

Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) in Central Africa

Reconciling the protection of biodiversity and the sustainable development of human societies

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Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (CBD, 2022), often termed the ‘30x30 target’, seeks to ‘ensure that by 2030, at least 30% of terrestrial and inland water areas, as well as marine and coastal areas, [...] are adequately conserved [...]’.

The 30x30 target encompasses both protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). Protected areas form the cornerstone of *in situ* conservation strategies but are insufficient alone to sustain ecological processes, ecosystem services, and the provision of goods and services to human societies. To maintain a functional biosphere with sufficient biodiversity, additional management measures, such as OECMs, are essential to promote biodiversity conservation.

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What is an OECM?

An OECM is defined as ‘a geographically defined area other than a protected area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity...’ (CBD, 2018). OECMs contribute to both biodiversity and human well-being. While managed for various objectives, these areas conserve biodiversity through three modalities: (i) **Primary conservation**: managed primarily for biodiversity conservation but is not formally designated as a protected area under national legislation; (ii) **Secondary conservation**: managed for other primary objectives, with biodiversity conservation explicitly integrated into the management framework; (iii) **Ancillary conservation**: biodiversity conservation occurs as a co-benefit of the site’s management objectives, even if not explicitly prioritized.

OECMs represent an innovative approach to *in situ* biodiversity conservation, recognizing efforts outside formally designated protected areas. These areas are managed by diverse stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, civil society organizations, the private sector, or public entities. OECM recognition is voluntary, requiring the free, prior, and informed consent of relevant stakeholders, with particular emphasis on respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

OECM designation is a label. It serves as a recognition of direct or indirect effective biodiversity conservation outcomes resulting from land management practices. It does not necessarily confer a new legal status, though this may depend on national legislation.

How are OECMs identified and validated?

OECMs must first be recognized at the **national level** through a transparent, multi-stakeholder process involving entities ranging from rural communities to government agencies. This recognition may be formalized through public policy, legislation, or other appropriate mechanisms. In Central Africa, no country has yet established a fully operational process for OECM recognition.

The IUCN proposes a three-stage process for OECM identification and validation: (1) a pre-assessment to identify potential OECMs, (2) obtaining stakeholder consent, and (3) conducting a full assessment (Jonas *et al.*, 2023). The criteria for identification and validation are outlined in Table 1. Stages 1 and 2 support a top-down planning approach, requiring prioritization of sites and agreement from governing authorities. In contrast, a bottom-up process, initiated by local governance authorities, may involve a single step combining a declaration by rights holders with a full assessment (integrating criteria 2 and 4).

Following this recognition process, OECMs must be reported to the global OECM database, managed by the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC). Currently, OECMs reported by governments are automatically included in the database, whereas those proposed by non-governmental entities undergo verification prior to inclusion. This differential treatment raises concerns about alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework’s principles, particularly those emphasizing stakeholder rights and inclusion. To ensure consistency, accreditation by a national multi-stakeholder validation committee appears to be the most equitable approach.

Table 1. Criteria for OECM recognition

Criteria	Wording
Pre-evaluation	
1	The site is not a protected area
2	The site is likely to support significant biodiversity value
Evaluation	
3	The site is a geographically defined area.
4	The site is confirmed to support significant biodiversity values
5	Institutions or mechanisms are in place to govern and manage the site
6	Governance and management achieve or are expected to achieve <i>in situ</i> conservation of significant biodiversity values
7	<i>In situ</i> conservation of significant biodiversity values is expected to be long-term
8	Governance and management arrangements address equity considerations

Source : Jonas *et al.* (2023)

Types of potential terrestrial OECMs in Central Africa

A diverse range of management systems can be recognized as OECMs, subject to the criteria outlined previously. However, their eligibility varies significantly depending on the national legal frameworks, as illustrated in Table 2.

