoire-comifac.net/foraf.php>

National Coordinators

The COMIFAC National Coordinators are designated by the respective ministries in each of the member countries. Their job is to both coordinate and communicate COMIFAC priorities to the member country governments on a regular basis, communicate member country priorities to COMIFAC, and communicate member country activities on the ground to COMIFAC so that the implementation of the Convergence Plan can be monitored. As will be discussed in section 5, with the key link that they play, the effective engagement and participation of the National Coordinators is paramount to COMIFAC success.

Working Groups

- **AFLEGT/FLEGT Task Force or Forest Governance Working Group** – This task force was created in 2008 through initiatives from the Franco-German COMIFAC support Office to start preparations in the region for many countries' adherence to the FLEGT process¹⁸ with the EU. Two workshops were held in 2008 and 2009, but the workgroup has since been inactive. There have been discussions to reinvigorate the Forest Governance Working Group now that five countries in the region have or will have FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs): Cameroon, CAR, Congo, DRC, and Gabon.
- **Biodiversity Working Group (GTBAC)** – Based on the Rio Convention (CBD), the Biodiversity working group is designed to coordinate and harmonize the positions and capacity of representatives of COMIFAC countries in their negotiations and representation at international biodiversity conventions, most specifically Conference of Parties, CITES, and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Specifically the Group GTBAC is comprised of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) national focal points and has five primary mandates: 1) to support the national level execution of the CBD; 2) to monitor the execution of the CBD at the regional level; 3) to coordinate international positions concerning biodiversity within the region; 4) to coordinate external support; and 5) to support the execution of axis 4 of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. The group is also active regarding issues related to Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits (ABS or APA) Arising from their Utilization to the CBD.
- **Climate Change Working Group** – Based on the Rio Convention (UNFCCC), the Climate Change Working Group is comprised of the UNFCCC Focal Points in each country, who are commonly also the designated negotiators at the Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP) meetings as well. This working group has been called upon in recent years for an increased number of workshops and trainings due to recent international interest in climate change. Through this working group COMIFAC has attempted, with varying degrees of success, to harmonize Central African climate change positions for the COP negotiations.
- **Desertification Working Group** - Based on the Rio Convention (UNCCD), the Desertification Working Group is designed to coordinate watershed management activities not only in the dense humid forest, but also the Central African semi-arid and arid ecosystems of COMIFAC member countries. Less active than the GTBAC or Climate Change groups, it is comprised of the

¹⁸ The FLEGT process is a system through which the EU members collectively negotiate with timber exporting countries to ensure a level of legality and traceability for products coming to the European markets. For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/forests/flegt.htm>

UNCCD focal points of each member country, the group aims to meet before and after UNCCD sessions to coordinate and restate discussions.

- **UNFF Working Group** – The UNFF working group was designed to prepare and coordinate COMIFAC member countries positions on issues that are discussed in the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF). With 2011 being the International Year of Forests, the 9th session of UNFF was held in January 2011 in New York, and was used “as a landmark opportunity to raise awareness and strengthen political commitment and action worldwide, this year and in the years to come, to achieve sustainable forest management.”¹⁹ Less active than the GTBAC or Climate Change groups, it is comprised of the UNFF focal points of each member country, the group aims to meet before and after UNFF sessions to coordinate and restate discussions.

3.0 COMIFAC Partners

3.1 COMIFAC Executive Secretariat Partners (Direct Assistance)

The organizations and programs listed below are focused on the primary partners and projects that regularly work directly with the COMIFAC Executive Secretary through the provision of technical assistance (organization of workshops, support to working groups, institutional support, and other projects that affect or implicate directly the COMIFAC Executive Secretary office). This list is in contrast with broader partners who contribute to the realization of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan in the Congo Basin, but do not work on a direct or regular basis with the COMIFAC Executive Secretary which is presented in the following section 3.2. Please also refer to Annex 3: List of Contacts.

Agence Française de Développement (Coopération Française)

The French Cooperation has supported forest and conservation activities at the regional level since 2002, but started more significantly supporting COMIFAC during the time of their facilitation of the CBF in 2006. They are currently under the process of transitioning their development assistance mechanism to be under the *Agence Française de Développement (AFD)*²⁰. The primary result of this restructuring is that much of the technical assistance will come through AFD contractors²¹ rather than direct from the French Foreign Ministry. AFD technical assistance remains focused on three (3) areas:

- 1) COMIFAC Institutional and Organizational support:
 - a. Sustainable financing of COMIFAC;
 - b. Effective and efficient institutional organization of the COMIFAC ES;
 - c. Support to COMIFAC in the steering, coordination and evaluation of its specialized institutions;
 - d. Donor and partner coordination;

¹⁹ 2011 9th UNFF Summit Ministerial Declaration

²⁰ AFD is a bi-lateral development finance institution established in 1941 that works on behalf of the French government. Its mission is to finance development according to France’s Overseas Development Assistance policies.

²¹ French COMIFAC assistance will likely, largely come through CIRAD: a French agricultural research organization working for development in the South and the French overseas regions. Its research work is generally conducted in partnership.

- 2) Forest Governance:
 - a. Improve the understanding of the FLEGT process in countries, especially Gabon;
 - b. Reinforce the capacities of national administrations in negotiations and monitoring of the Voluntary Partnership Accord (VPA);
 - c. Support the countries in the execution and financing of their VPAs;
 - d. Support the COMIFAC ES in the monitoring and coordination of forest governance and specifically FLEGT;
- 3) Climate Change and REDD+:
 - a. Support the COMIFAC Climate Change Working Group;
 - b. Support COMIFAC countries in international climate change and REDD+ negotiations;
 - c. Reinforce capacities of regional and national experts.

Currently, the French Cooperation supplies the COMIFAC ES with two (2) regional experts: one in monitoring (Valerie Tchuante) and one in biodiversity (Chouaibou Nchoutpouen). There are plans for AFD to expand this support with additional experts focusing on 1) FLEGT; 2) Climate Change/REDD; and 3) COMIFAC ES support. In the Franco-German COMIFAC support office, there is also a full time French Cooperation/AFD Technical Coordinator (Arthur Tomasion), a forest governance specialist (FLEGT), Alain Penelon, and a part time ONF International²² Consultant (Pascal Cuny).

Belgian Cooperation

The Belgian Cooperation supports the COMIFAC ES through the funding of micro-projects focused on support to the Tri-National Sangha (TNS) CBFP Landscape and the importance of pollinators for the biodiversity of Cameroon.

Canadian International Development Agency

With the handover of the CBFP facilitation, the Canadian Government is ramping up their regional level activities in the Congo Basin, not only at the CBFP level, but also in direct support to the COMIFAC ES.²³ Coordinated by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA or ACDI), the COMIFAC ES support activities will start in mid-2011 and focus on six areas:

- 1) Support the COMIFAC ES in the development of a long term vision and improve its internal organization ;
- 2) Reinforce the administrative and financial procedures and practices to be recognized as credible, effective and efficient;
- 3) Reinforce the capacities of the national coordinators to ensure communication between COMIFAC and its partners;
- 4) Put in place a system of coordination and monitoring of the Convergence Plan for executing partners;
- 5) Support the partner organizations and institutions of COMIFAC to be more functional, active and influential; support the role of women in the execution of the Convergence Plan;

²² ONF International is a subsidiary of the French “National Forest Office”

²³ Previously, Canada had significant forest activities in Cameroon and DRC in the 1980s and 1990s, and currently supports forestry schools and model forests within the region.

- 6) Facilitate the coordination, harmonization, and exchange of information between CBFP members; engender new partnerships and long term financing.

Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF)

The CBFF was started in 2008 with funding from the British and Norwegian governments. It is managed by the African Development Bank and meant to work closely with COMIFAC and CEEAC. In addition to several project grants to be launched in 2008 and 2011²⁴, a large sum of money (\$34 million) is planned to be allocated to an FAO executed regional Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) project. Using regional economies of scale approach, the project proposes to establish functioning MRV (GHG, national forest inventory (NFI), and satellite land-monitoring) systems in all 10 central African countries in the next three years to aid in the preparations for REDD. While details have not yet been finalized, the COMIFAC ES will be intimately involved in the coordination and management of this project, as well as the national governments. The Brazilian space agency INPE will also have a significant role as their deforestation software and monitoring approach will be used as a base to be adapted to the Congo Basin context. After the development of strategies and methodologies, the project plans to take advantage of existing institutions, organizations, and projects to train and support regional and national experts in their elaboration of the national MRV systems. Pending ongoing negotiations between the CBFF, FAO, COMIFAC and member countries, the project should start sometime in early 2012 and plans to coordinate with several other projects at national levels to leverage funding towards achieving its ambitious goals. USFS was preliminarily identified to have an integral role in the supporting development of a regional NFI methodology within the project.

German Cooperation

The German Cooperation entered into an agreement to support COMIFAC in 2007, at the same time as their taking over the facilitation of the CBFP. Primarily through the German Technical Assistance group, (now GIZ) their direct support to date to the COMIFAC ES has totaled €6 million and focused on seven strategic areas:

1. Reinforcement of the active participation of COMIFAC and the region in international forestry and environmental dialogues
2. Forest governance with the FLEGT process
3. The sustainable financing of COMIFAC
4. Support to the TNS landscape
5. Organizational support to the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat
6. Regional meetings concerning the Rio environmental conventions (climate, biodiversity, desertification)
7. Reform of COMIFAC institutional partners (CEFDHAC)

They currently have a staff of four expatriate technical experts and administrative support staff in the Franco-German COMIFAC support office, with experts focusing on 1) technical direction; 2) governance/FLEGT; 3) Climate Change/Biodiversity; and 4) support to CEFDHAC. In addition to trainings,

²⁴ For a list of potential CBFF projects see http://www.cbf-fund.org/site_assets/downloads/pdf/Brochure%20mai%202010.pdf

workshops, conferences, and equipment support the German Cooperation also supports COMIFAC through a small grant mechanism.

