

Challenges of the DR Congo in Coping with Carbon Pricing

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Abstract

The world's transition to a global low-carbon and resilient economy implies cutting global Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions to reach net-zero by 2050. Carbon pricing has become a major tool in mitigation strategies leading to the expansion of the carbon markets. It is also a top priority on the sustainable finance agenda. Since 2021, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has proposed an international carbon price floor targeting large emitting countries (the United States, the European Union, China, and India) to prevent carbon leakages. However, the IMF's proposal sets aside developing and emerging economies presenting themselves with Nature-based Solutions (NbS) that contribute to absorbing global CO₂ emissions.

In this regard, the DR Congo, which has a very limited carbon footprint, plays a significant role in addressing climate change, thanks to its natural capital. In addition to its vast reserve of critical minerals, it is home to about 60% of the Congo Basin's rainforest. The latter constitutes a valuable biodiversity asset and one of the world's largest carbon sinks, known as the "lungs of Africa." At the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP 27), in November 2022, the DR Congo joined forces with Brazil and Indonesia to form a rainforest cartel. Since then, the unique coalition has aimed to advocate the climate governance issues pertaining to the Global South during the international climate negotiations. Hence, it is likely to federate other rainforest countries. In the absence of multilateral consensus, the rainforest cartel has already called for fair forest carbon pricing. This could contribute to further curbing global GHG emissions and improve Domestic Revenue Mobilisation (DRM). In the DR Congo, the potential revenue stream from carbon taxation could be critical for investing in climate adaptation, due to the climate finance gap. Since July 2021, the DR Congo has worked on climate-related reforms, such as strengthening the forestry sector's governance and implementing a new regulatory framework related to carbon pricing. Ultimately, the country has embarked on its green economic recovery's path, which is hindered by a long-standing security crisis in the eastern provinces.

Keywords: Carbon Pricing; Domestic Revenue Mobilisation; Nature-based Solutions, Ecosystem Services; Congo Basin; The DR Congo.

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Introduction

The DR Congo presents itself as a "country solution"². Its vast natural capital has contributed to mitigating climate change effects. Beyond the growing interests in its critical mineral reserves, the country is also endowed with exceptional NbS, including rainforests and peatlands, in the Congo Basin. Its NbS have participated in curbing global carbon dioxide emissions.

In this context, the paper analyses how the DR Congo, which is a Least Developed Country (LDC) and a fragile State, has coped with challenges related to the ecosystem services resulting from the NbS. The paper is structured as follows:

- Firstly, the paper examines the key features of the NbS, which are threatened by environmental degradation. Hence, the country has deployed efforts to protect and restore the environment. This implies to further improve forest governance and peatlands management.

- Secondly, the paper highlights that the DR Congo figures out the best way to financially compensate the NbS role in building resilience against climate change at the global level. This is of critical importance for such a country experiencing a limited fiscal space. In 2021, the country started calling for fair carbon pricing to achieve climate and fiscal objectives. It expects to broaden the tax base and improve the mobilisation of domestic revenue.

- Thirdly, in 2022, the DR Congo partnered with two major rainforest countries (Brazil and Indonesia) to build their common climate agenda with a focus on fair carbon pricing. Since then, they have voiced their concerns at various climate diplomacy settings, such as COP 27, to large emitters.

1. The DR Congo, A Net Carbon Absorber Experiencing Environmental Degradation Challenges

The DR Congo is at the forefront of the transition towards a global low-carbon economy, through its invaluable NbS. Nonetheless, it is confronted with environmental degradation, including deforestation. Addressing this hurdle is a prerequisite, as the country has opted for fully benefiting from revenues generated from the ecosystem services.

1.1. The DR Congo Contribution to Global Climate Change Mitigation by Relying on Its Natural-Based Solutions

In 2021, Africa only emitted 3.91% of global CO₂ emissions, which embodied a low carbon footprint compared with data of North America, Europe, and Asia³. In this regard, the Congo Basin countries (Cameroon, Central African Republic, the DR Congo⁴, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon) are carbon-negative emitters, but also

² . "DRC, Country Solution," RDC PreCOP 27 2022, accessed 1 July 2023. <https://drcprecop27.medd.gouv.cd/en/yangambi.php>.

³ . "CO₂ and Greenhouse Gas Emissions", Hannah Ritchie, Max Roser and Pablo Rosado, accessed 1 July 2023. <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions>.

