REGIONAL ASSESSMENT OF FOREST AND BIODIVERSITY CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Action et Aide pour la Paix
ACEFA	Association Congolaise des Exploitants Forestiers Artisanaux
CAMV	Centre d'Accompagnement des Autochtones Pygmées et Minoritaires Vulnérables
CARPE	Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment
CBFP	Congo Basin Forest Partnership
CCT	Conseil de Concertation Territorial
CCU	Central Coordination Unit
CEFDHAC	Conférence sur les Ecosystèmes de Forêts Denses et Humides d'Afrique Centrale
CFCL	Concession Forestière des Communautés Locales
CFLEDD	Coalition des femmes leaders pour l'environnement et le développement durable
CLA	Collaborating, Learning and Adapting
COMIFAC	Central African Forest Commission
CONAREF	Commission Nationale de la Réforme Foncière
CREF	Réseau pour la Conservation et la Réhabilitation des Ecosystèmes Forestiers
CSO	Civil society organization
DGPA	Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DYFED	Dynamique des Femmes Engagées pour un Environnement sain et Durable
EAGLE	Eco-Activists for Governance and Law Enforcement
FABS	Forest and Biodiversity Support Activity
FECOFFA	Fédération Congolaise des Femmes et Filles Autochtones
FLEGT VPA	EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreements
FOCODER	Forêt Communautaire pour le Développement Rural
FODI	Forêt pour le Développement Intégral
FOPRADI	Foyer pour la Promotion Paysanne et la Redynamisation des Actions pour le Développement Intégral
FPIC	Free Prior Informed Consent
GA	General Assembly
GERNES	Gestion des Ressources Naturelles et Environnement Sain
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

ICCN	Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature
IR	Intermediate Result
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LAGA	Last Great Apes organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PIDP	Programme Intégré pour le Développement du Peuple Pygmée
PREPPYG	Association paysanne pour la réhabilitation et la protection des peuples autochtones pygmées
RECOFTC	Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation
REID	Réseau d'Initiatives Locales pour un Développement Durable Réseau
REPALEF	Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la Gestion Durable des Ecosystèmes Forestiers en RDC
RFN	Rainforest Foundation Norway
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two decades, development of civil society networks in Central Africa emerged to support collective action on a range of natural resource management issues. Many of these networks provide critical activities including support to policy analysis, formulation, and dialogue; technical assistance to under-resourced government agencies; and independent monitoring activities to strengthen accountability for natural resource management decisions. The proliferation of civil society networks working on conservation and natural resource management in Central Africa has created opportunities for increased knowledge exchange, dialogue, skill-sharing, and joint advocacy. These networks also face a host of challenges to maintain cohesion, sustain funding, and achieve impact in a context characterized by weak governance and low government accountability.

METHODS

The consultant implemented the research in two phases. Phase one consisted of a literature review and identification of relevant civil society networks operating in target countries in Central Africa (Cameroon, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo) that are focused on conservation and/or natural resource management. The consultant compiled a database of networks and key characteristics including geography, date of establishment, and thematic focus to identify general trends across the region, and selected a shortlist of four networks for more in-depth case studies, in consultation with the Activity team.

Civil society networks are "civil society groups, organizations, and sometimes, individuals that come together voluntarily to pursue shared purposes of social development or democratic governance. These purposes may include exchanging resources, addressing common social goals or expressing their identities as community or social group."[1]

The four case studies represent networks operating at different geographic scales working on a range of thematic areas, with two networks that explicitly focus on representation and voice of marginalized groups.

Network Case Studies

Network	Thematic focus	Intervention type	Geography and scale
EAGLE – *Eco-Activists for Governance and Law Enforcement*	Wildlife law enforcement	Independent monitoring; capacity strengthening	Regional
Réseau CREF – *Réseau pour la Conservation et la Réhabilitation des Ecosystèmes Forestiers*	Natural resource management	Policy advocacy	Provincial (North Kivu, DRC)
CFLEDD – *Coalition des femmes leaders pour l'environnement et le développement durable*	Women's empowerment and natural resource management	Policy advocacy	National (DRC)
DGPA – *Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones*	Indigenous peoples' rights and natural resource management	Policy advocacy	National (DRC)

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[1] Ashman, D. with C. Charles, A. Cuenca, C. Luca, B. Singer, and M. Schmith. 2005. Supporting Civil Society Networks in International Development Programs, Edition 1. AED Center for Civil Society and Governance.

SUMMARY OF NETWORK INVENTORY

Networks in the region have emerged as a response to internal priorities (e.g., achieving greater voice and participation in decision-making) and external drivers including new policy opportunities. The expansion of networks as an effective strategy for collective action to improve resource governance has led to new interactions and dialogue between state actors and civil society across the Central African region and documented improvements in policy and its implementation, as shown in the case studies in the following section. Through a desk review, the research identified 76 civil society networks and characterized them according to scale, timeline, and key thematic areas and types of intervention.

- Nearly one-third of the networks identified had an explicit regional focus spanning at least two countries in Central Africa, but many of these are dependent on project cycles, or are no longer active. Regional networks organized around general advocacy goals struggle to achieve stable funding and long-term sustainability. National and sub-national networks based in Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo comprised 60 percent of the networks identified, with a more limited number found in Central African Republic, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo. Sub-national networks operating in difficult contexts or rural areas are less likely to have an online presence and therefore may be underrepresented in these results.
- Many of the 76 platforms identified for this study were created in the early 2000s, as new initiatives such as the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreement process, and dialogue on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) were instrumental to the creation of policy dialogue and provided more opportunities for civil society to engage in forest policy discussions.[2]
- Two-thirds (46) of the identified networks focused on general advocacy as a primary objective. Of these, 30 percent focused on rights of Indigenous Peoples and 10 percent focused on women's empowerment. Thirteen percent of the identified networks organize around a specific technical niche, which presents opportunities for training and exchange, with another 11 percent focused on research and knowledge sharing. About 7 percent of networks identified are multi-stakeholder networks created to inform a specific policy process (e.g., FLEGT VPA platforms), and 9 percent focus on community-based natural resource management.

