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### **Future prospects for forest certification in the DRC: a tool for achieving sustainable and diversified use of forest resources**

What future does the DRC, in the process of reconstruction, hold for the country's 60 million hectares of tropical rainforests? The maintenance of their biodiversity, their genetic potential and their contribution to the planet's climatic balance involve global issues which extend far beyond the Congolese frame.

Around 10 million hectares are protected, at least on paper, by their status as national parks or reserves. International NGOs like the WWF are currently struggling to find the financial means and put together the human resources needed to effectively protect them in the long term.

Another 10 million hectares or so, situated on the fringes of large urban centres or along major transport axes that in the process of being rehabilitated, are or very soon will be subject to more or less major levels of secundarisation. It is hoped that this secundarisation, due to the inevitable expansion of subsistence and cash crop agriculture, will take place in a context that is more favourable to poverty reduction. However, as far as the conservation of large forest mammals is concerned, these 10 million hectares must be considered lost.

Of the remaining 40 million hectares, it is neither useful nor desirable to allocate more than 10 million hectares to the industrial exploitation of timber under the current circumstances. The following action is required in this regard:

- The conversion procedure must be finalised in a realistic way, specifying in advance the forest areas formally allotted to exploitation and locating them pertinently in relation to the issues of conservation/economic profitability.
- A clear but realistic legal framework must be applied to favour sustainable management of the converted forests. This will require a revolutionary change in the relationships between the administration and the forestry operators. This change will have to be promoted through external assistance for the Congolese government (FLEGT - Forest Law Enforcement on Governance and Trade) agreements and for committed businesses (assistance towards gaining FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification).

The fate of the remaining 30 million hectares of tropical rainforests still constitutes a question mark at the current time. Without special earmarking, they risk rotting away under the logic of informal exploitation that is the norm in the contemporary Congolese economy, or even being squandered by fraudulent political allocations.

The international community must play its role in the face of these two dangers by contributing financial support to the development and implementation of a fair and transparent forest policy in the DRC, but also by attentive monitoring to ensure no land is allocated outside the democratic rules.