⁴ . International Monetary Fund, *Democratic Republic of the Congo: Selected Issues. Country Report*, no. 22/211 (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2022), 6, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2022/07/05/Democratic-Republic-of-the-Congo-Selected-Issues-520403>.

providers of carbon capture services, thanks to their natural assets, offering additional benefits in terms of biodiversity conservation.

Among the above-mentioned countries, the DR Congo has a leading position:

- First, the country hosts 10% of the world's tropical forests with more than 130 million hectares (ha) absorbing nearly 24.5 giga tonnes of CO₂ emissions per day. Additionally, that $\frac{3}{4}$ of these GHG emissions are concentrated in 43% of the national territory⁵. The DR Congo holds the second largest tropical forest in the world corresponding to about 60% of the Congo Basin's rainforest. The latter is the second largest tropical forest in the world and one of the world's largest carbon sinks, also known as the "Lungs of Africa."

- Second, the country's peatlands are primarily located in four provinces (Mai-Ndombe, Tshuapa, South Ubangi, and Mongala) covering approximately 113,201 km² out of 167,600 km² of peatlands in the Cuvette Centrale, also designated the Central Congo Basin⁶, constituting about 36% of the world's tropical peatlands⁷. In addition, the DR Congo peatlands capture nearly 1.5 billion tonnes of CO₂ emissions every year, representing 4% of global carbon dioxide emissions. They constitute efficient carbon sinks by storing 19.6 billion tonnes of GHG emissions, while the Central Congo Basin peatlands capture 29 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions⁸. Like Brazil and Indonesia, the DR Congo plays a major role in carbon sequestration at the global level. Ultimately, preserving the rainforests, the peatlands and the mangroves' ecosystems is critical in the Congo Basin.

In early 2000, with the World Bank's assistance, the Congolese Government set up a series of structural reforms on natural resources to promote good governance and transparency. Concerning the forestry sector, on 29 August 2002, the law n° 011/2002 on the forestry code⁹ entered into force replacing a colonial decree of April 1949. It defined the main orientations of the forest policy to ensure sustainable forest management. Among others, it defined three types of forest uses (classified forests, protected forests, and permanent production forests) and the fiscal rules related to the forestry sector. In addition, in March 2002, the first attempt at reorganising the forestry sector led to the cancellation of forestry concessions covering 25 million ha, for non-respect of contractual obligations. A month later, a moratorium on awarding forestry concessions was put in place, while waiting for the establishment of the concession award procedures under the 2002 forestry code¹⁰. On 14 May 2002, this prompted the Government to issue a ministerial order suspending the granting of forest allocations. On 24 October 2005, the promulgation of a presidential decree n° 05/116 extended the aforementioned order.

⁵. RDC PreCOP 27 2022, "DRC, Country Solution."

⁶. Bart Crezee, Greta C. Dargie, Corneille E.N. Ewango, et al, "Mapping peat thickness and carbon stocks of the central Congo Basin using field data," *Nature Geoscience*, vol. 15, August 2022: 649, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41561-022-00966-7>.

⁷. Bart Crezee, Greta C. Dargie, Corneille E.N. Ewango, et al, "Mapping peat thickness and carbon stocks,": 643.

⁸. This index assesses the country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges, while taking into consideration its readiness to improve resilience.

⁹. Journal Officiel de la RD Congo, La loi n° 011/2002 du 29 août 2002 portant code forestier, <http://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20economique/Code%20Forestier/rdc-loiforets.pdf>.

¹⁰. International Monetary Fund, *Democratic Republic of the Congo—Letter of Intent, Memorandum on Economic and Financial Policies, and Technical Memorandum of Understanding*, (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2003), <https://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/2003/cod/01/>.

1.2. The DR Congo Implementing Climate-Related Reforms for Preserving and Restoring Its Environment

According to the 2022 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Index¹¹, in 2021, the DR Congo ranked 182nd out of 185 countries. It was the 17th most vulnerable country to extreme climate events in the world. It was listed 189th in terms of readiness, indicating that it stood among the least ready countries to tackle climate change impacts¹².

Nonetheless, a sustainable management of the forest ecosystem and the conservation of biodiversity was put in jeopardy, as a result of various challenges. According to Global Forest Watch, from 2001 to 2022, the DR Congo lost 18.4 million ha of tree cover, corresponding to 11.4 giga tonnes of CO₂ emissions. Over the same period, 0.39% of tree cover loss occurred in areas where deforestation was the primary cause of loss¹³, mainly due to the agriculture sector's development. Deforestation has unveiled a weak forestry sector's governance resulting from the illegal activities' expansion in the areas of logging, poaching, mining, and charcoal production. These activities have also entailed forest degradation.