Moving forward from 2010, GIZ (combination of GTZ and the German Development Bank KfW) is in the process of further developing the framework of their future assistance in both scope and scale. Future GIZ support will be likely focus on the following areas of support to COMIFAC:

1. Organizational development of COMIFAC as a regional leader
2. Reinforcement of the participation and integration of civil society in regional dialogue and political decisions
3. International cooperation and dialogue related to climate change, REDD, biodiversity, etc...
4. Regional management of protected areas

European Union

The EU ECOFAC (Conservation and rational use of forest ecosystem in Central Africa) program has been in existence since 1992 focusing on improving the management of protected areas and livelihoods of local populations living around them. With about 70 million euros in the first three phases, primarily from the European development funds, ECOFAC IV ran from 2006-2010 with a budget of 38 million euros, and ECOFAC V promises to be about 30 million euros. ECOFAC V will be focused heavily on supporting the continued institutionalization of RAPAC as a regional coordinating entity to manage significant portions of the funds.

The EU FORAF project is a consortium of scientific institutes: the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR); the Forest Resource Management (FRM) consulting firm; and the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL). One of the primary interventions of FORAF is to support OFAC in the production of the State of the Forest Report through the collection and analysis of forest data and information.

FAO

FAO works with COMIFAC to coordinate issues regarding Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs). The priority of the project is to promote at local, national and sub regional levels a policy and institutional framework that govern the access of local people to resources and markets for NTFPs. FAO supports COMIFAC to become a regional information point for NTFPs to disseminate best practices and technical knowledge. FAO also has specific NTFP programs in Gabon, Congo and CAR.

GEF / World Bank

In addition to their several national and multi-national level activities,²⁵ at the regional level with COMIFAC, the World Bank is implementing two GEF funded regional projects²⁶ to coordinate and

²⁵ The World Bank is significantly involved in REDD+ preparation and forestry projects in most notably DRC, but also several other countries in the region. WB also has relevant programs in the TRIDOM landscape and funding a new WRI regional project. However the GEF project is the most relevant for COMIFAC purposes.

²⁶ The project is projected to be at over \$25 million, including \$13 million from GEF.

prepare for REDD activities in the six primary forested countries of the Congo Basin²⁷ and support COMIFAC in their coordination role.

The first project has three (3) primary components: 1) Improve the coordination and knowledge of REDD in the region; 2) Reinforce capacities to measure and monitor carbon stocks; 3) Support the development of methodologies to integrate REDD into sustainable forestry management projects; 4) Project coordination, monitoring and evaluation. Component one will focus support on COMIFAC organizations (such as the Climate Change Working Group, CEFDHAC, and REPALEAC) as well as civil society and the private sector. Component two will support scientific capacities such as partnerships and information dissemination (such as OFAC and national research institutions), the advancement of the elaboration of allometric equations, and satellite image treatment. The third component will examine the drivers of deforestation and how to support and coordinate other PES and REDD projects in the region.

COMIFAC will be intimately involved in the coordination and monitoring of the first project through component four and the establishment of a management unit based in the ES. Additionally COMIFAC will be the focus of the second smaller project which aims to support COMIFAC as the regional coordinator for Climate Change and REDD+ activities. Preliminary studies have been carried out and the project plans to start activities in the first quarter of 2011. USFS is supporting COMIFAC and the World Bank by providing complementing technical expertise in a variety of areas as the project progresses.

Japan International Cooperation Agency

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is also starting to support forestry and NRM activities in Central Africa. While they have already been active in Gabon with wildlife conservation, in 2011 they will begin support activities to national forestry inventories in Gabon and DRC. In addition, they envision sending up to two (2) technical consultants to support the COMIFAC ES in 2011, most likely focusing on forest ecosystems and biodiversity.

PACEBCo – AfDB

The \$50+ million (2009-2014) *Programme d'Appui à la Conservation des Ecosystèmes du Bassin du Congo* (PACEBCo or the Congo Basin Ecosystem Conservation Support Program) is an African Development Bank funded project in collaboration with CEEAC designed to support the COMIFAC ES in the implementation of its Convergence Plan. It focuses on all ten COMIFAC countries²⁸ and in particular six CBFP landscapes²⁹. PACEBCo intervenes in four areas:

- 1) Reinforcement of institutional capacities of the COMIFAC ES;
- 2) Sustainable management of biodiversity and climate change adaptation;
- 3) Promotion of the well being of forest communities; and
- 4) Program management and coordination.

²⁷ CAR, Cameroon, Congo, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon

²⁸ CAR, Cameroon, Congo, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon

²⁹ TNS, Virunga, Maringa-Lopori-Wamba, Maiko-Tayna-Kahuzi Biega, Monte Alen-Monts de Cristal, and Lac Télé- Lac Tumba

PACEBCo has only recently established their office³⁰, but they have already begun to execute actions in support of the COMIFAC ES, including an institutional audit, and support to the daily operations³¹ of the ES. Their technical staff is quasi-seconded to the COMIFAC ES, and works in constant, close collaboration.³² Their field staff should soon be operating to achieve their goals improving the sustainability of the COMIFAC/CBFP landscapes, including the support of elaboration of protected area management³³ and community development plans.³⁴ The COMIFAC ES through PACEBCO support to its operation, as well as the member countries, through activities in the COMIFAC/CBFP landscapes, will be primary beneficiaries of this project and its activities.

USAID / US Forest Service

The USAID Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) is funding the USDA Forest Service (USFS) to provide direct technical assistance to the COMIFAC ES in several of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan axes as well as climate change work. This direct assistance to the COMIFAC ES is part of the broader USAID/CARPE funding of over \$110 million³⁵ in its Phase 2 activities (2003-2011), including over \$75 million through CARPE partners to the sustainable management of the 12 COMIFAC/CBFP landscapes and over \$34 million cross cutting activities, all in support of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan, COMIFAC Member States' conservation priorities, and civil society. The USAID/CARPE program has been the primary regional conservation program in Central Africa since 2003 and is elaborated in more detail in Section 4.

3.2 Broader COMIFAC Partners (Convergence Plan)

This section lists forestry and conservation organizations and projects active in the region that contribute to the COMIFAC Convergence Plan, however do not regularly and directly interact with the COMIFAC Executive Secretary. Inclusion was also broadened to organizations and their respective projects that are supported by U.S. Government funds (USAID/CARPE), though their activities may often extend beyond those funds.

African Wildlife Foundation (AWF)

The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) is the leading international conservation organization focused solely on Africa. AWF is one of the lead on-the-ground implementers for USAID/CARPE landscape activities in support of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. Specifically AWF is working in DRC in the Maringa-Lopori -Wamba CBFP priority landscape and in DRC/Rwanda/Uganda in the Virunga CBFP priority landscape. AWF receives some additional funding from other sources outside CARPE as matching funds to leverage more support to CARPE activities and beyond. For further details on the CARPE program, please see Section 4.

³⁰ It is envisioned that once the official COMIFAC ES office is finished that PACEBCo will co-locate with the COMIFAC ES and other COMIFAC ES partners.

³¹ Including significant IT equipment.

³² A complete list of PACEBCo technical staff is listed in Annex 3: List of Contacts.

³³ As mentioned above, RAPAC will be the primary partner for this activity.

³⁴ Much of the PACEBCo work is similar and will build on that currently done by USAID/CARPE

³⁵ CARPE is the US Governments primary method of contributing to the CBFP.

Conservation International (CI)

Conservation International (CI) is a large international nonprofit conservation organization which focuses on six key initiatives that affect human well-being: climate, food security, freshwater security, health, cultural services and species contribution. CI is one of the lead on-the-ground implementers for USAID/CARPE landscape activities in support of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. Specifically CI is working in DRC in the Maiko-Tayna-Kahuzi Biega CBFP priority landscape and in Gabon/Equatorial Guinea in the Monte Alen-Monts de Cristal CBFP priority landscape. CI receives some additional funding from sources outside CARPE as matching funds to leverage more support to CARPE activities and beyond. For further details on the CARPE program, please see Section 4.

Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)

The Center for International Forestry Research is a nonprofit, global facility dedicated to advancing human wellbeing, environmental conservation and equity. They conduct research that enables more informed and equitable decision making about the use and management of forests in less-developed countries. In Central Africa, their work is primarily focused around illegal/informal logging.

COMIFAC signed a cooperation agreement with CIFOR in 2007. In the context of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan, CIFOR is working primarily on projects related to Climate Change and REDD³⁶. The Congo Basin Forest Climate Change Adaptation project (COFCCA) focuses on three countries (Cameroon, CAR, and DRC) to assist them in the development of adaptation policies for the sustainability of their forest ecosystems. CIFOR is also supporting the integration of forest management between the Congo and Amazon Basins through their FORAMA project. The CIFOR Global Comparison Study of REDD is focused primarily in Cameroon, but brings together best practices and lessons learned from other continents. REAFOR is an agricultural and forestry research project in DRC that supports graduate studies and research institutions.

CIRAD

CIRAD is a French research center working with developing countries to tackle international agricultural and development issues. Related to COMIFAC³⁷, funded by the French Cooperation, GTZ, and USAID, CIRAD is currently undertaking a study to examine the potential evolution of the Congo Basin forest ecosystems through 2040.

CIRAD has a staff of 35 in central Africa: 17 researchers and four national administrative staff members in Cameroon, six in Congo, three in Gabon, three in Chad, one in the Central African Republic, and one in DRC. Their research is focused on the following areas:

- Improvement of tree crop-based agroforestry systems
- Cotton cropping systems and agro-ecosystem sustainability in grassland zones
- Rational management of planted and natural forest socio-ecosystems in the Congo Basin

³⁶ For other CIFOR projects visit their website at : <http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/our-research/projects.html>

³⁷ CIRAD will also be the primary contracting mechanism through which the French Cooperation supports COMIFAC with their transition to AFD. For example the French technical experts in the Franco-German COMIFAC support office will be CIRAD contractors.

COMIFAC Briefing and Orientation Report

- Improvement of banana and plantain cropping systems
- Ecological intensification of terrestrial aquaculture systems
- Food security and safety (horticulture)
- Animal health

IUCN

IUCN (The World Conservation Union) is the world's oldest and largest global environmental network - a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by more than 1,000 professional staff in 60 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. IUCN has been playing a central convening role in the USAID/CARPE Phase 2B Program since October 2006, notably in the "improved natural resource governance" component. USAID/CARPE funds IUCN to manage the CARPE national focal point network to: design and implement a small grant portfolio at the country and regional levels; monitor the activities of CARPE landscape partners; and also served as cross cutting leader to assimilate, coordinate, capitalize, package and disseminate a CARPE lessons learned initiative. The small grants program has the goal to strengthen the role of civil society in forest policy reform. COMIFAC national coordinators sit on the small grant national selection committees.