In some cases, legal provisions are ambiguous. For example, Areas of Hunting Interest (ZIC) are designated as protected areas in wildlife laws in Cameroon and Congo but lack mention in implementing regulations or do not exist. Consequently, these sites are excluded from the World Database of Protected Areas (UNEP-WCMC, 2024).

Potential contribution of OECMs to the 30x30 target

The contribution of potential OECMs to the 30x30 target varies by national context (Mitchell *et al.*, 2023; Figure 1). In forested Central Africa, industrial forest concessions, community forests, and publicly owned forests (e.g., communal forests) hold significant potential for OECM designation. In savannah and some forest areas, hunting zones are also relevant for recognition.

Ramsar sites, often expansive, represent another significant source of potential OECMs. Additionally, Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs) could

Table 2. Management systems potentially qualifying as OECM in three Central African countries

Management system	Management objectives	Conservation objectives	Cam.	DRC	Congo
Legally recognized					
Forests of public legal entities	Multiple objectives: exploitation, conservation, ecotourism	I, II, ancillary	x (1)		x
Community forests	Utilization of forest resources to meet community needs	I, II, ancillary	x	x (2)	x (3)
Community hunting areas	Use of wildlife resources	II, ancillary	x (4)		
Hunting areas	Use of wildlife resources	II, ancillary	(5)		(5)
Industrial forest concessions	Sustainable timber production	II, ancillary	(6)	(6)	(6)
Conservation series of industrial forest concessions	Conservation of specific species or ecosystems	I	x	x	x
Artisanal forestry units	Artisanal timber harvesting	II, ancillary		x	x (7)
Conservation forest concessions	Development of environmental services (e.g., carbon sequestration)	I, II, ancillary		x	
Conservation concessions	Biodiversity conservation	I		x	
Forest reserves	Safeguarding remarkable forest ecosystems or native tree stands and ensuring soil and environmental integrity	I, II		x	x (8)
Protection forest	Conservation of fragile soils, sources or watercourses, or sacred forests	II, ancillary			x
Water resource protection zones	Protection of public water resources, facilities, and water quality	ancillary		x	x
Recreation forests	Creation and maintenance of leisure environments	I, II, ancillary	x		x

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Table 2. Continued

Management system	Management objectives	Conservation objectives	Cam.	DRC	Congo
Teaching and research forests	Support for student training and scientific research	I, II, ancillary	x		x
Private natural forests	Comprehensive forest utilization	I, II, ancillary			x
Reforestation areas	Production of forest products and/or protection of fragile ecosystems	I, II, ancillary	(9)	(9)	
Buffer zones of protected areas	Protection and conservation of protected areas from external influences	I, II, ancillary	x	x	x
Tourist development zones	Ecotourism activities	I, II, ancillary	x	x	
Military zones	National security and training activities	ancillary		x	
Ramsar sites (10)	Conservation and sustainable use of wetlands	I, II	x	x	x
World Heritage sites (10)	Conservation, valorization of natural heritage, research, education	I, II	x	x	x
Not legally recognized					
Sacred sites	Preservation of cultural or spiritual values	II, ancillary	x	x	x (11)
Territories of life/ ICCAs	Biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods	I, II	x	x	x
Biosphere reserves	Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity	I, II	x		

Note: This table is preliminary, as a comprehensive analysis of relevant legislation is ongoing. It may evolve with legislative changes.

(1): Includes communal forests; (2): Local Community Forest Concessions (CFCL); (3): only in forest concessions; (4) Community Hunting Territories (TCC) and Community-Managed ZICs (ZIC-GC); (5): Zones of Hunting Interest (ZIC), sometimes considered as protected areas; (6): may fall under targets 3 and/or 10; (7): Domestic Forestry Units; (8): Natural Conservation Forests; (9): Eligible as OECMs if composed of diverse local species and old enough to harbour interesting natural biodiversity; (10): Only sites or portions not within protected areas; (11): In Congo, legally recognized sacred forests are included in protection forests, but many exist de facto in non-permanent forest estates or other management systems. Abbreviations: Cam.: Republic of Cameroon, DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo; Congo: Republic of Congo. ICCA: Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories; OECM: other effective area-based conservation measures; I: primary conservation objective; II: secondary conservation objective; ancillary: ancillary conservation, resulting from management activities (unintentional).

