

GABON/CAMEROON/ REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Spread over three countries – Gabon, Cameroon and the Republic of Congo – the Tri-National Dja-Odzala-Minkébé (TRIDOM) region still holds large forest areas, but deforestation, particularly driven by smallholder farming and large-scale agriculture, is expected to increase with likely future development of roads. Mining also places pressures on the forest frontiers. Improved policies are in place aimed at sustainable forest management, forest monitoring and diversification of livelihoods but are in need of more effective enforcement as well as wider resources and institutional support.

Drivers of deforestation

Smallholder farming 	<p>Currently small-scale farming and shifting cultivation is a major cause of forest loss^[1-3]. Commodity crop farming^[4] is increasing, with medium-scale cacao plantations along the roads throughout TRIDOM. Commodity crop farming for palm oil production in particular is still often undertaken at a small scale.</p>
Large-scale agriculture 	<p>Large-scale commercial agriculture is an important and growing driver of deforestation^[3], particularly for palm oil and rubber production. In the Republic of Congo, the government has allocated 120,000 ha for oil palm development in the middle of TRIDOM. In Cameroon a rubber plantation near the Dja reserve has plans to expand. All three countries have expansion of industrial agriculture in their national development plans. Large-scale agriculture not only directly impacts deforestation but also has significant indirect impacts such as through the influx of workers, families and services into thinly populated places.</p>
Fuelwood and charcoal 	<p>Wood energy demand, both for charcoal and fuelwood, is an ongoing moderate driver of deforestation and degradation^[2,3].</p>
Large-scale logging 	<p>Commercial logging makes a moderate contribution to deforestation in TRIDOM but contributes significantly to forest degradation.</p>
Mining operations 	<p>Artisanal small-scale mining is significant in Gabon, and has expanded into forest landscapes, including the border with Cameroon. Artisanal and small-scale miners in Gabon who primarily mine gold and, to a lesser extent, diamonds. In buffer zones of parks, artisanal mining is explicitly allowed by law^[6].</p>
Infrastructure expansion 	<p>Infrastructure expansion is a present but less frequently cited driver of deforestation^[2,3]. All three countries have received significant infrastructure investment from China. The Sangmelima-Ouessou road, which has been improved and is being paved, opens up the heart of the TRIDOM, and facilitates logging, bushmeat trade and migration processes. Another road with major impact is the Ouessou–Brazzaville road (now completely paved), which has opened the forests east of Odzala National Park.</p> <p>The 600 MW Chollet hydropower dam, to be built on the Dja river in a pristine area on the Cameroon-Congo border, could have a huge impact on forests. Most infrastructure projects have been in forested areas, and they have been linked to deforestation^[5].</p>
Urban expansion 	<p>Urban expansion is a minor driver of deforestation, including as connected to fuelwood and charcoal demand^[2,3].</p>

- Primary cause of forest loss and/or severe degradation
- Secondary cause of forest loss and/or severe degradation
- Less important cause of forest loss and/or severe degradation

Countries, region	Gabon, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Central Africa
Forest type	Tropical moist forest
Total area	11.5Mha
Forest area in 2018	11.2Mha (97.1% of total deforestation front area)
Forest loss 2004-2017	0.1Mha (1.0% of forest area in 2000)
Location of deforestation	Northern portion of Gabon, in the border with Cameroon and Republic of Congo
Total forest core area in 2018	9.9Mha (88.7% of forests in 2018)
Fragmented forests 2000-2018	0.4Mha (3.7% of forest area in 2000)
Accumulated burned area, 2002-2019	0.1Mha (0.8% of forest area in 2000)
Deforestation trend	Increasing, with oscillations
Future trends	Deforestation is expected to increase due to various economic development initiatives and population growth

Underlying causes

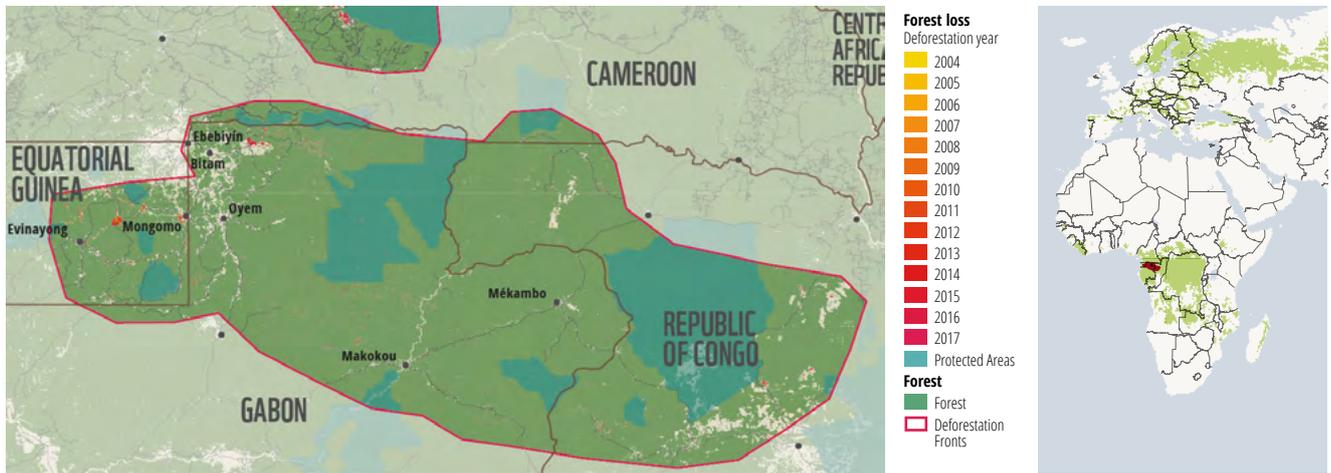
Underlying drivers of deforestation include institutional and policy factors (property rights and policies), demographics (population growth and population pressure), and economic changes (market growth and economic structures)^[3]. Policy failure and corruption have played a role in continued illegal logging in Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of Congo^[7].

