

WHICH REGULATIONS FOR LAND-USE CONFLICTS IN RURAL PARTS OF THE CONGO BASIN?

The dense forests of the Congo Basin are still relatively unaffected by human activities. However, the socio-economic emergence strategies of the countries of the region are likely to radically change this situation by increasing land-use conflicts. Forestry and protected areas have to some extent been in conflict in the past, yet new sources of tension are emerging with the expansion of mining and agro-industry. These different uses of resources will require intersectoral land-use planning.

• A rural setting that is often marginalised

The dense rainforests of Central Africa are the world's second largest forest area. With the exception of some very active corridors, the main deforestation fronts are still situated at the periphery of the forest block. In its western half, people are largely concentrated in towns and along roads, and vast tracts of forest remain very sparsely populated (Gabon, Congo, south-eastern Cameroon). However, in the DRC, the socio-economic and security situation has resulted in rural populations moving further afield, even into the forests, and a large part of Cameroon and the Albertine Rift are now seriously impacted by human activities.

In a general context marked by the fragility of economic development and by insecurity, rural people rely essentially on slash and burn agriculture and hunting for their livelihoods. Fuelwood gathering (firewood and charcoal) accounts for more than 80% of all wood har-

vested. Consequently, deforestation and more generally the degradation of natural resources remain limited. This situation could radically change in the coming years with the proliferation of industrial logging, agriculture and mining projects.

• The "anarchic" exploitation of natural resources

For several decades, industrial logging for timber – historically the only industry present in rural parts of the Congo Basin – has produced little deforestation but more significant forest degradation, especially due to the opening of forest tracks encouraging agricultural development. In the virtual absence of state intervention, this logging industry has supported some rural socio-economic development and the emergence of small rural communities.

Although few other industries exploit natural resources due to the geopolitical situation and the lack of infrastructure, mining and agricultural plantation projects are likely to disrupt the environmental, social and economic conditions of these rural areas. Indeed, these new activities are land-intensive and can dramatically alter the local socio-economic environment. Allocation and land-use conflicts are already growing.

Over the last 20 years, logging has become far more extensive in the region, sometimes resulting in land-use conflicts with pre-existing or newly created protected areas, due to a lack of consultation between the various government departments, and with the rural

communities. Some of these conflicts are currently being resolved thanks to a dialogue between the stakeholders concerned, with the support of donors involved in programmes encouraging sustainable logging and forest certification, the strengthening of protected area networks and community-based natural resource management. However, new sources of conflict are emerging, especially with the mining sector, for which exploration and mining permits are awarded without any real consultation with the other sectors.

• The need for integrated development policies for rural areas

Despite some past attempts at land-use planning in southern Cameroon and in several provinces of the DRC, no sustainable land-use policy has yet been implemented in Central Africa, whether at the national or regional level. Only Gabon seems to be working in this direction. However, the REDD+* strategies that the states wish to apply and, more broadly, the goal of planning sustainable development that takes into account territorial inequalities and rural poverty, require intersectoral planning of land-allocation and land-use changes.

With the expansion of the agro-industrial and mining sectors, land uses are in danger of overlapping in rural areas, requiring the establishment of clear management rules between the different users, and the implementation of

land-use policies. The Commission of Central African Forests (COMIFAC), which brings together the ministers responsible for forests from all over Central Africa, is conducting regional discussions on natural resources. It could act as a catalyst for the intersectoral planning of land-use in the Congo Basin.

OBSERVATOIRE DES FORÊTS D'AFRIQUE CENTRALE (OFAC - CENTRAL AFRICAN FOREST OBSERVATORY)

Under the umbrella of COMIFAC, and with the support of German cooperation and the European Union, OFAC is creating a regional atlas on land-use in 10 Central African countries in order to support them in the design of their integrated land-use strategies. This interactive atlas is already helping to identify overlapping land uses, which are often sources of potential conflicts. The provision of this atlas to the sectoral administrations and information updates by these administrations provide the different stakeholders with a shared, up-to-date reference on land-use, which fosters the transparency of information and a common vision of territorial development.