contribute substantially, though their formal identification in Central Africa is in its early stages, despite some already holding community forest status, as seen in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

However, these represent maximum potential, which is unlikely to be realized in the short term due to uncertainties surrounding management effectiveness. For example, most community forests, primarily designated for timber extraction, include degraded forests, regrowth areas, and agricultural zones, making their classification as OECMs challenging (Vermeulen *et al.*, 2011; Lhoest *et al.*, 2020). Only those with explicit objectives for protecting or regenerating local biodiversity may qualify, at least partially. For ICCAs, which typically exhibit an explicit goal of protecting biodiversity, challenges lie in assessing and monitoring biodiversity outcomes and ensuring accountability.

While industrial forest concessions could theoretically support long-term exploitation and biodiversity protection, only those certified for sustainable management consistently meet OECM criteria (Putz *et al.*, 2012; Lhoest *et al.*, 2020; Zwerts *et al.*, 2024). In Cameroon, for example, if only certified concessions are considered, the potential OECM coverage drops from 14% to 1.5% of the territory; in Congo, it decreases from 25.7% to 9.3% (Figure 2). Expanding the number of certified concessions and their sustainable management remains a significant challenge for Central Africa's forests.

Finally, the classification of certain territories as OECMs under Target 3 is complex. Industrial forest concessions, for instance, are typically addressed under Target 10 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. If restricted to conservation and protection series, their contribution to OECMs would be

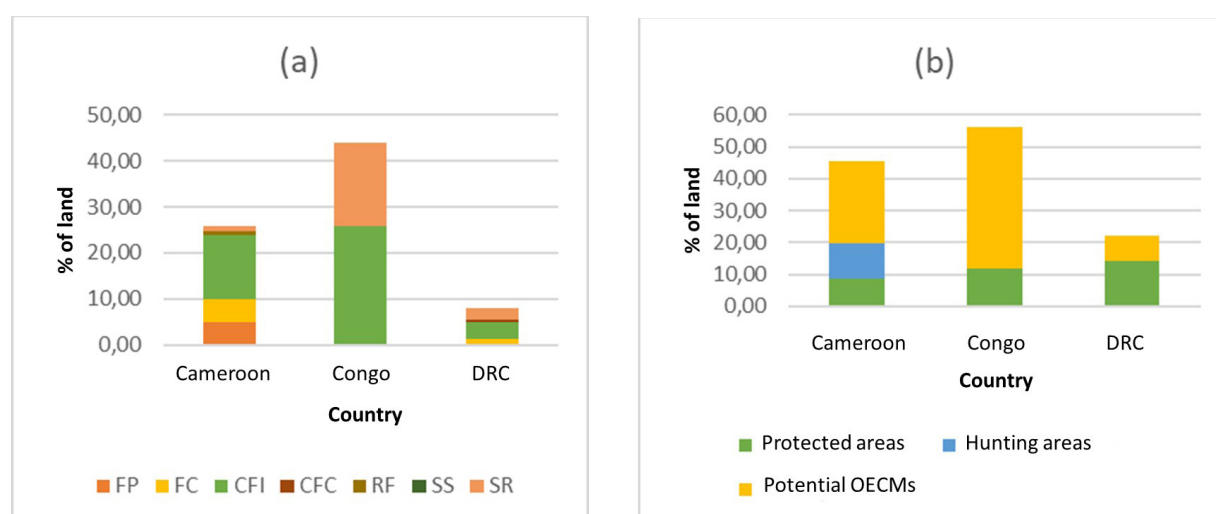


Figure 1. 30x30 target and potential terrestrial OECM in three Central African countries. (a) Potential OECM coverage by country; (b) Contribution of existing protected areas and potential OECMs to the 30x30 target

Note: Data are provisional and represent orders of magnitude for initial comparisons between categories. Abbreviations:

FP: Forests owned by public legal entities; FC: Community forests; CFI: Managed industrial forest concessions; CFC: Conservation forest concessions; RF: Forest reserves; SS: Sacred sites; SR: Ramsar sites outside protected areas.