PRESENTATION OF CASE STUDIES

Case studies of four active civil society networks in Cameroon and DRC provide a detailed analysis of the governance structures, impacts, lessons learned, and challenges. The case studies draw from document review and stakeholder interviews to share network members' own perceptions of strengths, weaknesses, and challenges. This approach supports understanding of the current interests, priorities and challenges of these institutions, as well as how these organizations adapt to meet new challenges and opportunities and the types of support that could help them better deliver on their missions. The table below presents an overview of impacts, best practices, and challenges identified by the case studies.

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[2] RECOFTC. 2021. Defining and assessing the effectiveness of civil society networks working on forest governance issues in Africa and Asia. Bangkok, RECOFTC.

Summary of Impacts, Best Practices, and Challenges by Network Case Study

Impacts	Best Practices	Challenges
EAGLE – *Eco-Activists for Governance and Law Enforcement*		
• *Raising the profile of wildlife crime.* With the arrests, prosecutions, imprisonments, and public awareness actions, EAGLE has found that public attitudes and perceptions are changing, including the attitude of civil servants in charge of enforcing the law. • *Gaining recognition and legitimacy for EAGLE members.* With the impact of its work, EAGLE has established working relationships with governments in countries where it operates and has gained legitimacy with governments, NGOs, and other technical partners for the assistance it provides. • *Influence on wildlife policies.* Though the core of EAGLE's work is on wildlife law enforcement, network members have in some instances contributed to broader policy reform. For example, LAGA worked to influence the definition of wildlife crime in Cameroon's "National Anti-poaching and Wildlife Crime Strategy 2020-2030" by incorporating a broader component on wildlife crime at the national level designed to address systemic challenges. This advocacy helps shift from a focus on small poachers in specific sites to the need to address organized criminal networks. • *EAGLE's work complements conservation efforts.* By filling an important link between strengthening wildlife crime prevention and traditional biodiversity conservation activities, EAGLE perceives that it has amplified conservation success.	• *Setting measurable standards/indicators to measure progress.* EAGLE has procedures to determine the success or failure of its activities. This approach aligns activities with intended results and enables the network to report on impact in a structured way. • *Ensuring transparency of operations.* Having an effective knowledge management system helps facilitate easy access to the network's results, which are published on the EAGLE website on a regular basis for all members to access. • *Institutionalizing new member capacity building and network exchange.* EAGLE has instituted membership assessment to identify the types of support required by the network members and uses a three-stage membership development model that facilitates member exchange by pairing new members with more experienced members to help them develop and implement their Law Enforcement Model. • *Leveraging connections.* Members bring their connections in different countries, which are shared across the network. Sharing connections among member organizations in different countries has been critical in supporting the EAGLE network's regional efforts to address wildlife trafficking. • *Maintaining flexibility to integrate new ideas.* The network maintains clear, structured systems and processes, while also providing opportunities for new ideas,	• *Maintaining standards and a shared identity as the network grows.* The network's high standards (against corruption, on governance issues, requirements on activities) are keys to its success, but also constitute a challenge with balancing expansion with ensuring that new countries follow the Law Enforcement Model. • *Sustainable funding.* Although the network has a model in place to secure funding for and among members, the amount secured often does not cover all the pressing needs of the network. Funding at the network level emphasizes the importance of country-specific fundraising by country coordinators; however, so far this has not been as effective as fundraising work conducted from headquarters. • *Sustaining leadership development and staff mobility.* The current situation of the network could be characterized as stable due to the current group of strong leaders in the steering group. However, there is a perception of limited upward mobility for staff within the network.

