Congo Basin Science Meeting

28 February

Responding to the call by central African environment ministers in 2021, scientists from across the central African region, across different countries and disciplines, spent two days discussing the needs, priorities and mechanisms to strengthen science in and of the Congo Basin. Scientists from the Amazon region and across the world joined them, to assess the science needed to inform and improve political decision making of national, regional and global relevance.

Building on the success of the long-term Brazilian Amazon research and capacity building program that invested in excess of $100 million, and the Science Panel for the Amazon, and the combined experience of central African experts, the discussions reflected broad agreement including the need for:

- a new synthesis of existing knowledge that connects scientific domains across the region;
- a concerted, adequately-funded long-term program to strengthen science and scientists in the region that builds on existing partnerships;
- the building and strengthening of existing partnerships for long-term investment in institutional capacity and career pathways for a new generation of scientists from and in the region.
- address the unique needs of the region to increase scientific capacity.
- target our science to the sustainable development and economic needs of the region.

The meeting identified that the 'Congo Basin' is an inclusive term, including the contiguous humid tropical forests of central Africa, mangroves, peatlands, savannas, rivers, lakes and other ecosystems of the region.

Priority themes for both the synthesis of existing knowledge and a future multi-disciplinary scientific research agenda are:

1) How do central African ecosystems function, and how does the Congo Basin system function as a regional entity and influence the changing Earth system?
2) How are the ecosystems of the Congo Basin impacted by global, regional and local human activity?
3) How might these ecosystems and the climate of the Congo Basin change in the future?
4) How can scientific data inform climate-resilient sustainable land-use, poverty eradication and other sustainable development goals across the region?

*The participants agreed to take steps to form a **Science Panel for the Congo Basin** as a unique independent platform for scientists to enhance collaboration across countries on a synthesis of what we know of the Congo Basin system, identify knowledge gaps requiring future investment, and help inform policy decisions and their implementation. The Panel will be inclusive in its engagement and consult widely with key partners to deliver a complementary high quality internationally peer-reviewed assessment.*

*The participants further agreed to take steps to form the **Congo Basin Climate Science Initiative**, which will develop a long-term Basin-wide integrated research and training program. This will include long-term flagship research sites across a range of intact and disturbed ecosystems, that implement both observations and experiments across disciplines. We will scale to the Basin by using dispersed ground data, socio-economic data, models and remotely-sensed data. Alternative policy options will be assessed using interdisciplinary models for scenario planning to assist informed decisions by policy makers.*

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The participants agreed to form an initial *ad hoc* International Science Steering Committee composed of scientists from at least DRC, Gabon, Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Brazil (from LBA), US and European countries, from complementary scientific fields, to draw on the scientific community to drive this process forward with potential development partners and funders.

Inclusive capacity building is integral to both the Science Panel for the Congo Basin and the Congo Basin Climate Science Initiative. This includes but is not limited to Centres of Excellence, education, mentorship, career development, exchanges, engagement and communication across the Basin.

A report on the meeting will be shared shortly detailing the provisional research themes, and a road map to achieve the research and capacity building objectives.

<u>Participant list</u>

Kate Abernethy – CENAREST, Gabon / University of Stirling, UK
Bhely Angoboy Ilondea – INERA, DRC
Nicola Anthony – University of New Orleans, USA
Tasso Azevedo – MapBiomas, Brazil
Nicolas Barbier – IRD, France
Clay-Archange Boupoya Mapikou – CENAREST, Gabon
Jean-Jacques Braun – IRD, France
Alessandro Carioca de Araujo – EMBRAPA, Brazil
Pierre Couteron – IRD, France
Thomas Evans – WCS
Corneille Ewango – University of Kisangani, DRC
Roger Fotso – WCS
Thierry C. Fotso-Nguemo – National Institute of Cartography, Cameroon
Matt Hansen – University of Maryland, USA
Philipp Henschel – Panthera
Nelly Houtsa – US Forest Service
Bila-Isia Inogwabini – Catholic University of Congo, DRC / Swedish University of Agricultural Science, Sweden
Kath Jeffery – CAFI / University of Stirling, UK
Michael Keller – US Forest Service
Lydie Stella Koutika – Research Center on Productivity and Sustainability of Industrial Plantations, Rep. of Congo
Judicael Lebamba – Masuku University of Science and Technology, Gabon
Michelle Lee – Ministry of Water and Forests, Gabon / Duke University, USA
Simon Lewis – University of Leeds / UCL, UK
Joël Loumeto – Marien Ngouabi University, Rep. of Congo

Fiona "Boo" Maisels – WCS
Yadvinder Malhi – Oxford University, UK
Danae Maniatis – CAFI
Wanjira Mathai – WRI
Vincent Medjibe – ANPN, Gabon
Patrick Mickala – Masuku University of Science and Technology, Gabon
Donald Midoko Iponga – CENAREST, Gabon
Guy Dieudonne Moukandi N'Kaya – Marien Ngouabi University, Rep. of Congo
Alfred Ngomanda – CENAREST, Gabon
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Teodyl Nkuintchua – WRI
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Christopher Orbell – Panthera
Elsa Ordway – UCLA, USA
F. E. "Jack" Putz – University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia / University of Florida, USA
Claudia Romero – University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia / University of Florida, USA
Gilvan Sampaio de Oliveira – INPE, Brazil
Jean Semeki Gabinzeke – University of Kinshasa, DRC
Bonaventure Sonké – University of Yaounde I, Cameroon
Denis Sonwa – CIFOR-ICRAF
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