



Deforestation Trends in the Congo Basin: Reconciling Economic Growth and Forest Protection (Directions in Development)

Carole Megevand

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The Congo Basin forests have been mainly “passively” protected by chronic political instability and conflict, poor infrastructure, and poor governance. Congo Basin countries thus still fit the profile of high forest cover/low deforestation (HFLD) countries. However, there are signs that Congo Basin forests are under increasing pressure from a variety of sources, including mineral extraction, road development, agribusiness, and biofuels, in addition to subsistence agricultural expansion and charcoal collection.

Congo Basin countries are now at a crossroad – they are not yet locked into a development path that will necessarily come at high cost to forests. They need to find new ways of development that can simultaneously respond to the dual challenge of developing local economies and reducing poverty while limiting the negative impact of growth on the region’s natural capital, and forests in particular. They can define a new path toward “forest-friendly” growth. The question is how to match economic change with smart measures and policy choices so that Congo Basin countries sustain and benefit from their extraordinary natural assets over the long term – in other words how to “leapfrog” the traditional dip in forest cover usually observed in the forest transition curve.

The report *Deforestation Trends in the Congo Basin: Reconciling economic growth and forest protection* is the output of a two-year exercise implemented by the World Bank at the request of the COMIFAC (Regional Commission in charge of Forestry in Central Africa) and the highly-forested countries in the Congo Basin (namely Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Republic of Congo). The study is informed by economic modeling complemented with sectoral analysis, as well as interactive simulations and workshop discussions.

This study on *Deforestation Trends in the Congo Basin: Reconciling economic growth and forest protection* analyzes the current and future pressures exerted by different sectors of the economy on Congo Basin forests, and highlights policy options to limit deforestation while pursuing inclusive, green growth. Emerging environmental finance mechanisms, such as reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) under the climate change negotiations, may provide additional resources to help countries protect their forests. But there are already a number of “no-regret” actions that countries can take to grow along a sustainable development path.

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