

Republic of Congo

Context

With support of UN-REDD, the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, as well as other partners, the Republic of Congo (RoC) is nearing completion of the REDD+ readiness activities for the UNFCCC, including a) a National REDD+ strategy which has been developed and validated by stakeholders in June 2016, b) a Forest Reference Emission Level (FRL/FREL) submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat in January 2016, making RoC one of the first in Africa to do so, c) a National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS) in advanced stages of development and d) participatory definition of principles, criteria and indicators to support Congo's national approach to safeguards, drawing on Cancun safeguards as well as on the World Bank's Operational Policies. With regards to institutional implementation framework for REDD+, the Country has a REDD+ National Committee (CONA-REDD), 12 Departmental Committees, a functioning National Coordination Office and a REDD+ civil society platform (CACO-REDD). RoC has also been selected in the pipeline of the Carbon Fund, through which the FCPF will pilot incentive payments for REDD+ policies and measures. An advanced draft Emission Reduction Program Document (ERPD) covering Sangha and Likouala Provinces has been submitted in November 2016 and will be finalized in May 2017. Congo is also a member of the Central Africa Forest Initiative (CAFI), a key platform of coordination that provides finance for policy reforms and field investments at scale in support of national investment frameworks for REDD+ and low-carbon development.

The National Investment Plan under the auspices of the Forest Investment Programme (FIP) and supported by the World Bank and CAFI is currently underway and a plan is to be submitted for consideration by the FIP/CAFI Steering Committee by December 2017. The investment plan process would detail outputs and activities for the REDD+ Strategy in order to enable implementation of the strategic objectives. Other pending tasks include continued improvement in the FREL, operationalisation of a safeguards information system and submission of a summary of information.

The national roadmap for results-based payments (RBPs) at national level consists of implementing the existing REDD+ strategy and assessing REDD+ results through continued MRV which are consistent with the submitted and technically assessed FREL. Congo will need to submit this information to the UNFCCC in the REDD+ Technical Annex of the Biennial Updated Report (BUR), as required for RBPs, while simultaneously seeking to improve the data and methodologies in the FREL especially in response to some of the areas for improvement identified by the assessment team in the Technical Assessment Report. At the moment, there is no clear date for submitting a BUR with a REDD+ technical annex (to obtain RBPs) to the UNFCCC. Nonetheless, the Government has indicated its commitment to do so in the coming years (probably by 2020) providing that it obtains funding to start implementing REDD+ activities through various planned initiatives (FIP, CAFI, GCF¹). This may involve the submission and technical assessment of a technically improved FREL by 2020. Submitting a summary of information on safeguards to the UNFCCC will increase the likelihood of receiving RBPs from the GCF. At the sub-national level, Congo will soon initiate the negotiation of an Emission Reduction Program Agreement with the FCPF Carbon Fund, providing the approval of its the ERPD. This would provide an opportunity for Congo to test and obtain RBPs at the sub-national level.

¹ The country intends to develop in 2017-2018 a GCF proposal with the support of FAO to support the implementation of its Nationally Determined Contribution in the land-use and forestry sector, including its REDD+ strategy.

Rationale and approach

RoC is in the process to move from the REDD+ readiness phase into the REDD+ implementation phase. The most important challenge foreseen to obtain RBPs is the capacity to mobilize and manage funding (national and international sources) to implement its proposed REDD+ activities and investments. Currently the country is undergoing a major budgetary crisis caused by the falling in oil price, the main source of revenue for the country. Without substantial external funding for implementing REDD+ activities, it is unlikely that the country will invest sufficient government funds to achieve emission reductions or increase carbon stocks. External funding is being mobilized by various partners and donor countries to mitigate this risk, including the FIP, the CAFI, as well as an ongoing GCF proposal. Other parallel/relevant funding and processes include funds put forward under the FLEGT programme, which is financed by various partners (UE, AFD, DFID, etc).

Other more protracted challenges to successful implementation of REDD+ and realizing results include, achieving the economic development aspirations of the country, such as reflected in the Agricultural Development Plan and the extensive areas allocated for large-scale agricultural concessions, improving forest governance and ensuring a positive impact on local communities and indigenous peoples. From a technical perspective, a potential barrier to reporting of REDD+ results is the capacity to obtain consistent MRV of emissions and removals through the NFMS. One challenge is the opportunity costs associated especially in view of the economic development aspirations of the country, which are reflected in the Agricultural Development Plan and the extensive area designated for Macro-Agricultural Concessions.

The UN-REDD team has supported Congo with the establishment of its NFMS and the submission of its Forest Reference Emission Level and is therefore well positioned to strengthen Congo's MRV capacity and provide technical assistance to the country for consistent REDD+ results reporting. UN-REDD has vast experience in capacity strengthening and implementation for the pillars of the NFMS (NFI, SLMS, GHGi), and Forest Reference Emission Levels/Forest Reference Levels (FREL/FRL); 70% of all 26 FREL/FRLs submitted to the UNFCCC were realized with support from UN-REDD.