The second "CARPE Lessons Learned" contains 27 case studies of applied conservation as well as seven overview articles synthesizing the results of the groups of case studies, which cover different thematic areas. The publication's case studies are organized into three sections: land-use planning, environmental policy and governance, and monitoring of natural resources, which parallel the structure of CARPE's three core components. This publication highlights the sum accumulated knowledge of CARPE partner institutions acquired during the implementation of the program³⁸.

IUCN receives some additional funding from sources outside CARPE as matching funds to leverage more support to CARPE activities and beyond. For further details on the CARPE program, please see Section 4.

OSFAC

The Central African Forest Satellite Observatory (OSFAC)³⁹ was founded in 2000 and acts as the Central Africa regional GOF-C-GOLD (Global Observation of Forest and Land Cover Dynamics) network. OSFAC works to improve the quality and availability of satellite observations of forest and land cover in the Congo Basin and to produce useful and timely information products for a wide variety of users. It is a legally recognized NGO in DRC that operates with a regional mandate to promote the use of satellite data and products for the management of natural resources and sustainable development. OSFAC works in collaboration with the University of Maryland, South Dakota State University, and NASA to produce wall to wall satellite mapping coverage of the Congo Basin. OSFAC is one of the primary, active training institutions in the region for remote sensing and GIS.

³⁸ For a copy of the "CARPE Lessons Learned" visit the IUCN website:
http://www.iucn.org/fr/propos/union/secretariat/bureaux/paco/programmes/paco_forest/carpe_paco/carpe_lessons_learned_case_study_articles/

³⁹ OSFAC should not be confused with OFAC, which is referenced above

Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

The Wildlife Conservation Society is an international NGO based in New York that manages conservation and research projects and programs around the world. WCS focuses on four issues facing wildlife and wild places: climate change; natural resource exploitation; the connection between wildlife health and human health; and the sustainable development of human livelihoods. With a significant presence and history in field conservation in Central Africa, WCS is one of the lead on-the-ground implementers for USAID/CARPE landscape activities in support of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. Specifically WCS is working in the following CBFP priority landscapes:

1. Monte Alen-Monts de Cristal (Gabon/Equatorial Guinea);
2. Gamba-Mayumba-Conkouati (Congo/Gabon);
3. Lopé-Chaillu-Louesse (Congo/Gabon);
4. TRIDOM : Dja-Odzala-Minkébé (Cameroon/Congo/Gabon);
5. TNS: Tri-National Sangha (Cameroon/CAR/Congo);
6. Léconi-Batéké-Léfini (Congo/Gabon) ;
7. Lac Télé-Lac Tumba (Congo/DRC) ;
8. Salonga-Lukenie-Sankiru (DRC);
9. Maiko-Tayna-Kahuzi Biega (DRC);
10. Ituri-Epulu-Aru (DRC);
11. Virunga (DRC/Rwanda/Uganda).

WCS has significant support outside of CARPE funding for conservation and natural resource management activities, and maintains country offices in most of the Central African countries to coordinate their programs. For further details on the CARPE program, please see Section 4.

World Resources Institute (WRI)

The World Resources Institute is a global environmental think tank works with governments, companies, and civil society to build solutions to urgent environmental challenges. WRI's activities in forest concession and other land use monitoring (collection and analysis of data) support the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. In the spirit of generating transparent information towards good governance to contribute to broader efforts to stem illegal logging, WRI collaborates with national ministries in five (5) countries (CAR, Cameroun, Congo, DRC, and Gabon)⁴⁰ in the production and updating of geo-databases, interactive forest atlases, and situational posters⁴¹, providing direct institutional support for national forestry services in the development of GIS-based forest information systems for the logging concessions in each country.

When data set collection for a given country is completed, the country is equipped with a formal interactive web-based atlas containing all information required to monitor all logging concessions in the country. This interactive forestry atlas is intended to reinforce good practices and to sanction fraudulent exploitation, and it is being developed to guide decision makers, such as members of Parliament, in each

⁴⁰ WRI is in the process of finalizing an agreement with the government of Equatorial Guinea.

⁴¹ The posters and atlases can be found at : http://carpe.umd.edu/Plone/resources/good_governance_forestry

country. The interactive forestry atlases integrate protected area boundaries and can easily add Community areas and mining concessions.⁴²

The forest information management systems are being directly institutionalized in the forestry departments of each participating country. Increasingly, logging companies are required to submit their annual cutting plans in GIS format that can be directly integrated into these systems.

For further details on the CARPE program, please see Section 4.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

Formerly named the World Wildlife Fund, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is a large international NGO working on issues regarding the conservation, research and restoration of the environment. With a significant presence and history in field conservation in Central Africa, WWF is also one of the lead on-the-ground implementers for USAID/CARPE landscape activities in support of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. Specifically WWF is working in the following CBFP priority landscapes:

1. Gamba-Mayumba-Conkouati (Congo/Gabon);
2. TRIDOM : Dja-Odzala-Minkébé (Cameroon, Congo, and Gabon);
3. TNS: Tri-National Sangha (Cameroon, CAR, Congo);
4. Lac Télé-Lac Tumba (Congo/DRC) ;
5. Salonga-Lukenie-Sankiru (DRC);
6. Maiko-Tayna-Kahuzi Biega (DRC);
7. Virunga (DRC/Rwanda/Uganda).

WWF continues to play an important role assisting in the logistical organization of the next Heads of State meeting in Kinshasa (2012) as it has in previous meetings and is supporting the COMIFAC ES through the translation of key documents into Spanish.

WWF has significant support outside of CARPE funding for conservation and natural resource management activities, and maintains country offices in most of the Central African countries to coordinate their programs. For further details on the CARPE program, please see Section 4.

4.0 USAID/CARPE/USFS – COMIFAC Technical Assistance

4.1 Background⁴³

The USAID Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) is the primary mechanism through which the US Government contributes to the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP). CARPE is a long-term initiative launched by USAID in 1997 to promote the sustainable management of natural resources in the Congo Basin by supporting the enhancement of local, national and regional management of natural resources. In the second of three proposed phases, CARPE is currently, specifically concerned with intensive national and field conservation implementation and the

⁴² The Mining sector of Gabon was recently integrated into the Interactive Atlas

⁴³ Much of this section quotes directly from the CARPE website: <http://carpe.umd.edu/>

establishment of improved natural resource management capacity in order to reduce forest degradation and conserve biodiversity.

The majority of CARPE funds are allocated to planning and management activities within the 12 priority CBFP landscapes. The CBFP Landscape Programs are currently being administered by multiple international conservation organizations functioning as consortia. These consortia are led by a single member and include other international NGOs, local NGOs, government agencies, international research institutions, and specific individuals to implement the landscape programs.

In addition to the landscape programs, CARPE also supports broader cross-cutting activities throughout the Congo Basin. Cross-cutting activities are designed to bring specific expertise to the Congo Basin and are concerned with a wide variety of tasks, including: forestry and natural resources monitoring, improved natural resources governance, policy development, and institutional capacity building.

As part of these cross-cutting activities, in December 2009, the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat (ES), worked together with USAID/CARPE support to sign a Letter of Intent (LOI)⁴⁴ initiating a partnership through which USFS will provide technical support to the COMIFAC ES for the Operations Plan for the Convergence Plan 2009–2011, as well as its Climate Working Group. Specific areas of the USFS technical expertise for the implementation of this USFS/COMIFAC partnership include eight of the ten COMIFAC Convergence Plan strategic themes, plus Climate Change.

4.2 USAID/CARPE⁴⁵

The USAID/CARPE program was first authorized by the U.S. Government in 1995 and was initially proposed as a 20-year regional initiative divided three strategic phases. Phase I of CARPE began operating out of Washington, D.C in 1997 and centered on gathering information on the Central African forest ecosystem, while simultaneously building regional human resources and institutional capacity. The program began in four countries; the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo. Since its beginning five additional countries have been added; Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Sao Tome & Principe.⁴⁶

In January of 2003, CARPE began its second strategic phase and officially transferred management to the region. CARPE Phase II is being operated as a regional Strategic Objective (SO) managed through the environmental sector of USAID in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Phase II is projected to

⁴⁴ See Annex 2

⁴⁵ This section quotes directly from the CARPE website: <http://carpe.umd.edu/>

⁴⁶ In 1997, there were no USAID missions in Congo Basin countries and the decision was made to work directly through partner organizations already operating in the region. The first set of ten partners included: the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS); the World Resources Institute (WRI); World Wildlife Fund (WWF); World Learning (later succeeded by Innovative Resource Management (IRM)); the U.S. Forest Service (USFS); the Peace Corps; and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), in collaboration with the Universities of Virginia and Maryland. The tenth partner, the Biodiversity Support Program (BSP), a USAID-funded consortium of the World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and the World Resources Institute, handled program management until its Global Bureau cooperative agreement ended in December, 2001. Four other partners began participating in CARPE in 2000: the World Conservation Union (IUCN); Conservation International (CI); the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF); and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

continue until September 30, 2011 and is specifically concerned with supporting sustainable natural resource management in the field, improving environmental governance, and strengthening natural resource monitoring capacity in Central Africa.

The implementation of Phase II corresponded with the launching of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. At the summit, the U.S. Government (USG) committed \$53 million to finance the CBFP's efforts to support sustainable forestry, biodiversity conservation, and poverty alleviation. The USG identified CARPE as the principal mechanism through which these funds would be dispersed.

From 2003-2005 USAID-CARPE dispersed approximately \$15 million per year to promote the objectives of the CBFP and the following Administrative and Legislative Priorities: the Congo Basin Forest Partnership Presidential Initiative, the Global Development Alliance, the Presidential Initiative Against Illegal Logging, the Global Climate Change Initiative, the Biodiversity Legislative "earmark" FAA Section 118, the Tropical Forestry Legislative "earmark" FAA Section 119, and the Microenterprise "earmark". In addition to the funds provided through the USG, CARPE requires matching funds from its primary partners amounting in aggregate to more than 50% of USAID's contribution.

