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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dear readers,

Welcome to the first edition of News from the Observatory of Forest Governance in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a bi-annual newsletter set up to provide our partners with an idea of the achievements of our various activities.

In this first issue, the content is as extensive as it is varied. We have organized field missions, training and workshops with the support of our partners (financial and technical) at the level of the provinces (Kongo central, Haut Uélé, Equateur) and the city-province of Kinshasa. So we have taken some of our achievements to put you in the bath of our work as a mandated Independent Observer.

This falls within the framework of OGF's mandate with the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of the DRC, whose commitment has been important and we are deeply grateful to all those who participated in the success of these activities. Enjoy this first edition. Good reading!



Serge BONDON

OGF Coordinator



1. Joint independent observer mission in the DRC's Haut-Uélé province



A joint mission was carried out from June 2 to 11, 2023 by the Observatoire de la Gouvernance Forestière en RDC (OGF) in collaboration with forest inspectors (judicial police officers) from the brigade provinciale de Contrôle, and the local civil society organization Actions Raisonnées pour la Sauvegarde Biologique et la Régénération Écologique (ARBRE) in the Rungu and Watsa territories, located in the Haut-Uélé province. The aim of the mission was to verify compliance with logging rules by artisanal loggers, as well as the regularity of forest control carried out by the competent provincial administration.

The independent observers found that artisanal logging is taking place on a massive scale, without respect for the procedures and regulations in force, which compromises the proper management of this forestry sector. Among the problems observed were the failure to issue approval certificates to artisanal loggers due to non-compliance with regulations, the failure to issue artisanal timber cutting permits, the illegal logging of timber in the Maïka-Penge hunting and reserve area, and the lack of regular monitoring by the coordinating body, among others.

Following this mission, a meeting of the reading committee of the Independent Observer's report was organized on June 14, 2023 in Isiro, capital of Haut-Uélé province, under the chairmanship of the Provincial Minister in charge of Agriculture, Fishing, Livestock, Environment, Rural Development and Tourism. All the key players were present at the meeting, including agents and executives from the

Provincial Environmental Coordination, the Ministry of the Environment, the Provincial Justice Division, the Maïka-penge Hunting Estate and Reserve, OGF, the NGO ARBRE, etc.

Several important resolutions were adopted during the plenary session, including the following :

- The Governor has undertaken to sign agreements for operators who have submitted compliant dossiers to the competent authorities.
- The Provincial Minister for the Environment has undertaken to restructure and reorganize the licensing process so that all operators whose dossiers comply with current legislation can obtain a licence signed by the Governor.
- The Minister of the Environment has instructed the curator of the Maïka-Penge hunting estate and reserve to issue an official communiqué ordering all those involved in illegal timber exploitation to leave the reserve. The Minister has also promised to visit the site personally to monitor the situation closely.

It is vitally important that the authorities act to implement the resolutions adopted at this plenary session, in order to restore order and legality to the forestry sector. However, further efforts are essential to preserve these precious forests, notably by strengthening forest control, both in this province and in the DRC as a whole.





2. Capacity building workshop for forest law enforcement services in Isiro on the use of forest information collection tools



From May 29 to 31, 2023, the Forest Governance Observatory, with the technical support of the World Resources Institute, organized a capacity building workshop for forest law enforcement services in the city of Isiro (province of Haut-Uélé).

During this session, the results from the collection of information on the state of participants' needs allowed the facilitators to assess the level of the learners in order to better adjust their interventions.

The working method chosen was based on presentations, questions and debates, and free expression in working groups.

It should be noted that these meetings were held as part of the project "Strengthening Cross-Border Collaboration to Fight Illegal Exploitation in the Congo Basin" thanks to the financial support of the International Bureau for the Fight against Narcotics and Repressive Affairs (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement business).