	systems, activities, or processes to be integrated into network operations.	
Réseau CREF – *Réseau pour la Conservation et la Réhabilitation des Ecosystèmes Forestiers*		
• *Contribution to establishing community forestry in DRC and in North Kivu.* The network implemented experimental field projects before the national regulation on *Concession Forestière des Communautés Locales* was adopted in 2014. Réseau CREF's experience contributed to national discussions on CFCL. • *Advocacy against SOCO International on oil exploration in the Virunga National Park*. DRC authorities signed an agreement with SOCO to allow the company to explore and exploit oil resources from within Virunga National Park. Members of the network participated in a successful advocacy campaign which pushed the company to stop oil exploration in Virunga National Park. • *Réseau CREF is perceived as an essential actor on environmental matters in North Kivu*. In recognition of the network's technical capacity, local authorities often consult Réseau CREF on environmental issues. As example, the secretariat was appointed as a member of the provincial steering committee for REDD+ projects. • *Reforestation success in Masisi*. Members of the network, such as *Réseau d'Initiatives Locales pour un Développement Durable Réseau* (REID), with Réseau CREF's support have been able to reforest a large forest in Masisi following deforestation and forest degradation caused by wood fuel extraction. • *Pioneering work on securing land for marginalized Indigenous Peoples in the province*. Members have supported a process to deliver land certificates for some	• *The network's "faire-faire" working approach.* The network's "faire-faire" working approach focuses on implementation by member organizations in the field and not by the secretariat, which makes it possible for Réseau CREF to scale-up and implement activities across the province more efficiently. • *Building institutional memory supports network resilience.* Réseau CREF has built an institutional memory thanks to the stability of network members. Having committed members and staff was critical during the period of instability between 2016-2018 to maintain trust and relationships with donors that enabled the network to rebuild. • *Diversifying funding and revenue streams.* While donor funding remains the most prominent source of revenue for Réseau CREF, the network has made progress in diversifying funding sources via membership fees, and capacity building services offered for non-member entities. • *Rigorous recruitment and assessment processes.* The rigorous membership recruitment process ensures organizations are committed and meet the network's selection criteria. This approach keeps the size of the network manageable and enables coverage of the province across the network, which is critical given the challenging transport, communications infrastructure, and insecurity in the zone. • *Instituting audits for member organizations.* Réseau CREF completes audits on funding, which can help reinforce the network's credibility.	• *Strengthening network leadership and supporting staff mobility.* Réseau CREF identified a need to strengthen leadership including communication of expectations and management styles. Beyond leadership, a need for more training and internal opportunities is needed to ensure staff are effective in their current role and support professional development opportunities and learning among current staff. • *Weak knowledge management.* Since its inception, Réseau CREF members have implemented several projects, but their learning, impact and results have not been clearly or regularly captured. Weak knowledge management and learning fails to properly capitalize on their successes and benefit the network. • *Funding model.* The network has been funded through its secretariat for almost 20 years. The continued dependency on one sole donor is also a challenge and poses risks to network longevity and cohesion. • *Building a common network vision.* The role of the secretariat in supporting member interventions and fundraising vs. the role of individual organizations that seek direct funding has generated some tension over the vision for the secretariat's role. • *Limited reach of advocacy.* Although the narrowed geographic scope to focus on North Kivu is central to the network's purpose, it limits the network's potential to influence policy dialogue or decision making.

Indigenous Peoples in North Kivu, thereby ensuring continued access to their lands.		
CFLEDD – *Coalition des femmes leaders pour l'environnement et le développement durable*		
• *Capacity development among women leaders*. Many members recognize support of the network in their capacity development: knowledge of various policy processes, gender, women rights, community rights, financial management, leadership, and project design. • *Contribution to gender-related laws and regulations*. CFLEDD contributed to the adoption and/or revision of legislations relevant to women in DRC, including the 2015 Parity Law; revision of the Family Code; and the Ministry of Environment's decree on gender. • *Contribution to the visibility of women leaders*. With the support of Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN), CFLEDD regularly publishes a newsletter titled "News des Femmes Leaders" that focuses on women-related issues. • *Land secured for women in Kasai*. Under a project funded by Synchronicity Earth, CFLEDD secured a land agreement, signed by the customary chiefs, which granted 500 hectares of arable land in Kasai to women. Women committed to use this land to support sustainable natural resource management.	• *Positioning women's leadership and empowerment as a change agent*. As a network, CFLEDD brought not only a new narrative on women's organizational leadership and concrete actions on women's issues. The primary approach focused on positioning women leaders as agents of change within their organizations to transform the practices while staying connected with other women leaders through the network. • *A leadership program allows permanent capacity development.* The Forum Masolo Leadership program was designed with the technical support of Well Grounded. It trains women and network members in several key areas such as "co-development" and "leadership" skills. • *Integrating Bantu and Indigenous women*. CFLEDD has both Bantu and Indigenous women within the organization. Having both groups active within the network provides the opportunity to promote their competence and skills and integrate their participation in the network. Empowerment of Indigenous women is reflected in the organizational structure, with an Indigenous woman being elected as the national coordinator of CFLEDD. • *Adopting the principle of volunteerism as a key criterion for membership.* All members enrolled in the network bodies must understand that, whether there is funding or not, women leaders are committed to implementing their plans.	• *Challenges of empowerment model.* CFLEDD's model aimed to build women champions within environmental CSOs, yet some members feel this model has not been sufficiently transformative and the network is now seen as simply as a group of women's organizations. • *Unclear process of member recruitment and membership status.* Unclear and slow processes for adding new members or removing inactive members is limiting the network's effectiveness. • *Weak coordination between national and provincial units.* Information-sharing and fundraising roles between national and provincial coordination units are cited as a persistent challenge. Many members, even at the national level, continue to consider fundraising as the responsibility of the national coordination. • *Integrating Indigenous women in a Bantu-dominated environment.* The communication or interaction with some Bantu women leaders that are perceived as lacking diplomacy and respect for Indigenous women. Differences in communication styles even resulted in a group of Indigenous women leaving CFLEDD to establish a new network of Indigenous women (FECOFFA). • *Limited resources of members.* Many members do not pay membership fees, and many also lack a dedicated office space. This generates additional expectations for the network secretariat to cover needs including meeting space.
DGPA – *Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones*		

- *Increasing awareness of Indigenous Peoples' issues*. DGPA's advocacy has contributed to increasing awareness on Indigenous Peoples' rights within Congolese society.
- *Advocacy for the adoption of a national law on the protection and promotion of the rights of Indigenous Peoples*. DGPA implemented a long period of advocacy (2012-2021) that contributed to the recent signing into law of a law on rights of Indigenous Peoples by the President.
- *Institutional support for Indigenous Peoples issues*. DGPA has supported advocacy to strengthen institutional frameworks for Indigenous Peoples rights, including the establishment of a Directorate of Indigenous Peoples within the Vice Prime Minister of the Interior, Security, Decentralization and Customary Affairs, integration of Indigenous Peoples into CONAREF provincial coordination, and in the consultative commissions for the settlement of customary conflicts.
- *Advocacy for provincial regulations*. DGPA advocated for regulations in Mai-Ndombe, Sud-Ubangi, and Equateur. The Mai-Ndombe regulation has been adopted and published in the official gazette. The Governor of Mai-Ndombe has created a provincial agency for the promotion of Indigenous Peoples and has recruited some Indigenous Peoples in the provincial administration.
- *Indigenous Peoples Atlas*. A first version of Atlas of Indigenous People in DRC was published in 2013, and a second version is being finalized. This important tool presents the location of Indigenous populations and