CARPE Phase III will employ the landscape management approach proven successful in CARPE II as underscored in the CARPE II Final Evaluation and formally endorsed by the CBFP and COMIFAC. This approach recognizes that the success of forest and biodiversity conservation cannot rely on protected areas alone. It engages all of the key stakeholders in the spatial planning processes which lead to the consensual management of the landscape according to three general categories of "macro-zones" -- protected areas, extractive resource zones, and community-based natural resource management zones. These macro-zones are then managed to minimize deforestation, forest degradation and biodiversity loss consistent with local needs and national/regional priorities.⁴⁷ The planning guides developed by CARPE for each category of macro-zones will continue to be major tools for managing these vast areas of tropical forest.

CARPE will institutionalize these methodologies through training and technical assistance using a participatory approach to: (1) strengthen local, national and regional capacity in land use planning, forest management and biodiversity conservation at the landscape as well as macro-zone levels; (2) strengthen institutional capacity at the regional, national and local levels for natural resource monitoring and climate change mitigation; (3) improve the policy and regulatory environment, including enforcement through criminal prosecutions for natural resource management and climate change mitigation, and (4) improve local and national government capacity to use and institutionalize the information generated through CARPE for decision making.

The selection of the four intermediate results recognizes the major obstacles to the effective implementation of sustainable natural resource management, which when corrected will contribute to the achievement of CARPE objectives. These obstacles are: (1) weak technical and organizational

⁴⁷ Detailed information on the CARPE Landscape Planning and Management approach and its effectiveness can be found on the CARPE website <http://carpe.umd.edu/>.

capacity; (2) lack or incomplete/inadequate legal framework or failure to implement policies/laws that create incentives to empower the communities to access and manage natural resources; (3) problems related to access rights, ownership and tenure of forests and their resources; (4) weak capacity of the judiciary systems to effectively regulate and enforce laws; and (5) lack of reliable information for decision making and resource monitoring.

4.3 USDA Forest Service International Programs⁴⁸

The USDA Forest Service International Programs (USFS/IP) is active in over 75 countries around the world, including over 15 in sub-Saharan Africa. USFS has more than 30,000 staff that manage more than 78 million hectares of land in the United States, including forests, rangelands, protected areas, extractive areas, and recreational areas.

By linking the skills of the field-based staff of the US Forest Service with partners overseas, USFS/IP can address the most critical natural resource management issues and concerns. USFS/IP regularly taps into the agency's wide range of expertise: forest planners, wildlife biologists, forest inventory specialists, forest economists, hydrologists, disaster and fire management specialists, and policy makers are among those who comprise the staff of over thirty thousand employees.

The United States benefits from USFS/IP's work overseas. Innovative technologies and methods are brought back to the country, cross boundary environmental problems are addressed, and opportunities to hone USFS skills are increased. Strengthened international ties lead to mutual aid, as illustrated by assistance from Mexico, Canada, Australia and Israel who assisted with the devastating 2000 fire season in the western region of the United States

USFS/IP has three main staff units: Technical Cooperation, Policy, and the Disaster Assistance Support Program (DASP). All three work closely with the US Department of State and USAID as well as other USG agencies. The Technical Cooperation unit, specifically, develops and manages natural resource projects overseas on a wide range of topics (i.e. forest planning, forest inventory, protected area management, and fire management). In Central Africa, the USFS Technical Cooperation department has been primarily engaged through CARPE, although additional funding from US State Department, other USAID missions and Bureaus, and USFS are also brought to the partnership. USFS activities through CARPE focus on providing targeted technical and capacity building assistance aimed at improving forest management in the Congo Basin. In an effort to focus this assistance in a manner which capitalizes on the relative strengths of the agency, the USFS has concentrated their efforts towards the land management planning processes and national forest inventory and monitoring systems with CARPE partners and the host country governments. USFS technical cooperation (further described in section 4.4) supports not only the CARPE program and its implementing partners but also several governments in the region (DRC, Gabon, and COMIFAC).

There are two main disaster programs: Disaster Assistance Support Program (DASP) and the Disaster Mitigation Program. Funded by USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, DASP trains and mobilizes personnel domestically to respond and mitigate foreign disasters, such as the drought in Ethiopia and

⁴⁸ This section quotes significantly from the USFS/IP website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/global/aboutus/welcome.htm>

the locust response in West Africa. The Disaster Mitigation Program,⁴⁹ on the other hand, trains and provides technical expertise to partners overseas in emergency preparedness, response and disaster mitigation. Finally, USFS/IP's policy unit is actively involved in sustainability roundtables and international fora, which ensures that US position on global forest policies and agreements reflect the best interests of the country and its priorities.

4.4 USFS-CARPE and USFS-COMIFAC Collaboration

The Technical Cooperation unit of USFS/IP has supported the implementation of CARPE since its inception in 1995 focusing on the following areas:

- 1) Land-use planning;
- 2) Ecotourism policy development;
- 3) Landscape, protected area, Community-Based Natural Resource Management Zone and extractive resource zone management and planning;
- 4) Climate change mitigation to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation;
- 5) Fire management;
- 6) National multi-resource forest inventories
- 7) Geographic Information Systems and information management;
- 8) Non timber forest products; and
- 9) Reduced impact logging for sustainable harvesting.

A significant amount of USFS technical assistance has been focused on working with the CARPE implementing partners to assist them in land use planning in the CBFP landscapes. CBFP Landscape land use planning prioritizes three types of zones to be delineated within the landscapes: Protected Area (PA), Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), and Extractive Resource (ERZ) use zones. Referred to as macro-zones, the PA, CBNRM, and ERZ use zones are fundamental components of the landscape land use plan. Each of these macro-zones will, in turn, also be zoned for differing uses and levels of resource protection, reflecting site-specific challenges as well as articulating how they will address and support landscape desired conditions and objectives. USFS has worked with CARPE partners to design four (4) land use planning guides that focus on each of these three (3) macro-zones, as well as a 4th guide that examines the integration of the macro-zones into the larger landscape context.⁵⁰ In this series of planning guides, USFS/IP attempts to adapt the expertise gained by the USFS from managing large forested, multiple-use landscapes in the United States, which include wilderness areas (complete protection zones), extractive-use areas, and recreation areas, and tailor this guidance to the specific context of Central Africa, and the needs of implementing partners and government agencies in the region.

As mentioned above, through CARPE and several other funding streams,⁵¹ the USFS has also participated in long term bilateral technical assistance efforts in DRC (forest zoning) and Gabon (protected areas

⁴⁹ Technically the Disaster Mitigation Program falls under the umbrella of Technical Cooperation.

⁵⁰ The USFS land use planning guides can be found at: <http://carpe.umd.edu/Plone/resources/carpemgmttools>

⁵¹ Other USAID, State Department, and USFS funding

management) as well as conducted a series of other technical exchange and assessment missions in other priority countries and thematic areas.

CARPE is committed to the reinforcement of forest governance capacity in Central Africa, and focuses many of its cross-cutting activities to support these efforts. Recognizing the need for broad-based technical cooperation and coordination in the sub-region, the USFS and the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat have worked together with USAID/CARPE to initiate a partnership⁵² through which USFS will provide technical support to the COMIFAC ES for the Operations Plan for the Convergence Plan 2009-2011, as well as its Climate Working Group.

USFS-IP will provide technical experts to the COMIFAC ES, in accordance with the process defined in the Operations Plan 2009-2011 for the COMIFAC Convergence Plan and the REDD work agenda for the Climate Working Group in the following various areas:

- COMIFAC Convergence Plan
 - Harmonious forest and fiscal policies (Theme 1)
 - Knowledge of the resource (Theme 2)
 - Ecosystem development and reforestation (Theme 3)
 - Biodiversity conservation (Theme 4)
 - Sustainable forest resource development (Theme 5)
 - Capacity building, actor involvement, information, and training (Theme 7)
 - Research and development (Theme 8)
 - Development of financing mechanisms (Theme 9)
- REDD work agenda
 - Reference scenarios on emissions linked to deforestation and forest degradation
 - Measures to monitor greenhouse gas emissions (measurement and monitoring)
 - Reporting – Information communication

In June 2010, USFS mobilized a technical coordinator to work with the COMIFAC ES and other regional projects/partners to identify and execute specific activities for collaboration, support, and technical assistance in the upcoming year. Specific ongoing and planned 2011 activities include: 1) Regional validation and training on the use of USFS/CARPE landscape and forest zone land use planning guides; 2) Technical reviews of/input to COMIFAC climate change/forest ecosystem models and studies; 3) Facilitation of communication and further synergy between USAID/CARPE and COMIFAC; 4) Regional and bilateral support to forest inventory methodologies; and 5) Strengthening of regional forest governance capacity, including links to the US Lacey Act.

5.0 Analysis

Given the institutional and organizational infrastructure presented above, the following section examines some specific competencies, and relative strengths and weaknesses of COMIFAC and its partner institutions. Areas to be discussed in particular are: 1) Significant Accomplishments; 2) Current Challenges; and 3) Key Issues to Watch in the future. This will be followed by specific recommended

⁵² USFS and COMIFAC signed a Letter of Intent in December 2009.

guidance for US Government engagement with COMIFAC at two levels: 1) at a Broad Level for regional US embassies; and 2) for the USAID/CARPE program within the context of Central African biodiversity and forest conservation and natural resource management.

5.1 Significant COMIFAC Accomplishments

Current Motivated and Functional Executive Secretariat

The current COMIFAC Executive Secretariat is motivated and functioning at a level that allows for cooperation and collaboration internationally and regionally. Although COMIFAC was created by the Yaoundé Accord of 1999, it was not until 2005, that its involvement in regional programs really began to take off. Most significantly since 2008, with the expansion to its current staff, the Executive Secretariat (ES) has demonstrated a solid work ethic and motivation in its interactions with partners, governments, and institutions. Both senior and junior staffs regularly work afterhours and during vacation. The ES has successfully made a name for itself in international circles as one of the few functioning, respected regional level organizations working in the conservation and forestry domain in the developing world. Internal meetings advance and decide issues and the ES regularly reaches out to seek involvement in relevant fora. Successful facilitation of some degree of trans-boundary cooperation, negotiation, and discussion between member states has become an expectation of its workshops and seminars. While certainly experiencing growing pains and limited capacity, this functionality and motivation should be capitalized on.

