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**“Strengthening and promoting the involvement of Indigenous and local community women of Central Africa and the Congo Basin in biodiversity conservation and climate resilience.”**

MAY 8–12, 2023  
*Brazzaville, République du Congo*

The First Subregional Forum of  
Indigenous and Local Community Women  
in Central Africa and the Congo Basin

# ROADMAP

## I. Preamble

The forest ecosystems of the Congo Basin represent the world's second green lung after the Amazon. Rich and diverse, with emblematic and endemic species, they are home to a biological diversity unique in the world and are of vital importance in regulating the global climate. According to scientific findings, the resources of the Congo Basin have been declining considerably and rapidly for several decades.

In response to this situation, a governance framework for the Congo Basin forests has been put in place through the adoption of the COMIFAC Treaty and the subregional Convergence Plan for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Forest Management. Alongside other stakeholders, the efforts of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) have been recognized as essential to achieving the goals set by the United Nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate disruption, and fight against biodiversity loss over the course of this decade.

The Network of Indigenous and Local Populations for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC) is a platform for organizations working for the recognition and promotion of IP and LC rights in sustainable forest management in Central Africa. Since its creation in 2003 in Kigali, Rwanda, REPALEAC's regional coordination and its national branches in several countries (Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, and Rwanda) have been taking action to defend the rights of these groups and guarantee the sustainability of the ecosystems on which they are intimately linked and on which their survival depends. To frame its actions, REPALEAC has adopted a vision that promotes "a Central Africa that values and conserves nature sustainably, with the contribution and participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities." This vision, translated into a strategy document for sustainable development in favor of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in 2018, gives priority, among other things, to the specific needs and issues of Indigenous women.

The involvement of these women at local and national levels through their grassroots structures in a number of activities makes a considerable contribution to nature conservation, climate resilience, and above all to combating socio-cultural vulnerability. However, despite best efforts, their contribution to nature conservation and climate resilience remains poorly supported and, more often than not, ignored. To enable women to receive the necessary attention, REPALEAC and Indigenous women leaders have developed a strategic partnership with various stakeholders in the governance of the ecosystems of the Congo Basin, including political figures in the Central African sub-region.

With the support of the Minister of Forest Economy of the Republic of Congo, as Ambassador for Indigenous women in Central Africa, the Keeper of the Seals, Minister of Justice, Human Rights and the Promotion of Indigenous Peoples of the Government of Congo, the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and other international partners, the First Subregional Forum of Indigenous and Local Community Women in Central Africa and the Congo Basin was organized from May 8 to 12, 2023 in Brazzaville.

Some 200 participants from over 20 countries around the world participated in the proceedings. In addition to REPALEAC members, the Forum brought together Indigenous and local community women delegates and leaders, donors (Christensen Fund, Bezos Earth Fund, Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA), David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Ford Foundation, Nia Tero, Re:wild, Skoll Foundation,

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*Note on Cover Image: Participants gather for a photo on the last day of the Forum at the Grand Lancaster Hotel in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. Photo: Nicole Harris for RRI.*

Synchronicity Earth, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund), representatives of COMIFAC and GIZ, Indigenous women's representatives of the Global Alliance for Territorial Communities (Amazonia, Indonesia), and members of the RRI coalition (Canada, USA, Asia, and Latin America).

Chaired by the Keeper of the Seals, Minister of Justice, Human Rights and the Promotion of Indigenous Peoples of the Republic of Congo, the aim of the Forum was to “strengthen and promote the engagement of Indigenous and local community women from Central Africa and the Congo Basin in biodiversity conservation and climate resilience.”

This Roadmap, validated at the end of the Forum, contributes to the implementation of REPALEAC's five strategic axes:

**Axis 1:** Securing IPLC lands, territories, and natural resources;

**Axis 2:** Participation of IPLCs in decisions concerning access to and sustainable management of land, forests, and natural resources, at local, national, and international levels;

**Axis 3:** Increase in sustainable economic benefits for IPLCs linked to sustainable management of natural resources and forests;

**Axis 4:** Improving living conditions for IPLCs; and

**Axis 5:** Defending the interests of IPLCs in Central Africa.

## 2. Potential for and lessons learned from Indigenous and local women's actions for biodiversity conservation and climate resilience

Discussions with Indigenous and local women revealed that:

Indigenous and local community women in Central Africa contribute to the traditional management of land, forests, and many other natural ecosystems that conserve biodiversity, sequester carbon, provide local livelihoods, and preserve traditional cultural knowledge, which have both local and global environmental benefits.

Biodiversity conservation by Indigenous and local community women is structured around traditions, local languages, practices, customs, and spirituality. Indigenous Peoples' habits and customs enable them to protect animals, carry out ecological monitoring, determine resource harvesting rules, and manage natural resources sustainably.

Furthermore, Indigenous and local community women's actions support the development of their communities. They lead initiatives to secure their spaces; improve the exploitation of natural resources; introduce innovative conservation practices such as agricultural pastoralism, agricultural forestry, and renewable energy; improve their incomes and fight hunger through the development of income-generating activities (IGAs); and organize to access financing and advocate for their rights.