- *Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations working together*. Though Indigenous People are the network's focus, it includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations. This approach is appropriate for the context of DRC (and Central Africa) where Indigenous Peoples' issues cannot be addressed in isolation.
- *Participatory approach is an effective way to work with Indigenous Peoples*. Innovation of DGPA members in the field has contributed to the development of specific approaches and tools which proved to be instrumental for the ownership of messages by Indigenous Peoples themselves. In one instance, participatory video played an important role in facilitating exchanges between two conflicting communities.
- *Develop a panoramic and cross-cutting vision*. The advocacy for a national law on Indigenous People was conducted in hand with provincial legislation on the same matter. This was a pragmatic approach in the context of the long process (more than a decade) to adopt the national law and a way to prepare the ground for its implementation in provinces.
- *The flexibility of DGPA governance in the context of conflict helps to put in place safeguards*. The current governance of the network, perceived as effective and professional, is the result of conflicts of the past.

- *Policy advocacy vs. poverty alleviation*. Advocacy on laws and policies is perceived as not enough by the people living in poverty, with differences in vision on the balance between work on advocacy and more direct implementation of poverty alleviation.
- *Weak knowledge management*. Weak knowledge management has not yet created a network culture of learning, and communication on activities often targets donors more than other relevant national stakeholders.
- *Participation and ownership of Indigenous leaders and their organizations is still weak*. Only 20 of 45 member organizations are managed by Indigenous Peoples, and there is a need for progress beyond representation to ensure more effective participation of Indigenous leadership.
- *Weak coordination between national and provincial level*. Provincial branches are not active and there is limited liaison with the administrative units where Indigenous Peoples are located to share information from the ground on challenges and needs with the national coordination.
- *Membership process*. New members were included without evaluation of their commitment to the network vision, leading to some opportunistic membership. There is an ongoing reflection to better define and enforce the responsibilities of members for the network.
- *Conflicting approaches to supporting Indigenous Peoples' rights*. Network members in some cases adopt different methods to addressing Indigenous Peoples rights (sometimes within the same communities) that created conflicts.

their history, and would be an asset for land tenure and land use planning reforms.		

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The case studies examined how four active civil society networks in Central Africa have built their collaborations and confronted challenges as part of their efforts to sustain their networks and achieve greater impact over time. Insights from the four case studies are discussed below, as well as recommendations on ways to strengthen civil society networks to guide network leaders and members, individual civil society organizations, technical partners, and donors funding programs that support natural resource governance or civil society strengthening.

NETWORK STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

- *Clear definition of roles and responsibilities*. The role of the network's governing body in relation to member organizations must be clearly defined. It is strategic to ensure that network governance provides supporting functions to its members based on clear terms. For example, Réseau CREF's model ensures that the network's secretariat provides training, oversight, and fundraising support to members, but implementation itself is the role of member organizations. CREF members specifically cited this model as well-adapted to the difficult security context of North Kivu, creating added value through increasing network reach, and encouraging active network participation by members. EAGLE network follows a similar model, which ensures that there is a clear mutual benefit that maintains independence of structures while ensuring that members benefit from the services of the network.
- *Deliberative approach to network scale and structure*. Networks such as EAGLE have carefully managed their expansion to align with their organizational principles and standards. Likewise, Reseau CREF made a conscious decision not to expand to other provinces despite stated interest. These decisions are closely aligned with the overall mission and strategies of the networks and have enabled them to keep the number of members manageable. National networks such as DGPA and CFLEDD cited challenges with maintaining structures at different administrative levels of the country (national, provincial, local) and facilitating interactions between these levels – these include communication, misaligned expectations of roles for national and provincial representation, and a strong reliance on the national coordination for funding support.
- *Clearly defined and enforced membership criteria*. Each network establishes membership criteria to varying degrees of rigor and application, often linked to the overall network purpose. EAGLE's law enforcement focus facilitates a more structured membership model as the convening principle of the network is focused on a core set of tasks (e.g., investigations and monitoring of wildlife crime law enforcement) for which clear operating standards can be set. Similarly, Reseau CREF adopted criteria on how new members will add value to the network, including related to geographic spread and thematic focus, and to keep the number of members limited. Both networks also have a robust process for evaluating member participation and performance which are perceived as core strengths by members. CFLEDD's focus on voluntary participation is aligned with its model, which focuses on creating champions within a larger number of organizations as a means of strengthening women's voice in natural resource management decisions at scale, although members cited challenges with ensuring that network members remain active.
- *Leadership development and transition planning*. The four networks in the case studies all identified long-term leadership development and continuity as a priority. Network members recognized the critical importance of building institutional memory and leadership within their networks, citing specific examples of network staffing changes and shifts which created tensions and challenges for overall network functioning. While some of the network governance structures provide training to member organizations, such as CFLEDD's Forum Masolo, most of

the networks did not describe formalized approaches to mentoring and identifying new leadership.