Climate Change Involvement and Recognition

The thrust of Climate Change to the forefront of global issues has raised the prominence of Central Africa and its forests to the international stage. While lacking the enabling environments of many other developing countries⁵³, including many African neighbors, COMIFAC member countries hold the 2nd largest dense humid rainforest in the world, which has until now taken a far backseat to its Amazonian cousin. Although DRC holds the largest percentage of the Congo Basin Forest, the trans-boundary nature of this forest's management has brought COMIFAC, as the regional forest coordinator, to the spotlight. COMIFAC has advanced regional communal positions for Conference of Party (COP) Climate negotiations, where they are likewise recognized as a relevant party. The ES regularly convenes the Climate Change Working Group⁵⁴ to advance regional capacity and coordination.

Interest in Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), or as an example, Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+), has complemented the climate change issues in the region towing in a wide variety of new projects, programs, and donors. Existing development projects and programs are increasingly including or adapting their interventions to include PES and/or REDD+ aspects. As a matter of functionality, PES efforts including REDD+ projects in Central Africa integrally involve the forests and their management. While many details of REDD+ are yet to be determined in detail, it appears highly likely that some sort of rigorous and transparent national carbon monitoring, accounting, and reporting system will be required to address data management in order to respond to

⁵³ The six primary forested countries of COMIFAC have an average 2010 Corruption Perception Index ranking of 149.3 out of 178 countries as defined by Transparency International.

⁵⁴ See section 2.4 Other COMIFAC Organizations

the international community demands and specifically and ultimately, investors. Even any sub national projects should be tiered to national systems as noted in the recent Cancun Agreements.⁵⁵ National systems by nature are created at a national level, but because of the current lack of institutional capacity in the region to handle such responsibilities and tasks, regional models and economies of scale approaches are a popular topic of exploration, which necessarily implicate COMIFAC. Most of these regional PES/REDD+ coordination initiatives are a long ways from being realized at a functional level, but COMIFAC has been involved in them from the beginning, so will be integrally involved in their execution.

Significant Support from Donors and Projects will Increase Legitimacy and Profile

Whether because of a recognition of the functionality of the COMIFAC ES or a heightened interest in the Congo Basin forests because of climate change, COMIFAC and its ES are experiencing a significant increase in interest and support from international partners and donors. As discussed in Section 4, the USAID/CARPE program has been the US Government’s primary method of contribution to the CBFP and thus COMIFAC Convergence Plan, however with the USFS-COMIFAC Letter of Intent, the US Government is giving more direct support to COMIFAC, and specifically the ES. With their facilitations of the CBFP, the French and German cooperations have an established relationship of direct support to the COMIFAC ES that will continue for the immediate future. The Franco-German COMIFAC support office and its 13 staff provide support to the ES in a variety of technical and administrative areas.⁵⁶ The Canadian Cooperation, with its current facilitation of the CBFP, will be ramping up their activities, both in the region as well as to the ES.⁵⁷ The Japanese will also be sending two experts to support the ES in complement to their work in Gabon and DRC.⁵⁸ These interventions as well as new COMIFAC support projects (like PACEBCo, the GEF/WB Regional REDD project, and the CBFF/FAO Regional MRV project) will put significant resources at COMIFAC’s disposal. They will increase the technical and administrative capacity of the ES. These resources and increased capacity will raise the competence and profile of COMIFAC in the region and at the international level.

Some Consistent Financial Support from Some Member Countries

Long term financing as a challenge will be discussed below, but at the same time, the fact that some member countries have consistently followed through on their commitments to contribute to the financing of COMIFAC is an achievement, and should be recognized and supported. Table 1 below is an updated list of contributions made by COMIFAC member countries.

Table 1: COMIFAC Country Contributions since 2002

	Contribution due since 2002 (million fcfa)	Amount contributed up through Sept 30 2010	Balance due	Percentage paid
Burundi	184.20	125.07	59.13	68%
Cameroun	261.60	261.60	0.00	100%

⁵⁵ Decision 1/CP.16, The Cancun Agreements: Outcome of the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (UNFCCC)
<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf#page=2>

⁵⁶ See section 3.0 COMIFAC Partners.

⁵⁷ See section 3.0 COMIFAC Partners.

⁵⁸ See section 3.0 COMIFAC Partners.

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Congo	261.60	113.19	148.41	43%
Gabon	261.60	200.20	61.40	77%
Guinée Eq.	261.60	169.50	92.10	65%
RCA	261.60	219.50	42.10	84%
RDC	261.60	77.50	184.10	30%
Rwanda	184.20	10.63	173.57	6%
Sao Tomé	184.20	0.00	184.20	0%
Tchad	261.60	141.70	119.90	54%
<i>S/Total</i>	<i>2,383.80</i>	<i>1,318.89</i>	<i>1,064.91</i>	55%
CEEAC		25.00		
non identifié		30.70		
Total	2,383.80	1,374.59	1,064.91	58%

(source : Mécanisme de financement autonome de la COMIFAC – note d'accompagnement à l'aide mémoire – octobre 2010 - COMIFAC)

COMIFAC/CBFP Landscapes Gaining Momentum

The priority conservation COMIFAC/CBFP landscapes have made notable progress since their original identification during the Conservation Priority-Setting Workshop for Central Africa in 2000. Indeed of the 12 landscapes, six are formally recognized through trans-boundary inter-governmental agreements or other national level pilot initiatives.⁵⁹ All 12 have established, integrated landscape level management plans drafted and under implementation. COMIFAC has been intimately involved in the facilitation of trans-boundary agreements, and management coordination in the trans-boundary landscapes. Additionally more programs, projects, and donors are working in the region, using a landscape approach⁶⁰, to complement the existing efforts of USAID/CARPE partners.

5.2 Challenges for COMIFAC

Long-term Financing

The COMIFAC biannual report presented to the Council of Ministers in Kinshasa in October 2010 focused heavily on the financial sustainability of the COMIFAC ES as a primary challenge. Rightly so, the ES is acutely concerned about its precarious coffers. The COMIFAC ES has three budgets: 1) the base operating budget covers salaries, office, and supplies for the ES; 2) the supporting budget is an extended operating budget that also covers larger COMIFAC organization⁶¹; 3) The last budget is the Convergence Plan implementation budget. Table 1 above illustrates the history of member country contributions as well as the 2011 estimated base operating costs. The extended operating budget is currently relied on

⁵⁹ Dja-Minkebe-Odzala Tri-national (TRIDOM), Gamba-Conkouati , Sangha Tri-national (TNS), Lac Tele-Lac Tumba, and Maringa-Lopori-Wamba (MLW), and Virungas.

⁶⁰ See the African Development Bank project: PACEBCo and RAPAC

⁶¹ : This includes: working group meetings; COMIFAC participation in international dialogues; national coordinator supplementary budgets; support to COMIFAC treaty sub-regional institutions; and COMIFAC Ministers' and steering committee meetings. See section 2.4

partners⁶² to support and execute, but is essential to the functioning and legitimacy of the COMIFAC ES and thus COMIFAC in general. It is hoped that eventually the member country contributions will eventually be able to support this budget as well. The Convergence Plan budget is and will continue to be executed through partners, with COMIFAC playing a coordination/harmonization role.

Despite the regular contributions of some countries, the financial viability of the COMIFAC ES continues to be precarious, with over one billion fcfa (\$2 million US) in arrears. There have been occasions where salaries of the ES staff have gone unpaid, or projects like PACEBCo have fronted payments for the ES. As mentioned above in section 2.2, some salaries of members of the COMIFAC ES are paid by donors and projects. The direct support of PACEBCo, GIZ, and the French Cooperation have been indispensable to the current success of the COMIFAC ES.

As discussed above in section 2.2, the COMIFAC incorporation to CEEAC was supposed to include a switch in the financing mechanism: from a 30 million fcfa (about \$60k US) contribution to a 0.01% variable contribution based on timber tax revenues. If fully respected, this switch would create a revenue increase of an estimated four billion fcfa/year (\$8 million US). CAR has already started adherence, but this can most probably be attributed to the fact that it lowers their contribution. Other countries with higher forest revenues will take much more convincing. Additionally, the new financial mechanism will pass money through CEEAC, rather than direct to COMIFAC, so it is also plausible that CEEAC might decide to disperse the monies to its other priorities.

Member Country Political Support and Consistency

Financial contributions of COMIFAC member countries are certainly a strong indicator of general levels of support, however, the overall correlations are not always inline. The attendance to regional meetings by high ranking officials, is a manifestation of political will. The October 2010 COMIFAC Ministers' Council, only had four ministers present, and representatives from five others; Cameroon, who is current on its financial contributions, had no high ranking ministry official present. Sao Tome was not present. Rwanda and Burundi sent mid-level representatives. The Heads of State meeting in 2012, its attendance and results, will be a strong indicator of the future of COMIFAC. Originally planned for 2011, it was pushed to 2012 because of a last minute scheduling conflict with the Three Basins Summit, supported and organized primarily by Republic of Congo.

In addition to high level meeting attendance, COMIFAC often convenes workshops/conferences for its working groups⁶³. A challenge within this context is not only obtaining consistent participation from the member countries, but also getting the same participants for pertinent topics and workshop series. Often, countries will send different representatives to consecutive workshops which limit their effectiveness. COMIFAC is at its essence a regional convening/coordination entity, and will always be limited by the sum motivation and consistency of its member countries. If member countries continue to not place priority on COMIFAC convocations and their participatory continuity, the viability and functionality of COMIFAC will be greatly impeded.

⁶² See section 3.

⁶³ See section 2.4

Ineffective National Coordinators

Related to Member Country Political Support is the relative effectiveness and engagement of the COMIFAC National Coordinators. These National Coordinators are appointed by the respective national ministries as a part-time position to coordinate communications between the ministries and COMIFAC. Additionally they are the primary point person responsible for the elaboration and execution of the country operational plans which place national activities and strategies into the COMIFAC convergence plan framework. Unfortunately, for the majority of the coordinators, the emphasis of their focus is not on COMIFAC activities as they report directly to their ministries and have no discretionary budget towards COMIFAC specific goals. The level of effectiveness and involvement of the National Coordinators varies between member countries, with several appearing uninterested in their COMIFAC role. In certain cases, without the designation of more effective National Coordinators, COMIFAC risks to become ineffective in that particular country. However, without operational budgets, more direct partner engagement, and/or high-level national interest, motivation for engagement will be difficult to stimulate.