As for the Central Congo Basin peatlands, they have remained relatively undisturbed. They are, however, at a high risk to evolve from carbon sinks to sources of carbon under the pressure of climatic hazards¹⁴ and the development of socioeconomic activities¹⁵, including agribusiness, logging, and oil exploration¹⁶. Overall, the country has been exposed to continued environmental degradation, generating biodiversity loss.

In response, the Government put in place frameworks pertaining to NbS with a view to improving carbon-dioxide removal at a large scale. In light of this perspective, it benefited from the donors' support:

- In 2009, the DR Congo joined the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) framework under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC) of the Parties. In 2012, it adopted its national REDD+ framework strategy focusing on stabilising forest cover at 63.5% by 2030.

- In 2015, the country partnered with the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI) after adopting its national REDD+ Investment Plan (2016-2020), which entailed the funding of various programmes, through the REDD+ Fund. At COP 26, a renewed and expanded agreement covering 2021-2031 was signed, leading to 500 million to halt deforestation and restore degraded lands.

¹¹. This index assesses the country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges while taking into consideration its readiness to improve resilience.

¹². Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, *ND-GAIN Country Index*, (South Bend: University of Notre Dame, 2022), <https://gain-new.crc.nd.edu/country/dem-rep-of-the-congo>.

¹³. "DR Congo," Global Forest Watch, Accessed 3 July 2023. <https://www.globalforestwatch.org>.

¹⁴. Richard Eba'a Atyi, François Hiol Hiol, Guillaume Lescuyer, Philippe Mayaux, Pierre Defourny, Nicolas Bayol, Filippo Saracco, Dany Pokem, Richard Sufo Kankeu et Robert Nasi, *Les forêts du bassin du Congo, État des Forêts 2021*, (Bogor Barat: Centre de recherche forestière internationale, 2022), 267-269, <https://doi.org/10.17528/cifor/008565>.

¹⁵. Richard Eba'a Atyi, François Hiol Hiol, Guillaume Lescuyer, "Les forêts du bassin du Congo, État des Forêts 2021," : 269-271.

¹⁶. It is worth stressing that forestry and oil concessions intersect with the peatlands in the Cuvette Centrale. For instance, a potential oil exploration and production in the Cuvette Centrale will threaten the ecosystem, including the peatlands.

Although the Government opted for increasing natural sinks for carbon and preserving rich reservoirs of biodiversity, mainly through afforestation and reforestation, the forestry sector's reform has remained largely uncompleted. In practice, the 2002 forestry code has never been effectively implemented. In April 2022, the General Inspectorate of Finance (IGF) released an audit report unveiling the mismanagement in the forestry sector, fuelled by corruption practices. This entailed ripple effects, notably a non-respect of the 2002 moratorium contributing to significant financial losses for the State¹⁷.

In a nutshell, the Government's failure to properly guarantee a sustainable forest management has lessened the forestry's sector's ability to fully act as a carbon dioxide emission sequester, in spite of the setting up of the frameworks on NbS led by the REDD and CAFI.

2. Towards a Carbon Pricing Scheme in the DR Congo

Carbon pricing has gained growing momentum in the sustainable finance agenda. It is one of the core instruments in climate change-related policies to deliver the Paris Agreement goals while mobilising fiscal resources to foster green economic recovery. Although the Congo Basin countries are getting familiar with forest carbon credits, the DR Congo initiated a dialogue on fair carbon taxation. Moreover, it has started to set up its national carbon pricing mechanism.

2.1. Putting a Price on Carbon in the DR Congo: The REDD+ Carbon Credit under Scrutiny

From 22 and 23 April 2021, President Biden hosted the Leaders' Summit on Climate¹⁸. During the event, President Tshisekedi, who chaired the African Union (AU), outlined the vital role played by his country in global climate change mitigation strategy. He expressed, however, his country's concerns about the undervalued price of the forest carbon credit. He outlined that the price of carbon credits is only estimated at USD 5 per tonne for forest conservation. Thus, he called for increasing carbon credits' price to at least USD 100 per tonne to achieve carbon neutrality under the Paris Agreement¹⁹.

