



The Forests Dialogue

ENGAGE! EXPLORE! CHANGE!

Dialogue on “Understanding Deforestation-Free” (UDF) in an African Context

14–18 October, 2017* | Mouila, Gabon

Concept Note

ABOUT THE “UNDERSTANDING DEFORESTATION-FREE” (UDF) INITIATIVE

The UDF Initiative, coordinated by The Forests Dialogue (TFD), was initially launched with a scoping dialogue in **New Haven, CT, USA** on **October 2014**. During the dialogue, participants deliberated on what is meant by deforestation-free, identified risks and opportunities associated with uptake of such a concept, debated safeguards and solutions to address risks, and determined practical ways to move forward.

The next dialogue was a field dialogue held in **Riau, Sumatra, Indonesia** in **April 2015**. This dialogue initiated a series of field dialogues that seek to explore, verify and apply the findings from the scoping dialogue in geographies that are focal points in the deforestation-free movement.

THE CHALLENGE

Initially, the deforestation-free debate largely focused on addressing deforestation in the palm oil sector in Asia by the private sector. As such, applying deforestation-free commitments have largely been centered around Indonesia and Malaysia, with less focus on the frontier forests and natural ecosystems of Africa and Latin America. Much of this effort to date has been on supporting the private sector to deliver their “no-deforestation” (NDPE) commitments.

For “deforestation-free” to be scaled up, sovereign Governments and actors from other geographies, notably west and central Africa, need to be included in the creation of regionally relevant definitions and metrics of success. Development of these regionally-relevant definitions should be done in the broad context of all commodities associated with deforestation (not just palm oil, but also rubber, timber, cocoa, etc), incorporate the socio-economic realities of these geographies, and include Governments at the center of the debate.

*tentative

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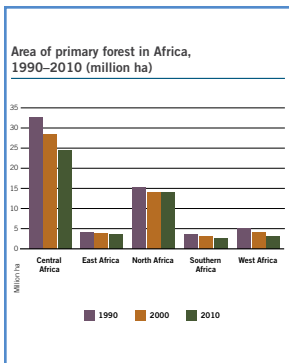
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Map of Mouila, Gabon

Therefore, TFD is planning to organize its next field dialogue on the UDF Initiative in Mouila, Gabon (tentatively scheduled for October 14-18, 2017).

This will be, in coordination with the TFA2020 Africa Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) meeting in Libreville (Oct 12-13). This stakeholder engagement process will facilitate a shared understanding of the unique opportunities and challenges of implementing deforestation-free commitments in highly-forested/forest dominated countries and landscapes in Africa, as well as co-designed solutions to meet those challenges. The initiative will provide insights into possible collaborations to increase clarity and leverage incentives around responsible commodity production in highly-forested landscapes in Africa, using Gabon as an example.

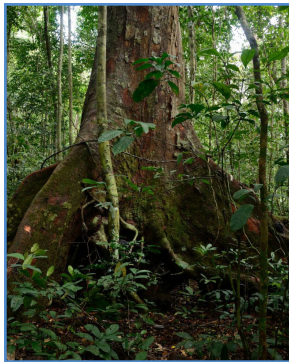


Figures and chart courtesy of FAO

UNDERSTANDING DEFORESTATION-FREE IN GABON¹

Gabon is one of the smallest and least populous countries of Africa, but retains a large area of African rainforest.

Approximately 85% of the country's forest area remains intact, and deforestation rates are around 0.1% annually (FAO 2010). Of the 22-23 million hectares of forest area, about 4 million are protected areas and 14 million are allocated for forestry.



Okoumé tree (*Aucoumea klaineana*). Photo by Ehoarn Bidault

Forestry has traditionally been an important industry in Gabon and has been supplying European markets with okoumé logs for centuries. In addition to timber, Gabon exports offshore oil to international markets. Despite the country's oil wealth however, most of Gabon remains poor and vulnerable to global economic conditions. Gabon's forestry sector fared better in the economic crisis of 2008 than other countries of the region due to the strong demand for okoumé wood in emerging markets, but to further reduce the economic risk associated with its dependence on oil, the Gabonese government began to look toward agriculture to diversify its economy.



Okoumé wood and resin. Photo by Ehoarn Bidault

Among the chief efforts to build a strong agriculture sector in Gabon is a push to utilize land for palm oil production. Long-cycle crops, such as palm oil and rubber, are a key factor in Gabon's economic growth strategy. Expected growth in global demand for palm oil, most notably in Africa, will provide a new source of revenue and job creation. For instance, Olam Palm Gabon and Olam Rubber Gabon are projected to increase sector GDP by 47%, or \$172m, by 2022 and create an estimated 23,000 jobs. Around 75% of Gabon's palm oil production will be exported, reducing economic risk associated with oil dependency, spurring economic growth and improving livelihoods across the nation.²

With this upside comes risk, however. The negative impact agricultural production has had on tropical forests is widely recognized. Facilitated by the New York Declaration on Forests, there are now a plethora of commitments from corporations and governments

to promote agricultural production in a manner that prevents deforestation. It is often small-holder farmers, however, who often lack capacity to sustain viable livelihoods while preserving the integrity of the land, who produce many agricultural commodities. It is imperative that the goals of poverty reduction and economic growth be better reconciled with sustainable management and protection of forests. This is particularly true in developing countries like Gabon that still have a high proportion of forest cover.