COMIFAC does engage the National Coordinators on a semi-regular basis to attend regional meetings, but they often send delegates. The effectiveness and engagement of these coordinators is key to the effectiveness of COMIFAC itself as an institution, as the coordinators are the link to national governments and represent COMIFAC to their peers. Member country political support is thus directly correlated to their work.

Complexity of Regional Coordination of Countries, Donors, and Projects

National sovereignty is a very sensitive issue regarding the operation of COMIFAC in the region. Many member countries fear that an increase in the operations of COMIFAC will necessarily entail a decrease in their national autonomy regarding the forest sector and now climate change/REDD+ issues. Government representatives strongly advocate for separate bilateral programs rather than regionally centralized ones. COMIFAC must walk a sensitive tightrope between its Convergence Plan execution and its member countries' political will as it is simultaneously the focal point for regional coordination yet dependent on bilateral support. There is a zero-sum mentality that must be overcome at a national level for a regional entity like COMIFAC to become more functional in the long-run.

Despite existing since only 2005, COMIFAC has within its institutional framework, duplicative organizational structure and non-functioning institutions. As a result of donor politics and national preferences, certain institutions continue to be implicated or supported despite obvious inefficiencies or ineffectiveness. A streamlined institutional framework is necessary for a fledgling organization to be effective. A PACEBCo organizational audit of COMIFAC is planned in 2011, that will make recommendations along these lines, however it is not certain that these recommendations will be implemented.

Donors and projects often approach COMIFAC and regional projects as a simpler way to engage in the Congo Basin and its quickly rising global forest profile. This approach has economies of scale, but can also exacerbate the sovereignty issues if not approached properly and thoughtfully.

Limited Capacity of Executive Secretariat

The COMIFAC Executive Secretariat is limited by several factors in their effective operation. In addition and related to the financial constraints mentioned above, they do not have sufficient human, administrative, or technical capacity to be responsive and engaged in all the activities that they are responsible for and that come across their desks. With the significant increase in interest and programs by the international community in the region, COMIFAC is overstretched to attend meetings, host delegations, and organize/coordinate its member country involvement.

Senior staff are constantly on travel, and are not able to focus on strategic issues, management, and coordination. As such, COMIFAC is often reacting to projects and partners inquiries rather than proactively coordinating COMIFAC and COMIFAC member countries engagement. Ideally their staff would be at least triple the size to effectively manage the workload, including country representatives based in the ES, more technical staff, and an increase in administrative and management personnel.

The large increase in interest by international actors in the past three years has significantly raised the demands on the organizational structure of COMIFAC. As a recent institutional audit by PACEBCo highlights, the COMIFAC ES is in dire need of administrative and financial reform to respond to the growth in its portfolio. More appropriate financial accounting systems and organizational management structures and procedures are needed. Currently a procedures manual was elaborated in April 2011, but it remains to be seen how much this will be executed. There are several partners who are engaged in this domain, including PACEBCo, GIZ, AFD, and now GEF.

While financial resources certainly constrain capacity, there is also a limited expertise of natural resource technicians with adequate experience in the Central African region. Thus even if financial resources were available to increase staff levels, it is probable that COMIFAC's increase would come at the direct detriment to member country government staff capacity, which in turn limits COMIFAC's effectiveness by proxy.

5.3 Key Issues to Watch

DRC Presidency

The 2010 handover of the COMIFAC presidency from CAR to DRC presents both a potential challenge and opportunity. CAR led by example⁶⁴ and managed a fairly effective and engaged term (and should be commended as such), but due to its relative size and location, often lacked the influence to really push issues. DRC, as the majority host to the Congo Basin forests, has this power, but has to this point been less motivated than other countries to support COMIFAC in its effective operation (including financial contributions). The recent legislative approval in DRC of the COMIFAC treaty could potentially change their engagement. Motivated DRC leadership within COMIFAC towards regional coordination and for

⁶⁴ CAR is one of two countries (with Cameroon) who is mostly up to date on its financial contributions and consistently sends qualified representatives to COMIFAC convocations. However much of this can be attributed the Executive Secretary's, Raymond Mbitikon, a former CAR Minister, personal influence and connections in the country.

COMIFAC's viability (financial and political) could propel the COMIFAC ES to new heights, but lackluster interest could also doom it to mediocrity during this crucial period.

COMIFAC Heads of State 2011 Meeting

The 3rd COMIFAC Heads of State meeting was recently moved from the planned mid 2011 in Kinshasa to 2012 in order to not conflict with the "three basins summit"⁶⁵ in Brazzaville planned for June 2011.⁶⁶ The Heads of State meeting provides a high level forum for discussion and resolution of the issues facing and future of COMIFAC. The attendance itself will be a strong indicator of the upcoming effectiveness of COMIFAC. Additionally the resolutions and language adopted by the leaders for the presented issues will establish the manner in which the above challenges are addressed. Strong and clear language on key issues could unbridle COMIFAC in many of its operations, however vague and unresolved agendas could further hinder and restrict COMIFAC's development.

COMIFAC ES Building

The current headquarters of the COMIFAC ES is insufficient to house its current staff and meetings, without mention of the potential growth that COMIFAC could see in the coming years. Cameroon promised to provide a sufficient building, however the resources to adequately rehabilitate the designated site have been lacking. The African Development Bank has recently put forth 200 million fcfa (~\$400,000), but an additional estimated 150 million fcfa are needed (~\$300,000). This site would house both the COMIFAC ES as well as its direct partners and projects,⁶⁷ enabling enhanced internal coordination. A renovated building would improve the international and regional image and respect of COMIFAC.

Management of REDD+ and its Potential Populist Effect

Climate change and specifically REDD+ have swept Central Africa in the last several years, with several large projects and programs currently being put into place. For better or worse, as mentioned above, COMIFAC has tied itself to the regional REDD+ endeavors. The regional mandate of COMIFAC synchronizes well with the economies of scale approaches proposed to elevate the regional institutional management necessary for functional monitoring and reporting of REDD+ projects. Individual bilateral systems would require significantly more investment than a regionally coordinated one. Realistic expectations regarding REDD+ and other PES efforts must be maintained at regional, national, and community levels throughout this process. Functional and durable REDD+ systems could take significantly longer to develop than optimists expect. Some in the international community, notably international advocacy NGOs (with occasionally national linkages or affiliates) are concerned about possible negative impacts of REDD+ without first addressing land tenure reform (who owns the carbon?), human rights of indigenous peoples (no rights no REDD), and assuring social and environment safeguards are effectively put in place (REDD might have detrimental effects on biodiversity as well as already tenuous access and rights of locals to the lands and resources in their vicinity). The resulting success or failure of these approaches and projects will necessarily reflect on COMIFAC's reputation and viability.

⁶⁵ Amazon, SE Asia, and COMIFAC.

⁶⁶ The 1st was in 1999, which created COMIFAC, and the 2nd was in 2005.

⁶⁷ Partners directly supporting the COMIFAC ES (French Cooperation, GTZ, JICA, USFS, PACEBCo, etc)

Revising, Monitoring, and Bilateral Implementation of COMIFAC Convergence Plan

As approved by the Heads of State in 2005, the current COMIFAC Convergence Plan has 10 axes. Additionally there exists some duplication within the axes regarding several topics. It is recognized that a revision of the Convergence Plan is needed to reflect current realities of projects and partners on the ground and new regional and global issues. Most notably, the issue of Climate Change and REDD+ are not currently represented in these 10 as prominently as their activities would warrant. The revision of the Convergence Plan presents an important opportunity for member countries and other partners to synergize their priorities and identify and address regional needs.

As a framework for activity coordination, the Convergence Plan should serve as a menu and guide for intervention and coordination, rather than as a presentation and summary of ideas. Thus the document needs to be restructured in a way that allows the COMIFAC ES to proactively coordinate, guide, and monitor partner activities. A monitoring system should be established to track the Plan's execution and identify gaps for COMIFAC to direct and coordinate interventions. This is a priority of the Canadian CBFP Facilitation, and its relative effectiveness will enable COMIFAC and further regional conservation effort efficiency.

Furthermore, the Convergence Plan (revised or current) needs to be integrated into national strategies through the elaboration of national *Plans d'Opération du Plan du Convergence* (POPC). Currently no national POPCs exist, which should link the Convergence Plan to national activities, including monitoring. This is also related to member country political support for COMIFAC and available financial resources.

Burundi & Rwanda

In 2007, Burundi and Rwanda joined the East African Community (EAC), formally signaling their strengthening economic and language ties to the East, especially Tanzania. Not part of the six primary forested core countries of COMIFAC⁶⁸, Burundi and Rwanda straddle the cultural and natural differences of Central and East Africa. While their active participation is not crucial to COMIFAC's effectiveness, along with Uganda, they provide important tourism and recreational links to the Congo Forest Basin's development.

Angola

The 2010 COMIFAC Ministers' Council reemphasized the interest of COMIFAC, its member countries, and Angola to pursue the integration of Angola into Central Africa and become a member of COMIFAC. Having not insignificant forested areas contiguous with DRC in its northern areas, Angola also straddles the Southern African ecosystems, such as the Okavango, so it is not certain that it will throw its interests northwards. In the long term, Angola, as the former bread basket of Africa and its developed oil fields, could quickly become a significant regional player as they continue to recover from recent internal crisis. However, the language difference already provides difficulty for Equatorial Guinea, and would surely inhibit effective participation of Angolan delegates.

⁶⁸ Cameroon, CAR, Congo, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon

Annex 1: COMIFAC Convergence Plan

I- VISION

Sustainable and joint management by Central African States of their forest resources for the wellbeing of their people, the preservation of biodiversity and the protection of the global environment.

II- GENERAL OBJECTIVE

“Sustainable and joint management by Central African States of the forest resources of the subregion and of a network of protected areas representative of the biodiversity and the ecosystems, for the wellbeing of the population and to ensure global balance.”

III- STRATEGIC AREAS OF THE CONVERGENCE PLAN

1- HARMONISATION OF FOREST AND TAXATION POLICIES

- Implementation of international agreements and conventions;
- Harmonisation of forest policies;
- Harmonisation of taxation systems.