Indigenous and local community women face difficulties that prevent them from asserting their rights fully and effectively, limiting their fight for resilience. In particular, they face: multiple structural and systemic discriminations; the appropriation of territories by states and private individuals; the existence of policies hindering the securing of collective land rights; the absence and weak measures that exist for the application of texts in favor of Indigenous Peoples; the increasingly difficult access to pharmacopoeia and the repercussions on health; vulnerability to epidemic and endemic diseases; the absence of health policies and systems adapted to the needs of Indigenous women; the absence of an education system adapted to their culture; difficult access to basic infrastructure (roads, schools, health facilities) and funding; patriarchy and customs based on male domination; the timidity of Indigenous women as an obstacle to their commitment; sexist attacks; and the perverse effects of security and health crises.

Threats to territories put women's survival at risk, resulting in the degradation of territories, the disappearance of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' cultural knowledge and traditions, and the loss of traditional livelihoods. The Forum in Brazzaville demonstrated that, despite the threats they face, women are resilient and highly adaptable in the face of these challenges.

### 3. Priorities for strengthening and promoting the involvement of Indigenous and local community women in biodiversity conservation and climate resilience

The results of exchanges during the Forum led to the identification of three (3) priorities organized as follows: (A) Strengthen community development and the technical and institutional capacities of grassroots organizations, associations, and networks of Indigenous and local community women; (B) Facilitate access to direct funding for Indigenous and local women-led organizations; and (C) Ensure monitoring, evaluation, learning, and sharing of lessons.

#### **PRIORITY A :**

***Strengthen the development and technical and institutional capacities of grassroots organizations, associations, and networks of Indigenous and local community women***

1. Strengthen and support the organizational, technical, and institutional capacities of women's—especially Indigenous and local women's—organizations in defending their rights (leadership, advocacy, structuring and energizing organizations, intergenerational knowledge, literacy), managing their organizations (negotiations, projects, financial management, governance), and developing sustainable production systems by promoting their know-how;
2. Support the improvement of living environments with basic infrastructures and the livelihoods of Indigenous women through the development of income-generating activities to increase sustainable economic benefits linked to the management of natural resources, forests, and pastoralism;
3. Contribute to the improvement of policy and legislative frameworks related to forests and land governance, taking into account traditional systems of governance;

4. Promote and enhance Indigenous knowledge systems through the exchange of traditional knowledge, research, protection of intellectual property rights, modernization of pharmacopoeia, certification, etc;
5. Promote the development of sustainable management systems to secure Indigenous lands (agroforestry and tree planting, biodiversity conservation through the “One Health” approach and ecotourism, etc); and
6. Advocate Indigenous women’s rights to governments, subregional bodies, and other influential players across all activities.

#### **PRIORITY B :**

##### ***Facilitate access to direct funding for Indigenous and local women-led organizations***

1. Ensure flexible and direct access to financing adapted to the conditions of Indigenous and local women, with firm commitments from donors to interventions defined by the women at the Forum;
2. Clearly define the roles of stakeholders such as development partners, technical partners, governments, donors, REPALEAC, civil society organizations (CSOs), etc; and
3. Define flexible fundraising and management procedures and mechanisms adapted to the situation of Indigenous and local women, including advocacy with governments and donors.

#### **PRIORITY C :**

##### ***Ensure monitoring, evaluation, learning, and sharing of lessons***

This Roadmap will be implemented as of 2024. Monitoring progress is an essential condition for ensuring the scope and effectiveness of women’s actions. The key achievements listed below can serve as short- and medium-term monitoring indicators.

According to preliminary analyses, a minimum amount of US\$2 million is essential to ensure the start of the implementation of this Roadmap for the year 2024. This Roadmap will be implemented by REPALEAC in partnership with RRI to strengthen and promote the engagement of Indigenous and local community women in Central Africa and the Congo Basin in biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. The RRI-REPALEAC collaboration builds on the ongoing implementation and experience of direct funding targeting conservation, climate resilience, and secure livelihoods under the RRI-REPALEAC partnership supported by the Bezos Earth Fund (BEF).

Activities	2024	2025	2026
1. Strengthen the capacities and provide organizational, technical, and institutional support for Indigenous and local community women's organizations in defending their rights (leadership, advocacy, structuring and energizing organizations, intergenerational knowledge, literacy), managing their organizations (negotiations, projects, financial management, governance), and developing sustainable production systems by promoting their know-how.			
2. Support the improvement of living environments with basic infrastructure and the livelihoods of Indigenous women through the development of income-generating activities to increase sustainable economic benefits linked to the management of natural resources, forests, and pastoralism.			
3. Contribute to the improvement of policy and legislative frameworks related to forest and land governance while taking into account traditional governance systems.			
4. Promote and enhance Indigenous knowledge systems through the exchange of traditional knowledge, research, protection of intellectual property rights, modernization of pharmacopoeia, certification, etc.			
5. Promote the development of sustainable management systems to secure Indigenous lands (agroforestry and tree planting, biodiversity conservation through the "One Health" and ecotourism, etc).			
6. Advocate Indigenous women's rights to governments, subregional bodies, and other influential players across all activities.			
7. Support economic activities implemented by Indigenous and local community women in the context of resilience and that do not harm forests.			

Brazzaville, May 12, 2023



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*Photo: Nicole Harris for RRI.*