

# Congo Basin Landscapes Initiative Fact Sheet

MAY 2025

## The Congo Basin: A Global Treasure

Spanning over 200 million hectares, the Congo Basin contains Earth's second-largest tropical rainforest. This vast expanse represents over 15% of the world's remaining tropical forests and 70% of the African continent's forest cover. The relatively intact forests and peatlands of the Congo Basin sustain approximately 80 million people while harboring an extraordinary array of biodiversity, including rare and endangered species such as forest elephants, lowland gorillas, and chimpanzees.

The Congo Basin also harbours the world's largest tropical peatland complex which measures an estimated 167,600 km<sup>2</sup> and represents 36% of the world's tropical peatland area. The Congo Basin peatlands store an estimated 30 billion metric tons of carbon—equivalent to three years of global fossil fuel emissions. These vast wetlands not only regulate regional water cycles and support extraordinary biodiversity found nowhere else on Earth, but they also play a crucial role in climate stabilization by preventing massive amounts of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere.

## The Challenge

Despite their global significance, these Congo Basin rainforests and peatlands face mounting threats from oil exploration, industrial agriculture, logging, and infrastructure development that could trigger a carbon "time bomb" if disturbed. Protecting these pristine ecosystems is essential not only for preserving the livelihoods of local communities who depend on them, but also for meeting international climate goals, as their destruction would release catastrophic amounts of greenhouse gases that would accelerate global warming beyond manageable levels.

## Our Response

With funding support from GEF and IKI, the UNEP-led Congo Basin Landscapes Initiative is working with governments, regional institutions, civil society, indigenous people, local communities, international and

national partner organizations and the private sector to drive transformational change in the conservation and sustainable management of tropical forests in the Congo Basin.

The Congo Basin Landscapes Initiative includes the GEF-funded Congo Forest Integrated Programme and the IKI-funded Congo Basin Peatlands Project.

## GEF-funded Congo Forest Integrated Programme

The GEF-funded Congo Forest Integrated Programme consists of two sequential initiatives, the GEF-7 Congo Basin Impact Programme (2021-2026) and the GEF-8 Congo Critical Forest Biome Integrated Programme (2025-2032). The geography of these Initiatives covers (in alphabetical order) Angola, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo, and São Tomé et Príncipe. Together, these programmes represent an investment of approximately \$100 million from the GEF.

The Congo Forest Integrated Programme supports forest conservation and sustainable management through a regional landscape approach that addresses deforestation and forest degradation. It promotes regional dialogue and collaboration while mobilizing climate finance to expand conservation efforts throughout the Congo Basin.

## IKI-funded Congo Basin Peatlands Project

Supported both by IKI and GEF, UNEP is also working with partners and stakeholders to preserve and sustainably manage the Congo Basin Peatlands, the largest tropical peatlands ecosystem of the planet. From 2022-2027, IKI is investing nearly 15 million EUR in the project "Securing crucial biodiversity, carbon and water stores in the Congo Basin Peatlands by enabling evidence based decision making and good governance". This project advances peatlands conservation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Congo.

The Congo Basin Landscapes Initiative represents a global effort to protect the Congo Basin's invaluable biodiversity, carbon reserves, and water systems while promoting sustainable development through world-class forest management practices that benefit both local communities and natural ecosystems.

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