IMPACT

- *Strategic vision*. Consistent, long-term vision and shared objectives are critical to achieving impact. DGPA cites the example of its work over more than a decade to advocate for the passing of a national law on Indigenous Peoples, which was recently signed into law by the Government of the DRC. Several networks cited the challenge of establishing a common vision for the network while balancing the different approaches and expectations of its member organizations. In some instances, network members indicated that the vision and objectives of the network are neither clear to all members nor owned by all members, citing disconnects between network governing bodies and their member organizations and reinforcing the importance of transparency in network communications.
- *Standards and procedures*. Networks focused on a common geography or intervention typically indicated a more standardized approach to operations than those focused on general advocacy or representation. EAGLE cited the critical importance of maintaining standards and procedures, as well as the tension between expanding its work and ensuring that new members uphold these standards. In the case of DGPA, they noted that maintaining common approaches across network members was not always feasible, and cited examples of conflicting ideologies on how to best address the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in achieving a balance of work on policy advocacy and grassroots action on poverty alleviation. DGPA and Réseau CREF noted the importance of using the network approach to achieve complementarity among network members specialized in different thematic areas or geographies.

RESOURCE AVAILABILITY

- *Centralized network funding and fundraising*. Each case study organization indicated that network governance structures had a key role in fundraising, but with varying degrees of dependence on member organizations. For example, Réseau CREF's model centralizes a significant amount of fundraising at the secretariat level, but with a process for distribution of funds to facilitate implementation of activities by members. EAGLE, on the other hand, emphasizes fundraising at both the network and country coordination level; the intent is to empower national affiliates to fundraise independently, while the network at times can provide resources to cover shortfalls or respond to opportunities. CFLEDD and DGPA, the two largest networks interviewed, cited challenges of overreliance and outsize expectations of the role of the coordinating body in providing funding to its members. These examples reinforce the importance of network structure, governance, and bylaws in clarifying the benefits and services provided by network membership to avoid creation of additional layers of bureaucracy and ensure that the benefits of network membership go beyond funding.
- *Project-focused funding*. The case study networks operate based on donor funding through short and medium-term projects, although there are some instances of innovation to generate new revenue streams such as Reseau CREF's investment in its space to hold workshops and trainings. As a result, there is less investment in strengthening systems and processes including knowledge management, communications, leadership, and member capacity development. As is also the case for direct support to civil society organizations, many donors or technical partners providing grant funding emphasize labor and activity costs, with only limited funds allocated to administrative or overhead costs that can support overall system strengthening.
- *Dependence on core donors*. Support to networks has, in some cases, evolved as a strategy for donors and technical partners to support a broader group of civil society through a single

structure. Several of the networks studied in this report received over half of their support from a single funding source, often based on long-term relationships maintained over time. Staff of these networks expressed concerns, including from member organizations, that this overreliance on a limited funding pool has restricted the range and types of activities that are supported by the network and limits the independence of the network. Donor priorities are perceived as driving which member organizations receive more support, which can lead to conflict among members. In addition, CFLEDD cited an example of donor funding disrupting network cohesion when the intent to fund salaries was not well-adapted to its volunteer-based model.

REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSIVENESS

- *Understanding progress and impact of social inclusion.* Networks such as DGPA and Réseau CREF have developed a gender policy which states principles and mechanisms for gender mainstreaming within the network and among members' organizations. CFLEDD adopted an innovative model devoted to creating champions via a volunteer network that would in turn push for change within their individual institutions. While there has been an increase in awareness and discourse on women's participation and representation, there is still limited assessment of the impact of these policies. CFLEDD noted that their approach has met with limitations in terms of the institutional change it envisioned at the outset, with some staff citing a lack of tools to address gender issues effectively in their activities. This underlines a need for appropriate technical support and management tools including gender and social inclusion analysis, monitoring and evaluation, human resources management and training, and communication. In several instances, application of the term "gender" refers primarily to women's participation and empowerment, rather than exploring the differential roles, responsibilities, and social norms attached to both men and women, as well as the intersection of these issues with other forms of marginalization including for Indigenous Peoples or youth.
- *Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples.* Three of the four network case studies have clear mechanisms for engaging Indigenous Peoples organizations and leaders. DGPA has a significant number of Indigenous Peoples organizations as members and is committed to increase this number. There are also several examples of Indigenous People's leadership in network bodies, including in DGPA and CFLEDD. In DGPA, there is a quota for Indigenous Peoples leaders in network bodies including 3/5 members in the board. DGPA has also adopted the use of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) for making decisions among the Indigenous Peoples leaders in the network. While there are stated examples of representation, ensuring real and effective participation and voice in decision-making is still cited as a challenge.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

- *Knowledge management systems.* While most of the networks have invested in communications—for example all have active websites—development of robust knowledge management systems is an ongoing challenge. For example, both Reseau CREF and DPGA cited knowledge management as a key area for strengthening; institutional memory is perceived as present within network leadership, but not necessarily codified through systems and processes that can be easily transferred and tell the story of the network. Several leaders also identified the need to strengthen an overall culture of learning – while all groups could point to specific impacts and shared insights on success factors, there is opportunity for more analysis of what factors led to success as well as which approaches have not been effective and should not be replicated as part of network strategy. The research identified a need for more effective learning mechanisms to develop member capacity, create awareness at the level of grassroots' members

and communities. Developing systems to share   institutional history and success stories of networks was cited as a strategy to build network resilience that would have improved ability to navigate leadership transitions and other difficult periods.