2- KNOWLEDGE OF THE RESOURCE

- Inventory of forest resources: timber -wildlife - NTFPs / medicinal plants;
- Strengthening and/or setting up national and regional observatories;
- Geo-spatial monitoring of forest resources.

3- MANAGEMENT OF ECOSYSTEMS AND REFORESTATION

- Forest land development;
- Management of forest concessions and protected areas;
- Regeneration and reforestation;
- Combating desertification.

4- BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

- Strengthening the national network of protected areas;
- Joint management of transboundary zones and protected areas;
- Phylogenetic resources.

5- SUSTAINABLE VALORISATION OF FOREST RESOURCES

- Economic development of the timber, wildlife, NTFPs and tourism sub-sectors;
- Monitoring the management and utilisation of forest resources/control;
- Forest certification and traceability;
- Combating illegal exploitation and poaching.

6- DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

- Alternative activities to poaching;
- Income-generating micro-projects for the local population.

7- CAPACITY BUILDING, STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION, INFORMATION, TRAINING

- Stakeholder participation / Forums ;
- Involving the population;
- Communication/information/sensitisation ;
- Academic, vocational and continuous training.

8- RESEARCH - DEVELOPMENT

- Forest research programmes;
- Valorisation of traditional knowledge ;
- Epidemics / zoonotic diseases.

9- DEVELOPMENT OF FUNDING MECHANISMS

- National forest funds;
- Innovative funding mechanisms (Land conversion taxes, the percentage for COMIFAC, debt-for-nature swap etc.);
- Debt reduction mechanisms - HIPC;
- Bilateral and multilateral funding sources.

10- COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Sub-regional cooperation and development of partnerships (COMIFAC Treaty, Implementation of the Convergence Plan, Forums, etc.);
- Interagency cooperation agreements.

IV- RESULTS EXPECTED

1. HARMONISATION OF FOREST AND TAXATION POLICIES

- COMIFAC Treaty is ratified by each member State;
- Important international conventions on forest and biodiversity are ratified by member countries;
- Each member State has designed a forest sector development programme that fully mainstreams the guidelines and strategies of the sub-regional Convergence Plan;
- Forest management standards of the different States of the sub-region are compatible;
- Member States correctly apply common guidelines and criteria on sustainable forest management;
- The different taxation systems are harmonised and compatible with sustainable forest management requirements;
- The size of forest concessions is compatible with economic and ecological requirements;
- Forest concessions are managed in such a manner as to generate economic development activities in the hinterland;
- A sub-regional strategy to control exploitation, movement of forest products and poaching is designed and implemented;
- National regulations provide for environmental impact assessment prior to all major projects in the forest.

2- KNOWLEDGE OF THE RESOURCE

- Inventory of forest/wildlife/NTFP resources is carried out;
- A sub-regional forest resources database is established;
- A geo-spatial monitoring system and observatories are set up.

3- MANAGEMENT OF FOREST ECOSYSTEMS AND REFORESTATION

- A land management plan, including a permanent forest estate, is prepared;
- The permanent forest estate, especially forest concessions and protected areas, is developed;
- Reforestation allows for the restoration of degraded lands, increase in forest cover and accounts for a significant volume of timber production (lumber, firewood, etc.);
- Forest activities contribute to desertification control.

4- BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

- A network of protected areas representative of the biodiversity and ecosystems, including the marine, mangrove and mountain ecosystems of the sub-region, is designed and put in place;
- The phylogenetic resources of the sub-region are protected;
- The transboundary zones of Congo Basin countries are jointly managed.

5- SUSTAINABLE VALORISATION OF FOREST RESOURCES

- Social and economic activities ensuing from the sustainable management of forests contribute to the creation of new jobs and to poverty alleviation;
- Partnership agreements on the control and monitoring of resource utilisation are established and implemented.
- *Timber sector*
 - Increase in the number of forest species exploited;
 - Local processing of nearly all the timber produced;
 - Increase in the number of jobs in the timber processing industry;
 - An intra-regional timber market is operational;
 - Development of regional and international timber trade,
- *Wildlife sector*
 - Greater contribution of wildlife resources to economic growth
- *Non-Timber Forest Products sector – NTFPs*
 - The non-timber forest products and phyto-genetic resources sectors are organized And contribute to the economic development of the neighbouring population.
- *Tourism sector*
 - Central African ecosystems underlie the development of tourist activities.
- *Monitoring and control of the management and use of resources*
 - Principles, criteria and indicators of sustainable management of forest resources are implemented;
 - The traceability of forest and wildlife products coming from the sub-region is guaranteed;
 - The local population is sensitised and involved in the monitoring and control of resource exploitation;

- The transboundary movement of forest and wildlife products is monitored and gradually brought under control on the basis of mutually agreed conventions;
- Security at frontiers and peace building within the sub-region are improved upon.

6- DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

- Alternative activities to poaching are implemented;
- Income-generating micro-projects are designed for the local population;
- Resources generated from the forest are fairly distributed and contribute to poverty alleviation among the local population.

7- CAPACITY BUILDING, STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION, INFORMATION, TRAINING

- National and sub-regional consultation forums allow for the effective involvement of all stakeholders;
- Specialised training institutions are networked and admit students from all the countries of the Congo Basin;
- Sub-regional institutions train professionals in the different specialties necessary for the development of forest activities on the basis of updated and harmonised curricula;
- Networks of modular training, retraining and further training of professionals are operational;
- Joint management contracts are established and implemented;
- All players involved in the management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa are organised, hold consultations and uphold an internal code of ethics that is coherent with the guidelines of the Convergence Plan.

8- RESEARCH - DEVELOPMENT

- An applied research programme that mainstreams all the concerns relating to the sustainable management of forests is operational in the sub-region;
- A network of forest information management computer systems is operational in each country and centralised at the level of a COMIFAC-based sub-regional observatory;
- A scientific group operates within COMIFAC.

9- SETTING UP INNOVATIVE FUNDING MECHANISMS

- Each country of the sub-region is endowed with a forest fund;
- The CBFP finances the implementation of the Convergence Plan;
- NEPAD contributes to the funding of the Convergence Plan;
- New funding mechanisms have been studied, adopted and implemented to fund forest resources conservation and management activities: carbon wells, debt-for-nature swap, trust funds, debt reduction programmes, compensations for the prohibition of exploitation of some zones, private foundations, etc.
- Institution of a permanent forest land conversion tax in the countries of the sub-region to supply a sub-regional fund for the reforestation of low tree cover zones.

10- COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

- COMIFAC Treaty is ratified by each member State;

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- COMIFAC designs, guides and coordinates the implementation of forest development strategies in the Congo Basin are;
- COMIFAC organs contribute efficiently to the orientation and coordination of the implementation of sub-regional strategies contained in the Convergence Plan;
- Sub-regional and international organisations work in partnership with COMIFAC within the framework of the Convergence Plan and cooperation agreements;
- A framework laying down the ethical rules governing the technical and financial management of projects and programmes jointly financed in the sub-region is established and implemented;
- Partnership agreements between the different parties involved in resource exploitation are established and effectively implemented.

Annex 2: USFS – COMIFAC Letter of Intent



**LETTER OF INTENT
BETWEEN
THE CENTRAL AFRICA FOREST COMMISSION**

AND

**THE UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE
(INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM DIVISION)**

**WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REDD WORKPLAN
AND CONVERGENCE PLAN (OPERATIONS PLAN 2009-2011)
OF COMIFAC**

1. Context

1.1 The Central African Forest Commission

The Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) is the primary authority for decision-making and coordination of sub-regional actions and initiatives pertaining to the conservation and sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests. COMIFAC has developed a convergence plan followed by an operations plan which identifies COMIFAC priorities for sustainable management of the Central Africa forests. This plan is organized around the following vision:

”The Central African nations manage their forest resources in a sustainable and concerted manner for the welfare of their populations, biodiversity conservation, and the global environment.”

Its overall objective is as follows:

“The Central African nations manage in a sustainable and concerted manner the sub-region forest resources, as well as a network of protected areas representative of the biodiversity and ecosystems for the welfare of their populations and for the global equilibrium.”

This plan provides ten strategic themes aimed at moving Central Africa toward this ambitious vision.⁶⁹

1.2 Support for Implementation of the Convergence Plan

The Convergence Plan, notably strategic themes 9 and 10, as well as its 2009-2011 Operations Plan (POPC) speak to the need for improved partnerships and coordination among actors at a sub-regional level.⁷⁰ Additionally, a regional workshop on Reducing Emissions from Avoided Deforestation and Degradation (REDD), held in Kinshasa by COMIFAC in last January in prelude to negotiations on a future post Kyoto 2012 climate agreement, further highlighted the need to support COMIFAC, and the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat in particular, in a coordinated manner.⁷¹

1.3 Support for COMIFAC Climate Working Group

The COMIFAC Climate Working Group, established in 2006 with the support of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), has been ”an important forum for considering new ideas, input and analytical results.” At the September 2008 meeting in Bangui, Central African Republic, the ministers formalized the Climate Working Group in the Bangui Declaration and called upon the international donor community to support them in preparing themselves for participation in a future REDD regime, as well as to strengthen their coordination efforts through

⁶⁹ Convergence Plan: For conservation and sustainable management of Central Africa forest ecosystems. Yaoundé, July 2004. COMIFAC Executive Secretariat.

⁷⁰ For example, Strategic theme 9 – Development of financing mechanisms; and Strategic Theme 10 – Sub-regional cooperation and partnership development.

⁷¹ Debriefing on the Regional REDD Workshop – COMIFAC – Kinshasa, January 27-30, 2009.

COMIFAC.⁷² It has been noted that the Climate Working Group indeed should be supported strongly as a critical forum for developing a regional position within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) going forward to the Conference of Parties (COP) 15 and beyond.⁷³

1.4 Congo Basin Forest Partnership

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) was launched at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg as a non-binding partnership registered with the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. As a "Type II" partnership, it represents a voluntary multi-stakeholder initiative contributing to the implementation of an intergovernmental commitment, i.e., the Yaoundé Declaration; additionally, it brings together the 10 member states of COMIFAC, donor agencies, international organizations, NGOs, scientific institutions, and representatives from the private sector. CBFP works in close relationship with COMIFAC.⁷⁴

1.5 Central African Regional Program for the Environment and the US Forest Service – International Programs

The Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) is a long-term initiative by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to promote sustainable natural resource management in the Congo Basin by supporting increased local, national, and regional natural resource management capacity. CARPE is the key mechanism through which the United States contributes to CBFP.⁷⁵ The United States Forest Service through its International Programs (USFS-IP) is a key partner in CARPE.