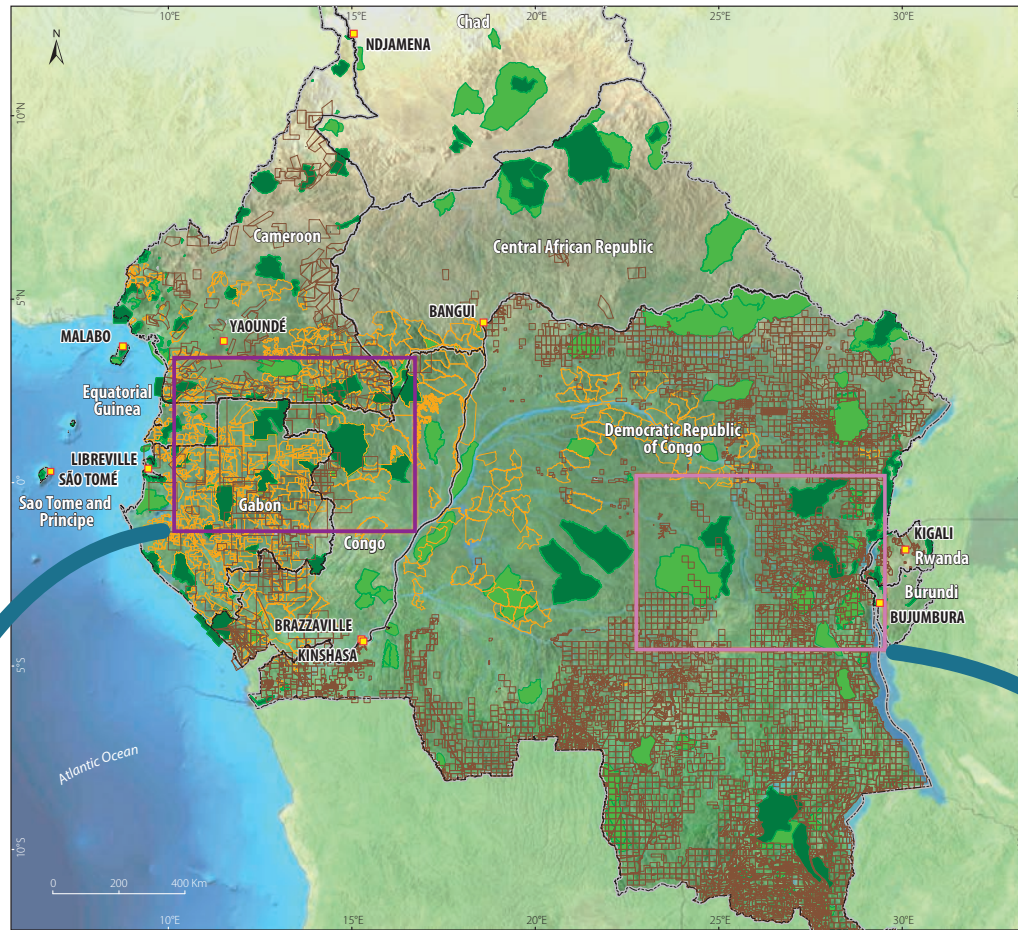
<http://www.observatoire-comifac.net>

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* REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) is an initiative launched in 2008 and coordinated by the UN. Its aim is to mitigate global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions produced by the degradation, destruction and fragmentation of forests. The addition of «+» illustrates the inclusion of the increase in carbon stocks, through appropriate silvicultural practices or plantations, for example. Its principle is to compensate developing and emerging countries by means of contributions from industrialised countries, either through a market or a fund.

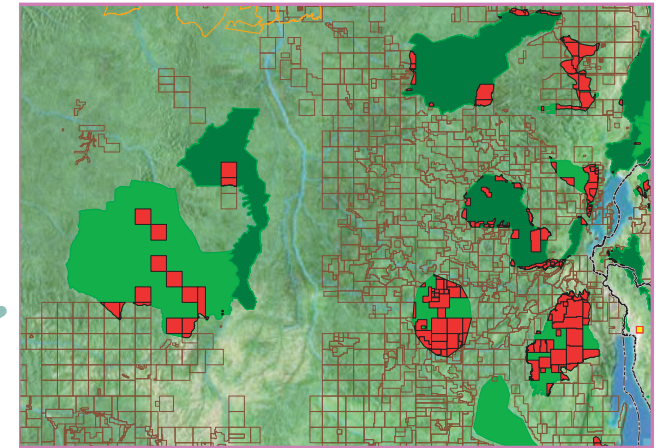
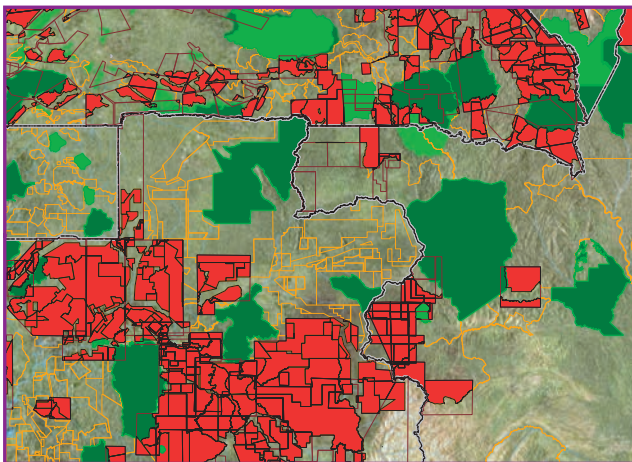
M36. Land use conflicts in the Congo Basin

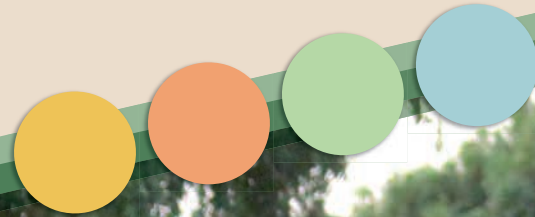
Source: OFAC



M37. Overlap between logging concession and mining rights

M38. Overlap between mining claims and protected areas





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