- *Member exchange and best practices*. Related to the need for knowledge management systems, proactive sharing of lessons and even facilitation of member exchange between organizations was identified as a best practice. For example, EAGLE network has institutionalized member exchange as well as ensuring that steering group members are available to provide mentorship to country staff. Exchange on methods and practices could also serve as a potential conflict resolution mechanism between organizations with different experiences, with network leadership playing the role of facilitator to encourage members to evaluate their approaches and learn from others.
- *Communications*. Maintaining effective internal communications, particularly for networks with representation across larger geographies, is an ongoing challenge that is critical to building support and buy-in for network vision. Regarding external communications, as noted by DGPA leadership, in some cases networks focus more on targeting donors than in communicating with national stakeholders and constituents. Investing in communications infrastructure and regular practices is a potentially critical role for network governance structures to strengthen cohesion and two-way exchange of information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature review, network inventory, and case studies there are numerous positive examples of civil society groups working collectively for common goals to improve transparency and accountability of decisions over natural resource governance. Yet, many of these groups face critical questions of defining a clear mission, role, and competing for a limited pool of human, financial, and technical resources. The proliferation of networks, frequent overlap in membership between platforms with broad policy advocacy and dialogue objectives, and resource constraints identified by many CSOs and networks within the region suggest programs interested in creating or supporting civil society networks should align support strategies with the needs of target actors, and work closely with civil society networks and member organizations to design locally-led capacity strengthening strategies that strengthen institutional support alongside support to core labor and activity costs. Table 3 synthesizes recommendations for civil society networks and their member organizations, as well as donor and technical partners focused on organizational development and capacity strengthening.

Summary of Recommendations

	Civil Society Networks and Members	Donors and Technical Partners
Network Governance	- Establish clear criteria and targets for network size - Establish clear membership criteria and regular review of member performance to encourage network cohesion - Create clear channels for members to influence decisions on governance and management of networks. - Adopt and implement clear policies for review and updating of strategy, network organization, membership criteria, and planning processes into network procedures	- Ensure that new programs and initiatives identify and build on existing local civil society networks - Through existing or future activities, support civil society networks and member organizations in conducting governance self-assessment to identify issues and develop strategies to address them
Impact	Implement strategic planning and ensure that network objectives are clearly	Convene "listening sessions" to facilitate opportunities for civil society

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	shared, understood, and communicated across network membership (e.g., through annual/quarterly strategy updates to members) ● Develop measurable standards/indicators and procedures to measure progress that enable mutual learning among members ● Create opportunities for network exchange that facilitate collaboration, for example through exchange programs or skill-sharing to match to needs across network membership	networks and their members to communicate on priorities, challenges, and needs to inform design of technical and financial interventions ● In projects that support or partner with civil society networks and member organizations, incorporate indicators and targets that relate to their long-term institutional capacity and sustainability, not just short-term outputs or outcomes within project life cycles
Resource Availability	● Establish strategies to diversify funding, achieve a sustainable funding model, and increase financial autonomy ● Design criteria to assess the capacities of each member of the network on a regular basis ● Institute strong financial controls and transparent financial reporting including sharing financial performance with network members	● Create funding windows to support more flexible institutional funding for civil society organizations ● Review regulations and procedures that limit overhead and administrative costs for small local organizations and networks and identify opportunities to cover costs of internal systems strengthening (e.g., knowledge management, communications, leadership development, and financial management)
Representation and Inclusiveness	● Develop and review implementation of inclusive policies on gender, Indigenous Peoples, and other relevant vulnerable groups, and provide principles and procedures on how the network will proactively address and measure progress on these objectives ● Develop strategies to track outcomes beyond participation and representation metrics to evaluate success of social inclusion strategies	● Integrate gender and social analysis into strategy, program design, and planning including for grants and other support windows ● For technical partners collaborating with civil society organizations, develop simple tools and trainings that develop concepts of representation into actionable strategies ● Provide support for evaluate frameworks to generate an evidence base for understanding how gender and social inclusion interventions influence outcomes for beneficiaries
Communications and Knowledge Sharing	● Establish long-term monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning processes that build institutional memory and learning ● Define or clarify network target audiences and adapt messaging to each of these groups ● Establish and evaluate internal communication mechanisms to facilitate regular exchange and ensure equitable access to information on network governance	● Create incentives for knowledge management and lesson-sharing through funding windows and calls for applications ● Strengthen knowledge sharing and coordination between donors and technical partners in relation to civil society network support to avoid duplication of efforts and proliferation of additional networks

1.0 ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

1.1 ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

On August 11, 2020, USAID awarded Tetra Tech USAID's Forest and Biodiversity Support Activity contract to support the overall development objectives of USAID's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE). The goal of USAID's Forest and Biodiversity Support Activity (hereafter referred to as the Activity) is to assist CARPE and other environmental stakeholders in Central Africa to implement strategies and actions that address the large-scale threats to biodiversity conservation and forest management by focusing on three interconnected intermediate results (IRs):

1. Leadership and participation of diverse local organizations and the private sector strengthened
2. Policy, regulatory, and enabling environment improved
3. Innovative and evidence-based approaches adopted and institutionalized within conservation and forest sectors

