

DRC: Intact Forests Facility to Scale up IPLC forest tenure and management

Photo: Regnskogfondet/ Julie Forchhammer



A group of Mbuti Indigenous peoples in the Ituri forests.

- **Recent advances in recognising the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in DRC offer opportunities for protection of large areas of DRC's intact forests.**
- **Forests can be more sustainably managed by establishing community forests for IPLCs and strengthening the involvement of IPLCs in management of protected areas and inclusive spatial planning.**
- **Forests For Life proposes to the establishment of an Intact Forests Facility to support effective, equitable, rights-based management regimes for the remaining large blocks of intact forest in DRC.**

About 700,000 Indigenous Peoples (IPs) live in the DRC¹. Many IPs live in close relationship with the forest and its biodiversity² in intact forest areas, especially in the west, centre and east³. Their ancestral knowledge, traditional practices and governance systems have for centuries contributed to the preservation of the rainforest. Their sustainable use of customary forests and involvement in the management of protected areas are therefore vital to ensure the effective protection of DRC's remaining intact forests.

While the DRC government exercises permanent sovereignty over all forests, the national territory is also covered extensively by customary rights. Unclear and overlapping user-rights can create confusion and conflict, and hinder IPLCs in accessing and using their resources for their own development. However,

DRC has recently made several legal advances in recognising the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities. An Indigenous peoples' law has passed the lower house and is awaiting senate consideration. Community forestry has been established as an instrument that allows IPLCs legal recognition and use of their lands. President Tshisekedi recently committed to "legally secure the lands and ancestral territories of the Indigenous Pygmies in the form of large natural, ecological and community reserves, according to the will and under the control of these peoples".

Forests for Life is a partnership of leading environmental organizations aimed at protecting the remaining major intact forest of the world.

Find out more at forests-for-life.org

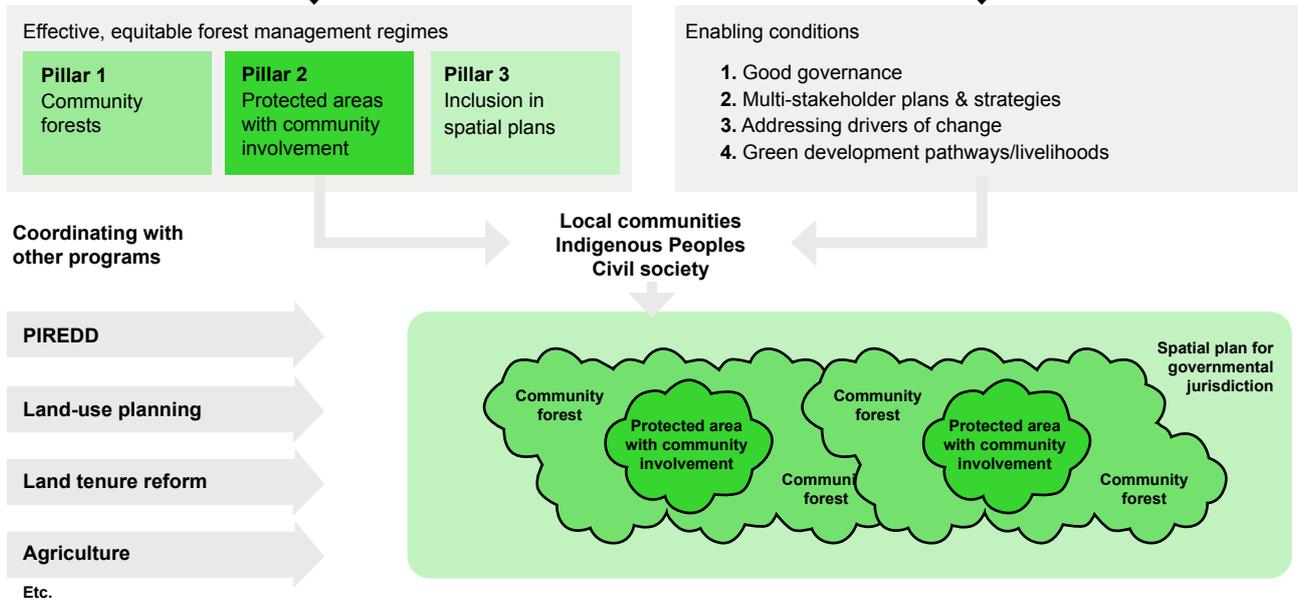
New thinking for IPLCs and intact forests - the Intact Forests Facility

To build on these advances, Forests For Life proposes the establishment of an Intact Forests Facility in DRC to enable greater involvement by IPLCs and civil society in forest management and forest governance at the provincial level. This will address two urgent, parallel needs:

- The need for special measures to conserve the remaining tracts of large intact forests
- The need for land tenure regimes, spatial planning and development interventions to support IPLCs

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To ensure long-term security for DRC’s forests, and to strengthen the role of communities in forest governance, the facility will primarily support the implementation of effective, equitable, rights-based management regimes for intact forests. This will focus on creating integrated mosaics of Indigenous or community land and protected areas, recognized, and supported in government-endorsed spatial and provincial plans.

Funding needs and opportunities

To achieve large-scale impacts, direct support is needed for these approaches in and around each intact forest area. Furthermore, investment is also needed to support greater civil society involvement in establishing four key enabling conditions (see diagram). Forests For Life is mapping the conditions needed to establish an Intact Forests Facility.

The facility would initially support the following activities:

- direct assistance to projects of local organizations in community-based forest management
- strengthening the involvement of IPLCs in protected area management
- advocacy and technical support enabling civil society to engage more effectively on land-use planning and decision-making with provincial and national authorities
- potentially also climate payments to communities managing their forests successfully, depending on national policy developments on this topic

After initial investments, it is critical to establish financing mechanisms that can deliver long-term support for IPLCs forest management and involvement in protected area management. One potential modality for delivery is through the creation of a new stand-alone civil society forest management support fund. A second option is to create this fund as a branch of an existing entity such as the national REDD+ fund, FONAREDD. This could leverage international climate finance, potentially in a mix with other public and private sources and ensure that such resources flow to IPLCs.

Intact forests in DRC

DRC’s tropical forests cover 1 million km² and represent 60% of the Central African rainforest, the world’s second largest. In 2016 the main large blocks of intact forest in DRC covered 604,000 km². Loss of Intact Forest Landscapes (IFLs)⁴ in DRC increased from 0.28% per year during 2000-2013 to 0.40% per year during 2013-2016. The expansion of small-holder agriculture, mining and expanding road networks for timber harvests are key drivers⁶. Maintaining their extent and ecological integrity is essential for climate-resilient development, to secure their carbon stocks and other ecosystem services. 50 million people depend on the DRC rainforests for their livelihood.

1) Banque Mondiale. 2009. Cadre stratégique pour la préparation d’un programme de développement des Pygmées en RDC 2) Updated edition expected in 2021. 3) Garnett, S.T. et al. 2018. A spatial overview of the global importance of Indigenous lands for conservation. *Nature Sustainability*, 1(7): 369–374. 4) IFLs represent unbroken forest blocks of at least 500 km² without signs of intensive human activity (such as roads or industrial logging) detectable on satellite imagery. Potapov et al. (2017) 6) Potapov et al. op cit.