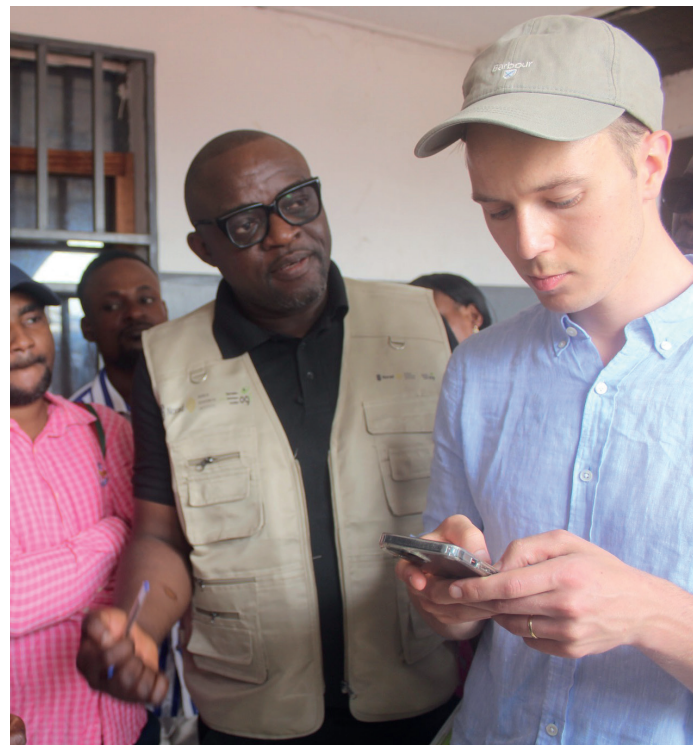


3. Special visit to Zelo , Gigal and Maman Ngalu ports



This visit was organized by the World Resources Institute, Observatory of Forest Governance - OGF DRC, inspectors from the Control and Verification Unit (CCV), members of the Congolese Association of Artisanal Exploiters (ACEFA) as well as representatives the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation (NORAD) and the Norwegian Embassy in Kinshasa. These ports are the points of arrival of timber from artisanal logging in the provinces of Equateur, Kasai and Mai-ndombe , and which flow towards Kinshasa.

This visit was organized as part of the project “Innovative technologies to fight against illegal logging: scaling up of timber transparency identification platforms, Congo Basin component”, funded by NORAD and implemented by the WRI.





4. Validation workshop of the report of the control mission of logging activities in the province of Kongo Central



Following the information reported by certain civil society organizations on cases of illegal exploitation of timber observed in the Luki Biosphere Reserve and their wish to know the nature of the operations that are carried out in the port of the Congo company DIHAO, the Forest Governance Observatory funded by the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau (INL) of the United States Department of State, had seized the provincial coordination of the environment of Kongo Central to obtain the approval of the supervisory authority to allow a joint investigation mission from July 28 to August 09, 2022.

Two provincial OPJ inspectors and two representatives of provincial civil society joined by the team of the Independent Observer of the application of forest legislation and governance in the DRC (IO, FLEG, OGF).

After the completion of the said mission and in accordance with the provisions of Article 1 point b of Ministerial Order 032/CAB/MIN/ECN – T/ 10/ BNME/ 012 of October 16, 2012 amending and supplementing Ministerial Order 102/ CAB/MIN/ ECN – T/15/JEB/09 of June 16, 2009 setting the rules and formalities of forest control which provides that the Independent Observer's report be examined within fifteen days of its receipt by an ad hoc committee whose the composition is given in point a and b of the same article.

At the end of the meetings held with the managers of the Congo DIHAO company, the Independent

Observer noted that the latter was only responsible for transporting the logs of the logging companies, from the place of cutting to the Kitona village which lies on the shore of the Congo River.

As for the Luki Biosphere Reserve , the Independent Observer notes that this reserve has the following major problems: lack of financial means; the absence of eco-guards to ensure the security of the reserve; absence of the provincial governor's delegate in the local steering committee; non-existence of the Man And Biodiversity program .

Then, on Thursday February 2, 2023 in the meeting room of the Hotel Soleil, the mission validation workshop was held. The ceremony was chaired by the Provincial Minister in charge of the environment, forests and nature conservation.