The Congolese president's criticism of the unfair price of the forest carbon credits also occurred while the country has attempted to be involved in carbon markets from the perspective of delivering its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), defined in 2017 and revised in 2021. Hence, it started building its own experience with the REDD+ carbon

¹⁷. Inspection Générale des Finances, Rapport de mission relatif au contrôle des concessions forestières et des droits dus au trésor public par les exploitants forestiers formels, 1 avril (Kinshasa: Inspection générale des finance, 2022), 1-83, <https://medd.gouv.cd/rapport-de-mission-relatif-au-contrôle-de-la-legalite-des-allocations-et-cessions-des-concessions-forestieres-et-des-droits-dus-au-tresor-public-par-les-exploitants-forestiers-formels/>.

¹⁸. "Leaders Summit on Climate Summary of Proceedings," The White House, accessed 13 July 2023. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/23/leaders-summit-on-climate-summary-of-proceedings/>.

¹⁹. "Intervention de son Excellence Monsieur Félix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, Président de la République Démocratique du Congo au sommet virtuel des Chefs d'Etat et de Gouvernement sur le climat du 22 au 23 avril 2021," Partenariat pour les Forêts du Bassin du Congo, accessed 13 July 2023. <https://pfb-cbfp.org/actualites-partenaires/Antoine-TSHISSEKEDI.html>.

credits. According to the IMF²⁰, at the end of 2021, 14 million tonnes of carbon credits were issued through international markets. The Government, holding the ownership of all natural resources, barely generated fiscal revenues from these transactions because it did not have ownership rights to the carbon credits. Learning from a non-beneficial exposure to REDD+ carbon credits, in January 2022, the Government obtained from the REDD+ framework the complete ownership rights to the issuance of carbon credits. This was a positive development in terms of public finances. By the end of 2022, the Government expected to issue 30 million tonnes of carbon credits. Hence, it has progressively operated in the international carbon markets. Like other Congo Basin countries, the DR Congo is likely to play a significant role in the voluntary carbon market under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

2.2. The Institutional and Legal Framework on Carbon Pricing Scheme in the DR Congo

In July 2021, the Government opted for an unprecedented forestry sector's reform, while strengthening its climate policy. To this end, it defined a national strategy for the forestry sector, comprising the key policy measures:

- The end of the 2002 moratorium on new industrial logging concessions;
- The review of existing forestry concessions;
- The implementation of a carbon pricing mechanism.

On 3 February 2023, the Council of Ministers approved a draft ordinance law amending environment law no. 11/009 on 9 July 2011 to align the Congolese legislation with the Paris Agreement. The law mainly comprised provisions for carbon pricing initiative:

- The introduction of a carbon tax will contribute to the broadening of the tax base.

It will help to improve the country's DRM.

- The setup of a national a carbon market regulatory authority.

The carbon pricing mechanism's purpose has tackled a loophole. The ecosystem services rendered by the NbS are not properly accounted for, which has hindered the country's ability to fulfill its engagement under the Paris Agreement²¹. In other words, a fair and equitable monetisation of the carbon sinks has become one of the main priorities of the national climate policy, under Tshisekedi's presidency. According to a preliminary assessment made by Dalberg and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) points out that African countries can raise significant revenues from NbS: from USD 1 billion per year with a carbon price of USD 10 per tonne up to USD 82 billion per year with a carbon price of USD 120 per tonne. Assuming that USD 50 per tonne can be assessed as a fair carbon price, African countries can generate revenues of USD 15 billion per annum²². The additional revenues could be used to finance climate change adaptation measures.

²⁰. International Monetary Fund, *Democratic Republic of the Congo: Selected Issues. Country Report*, no. 22/211, 14.

²¹. "Compte rendu de la quatre-vingt-cinquième réunion du conseil des ministres, Ministère de la communication et des médias," access 14 July 2023. <https://www.primature.gouv.cd/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/COMPTE-RENDU-DE-LA-QUATRE-VINGT-CINQUIEME-REUNION-DU-CONSEIL-DES-MINSITRES-DU-03-FEVRIER-2023.pdf>.

²². Brookings Institution, *Keys to Climate Action*, Chapter 9: Delivering Africa's Great Green Transformation, Working Paper #180.9 (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2023), 6-7, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/delivering-africas-great-green-transformation/>.

Despite the potential benefits related to a carbon pricing scheme in the DR Congo, some roadblocks are identified, including a lack of carbon capacity and trading²³. In response, on 27 May 2023, the country initiated cooperation with China to create a national carbon registry as well as receiving technical assistance given China's expertise in carbon market development²⁴. It is worth stressing that the creation of high integrity registry will help to raise carbon credit's price²⁵. Another matter of concern refers to a longstanding security crisis contributing to deforestation and forest degradation in the eastern provinces²⁶. The armed groups operate in the forests, even in national parks, such as Virunga Park. The militarization of a portion of the forestry patrimony, therefore, shattered the country's ability to fully monetise its carbon sinks.