2. Purpose of the Letter of Intent

Recognizing the need for broad-based technical cooperation and coordination and the previously described institutions, programs, and partnerships, the USFS and the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat (ES), have worked together with USAID/CARPE to initiate a partnership through which USFS will provide technical support to the COMIFAC ES for the Operations Plan for the Convergence Plan 2009-2011, as well as its Climate Working Group.

This Letter of Intent is agreed upon by the Central Africa Forest Commission, or COMIFAC, and the United States Forest Service, through its International Programs, or USFS-IP, otherwise designated "the parties".

The purpose of this Letter of Intent is for the USFS-IP to provide technical experts in various areas to the COMIFAC ES, in accordance with the process defined in the Operations Plan 2009-2011 for the Convergence Plan (POPC) and the REDD work agenda for the Climate Working Group. This support will be provided through a series of short or medium term

⁷² COMIFAC/CBFP/WWF Workshop on donor initiatives to support preparation for REDD mechanisms in the Congo Basin. Discussion Document.

⁷³ COMIFAC/CBFP/WWF Congo Basin REDD Donor Dialogue, Washington, October 23, 2008. Meeting Report.

⁷⁴ As described at www.cbf.org/.

⁷⁵ As described at carpe.umd.edu/.

assignments during which USFS technical advisors will work with the COMIFAC ES on a daily basis in order to carry out a number of key components for the execution of the REDD work agenda and Convergence Plan (POPC 2009-2011) as described above.

3. Objective of the Letter of Intent

The objective of this Letter of Intent is to assist the COMIFAC ES in playing its key role, i.e., through support for the implementation of the POPC and REDD workplan. Specifically, it identifies the roles and responsibilities of each party (USFS-IP and COMIFAC ES). This Letter of Intent should serve as a general guide on the overall form of technical assistance and mode of collaboration amongst the COMIFAC ES and USFS. Once the general guidelines are agreed upon, then more detailed work plans can be developed and more precise support can be planned and executed.

4. Definitions of the Acronyms Used in this Letter of Intent

The definitions of the acronyms used are presented below:

CARPE	Central African Regional Program for the Environment
COMIFAC	Central African Forest Commission
COP	Conference of Parties
ES	Executive Secretariat
POPC	Operations Plan 2009-2011 for the Convergence Plan
CBFP	Congo Basin Forest Partnership
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Avoided Deforestation and Degradation
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USFS-IP	United States Forest Service – International Programs

5. Presentation of the Parties

5.1 COMIFAC

The Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) has primary authority for decision-making and coordination of sub-regional actions and initiatives pertaining to the conservation and sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests.

COMIFAC, based in Yaoundé, Cameroon, was established by treaty on February 5, 2005. This commission enjoys legal and moral entity, as well as administrative and financial autonomy. It is in charge, among others, of monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the

Convergence Plan. As such, COMIFAC has the mandate to provide guidance, harmonization, and monitoring for environment and forest policies in Central Africa.

The entity responsible and in charge of the technical execution of this letter of intent is the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat (ES). The ES is the administrative head in charge of following up on the letter of intent, thus contributing to its sound execution.

The technical leader for this letter of intent at COMIFAC is the Assistant to the Executive Secretary and Technical Coordinator.

5.2 USFS-IP

The US Forest Service was established in 1905 with the mandate to ensure national forest health, diversity, and productivity in order to meet the needs of present and future generations through a resource land planning strategy, an ecosystem approach, and partnership development.

As an agency with long-standing experience in managing 80 million ha of US land, USFS has excellent institutional expertise, as well as extensive practical experience from the lessons learned in various areas related to national forest and grassland management, such as climate change, ecosystem services, fire, global disaster support, invasive species, land management and planning, natural resource management, sustainable forestry, sustainable tourism, and water resource management. Such institutional expertise offers invaluable assets for COMIFAC as it continues the implementation of the Convergence Plan and the REDD workplan for its Climate Working Group.

As an implementing partner with the Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), initiative launched in 1995 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), USFS provides targeted technical assistance aimed at capacity building for improved forest management in the Congo Basin, focusing its efforts on forest management and planning processes implemented by CARPE partners and by the host country governments.

The person responsible for this letter of intent at USFS-IP is the Central Africa Program Coordinator with USFS, based in Washington.

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6. Responsibilities of the Parties

6.1 COMIFAC Responsibilities

COMIFAC primary responsibilities under this letter of intent include:

- Providing USFS-IP technical advisors with all moral support needed for smooth implementation of technical assistance;
- Facilitating working relations among the USFS-IP technical advisors and the various bodies, regional and sub-regional organizations, committees, and relevant working groups operating in the sub-region;
- Facilitating the preparation and holding of meetings with stakeholders;
- Establishing the terms of reference in consultation with USFS for technical assistance missions;
- Integrating the USFS technical assistance assignments into the POPC and REDD workplan;
- Ensuring follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations proposed by USFS technical assistance missions;
- Depending on availability, providing USFS-IP technical advisors with working space, with internet connection if possible, on COMIFAC premises in order to enable them to carry out their activities smoothly.

6.2 USFS Responsibilities

USFS-IP will mobilize technical advisors for COMIFAC ES in Yaoundé to conduct short or medium term missions with possible renewal depending on: 1) COMIFAC needs; and 2) USFS-IP budget restrictions. During that period technical advisors will work on a daily basis at the COMIFAC premises with the COMIFAC ES staff in charge of the REDD program and the implementation of the Convergence Plan.

Within their mandate the USFS-IP technical advisors may provide possible support for conducting studies and preparing regional workshops selected in the priority areas mentioned in section 7 below.

Technical advisors will share the lessons learned as well as the tools and methodologies that have helped USFS to manage US national forests for multiple uses. They will adapt US strategies to the context suitable for Central Africa.

USFS advisors will conduct consultations and will work closely with a large range of actors involved in activities regarding Central African forests and environment. These actors will include agents from ministries in charge of forest ecosystem conservation and sustainable

management, environment and planning, REDD National Committees, government representatives, NGOs specializing in conservation, as well as representatives from the private sector, World Bank, and sub-regional public organizations.

USFS-IP technical advisors with COMIFAC will ensure coordination, submit reports to the USFS International Programs Coordinator – Central Africa Program – and will advise this office on any additional technical assistance that COMIFAC may need in the future. These communications will be made in view of strengthening their activities and ensuring follow-up during and after their period of assignment in Yaoundé.

Upon completion of their assignment in Central Africa, technical advisors will return to their original post in their respective countries. They will remain, however, available for short-term recurrent assignments to Central Africa to provide targeted assistance, as needed.

7. Scope of Work and Expected Results

The specific areas of the USFS technical expertise for the implementation of this USFS/COMIFAC partnership will include ten strategic themes of the Convergence Plan and three components of its REDD workplan listed below:

1 – Convergence Plan

- Harmonious forest and fiscal policies (Theme 1)
- Knowledge of the resource (Theme 2)
- Ecosystem development and reforestation (Theme 3)
- Biodiversity conservation (Theme 4)
- Sustainable forest resource development (Theme 5)
- Capacity building, actor involvement, information, and training (Theme 7)
- Research and development (Theme 8)
- Development of financing mechanisms (Theme 9)

2- REDD work agenda

- Reference scenarios on emissions linked to deforestation and forest degradation
- Measures to monitor greenhouse gas emissions (measurement and monitoring)
- Reporting – Information communication

Each technical assistance mission will produce a final trip report. In this regard, USFS technical advisors assigned to COMIFAC will submit reports detailing the status of the activities carried out with the USFS/COMIFAC partnership. These reports will also suggest recommendations to COMIFAC in order to channel its efforts and initiate the next stages of the process.

8. Results Review and Distribution

All products (publications and reports) resulting from this letter of intent will be addressed exclusively to COMIFAC and USFS-IP for a period of 30 business days. During that period

products will be subject to an internal review process (within USFS and COMIFAC) for comments and amendments prior to public distribution. Beyond the 30 business days the products will be distributed in paper and electronic formats by USFS and COMIFAC.

Any publications prepared by USFS-IP under this letter of intent are contingent upon COMIFAC approval. In the event of differences between USFS and COMIFAC on factual information or interpretation of factual information at the end of the 30 business day period, the perspective of either institution will be included in the final product.

9. Compliance with the Letter of Intent

Each party, as far as it is concerned, is responsible for complying with this letter of intent. Compliance with the letter of intent is necessarily contingent upon adequate and allocated funding which will be solicited but is not guaranteed by the signature of this letter of intent.

10. Honoring Commitments

This letter of intent is not a contract of exclusive rights. COMIFAC, however, commits itself to providing USFS with all support needed in view of facilitating the implementation of the activities described in this letter of intent. USFS commits itself to submit to COMIFAC all the different reports, publications, and information in paper and electronic formats.

11. Applicable Languages

This letter of intent is in French and English versions, each of them being duly signed. In case of disagreement between the two versions, the English version will prevail. All the products resulting from this collaboration will be prepared in French and in English.

12. Disagreement between the Parties

Any disagreements occurring during the implementation of this letter of intent between the parties in charge of executing this letter of intent will be solved in an amicable manner. In the event of persistent disagreement it will be submitted to the discretionary judgment of the COMIFAC Executive Secretary and the USFS-IP Director.

13. Duration of the Letter of Intent

This collaboration takes effect upon signing this letter of intent and continues until September 30, 2011, designated as the initial period renewable by agreement of the parties. Either party reserves the right to cancel this letter of intent by notifying the other party with a one-month written notice.

14. Writing of this Letter of Intent

This letter of intent is written in common agreement by both parties.

15. Validity of this Letter of Intent

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This letter of intent is valid upon signature by the COMIFAC Executive Secretary and the USFS-IP Director.

Washington, _____

Yaoundé,

For

For

US Forest Service

Central African Forest Commission

International Programs

Val Mezainis, Ph.D.

Raymond MBITIKON

Director

Executive Secretary

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