MAINTAINING THE GREEN HEART OF AFRICA’S FORESTS FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET
The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) lies in the Congo Basin, home to some of the most important areas of biodiversity on earth.

Here, in what is known as the Green Heart of Africa, vast expanses of primary forest still stand. The DRC alone contains more than 155 million hectares of that forest cover—half of Africa’s tropical forest and the second largest continuous tropical forest in the world.

Spanning 12.3 million hectares northeast of the DRC’s capital of Kinshasa, the province of Maï-Ndombe is a unique and vital landscape—9.8 million hectares of diverse ecosystems, including tropical moist forests interspersed with savannas and peat-rich “swamp” forests that support a multitude of species. Most of the 1.8 million residents who live in this region practice traditional lifestyles based on hunting, fishing, and collecting forest products. But myriad pressures threaten these lifestyles and the lands that support them.

In Maï-Ndombe, slash and burn agriculture, charcoal production for local and regional markets, uncontrolled bushfires, industrial and artisanal logging, and demand for fuel and timber in Kinshasa propel forest loss at rates that outpace those of the rest of the DRC.
In 2014, the DRC became the first African nation to receive approval of its Emissions Reductions Program Idea Note (ER-PIN), and Mai-Ndombe was selected as the programme’s pilot region. Since then, WWF has worked with stakeholders at the local, provincial, and national levels to develop an approach that will enable local communities to plan and benefit from their own forest management and green development, and to lay the groundwork for turning the vision behind the ER-PIN into a reality.

**OUR RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN DRC**

WWF’s work with stakeholders in Mai-Ndombe has empowered local communities to organize, advocate for, and engage in participatory mapping, natural resources management planning, and other key community forestry and development activities. It has also supported inclusion and leadership by historically marginalized groups like women and Indigenous peoples.

In our most recent work, WWF has focused on efforts to continue and build on these accomplishments, deepening and expanding their reach to set the standard for other large REDD+ jurisdictional programs.

**This work has:**

- **Supported transformational political change, including the DRC’s ratification of the Paris Agreement.** Through high-level lobbying and advocacy in partnership with civil society organizations and other stakeholders, WWF helped to secure ratification of the Paris Agreement by the DRC government and supported the DRC’s review of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) initiated by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in application of the ratified agreement.

  - WWF and its partners have also continued to guide the DRC’s REDD+ process at the national and jurisdictional levels, providing both technical and stakeholder participation support in the development of the Emission Reduction Program Document (ERPD) approved in 2016 and the Emission Reduction Purchase Agreement (ERPA) in the Mai-Ndombe jurisdiction, which was signed in 2018. Five out of six ERPA conditions of effectiveness have been fulfilled, and work is currently underway to fulfill the sixth condition and move forward with the DRC’s green development vision.

  - **Fostered supportive structures and processes to strengthen forest governance in Mai-Ndombe.** WWF provided technical and financial support in a series of workshops that identified obstacles to the operationalization of the National Forest Advisory Council, a technical and advisory body within the DRC Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development tasked with efficiently and effectively managing the country’s forest resources. These workshops led to the council’s successful operationalization after more than a year of inaction. The Ministry appointed council members and approved draft statutes for the Council, subject to some amendments.

  - A Provincial Forest Advisory Council was also decreed for the Mai-Ndombe province, with the mission of advising on provincial forest classification and declassification projects, and therefore providing a counterweight to any mismanagement of forest resources by the provincial governor. The joint efforts of WWF and this newly appointed council have led to
the designation of more than 600,000 hectares as community forests in Maï-Ndombe.⁷

- Established and tested an innovative model for direct payment for ecosystem services (PES) that is truly participatory, consent-based, and community-driven. Through a rigorous process of free prior informed consent (FPIC) and community consultation and capacity building that specifically included historically marginalized groups, local communities have been empowered to manage their own lands, receive and share benefits for sustainable management, plan for their own development, and improve their own livelihoods in alignment with their goals and values.

Communities have restored 100 hectares of forest and protected 1,000 hectares of savannas, resulting in natural forest regeneration on these lands. These forest landscape restoration activities generated income that was used to enhance community services and infrastructure. For example, communities installed 50 beehives to protect planted areas from human-started fires (with the honey providing additional income, in turn), and constructed four new schools in the region, which will improve children’s access to education and further support the change this work has set in motion.

Endnotes
1 Source: The State of the forest in the Congo Basin, 2008
3 Forest Carbon Partnership Facility https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/system/files/documents/20161108%20Revised%20ERPD_DRC.pdf
4 An ER-PIN is a proposal to implement a large-scale REDD+ programme with the support of the World Bank-managed carbon fund of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF).
5 REDD+ stands for “reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation” and seeks to help countries shift to low-emissions development pathways by increasing the value of healthy forests relative to other land uses.
6 Once an ER-PIN is approved, the process moves into development of the Emission Reduction Program Document (ERPĐ) and finally the Emission Reduction Purchase Agreement (ERPA), both of which must be reviewed, approved and signed.
7 Community forests are forestlands given free of charge and in perpetuity to the requesting community by the provincial governor’s official order.

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