Data source: Cameroon-Wanecque C. (2023); DRC - Jacques C. (2022); Congo: Laurencier-Le Boru (2024); except for protected areas in Cameroon and Congo (Doumenge *et al.*, 2021).

minimal, covering only 0.15% of Cameroon's territory and 2.2% of Congo's (Figure 2). Given the prevalence of forest concessions in Central Africa, this distinction poses a critical challenge.

Achieving the 30x30 target requires addressing management effectiveness and equity alongside the quantitative goal of conserving 30% of areas by 2030 (Mitchell *et al.*, 2023). Both sustainability and social equity are critical and often interlinked. Effective management is a prerequisite for OECM certification and can be evaluated using established tools and methodologies (Hockings *et al.*, 2006; Roggeri *et al.*, 2021). However, this demands expertise and investment in assessment and accountability mechanisms, which are currently lacking.

Finally, the issue of equity is crucial. This requires inclusive and transparent decision-making processes that empower stakeholders within their respective roles. It also entails ensuring that the costs and benefits of OECM management are equitably distributed among stakeholders.

Potential OECM	Nb	Superf (ha)	%
Managed forest concessions	110	6,527,823	13.70
↑			
Certified forest concessions	10	698,501	1.47
↑			
Conservation series of certified forest concessions	10	69,850	0.147

Figure 2. Towards maximum potential for OECMs in Cameroon's forest concessions

Source: Wanecque (2023).

Recommendations

- *Governments and partners*: Promptly establish a multi-stakeholder platform to facilitate inclusive national dialogue on OECMs. This platform should be led by a cross-sectoral committee that includes all relevant stakeholders, with particular emphasis on the representation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- *Governments and partners*: Given the limited understanding of the OECM concept, implement communication strategies to inform all stakeholders about its benefits and implementation challenges.
- *Governments*: Develop a transparent, participatory, and streamlined process for identifying and validating OECMs. The validation authority should comprise representatives from all relevant stakeholder groups.
- *Governments and partners*: Promote a bottom-up approach for identifying, assessing, and recognizing OECMs, tailored to the knowledge, skills, and capacities of local stakeholders, particularly Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- *Governments and donors*: Allocate sufficient resources for OECM identification and designation, focusing on biodiversity characterization, monitoring, evaluation, and demonstrating sustainable and equitable management practices.
- *All stakeholders*: Prioritize the assessment of OECMs with high certification potential, such as conservation and protection series within managed and certified forest concessions, some conservation concessions, hunting zones, sacred forests, or ICCAs.
- *All stakeholders, including governments and the international community*: Develop sustainable income sources, such as improved agricultural systems, sustainable supply chains for timber and non-timber products, and direct conservation funding, to ensure the long-term viability of OECMs, which depends on the economic empowerment of stakeholders through stable and sustainable revenue.
- *Governments*: Although OECM recognition does not necessitate changes to legal status, establishing a specific legal framework would be beneficial. The most effective approach would be to amend existing nature conservation laws to formally recognize management systems that support biodiversity conservation.