After the opening ceremony, the floor was given to the Forest Governance Observatory team to present the mission report. After debate, certain points had been pruned from the report, in particular the absence of a representative of the governor in the steering committee and the non-existence of the Man And Biodiversity program ; the participants had preferred to talk about the problem of financial means. Finally, the report was validated subject to a few observations.



5. Training of eco-guards and forest cover monitoring mission in the Luki reserve in Kongo Central, using Global Forest Watch



Following a mission carried out by Observatoire de la Gouvernance Forestière in May 2022 in the Luki reserve to test the Forest Watcher tool, the observation on the ground showed that the communities practiced itinerant agriculture on slash and burn in the totally protected area, carbonization and illegal logging. This threat is perpetuated by the fact that the steering committee of this reserve does not have the financial and human resources to ensure the security of this reserve.

The Forest Governance Observatory works with the micro-grant “Global Forest Watch Small Grants Fund (SGF)” to strengthen the intervention capacities of sworn agents, civil society independently, community forest supervisors in charge of forest law enforcement and use data from Global Forest Watch to support the DRC’s contribution to the fight against climate change. As part of this grant, training was organized from April 24 to 28, for local observers and agents involved in the management of this reserve, in the use of Forest watcher, for better planning and deployment in areas susceptible to deforestation.

This training took place in two stages, the first of which was intended for theory on the manipulation of the Forest watcher tool, then the second stage consisted of the descent into the field to put into practice the

lessons learned and the evaluation of the training by the trainees.

At the end of this training, a field mission was organized in this reserve to monitor deforestation alerts.

In the field, the following two observations were noted:

- the use of slash and burn agriculture by the surrounding communities in the protected areas of the reserve,
- the use of carbonization as the main source of income in the protected areas of the reserve.





This action is part of the project “Innovative technologies to fight illegal logging: scaling up timber identification and transparency platforms”, which aims to increase transparency in the forestry sector by enhancing the visibility and credibility of the work of independent forest monitors in the Congo Basin through the Open Timber Portal. The project is funded by NORAD - the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

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7. Capacity Building Workshop for Inspectors of the Control and Verification Unit of the Ministry of the Environment in Kinshasa on the use of tools for collecting forest information



The Democratic Republic of Congo is part of the Congo Basin, which is the second largest contiguous tropical forest in the world after the Amazon. It has several passive and active channels for making forest information public, however this is available in different, non-centralized formats.

This is how the Observatory of Forest Governance - OGF DRC and its partner World Resources Institute had wished to strengthen the capacities of the inspectors of the Control and Verification Unit (CCV) of the Vice Prime Minister, Ministry of the Environment, to that they adopt the quality approach in their work of research and detection of infringements due to logging; by exploiting the data produced by the various administrations, the private sector and civil society consolidated in the platforms: forest atlas, Open Timber Portal and Global Forest Watch.

For three days, from January 18 to 20, 2023, nineteen CCV inspectors received rich and varied knowledge, namely :

- introduction to the use of the Open Timber Portal (OTP) which aims to bring transparency to forestry operations;
- reminder of the legal framework for logging and the role of the various actors in the forest management process;
- explanation of the methodological approach of the OTP and its quality requirements;

- evaluation of the methodological approaches currently used by inspectors for the control of the exploitation of timber and proposal of strategic axes for its improvement.

“In the process of forest transparency in the DRC, the mandated independent observation missions must be carried out jointly with the national inspectors of the forest pool of the Control and Verification Unit (CCV). This is why WRI and the Forest Governance Observatory (OGF) wanted to build the capacity of the 19 CCV inspectors in the use of forest cover monitoring tools such as the Open Timber Portal, the interactive forest atlas and Global Forest Watch and on forest legislation.

“We believe that this training will contribute to improving their knowledge in relation to the conceptual and methodological bases of quality assurance to produce reliable information within the framework of the exercise of their mission. » Word of Master Essylot Lubala , technical advisor to the Forest Governance Observatory.

The said training had been organized within the framework of the project “Strengthening cross-border collaboration to combat illegal exploitation in the Congo Basin”, financed by the international office in charge of the fight against narcotics and law enforcement (INL) of the United States Department of State .

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