The Activity applies these IRs to the four overarching thematic areas and strategic approaches of CARPE's Phase IV vision: (i) Land governance works for forests and biodiversity; (ii) Civil society works for forests and biodiversity; (iii) Law enforcement works for forests and biodiversity; and (iv) Green enterprises and markets work for forests and biodiversity. The Activity engages with a broad network of institutions including civil society, private sector, government, and other conservation and development practitioners across the Congo Basin to build sustainable local institutions. Underpinning these objectives is the activity's collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) approach that will improve knowledge-sharing, communications, and learning across conservation networks in the Congo Basin.
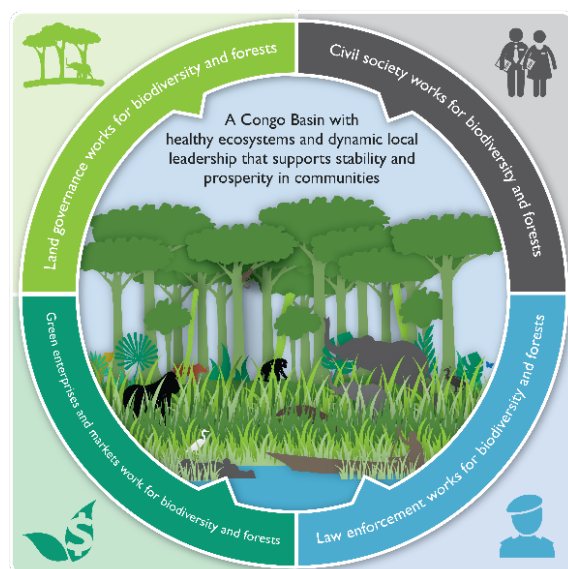
2.0 INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades, the proliferation of civil society networks working on conservation and natural resource management in Central Africa has created opportunities for increased knowledge exchange, dialogue, skill-sharing, and joint advocacy. Civil society networks also face a host of challenges to maintain cohesion, sustain funding, and achieve impact in a context characterized by weak governance and low government accountability. This report reviews the evolution of civil society networks in Central Africa to understand under what conditions they form, factors that contribute to improved collective action, and specific challenges facing civil society networks and organizations in the region. In the context of this report, we adopt Ashman et al.'s definition of civil society networks: "civil society groups, organizations, and sometimes, individuals that come together voluntarily to pursue shared purposes of social development or democratic governance. These purposes may include exchanging resources, addressing common social goals or expressing their identities as community or social group."[3]

The objective of the regional network assessment is to understand the successes, impacts, and challenges of civil society networks' operational networks in Central Africa and produce recommendations to orient institutional strengthening and network support activities. It contributes to achievement of USAID's Forest and Biodiversity Support Activity's Intermediate Results (IRs) by strengthening capacity and leadership of local organizations working on conservation and natural resource management (IR1) and improving policy and enabling environment (IR2) by strengthening voice and participation in design and implementation of policies and regulations. In addition, the assessment identifies best practices and lessons learned for support to civil society networks to share insights on capacity strengthening and organizational development with the broad range of donors, practitioners, civil society organizations, and networks and civil society organizations themselves.

The assessment contributes to the overall implementation of Theme 2 of the CARPE Phase IV Vision, which aims to support civil society that works for biodiversity and forests by strengthening environmental advocacy to improve accountability and transparency of government agencies. It also aligns with USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy, which recognizes that achieving development outcomes depends on the contributions of multiple and interconnected actors and identifies networks as a critical social level that requires targeted capacity strengthening approaches. [4]

Section two introduces the study's rationale and methods. Section three presents an overview of regional networks and trends. Section four presents case studies of four active civil society networks, and section five synthesizes insights and lessons learned from the case studies and shares recommendations for networks, technical partners, and donors for developing and sustaining effective civil society networks.

2.1 RATIONALE

Over the past two decades in Central Africa, development of civil society networks emerged as a strategy to implement collective action on a range of natural resource management issues. In the context of weak state accountability, many of these networks provide critical activities including support to policy analysis, formulation, and dialogue; technical assistance to under-resourced government agencies; and independent monitoring activities to strengthen accountability for natural resource

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[3] Ashman, D. with C. Charles, A. Cuenca, C. Luca, B. Singer, and M. Schmith. 2005. Supporting Civil Society Networks in International Development Programs, Edition 1. AED Center for Civil Society and Governance.

[4] USAID Local Capacity Strengthening Policy. 2022. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/LCS-Policy-2022-10-17.pdf

management decisions. This study aims to understand the current trends, lessons learned, and challenges of environment-focused civil society networks currently operating within Central Africa, and present   recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of these efforts for network members, technical partners, and donors.

Background research for this report found that there is "relatively little documented experience and analysis around organizational issues and practices within the African natural resources field."[5] Analysis of civil society is often limited to stakeholder and network mapping exercises or evaluations of donor support to civil society strengthening programs implemented via international NGO partners focused on compliance.[6] In support of localization objectives as outlined in USAID's Local Capacity Strengthening Policy, there is a need to strengthen understanding of the priorities and interests of actors within local systems and networks to provide more targeted support adapted to local needs. This study aims to support locally led capacity strengthening approaches and provide insights to networks, donors, and technical partners working closely with civil society and their networks within Central Africa.

2.2 METHODS

The consultant implemented the research in two phases. Phase one consisted of a literature review and identification of relevant civil society networks operating in target countries in Central Africa (Cameroon, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo) focused on conservation and/or natural resource management. A database of networks and key characteristics including geography, date of establishment, and thematic focus was compiled and analyzed to identify general trends across the region (Section Two). The consultant compiled a shortlist of networks for more in-depth case studies, which was reviewed and agreed with the Activity team (Table 1). The four case studies represent networks operating across geographic scales and with a diversity of thematic focus, as well as two networks that explicitly focus on representation and voice of marginalized groups.

Table 1. Network Case Studies

Network	Thematic focus	Geography and scale
EAGLE - *Eco-Activists for Governance and Law Enforcement*	Wildlife law enforcement	Regional
DGPA - *Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones*	Indigenous peoples' advocacy	National (DRC)
CFLEDD - *Coalition des femmes leaders pour l'environnement et le développement durable*	Women's advocacy	National (DRC)
Réseau CREF – *Réseau pour la Conservation et la Réhabilitation des Ecosystèmes Forestiers*	Natural resource management CSO advocacy	Provincial (North Kivu, DRC)

In phase two, the consultant conducted field visits to meet in person with selected organizations in Cameroon (January 2022) and in DRC (February-March 2022). Table 2 summarizes key questions covered during field visits with each network. The case studies provide a detailed analysis of the

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[5] Maliasili Initiatives and Well Grounded. 2015. Strengthening African Civil Society Organizations for Improved Natural Resource Governance and Conservation. Maliasili Initiatives and Well Grounded: Underhill, VT and London, UK.