The UN-REDD team also supported Congo with the design and approval of its REDD+ National Strategy, the planning of its investments for the land-use and forestry sector (including cost-benefit analyses of REDD+ options), formulation of Policies and Measures, reforms of the country's Policies, Legislation and Regulation, and the formulation of the (Intended) Nationally Determined Contribution submitted to the UNFCCC. UN-REDD experience garnered, and technical assistance for designing and setting up a mechanism in order to have a coordinated, transparent and accountable framework for the management of REDD+ funds can also be extended to inform options for Congo. Identification of land use planning criteria to allocate land-use decisions to inform policies and measures within the investment plan can build on work underway with other partners such as the World Resources Institute.

While the Republic of Congo has advanced considerably in the design of social and environmental standards, a Safeguards Information System (SIS) has not been designed nor has the country produced its first summary of information on safeguards. These safeguards products will be essential deliverables for the country to access results-based payments under the UNFCCC and constitute an important missing part of the national REDD+ regime.

Technical Assistance requested

RoC's Ministry of Environment plans to develop technical capacity to ensure that the NFMS is operational and well anchored, in particular by strengthening national capacities in remote sensing, analysis of ground collected data and Greenhouse Gas inventory reporting (BUR and National Communications). This capacity is crucial for institutionalizing the measuring, reporting and verifying (MRV) of GHG emissions and removals from forestry, which allows the country to report REDD+ results. In specific, the country aspires to improve its MRV of the REDD+ activity forest degradation (currently included in the FREL with proxy data) and include enhancement of forest carbon stock (currently omitted in the FREL). The latter is especially important in view of the country aspiration in its most optimistic scenario to scale up reforestation/restoration areas to 100,000ha per year (see first NDC submission RoC). These activities will include strong capacity building components for national experts, particularly those working for CNIAF. RoC also wishes to put in place a formal partnership with countries in the region to exchange data and knowledge (e.g AGEOS in Gabon, OSFAC in DRC), and enjoy the opportunity of South-South exchange with countries in other parts of the worlds which are more advanced in REDD+ implementation (e.g. Brazil).

The country wishes that UN-REDD experts extend their support to enhance the country's capacities in planning REDD+ investments, for instance through decisions making processes to review, broker and achieve land use decisions which reflect the strategic objectives in the REDD+ Strategy, and instruments for REDD+ funding design and for mobilizing funding. These will be explored through the Investment Plan process as support for these elements are not forthcoming for 2018.

While the Congolese Government would like additional support to complete its SIS and fill knowledge gaps about the peatlands, the current level of funding will not allow the UN-REDD agencies to support this issue at this stage.

Results Framework

UN-REDD TA outputs (*)	UN-REDD TA agency	Timeline (year/s)	Indicators (**)	Baseline (***)	Means of Verification
2.1 Congo has consolidated National Forest Monitoring Systems and improve its Reference Levels conforming to international UNFCCC requirements and aligning to	FAO	2018	Degradation monitoring is improved either by assessing it geospatially or through improved estimates of damage associated with conventional logging	Degradation is included in the FREL with proxy data using non-country specific values for damage in uncertified plantations	FRL Assessment Report submitted to the UNFCCC
		2019	Enhancement of forest carbon stock will become part of the NFMS and can be included in the FRL	Enhancement of forest carbon stock is not part of the NFMS and omitted in the FREL submitted in 2016	FRL Assessment Report submitted to the UNFCCC

the NS/AP for REDD+.		2020	Formal partnerships have been established with Gabon (AGEOS) and OSFAC (in DRC) for the supply of imagery on a regular basis facilitating the biannual assessment of forest area changes area (2014-2016 and 2016-2018 is assessed)	No formal data sharing partnership is in place, deforestation is assessed up to 2012	BUR methodology for forest cover change satellite monitoring includes list of images used and provided by AGEOS and OSFAC
		2020	An updated FREL is submitted to the UNFCCC, including updated statistics for deforestation, degradation and carbon stock enhancement for the period covering 2012-2018	The current FREL solely includes statistics from deforestation and degradation, for the 2000-2012 period	FRL Assessment Report submitted to the UNFCCC
3.1. Technically robust REDD+ PAMs are designed, implemented and monitored based on RoC's REDD+ Strategy to address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation	FAO	2020	Identification of REDD + PAMs requiring private sector engagement and key private sector entities committed to supporting implementation, in close collaboration with other ongoing processes (FIP, CAFI, ER-Programme, upcoming GCF project)	REDD+ Investment plan not yet initiated	REDD+ investment plan developed for and submitted to FIP/CAFI/GCF
	FAO	2020	Status of REDD+ results following PAM implementation are assessed and prepared in the correct format for reporting in the technical annex of the BUR	No REDD+ results have been assessed	BUR submitted to the UNFCCC