Main outcomes

Small- and large-scale agriculture continue to be primary drivers of deforestation, while wood energy demand and industrial and artisanal logging are important secondary drivers. Underlying drivers of deforestation related to property rights and policies indicate that deforestation will continue unless these root causes are adequately addressed.

Recommended future actions

- Enforce existing policy responses to deforestation, including sustainable forest management, forest monitoring and diversification of livelihoods^[2].
- Promote land-use planning taking into account high conservation value areas to prevent allocation of prime forest areas for industrial development.
- Complement efforts focused on illegal timber with enhanced responses related to agriculture as a primary driver of deforestation.



Key responses

Timber legality and assurance systems	Cameroon has a voluntary partnership agreement (VPA) with the EU that encourages legal timber production, and works to improve forest governance and law enforcement. Gabon declared in 2019 that by 2021 all timber needs to be FSC certified. Gabon also plans to aggressively increase forest cover under community forestry arrangements to reduce illegal logging.
PES including REDD+	REDD+ and other climate funding mechanisms have been a focus of deforestation studies and response options in recent years ^[2, 8] . This has resulted in tangible climate funding for Gabon through the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI). The Republic of Congo is also on track to receive CAFI funding. Several other initiatives (Green Climate Fund, Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions) may result in additional funding for these countries in the near future to offer multiple benefits for people and biodiversity ^[9] .
Integrated land-use planning	The Cameroon forest law of 1994 provides for a permanent forest estate that is intended to remain forested and a non-permanent forest estate that can be converted to other land uses. In addition, a law was passed in 2011 defining the framework for land-use planning and sustainable development planning. Cameroon, under the new GEF-7 programme, aims to harmonize land-use planning for the TRIDOM zone. Gabon and Congo both aim to harmonize land-use planning under their respective CAFI programmes. There is no TRIDOM transboundary land-use planning initiative active across the three countries.
Improved agriculture	The Republic of Congo government has declared that it will focus its agricultural development in the savannah zone to protect the forest zone. Gabon intends to focus its agroindustry development outside areas of high conservation value (HCV); its current oil palm expansion is mainly in the savannah zone.
Protected areas	Empirical evidence has shown that protected areas have low rates of deforestation, but also that low deforestation rates are likely more influenced by the remote locations of parks rather than by park designation ^[10] .
Forest landscape restoration	Cameroon pledged to restore 12Mha of forest under the Bonn Challenge ^[11] .
Improving agricultural yields	One study suggests that increasing farm yields may limit deforestation, while also noting that weak land tenure laws can incentivize deforestation ^[12] .
Voluntary standards (RSPO)	To manage deforestation related to oil palm expansion, efforts have been undertaken to establish RSPO standards for sustainable palm oil production in Cameroon, Congo ^[13, 14] . The Gabonese government has already stated that it wants to develop certified palm oil.
Voluntary standards (forest certification)	Forest certification has been found to have potential to reduce unsustainable use of forests in Cameroon ^[15] . A recent study in Cameroon did not find reduced deforestation in certified forest concessions, but did assert potential for future impacts under expanded certification ^[10] . However, several FSC-certified logging operators have sold their concessions or dropped FSC certification. A recent change was the decision by the government of Cameroon to degazette the previously FSC-certified Wijma logging concession to make it a oil palm concession. Republic of Congo currently holds the largest areas of FSC-certified natural tropical forest in the world. Gabon intends to move to 100% FSC for all its industrial logging concessions.
Recognition of IPLCs	Community forest legislation was put in place in Cameroon in 1994, and 182 community forests were active in Cameroon by 2016. In the Republic of Congo, community forestry is not yet a legal instrument. Results have been mixed: community forests have struggled with illegal logging, and are seen by some as an impediment to FLEGT VPA efforts ^[16] .

■ Deployment at wider scale
 ■ Actively used and expanding
 ■ Project-specific, experimental

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