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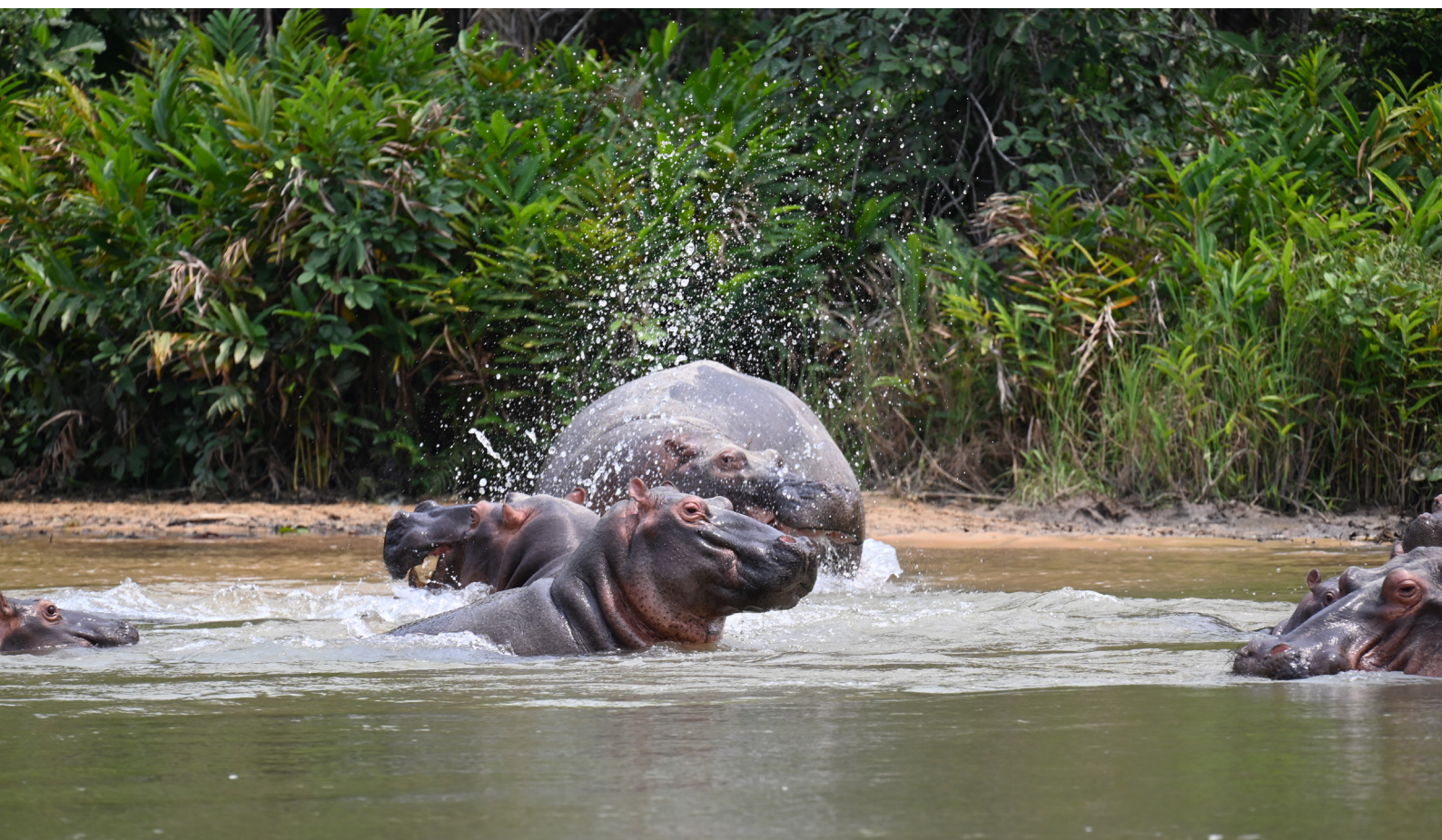


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Established in 2007, the Observatory of the Forests of Central Africa (OFAC) is a specialized unit of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC). It provides current and relevant data on the region's forests and ecosystems to inform policy decisions and promote improved governance and sustainable management of natural resources. OFAC is supported by the OFAC-CE project, funded by the European Union.

