

PRESS RELEASE

Understanding forest ecosystems is key for successful climate-change mitigation

Montreal, 2 December 2009 – What do western lowland gorillas and the seed of the Lopé Kola Tree (*Cola lizae*) have to do with climate change? According to Ian Redmond, OBE, Ambassador for the United Nations Year of the Gorilla: “More than 75 per cent of tropical trees have their seeds dispersed by animals. The Lopé Kola Tree is the most numerous tree species in the forests in and around Lopé National Park in central Gabon. Its seeds are dispersed almost exclusively by gorillas, so if the gorillas disappeared, so could this species of tree and all the animals that depend on it. The ‘empty forest syndrome’ caused by overhunting in many tropical forests threatens the long-term success of forest-based climate-change-mitigation efforts.”

Discussions on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, known as REDD, will be an important part of the United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in Copenhagen from 7 to 18 December 2009. Mr. Redmond expressed the hope that “forests will be a key part of a Copenhagen agreement”, but cautioned that “we need to take into account that trees are more than carbon, and forests are more than trees”.

He also added that: “I recently travelled through seven of the ten gorilla range States and spoke to ex-militiamen who had logged and mined minerals in forests illegally, killing apes and elephants to feed rebel groups, and brave rangers who risk their lives defending the forest. Some former poachers in Nigeria are now being trained by conservation groups to farm edible snails to feed and support their families on a sustainable basis. Solutions exist for reducing deforestation and forest degradation, but the resources to implement them on a big enough scale have been lacking – REDD can contribute to the solution, if we fully understand the ecological and human dimensions of the issue.”

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has recently launched two reports on the role of biodiversity—the variability among genes, species and ecosystems that make up life on Earth—for successful climate-change mitigation and adaptation (CBD Technical Series Nos. 41 and 43).

According to Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity: “Forest-based solutions to climate change have great potential for synergies between the Rio conventions, but we must understand that the health and stability of forests and other ecosystems rests on biodiversity, and this basic ecological reality must be reflected in our policy responses.”

The Rio conventions—the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)—have complementary objectives to support sustainable development, and the parties to all three conventions have adopted commitments to conserve and sustainably use forests. Present efforts to expand the UNFCCC commitments through REDD are fully supported under the Convention on Biological Diversity, says Mr. Djoghlaif, if the biodiversity that underpins forest stability, and the forest ecosystem services that ensure the livelihoods for indigenous peoples and local communities, are considered.

Information for journalists

Ian Redmond, Ahmed Djoghlaif and other biodiversity experts, including the authors of the CBD Technical Series reports, will be present at **Forest Day 3** and will be available for interviews. Forest Day 3 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference is a full day dedicated to learning and holding discussions about forests, on **13 December 2009 in the Radisson Falkoner Hotel in Copenhagen** (www.cifor.cgiar.org/Events/ForestDay3/Introduction/).

The CBD Technical Series reports “*Connecting Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation*” and “*Forest Resilience, Biodiversity, and Climate Change*” will be presented at Forest Day 3. Key findings of the reports include:

- Ecosystem-based approaches that integrate biodiversity and provision of ecosystem services into overall climate-change-adaptation strategies can be **cost-effective, generate social, economic and cultural co-benefits and help maintain resilient ecosystems**;
- Ecosystem-based approaches and other sustainable land-management activities for mitigation have potential **benefits for indigenous peoples and local communities**. A number of conditions are important for realizing these co-benefits - land tenure, free and prior informed consent, recognition of identities and cultural practices and participation in the policy-making process;
- A portfolio of land use management activities, including the **protection of natural forest and peatland carbon stocks**, the sustainable management of forests, the use of native assemblages of forest species in reforestation activities, sustainable wetland management, restoration of degraded wetlands and sustainable agricultural practices can contribute to the objectives of both the UNFCCC and Convention on Biological Diversity;
- On the role of **forest ecosystem-based mitigation**, activities to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) have the potential to **deliver significant co-benefits for forest biodiversity** if mechanisms are designed appropriately. This means:
 - (a) Recognizing the contribution of diverse forests, in particular primary forests, to long-term carbon sequestration/storage
 - (b) Considering the rights of indigenous and local communities
 - (c) Addressing important forest governance issues such as illegal logging.
- The **resilience inherent to intact forest ecosystems**—that is, fully functional units of plants, animals, micro-organisms, and fungi—provides the best insurance against climate change, and helps ensure that forests meet the needs of present and future generations;
- The carbon pool is largest **in old primary forests**, especially in the wet tropics, which are stable forest systems with high resilience. Therefore, reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) activities should take biodiversity conservation into consideration, as this helps maintain forest ecosystem resilience and the long-term stability of the carbon pool;
- If pushed past an **ecological “tipping point”**, forest ecosystems could transform into a different forest type. In extreme cases, a new non-forest ecosystem state could emerge, for example from forest to savannah. The new ecosystem state would invariably be poorer in terms of both biological diversity and delivering ecosystem goods and services, and the transformation would release additional greenhouse gases into the atmosphere;
- Because of their reduced biodiversity, **plantations and modified natural forests** face greater disturbances and risks for large-scale losses due to climate change than primary forests. The study says that risks can be partly mitigated by following a number of forest-management recommendations, including by ensuring national and regional networks of protected areas, and incorporating these networks into national and regional planning for large-scale landscape connectivity.

CBD Technical Series No. 41, *Connecting Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: Report of the Second Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change* and No. 43, *Forest Resilience, Biodiversity, and Climate Change: A Synthesis of the Biodiversity/Resilience/Stability Relationship in Forest Ecosystems* are available at www.cbd.int/ts

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits from utilization of genetic resources. With 193 Parties, the CBD has near-universal participation among countries committed to preserving life on Earth. The CBD seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The headquarters of the Secretariat of the Convention are located in Montreal.

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Or visit the following websites:

www.cbd.int (For general information on the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.)

www.yog2009.org (For information on the United Nations Year of the Gorilla.)

<http://www.unesco.org/bpi/gorilles/index.html> (For images that can be downloaded free of charge for non-profit use, provided you mention the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the photographer's name and they illustrate activities within the realm of the UNESCO programme.)