



HIGH LEVEL DISCUSSION WORKSHOP

Strengthening strategic partnerships and scientific leadership of training institutions and forest research in Central Africa

Location : Libreville, Gabon
Date : 27 November 2025

1. Context and rationale

The Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF) is a global research institution. Alongside our network of partners, we aim to co-create practical context-relevant solutions based on scientific evidence to inform and transform how forests, trees and land can be managed to respond to major global challenges and sustainably deliver goods and services for the benefit of people everywhere.

Since 2022, CIFOR-ICRAF has implemented a programme titled “Applied research in ecology and social sciences in support of sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa” (RESSAC). This programme aims to strengthen the impact of our research on the sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa.

Funded by the European Union for a four-year period (2022–2025), the programme has two overarching objectives:

1. Organize and support applied research that seeks to strengthen knowledge in social sciences and in ecology on the management and enhancement of natural resources in the forest ecosystems of Central Africa.
2. Promote the use of this knowledge in the operating methods of relevant stakeholders and in the development, implementation and monitoring of public policies and sustainable development assistance programmes in Central Africa.

The RESSAC programme has facilitated the development of strategic partnerships through

consortiums of universities in the Global North and South, forest administrations, civil society and the private sector. These consortiums oversee research activities led by post-doctoral researchers. Through the 26 projects supported since 2022, the programme has engaged 27 post-doctoral researchers, one doctoral student and 84 Master's students to implement research activities with a network of partners including private companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities and research institutes.

As part of the RESSAC programme, coordination workshops were held with the project leaders and post-doctoral researchers and a mid-term evaluation was conducted. Through these mechanisms, the programme has fostered innovative and inclusive approaches to setting up research projects on forest ecosystems in Central Africa. In so doing, it has contributed to the implementation of the European policy on support for sustainable tropical forest management. As a result of the RESSAC programme, post-doctoral status is increasingly recognized by universities, institutes, research centres and the private sector in Central Africa. The post-doctoral researchers have in particular helped to increase the volume and scientific quality of research work. This was facilitated by more diverse partnerships and training on scientific writing, project design and funding mobilization in Central Africa.

To ensure the achievements of the programme can be maintained and expanded and to position Central African universities at the centre of research and innovation on the sustainable management of ecosystems and biodiversity conservation, a high-level discussion workshop is planned. This workshop will bring together the leaders of the institutions involved alongside technical and financial partners at the national, regional and international levels. The aim of the workshop is to develop strategic, operational and institutional proposals for a paradigm shift that strengthens the position of post-doctoral programmes in African academic institutions' research, teaching and development support ecosystems.

In its role as facilitator, in collaboration with the Network of Higher Education Institutions and Research Institutions in Central Africa (REESIRAC),

CIFOR-ICRAF will mobilize institution leaders and other networks of higher education institutions to institutionalize a framework for connecting stakeholders that integrates post-doctoral research into both the university system and the research landscape in Francophone Africa. Other relevant networks include: the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES); the Network of Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions in Central Africa (RIFFEAC); the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM); the African Network for Agriculture; and Agroforestry and Natural Resources Education (ANAFE). This framework will foster a dynamic and strategic transition between university education and the socio-professional world. The framework will also serve as a nexus between post-doctoral researchers and key development actors, while generating context-relevant responses or local solutions to the constraints affecting the management and conservation of forest ecosystems in Central Africa.

2. Workshop objectives

The objective of the workshop is to document good practices, catalyse research clusters into partnerships to improve scientific leadership and influence sustainable forest management policies and practices in Central Africa.

More specifically, it will:

- Encourage feedback on post-doctoral programmes at the regional and international level;
- Analyse the strengths, opportunities and needs of such programmes for the scientific standing of educational and research institutions;
- Discuss the need for institutional, organizational and financial capacity for the development of post-doctoral programmes in Central African universities;
- Establish the prerequisites for the implementation and operationalization of post-doctoral programmes and identify institutions in the sub-region with the capacity to host such programmes;

Draw up a roadmap and assign stakeholders' roles and responsibilities for the institutionalization of post-doctoral programmes in the forest research environment in Africa.