3. The DR Congo Heading the Global South Rainforest Cartel in a Quest for Fair Carbon Pricing

At COP 27, in November 2022, the DR Congo²⁷ partnered with Brazil and Indonesia to create a rainforest cartel. The cartel's members have set their own path toward a green transition, relying on their vast natural assets. The coalition's objectives consisted in ensuring that climate governance issues of the Global South are reflected in the climate-related debates and integrated into the international climate negotiations accordingly. Owing to the rising importance of carbon pricing, in 2021, the IMF proposed an international carbon price floor targeting large emitting countries (the United States, the European Union, China, and India) to curb global CO₂ emissions by 2030²⁸. A price floor can be differentiated according to the development level, but it needs to rise to USD 75 per tonne by 2030. It also aims to avoid free-rider concerns, and, as a result, carbon leakages. Nevertheless, the IMF's proposal set aside the case for developing and emerging economies holding nature-based storage, whereas carbon pricing is a global mitigation instrument. Given a lack of multilateral consensus, the rainforest cartel has

²³. International Monetary Fund, *Democratic Republic of the Congo: Selected Issues. Country Report*, no. 22/211, 15.

²⁴. "Carbon Market: Eve Bazaiba and Huang Runqiu discuss the possibility of setting up the Congolese Domestic Registry," Ministère de l'environnement et du développement durable, accessed 15 July 2023. <https://medd.gouv.cd/marche-carbone-eve-bazaiba-et-huang-runqiu-discutent-de-la-possibilite-de-la-mise-en-place-du-registre-domestique-congolais/>.

²⁵. Nomvuyo Tena, "The Potential of Carbon Credits to Fund Africa's Renewable Energy Goals," ESI Africa, 1 September 2022, <https://www.esi-africa.com/renewable-energy/the-potential-of-carbon-credits-to-fund-africas-renewable-energy-goals/>.

²⁶. Kira Vinke, Loyle Campbell, Dana Schirwon, Katongo Seyuba, Florian Krampe, Hafsa Maalim, Guélor Isulu Mbungwal, *Climate and Environmental Security in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Competing over Abundant Resources – Adapting to Change*, no. 3 (Berlin: German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), 2023), 4-5, <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/climate-and-environmental-security-democratic-republic-congo>.

²⁷. "Crédit-Carbone : le Brésil, l'Indonésie et la RDC font bloc (Eve Bazaiba)," Ministère de l'environnement et du développement durable, accessed 16 July 2023. https://www.drcprecop27.medd.gouv.cd/fr/credit-carbone-le-bresil-l-indonesie-et-la-rdc-font-bloc-eve-bazaiba_120.

²⁸. Ian Parry, Simon Black, and James Roaf. *Proposal for an International Carbon Price Floor among Large Emitters*, IMF Staff Climate Notes 2021/001 (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2021), 12-13, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/staff-climate-notes/Issues/2021/06/15/Proposal-for-an-International-Carbon-Price-Floor-Among-Large-Emitters-460468>.

already called for fair carbon pricing that provides incentives for boosting forest conservation and reforestation to reduce global GHG emissions.

The additional fiscal revenues generated from fair carbon pricing could help their fiscal sustainability. They should be used equitably and productively for financing climate investments or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By doing this, the cartel could potentially contribute to closing the climate finance gap. The perspective of climate finance flows from the Global South participated in rethinking development finance for climate, in response to the unmet financial commitment of USD 100 billion per year to be provided by developed countries, under the Paris Agreement.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In the long run, carbon pricing will allow the DR Congo to achieve its climate and fiscal objectives. As a prerequisite, the country has to pursue forestry sector reform effectively while putting in place strong institutions. For instance, the latter will help to restore State authority in the conflict-affected areas in the eastern provinces and fight against corruption. It is vital to ensure sustainable management of the forestry sector because carbon pricing must reflect the environmental and biodiversity conservation efforts.

The DR Congo has also paved the way in calling for fair carbon pricing among resource-rich developing countries and emerging economies. Although this proposal is the most challenging to achieve, the rainforest coalition embodies the Global South's vision in building resilience against climate change, based on protecting and restoring the environment. Knowing that investing in NbS in rainforest cartel has generated co-benefits for the global economy, it has become a top priority, requiring donor support and the private sector's mobilisation.

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