

THE EBONY PROJECT

Restoration, livelihoods, and field-based learning in the Congo Basin

OVERVIEW

The Congo Basin is one of the world's most important ecosystems, vital for biodiversity and climate stability. Yet increasing land-use pressures threaten its forests and the communities that depend on them. Launched in 2016, the Ebony Project brings together communities, researchers, and private-sector partners in Cameroon to restore degraded forest landscapes, support sustainable livelihoods, and protect endangered African ebony.

By combining ecological science, community participation, and long-term restoration approaches, the project is helping strengthen more resilient and sustainable forest landscapes in the Congo Basin.

CORE OBJECTIVES

- **Forest restoration** through community-led tree planting
- **Ebony restoration** paired with fruit trees for food security and income
- Scientific knowledge to **improve practices**
- **Community capacity** via training, nurseries, and **long-term engagement**

KEY RESULTS

- **Restoration at Scale**

Landscape Expansion

Expanded from the Dja landscape into the Lobéké / TRIDOM region

Community-Based Implementation

- Community nurseries established across participating villages.
- Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) implemented at both village and household participation levels.
- Communities now categorized through long-term participation pathways:
- onboarding → active → graduated → independent

Scientific Contribution

Research published in Science Advances journal confirmed that:

- forest elephants play an important role in ebony seed dispersal;
- ebony regeneration declines significantly in forests without elephants.

THE EBONY PROJECT IN CAMEROON



KEY RESULTS 2025 SNAPSHOT



Trees planted
81,982

Ebony trees
47,561

Fruit Trees
34,421



6 new communities integrated near the borders of CAR and Republic of Congo

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Strengthened Monitoring & Evaluation

In 2025, the Ebony Project developed a Theory of Change to strengthen long-term planning, monitoring, and adaptive management.

The framework recognizes that successful restoration depends not only on tree planting, but also on:

- sustained community participation;
- livelihood integration;
- ecological connectivity;
- and long-term monitoring and learning systems.

The Theory of Change helps guide implementation by linking restoration activities to broader ecological, social, and landscape-level outcomes.



EMERGING INSIGHTS

- Long-term participation strengthens restoration outcomes.
- Linking livelihoods and restoration supports sustained engagement.
- Ecological science helps improve restoration effectiveness.
- Monitoring systems support adaptive implementation.



FROM PRACTICE TO SCALE

Experiences from the Ebony Project highlight the importance of:

- flexible implementation approaches;
- long-term community engagement;
- integrating livelihoods into restoration activities;
- and linking ecological science with field implementation.

These lessons can help inform broader landscape restoration efforts across the Congo Basin.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Sustainable restoration depends not only on trees planted, but on long-term community engagement, ecological connectivity, and adaptive management systems.

ABOUT THE CONGO BASIN LANDSCAPES INITIATIVE (CBLI)

This UNEP-led multi-partner and multi-country initiative includes the GEF-funded Congo Forest Integrated Programme (CFIP) and the IKI-funded Congo Basin Peatlands project.

The GEF-funded CFIP, being delivered under the UNEP-Led multi-country and multi-partner CBLI, comprises of two flagship initiatives, including the GEF-7 aCongo Basin Impact program (2021-2026) and the GEF-8 Congo Critical Forest Biome Integrated Programme (2025-2032).

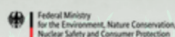
The CBLI collaborates with governments and partners to protect the Congo Basin rainforest and peatlands by implementing transformative landscape approaches in partnership with local communities, forest-dependent individuals, and the private sector, ensuring benefits for all stakeholders.



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