



Tree nursery managed by CREF member

CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT IN A CONFLICT REGION

In a region devastated by armed conflict and population displacement, a remarkable network of community-based organizations working on natural resource issues has emerged with the support of a grant from IUCN NL.

Over the last ten years, the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) have suffered severely from civil war, the breakdown of governance, massive human rights violations and the destruction of the livelihoods of an already impoverished population. Besides the human tragedy, the civil war has placed heavy pressure on the region's rich rainforests, which at the same time are essential for human livelihoods. In 2003, local NGOs established the Network for the Conservation and Rehabilitation of Forest Ecosystems in North-Kivu (Reseau CREF in French). The network currently has 32 member organisations which are united by a shared concern on environmental and natural resource issues, including forest conservation. Most CREF members approach these issues from a humanitarian or development perspective and work in community development, agriculture, agroforestry and tree nurseries. The target group directly and indirectly reached by the network now represents around 5 percent of North-Kivu's total population and the area where CREF members are active covers 45 percent of the province, an area almost the size of the Netherlands.

ACTIVITIES From the very start, IUCN NL has provided flexible financial support to this network, funding core costs and organisational development. Activities included a participatory exercise analysing strengths and weaknesses in each member organization, capacity building support, consultations with local traditional leaders and the launch of a quarterly electronic bulletin. The core support by IUCN NL has been crucial in providing basic stability to CREF and in encouraging support by other donors.



Large-scale charcoal smuggling is a major threat to natural forests. Photo: Lionel Diss.

IMPACTS In the few years since CREF began operating, it has developed so successfully that international organizations such as the Rainforest Foundation, CARE and UNDP stepped in to support the network and its members with project grants. Another major accomplishment was that CREF was selected as one of the country's three NGO focal points for policy and legislation in community forestry. In this initiative, supported by the FAO, CREF is responsible for coordinating civil society participation in the eastern part of the DR Congo. CREF has already become an official member of IUCN. At the national level, CREF is member of the RRN, a national civil society network on natural resources. CREF's policy influence is now extending beyond North-Kivu into other provinces and even to the national and subregional level.

Projects supported by donors deal with community forestry, organizational strengthening, conservation and governance. For instance, in 2007 CREF made a socio-economic impact assessment of the timber industry in the DR Congo, supported by the Rainforest Foundation. Such efforts are crucial to help prevent and respond to uncontrolled and destructive logging and forest exploitation. This is a real threat in view of the weak governance situation during and after the conflict in one of Africa's richest forest regions.

Grantee: Reseau CREF

Project: 'Support to the participatory assessment of conservation actors in North Kivu' (2005-06)

Grant size: € 53,000

Category: Developing civil society