3. Participant profile

Around a hundred people from different institutions will participate in this workshop:

- 11 research/programme directors from ministries responsible for forests, the environment, higher education and scientific research;
- 10 chancellors and directors of academic or research institutions;
- 7 private-sector research and development managers (from the Rougier Group, Carrefour International du Bois (CIB), Olam International, PALLISCO, Fondation pour le Tri-national de la Sangha (FTNS), Sudcam/Hevecam, Société Camerounaise des Palmeraies (SOCAPALM));
- 15 international research cooperation institutions (International Development Research Centre (IDRC), UNESCO, Regional Postgraduate School for Integrated Management and Development of Tropical Forests and Territories (ERAIFT), Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), Network of Higher Education Institutions and Research Institutions in Central Africa (REESIRAC), Central African Forest Research Network (R2FAC), College 6 of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (PFBC), African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES), the French Cooperation and Cultural Action Service (SCAC), the Pangea Institute, Capacity Development for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Experts (CABES), International Francophone Network for Science Advice (RFICS), the Network of Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions in Central Africa (RIFFEAC), Congo Basin Science Initiative (CBSI), Science Panel for the Congo Basin (SPCB), Congo Basin Institute (CBI)/PAN Tropical of BioGeochemistry and Ecological Adaptation (PANGEA), Interprofessional Grouping of Artisans of the Congo (GIAC), French Development Agency (AFD));
- 1 representative of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC);

- 1 representative of the European Union;
- 1 representative of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS);
- 3 representatives from the Directorate-General of CIFOR-ICRAF;
- 15 post-doctoral researchers;
- 5 representatives or alumni of internationally renowned post-doctoral programmes, such as the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Fulbright alumni, the Humboldt Foundation, the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD) and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD);
- 10 representatives from the training departments of Ministries of Higher Education.

4. Expected outcome

At the end of this workshop, actors from the private, academic and research sectors should be aware of the potential of post-doctorate status in higher education and research institutions in Central Africa. More specifically:

- Participants understand how to formalize and raise awareness about post-doctorate status;
- The recommendations have been discussed and prioritized;
- The heads of academic and research institutions are aware of the importance of post-doctoral researchers;
- Institutional, organizational and financial capacity needs for the development of post-doctoral programmes in Central African universities have been assessed;
- The profile and capacity of institutions to host such programmes in the sub-region have been documented;
- Stakeholder roles and responsibilities have been assigned;

- A roadmap has been drawn up for the institutionalization of post-doctoral programmes;
- Research needs in the private sector have been identified.
- Formal opening;
- Presentation of the achievements and challenges of the RESSAC programme;
- Feedback from institutions on post-doctoral programmes in Africa and contributions to scientific leadership;
- Roundtables and panel discussion to share experiences and adopt a roadmap.

5. Methodological approach and workshop programme

The workshop will be facilitated by a facilitator and divided into four parts:



Workshop programme:

Time	Activities	Activity leader
08:00 – 08:30	Participant arrival	Facilitator
Formal opening		
09:00 – 09:15	Welcome	Representative of the Directorate-General of CIFOR-ICRAF
09:15 – 09:30	Opening remarks	Representative REESIRAC/CAMES
09:30 – 10:00	Presentation of workshop objectives and practical information	CIFOR-ICRAF Cameroon
10:00 – 10:30	Coffee break/chat/group photo	All/Journalists
Presentation of the achievements and challenges of the RESSAC programme		
10:30 – 10:45	Presentation of the RESSAC programme: Achievements and challenges	CIFOR-ICRAF Cameroon
10:45 – 11:45	Post-doctoral research on forest ecosystem management: feedback, lessons learned, challenges and prospects	Discussion panel
Institutional/network experience of setting up, funding and managing post-doctoral programmes: Good practices, success factors strategic partnerships with the private sector		
11:45 – 13:00	AUF Central Africa and the Great Lakes	Discussion panel/World Café
	CBFP College 6 and RIFFEAC	
	CAMES	
	RUFORUM-ANAFE	
	DAAD	
	Humboldt Foundation	
	Fulbright	
	Private sector	
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch break	
Action plan and roadmap for the institutionalization of postdoctoral programmes in Central African institutions		
14:30 – 15:30	High-level discussion with chancellors and directors of institutions, donors and the private sector on how to institutionalize and fund post-doctoral programmes at universities and research centres in Central Africa	Discussion panel
15:30 – 16:00	Reading and approval of the roadmap and the declaration of the chancellors and directors of the research institutions Recommendations	
16:00 – 16:30	Workshop close	