There is still great potential in highly-forested countries to support the development of thriving farming communities alongside healthy natural forests that provide both production and protection. Doing so, however, requires innovative thinking and collaboration amongst a large, diverse group of stakeholders.

WHAT TFD BRINGS TO THE TOPIC OF DEFORESTATION-FREE

Building on TFD's UDF Initiative, this stakeholder engagement process will facilitate a shared understanding of the unique opportunities and challenges of implementing deforestation-free commitments in highly-forested/forest dominated countries and landscapes, as well as co-designed solutions to meet those challenges. This initiative will complement other related efforts such as TFA 2020, HCSA, CAFI, HCVRN, CFA and the Accountability Framework and will provide insights into possible collaborations to increase clarity and leverage incentives around responsible commodity production in highly-forested landscapes.

TFD will provide a neutral, multi-stakeholder platform to understand how current and proposed deforestation-free policies are impacting actors along the supply chain.

TFD's process ensures broad participation of all stakeholders and leads to trust building, deeper understanding the challenges and solutions and empowerment that drive action. TFD will include local, national and international companies, NGOs, civil society organizations, and government representatives affected by deforestation-free policies in all aspects of the development of this dialogue to guarantee full ownership of the process going forward. By prioritizing inclusion, the process will lead to durable outcomes.

TFD's ultimate goal is to work with stakeholders to develop a common understanding of key definitions, targets, and workable approaches for formulation and effective implementation of deforestation-free commitments. By involving key actors across different sectors in its multi-stakeholder process, TFD is well-poised to identify the critical challenges stakeholders face in implementing such policies, as well as to motivate robust political support for implementing potential solutions.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

The objectives of the TFD UDF field dialogue in Gabon are as follows:

- ➔ **Capture insights and develop shared understanding on key challenges** to ensure deforestation-free initiatives deliver positive social and environmental outcomes in Gabon, using this as a prototype to inform a general approach in highly-forested countries;

- ➔ **Provide an understanding of the smallholder, company agriculture, livelihood context** (both challenges and opportunities) and land development dynamics in highly-forested African countries, using Gabon as an example.
- ➔ **Bring key local, regional, and global actors together** to define the expectations of and examine operational challenges associated with deforestation-free commitments and implementation in the highly-forested context in Africa;
- ➔ **Begin to co-design potential solutions to address these commonly understood challenges**, particularly around incentivizing smallholders, companies, and partners to contribute to local and landscape-scale forest conservation and forest restoration in a way that ensures sustainable livelihoods;
- ➔ **Build on and inform other related processes** such as TFA 2020, HCSA, HCVRN, CAFI, CFA and the Accountability Framework.

DATES AND LOCATION

The proposed location and dates for the UDF Gabon Dialogue are **14-18 October 2017** in/and around **Mouila, Gabon**.

COORDINATION

African leadership and facilitation in the planning and delivery of this dialogue will be central to its success. **The field dialogue will engage approximately 40 African experts and 20 internationals to inform the discussion.** The dialogue will be co-convened with a Gabonese institution (tbd) and the logistics will be organized in partnership with a local partner. An Advisory Group made up of representatives from TFD's UDF Initiative, the Gabonese institutions and other key local/regional partners will be created that will provide critical input on all aspects of the dialogue content and process. Participants will include, among others, representatives of government agencies of Gabon and other Central/West African countries. Dialogue participants will also include similar related initiatives such as TFA2020, HCSA, CFA, HCVRN, CAFI and the Accountability Framework.

AGENDA

Participants will spend two days at field sites where various commodities are being produced in Gabon; these sites will illustrate the social, economic, and environmental context of smallholder commodity production. Participants will have a chance to meet with local farmers, communities, researchers, companies and government representatives to understand how land use decisions are made and how the relationship between different land uses at a landscape scale (including staple food and industrial scale plantations (such as palm and rubber), forestry operations and conservation areas) plays out.

Dialogue participants will then participate in a two-day, facilitated multi-stakeholder dialogue process utilizing both plenary and small working group sessions to seek agreement on the challenges to and opportunities for incentivizing smallholders, companies, and partners to achieve forest conservation objectives in highly-forested landscapes such as those of Gabon. Participants will then begin to co-design potential solutions that could be prototyped and tested collaboratively following the workshop.

INPUTS/OUTPUTS

- ➔ **A Background paper distributed prior to the dialogue** to provide participants with a baseline understanding of the forest and smallholder context in Gabon specifically and in highly-forested countries in general and present ideas to stimulate discussion;
- ➔ **A Dialogue summary prepared by the co-chairs** to report participants' main experiences during site visits and discussions during dialogue sessions;
- ➔ **Path forward to further developing potential solutions** that could be collaboratively tested in the field post-workshop;
- ➔ **Communications-related outputs** (may include video, blog posts, opinion articles, etc.).

REFERENCES

¹ Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Global Forest Atlas. Forest Governance – Gabon. <http://globalforestatlas.yale.edu/congo/forest-governance/gabon>

² Oxford Business Group. *The Report: Gabon 2015*. <https://books.google.com/books?id=6SW-DQAAQBAJ&pg=PA108&lpg=PA108&dq=gabon+palm+oil&source=bl&ots=cO9RgDqiGR&sig=IXBuOuWzyAI08LgzEW6Znvx-hOJs&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiurNTRkubTAhUDw4MKHa5ACXI4FBDoAQg6MAQ#v=onepage&q=gabon%20palm%20oil&f=false>