3.2 REDD+ PAMs have a Technical assistance provided for the robust institutional anchoring, with a wide range of economic sectors engaged in REDD+ objectives.	FAO	2019	Institutional anchoring of GHG emission/removal reporting reflecting emission reductions associated with the implementation of mitigation actions	Institutional capacity for GHG inventory reporting is weak and not well anchored in the government structure	Government decree creating a formal, national structure with the mandate to regularly develop and submit a GHG inventory, as part of the BUR and National Communication submissions
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National ownership and sustainability

The technical assistance needs were identified through consultation in the country and by emails. A discussion with the REDD+ focal point was held on 26 April in Brazzaville by FAO to discuss about the priorities for UN-REDD/TA support (FAO/UN-REDD mission). An additional follow up call with the REDD+ focal point was held on 5 May to further discuss priorities and needs, which was attended by representatives of the three UN-REDD agencies. The technical assistance needs respond directly to areas for future improvement which RoC has included in its FRL submission (improving the degradation estimate, including the soil pool including better data on peatlands) and respond clearly to some of the ambitions the country included in its NDC (notably on reducing deforestation and increasing enhancement of forest carbon stocks).

Annex 1 presents the Risk Management Matrix of the TA plans for RoC.

The TA seeks to coordinates and align with on-going programmes and investment planning for REDD+ including CAFI, the FIP, FCPF and the ER-PD if approved by the BioCarbon Funds.

Annex 1: Risk Management Framework

Guidance:

Please complete the Risk Management Framework, using the following table as a template. The risk formulation in the table below is generic and provided here simply as an example of the type of information expected. Please revise it so that it responds to the specific circumstances of the country.

Risk description	Rating	Mitigation measure
External risks		
In the course of the year the technical expertise provided by the programme is no longer considered relevant in certain countries	P= Low I = High	The deployment of TA was done based on (i) gap analysis; (ii) in discussion with governments; (iii) according to the expertise of the team. In principle this risk has a low probability of occurrence. However should it materialize; the programme has built in a buffer to allow redeployment of teams where they are most needed. Also, while the UN-REDD team does not have oversight over the annual workplans of the sources of funds being assisted, the dialogue with and trust of the country counterparts should enable an early discussion and adjustment of the UN-REDD expertise made available.
The advice/recommendations of the UN-REDD team are not appropriated or adopted by the governments or stakeholders in country	P= Low I = High	As above, in principle the TA has been jointly identified with counterparts. However it is uncertain how and what the outcomes of this TA would be taken on. In cases where such advice or expertise is finally not taken on board, the impact will be quite high as the programme would have failed to deliver relevant, quality or applicable advice.
The advances resulting from the assistance of the UN-REDD team are not attributed to the programme as it plays a supportive function	P = High I = Medium	In an environment where TA is deployed amidst multiple other funds, the impacts of this TA are likely to be unappreciated in comparison with the financial flows supporting that same activity. E.g. UN-REDD TA providing expert advice on MRV systems financed by other SOF. The likelihood of this occurring are high and impacts will have to be determined depending on the country context. The only possible mitigation measure is through the documentation of requests, support deployed and agreement with all partners of the impact of this support.

Risk description	Rating	Mitigation measure
The national REDD+ coordination unit is not sustained weakening the coordination of REDD+ activities in the country and the implementation of the TA	P = Medium I = High	The current national REDD+ coordination unit (CN-REDD) was established and maintained with external support, in particular from the World Bank FCPF. Therefore the maintenance of the unit after completion of the FCPF programme is at risk. As the country intends to enter in the REDD+ implementation phase, the government will need to either use external funds (CAFI or others) to maintain the current coordination unit or institutionalize it and create a new multisectorial structure. Though the UN-REDD team can advocate for a sustainable, institutionalized unit well knowledgeable of the REDD+ process and the programme will use the coordination channel decided by the Government.
Internal		
The presence of in-country support through longer missions is requested from governments and increases costs beyond what is planned for.	P= Low I =High	The budget covers primarily regional and global staff costs and contracts, with some resources allocated to missions and other local costs. Should certain support and expertise require longer missions/presence in country, the limited financial buffer would imply reallocating from one country to another or from one activity to another within the same country. The programme will undertake a mid-term revision of TA and budgets to determine what flexibility is available and table such reallocations for approval of the concerned country.

Risk description	Rating	Mitigation measure
<p>Inability to respond to changes in country needs due to the rigidity in reallocating resources from one agency to the other.</p>	<p>P = Medium I = High</p>	<p>While the TA to be deployed was identified in conjunction and consultation with counterparts, this was done quite early in the planning for 2017 and therefore may be subject to changes. This may entail requesting more expertise from one agency than the other. Considering the budgeting, contracting and fund allocation structures, it will be difficult to accommodate for changes that entail reallocation from one agency to another therefore diminishing the relevance of the programme to countries and subsequently its reputation.</p>

* P: Probability; I: Impact