[6] See for example Djontu, J. ; Turunen, L. ; Vaudry, R. ; Bisiaux, A. (2021). Cartographie des organizations de la société civile et des espaces de dialogue dans le cadre de l'Initiative pour les Forêts d'Afrique centrale en République du Congo, Rapport de consultation.

governance structures, impacts, lessons learned, and challenges of four active civil society networks operating in the Congo Basin. The case studies draw from analysis of documents collected as well as stakeholder interviews to share network members' own perceptions of strengths, weaknesses, and challenges. This approach supports understanding of the current interests, priorities and challenges of these institutions, as well as how these organizations adapt to meet new challenges and opportunities and the types of support that could help them better deliver on their missions. Figure 1 presents main data sources, which included network leaders, staff, and member organizations, as well as other resource persons such as donors or organizations providing technical support to the platform such as Well-Grounded.[7] Annex 1 presents the full list of key informants interviewed.
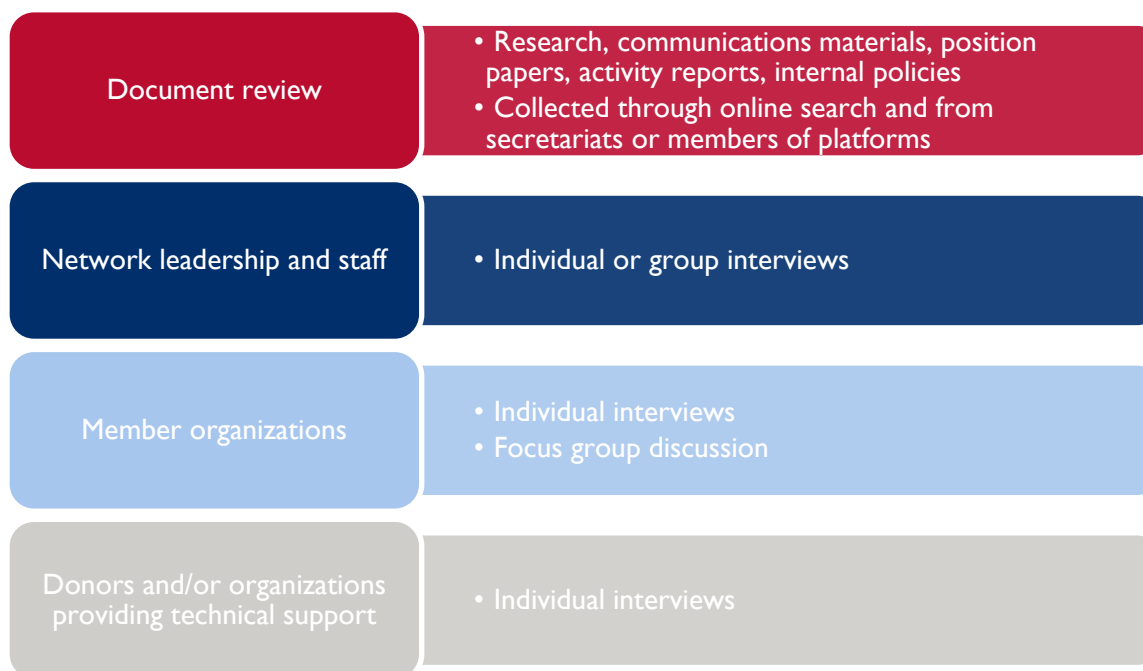
Table 2. Issues covered by the field research

Category	Key questions
Context of creation	- Year of creation - Socio-political context - How did the network originate? - Actors or leaders behind the creation of the platform
Thematic focus	- Why the platform/network? - What is/are the thematic entry points? - Have those evolved with time? Why?
Network governance	- Who are the stakeholders in the platform? - How is the platform/network structured? - What are the different bodies and how are they connected? - What are the internal rules? Are they enforced? - How are the responsibilities shared and assumed? - What are the internal collaboration mechanisms? - How does the platform work to achieve its purpose? - What is the level/degree of relationships members maintain with each other in the process of working toward their purpose? - To what extent the platform works with entities beyond its boundary to achieve its purpose?
Finance, management, and human resources	- How is the platform funded? To what extent are there self-funding mechanisms? - Who are the major donors? Are they committed for the short or long term? - What budget for the past years? - What do the audits for the past years say? - To what extent is there progress toward financial autonomy? - Has the platform developed specific policies (e.g., gender, IPs, anti-corruption)? To what extent are they enforced? - Are the human resources dedicated to the functioning of the platform enough to cover the managerial tasks?
Achievements and impact	- What could be considered as major achievements of the platform/network? - To what extent the achievements are products of collective effort? - What are the claims of changes brought by the platform in the concerned context? On policies? On practices? - What could be considered as "best practices" developed by the platform? - To what extent the achievements include the needs of specific groups such as women and IPs? - What are the success factors that have contributed to the network's impacts? - What type of organizational developments have the platform/network benefited and how effective are those capacity building events in its functioning and sustainability?

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[7] Well Grounded is an NGO that has provided extensive support to civil society organizations and networks across the Congo Basin including three of the organizations assessed for this report: CFLEDD, DGPA and Réseau CREF. Well-Grounded staff were also interviewed to provide insights into opportunities to strengthen network effectiveness and sustainability.

	● What have been the key challenges of the network since its creation? How have they been overcome?

Figure 1. Data collection sources

Document review	• Research, communications materials, position papers, activity reports, internal policies • Collected through online search and from secretariats or members of platforms
Network leadership and staff	• Individual or group interviews
Member organizations	• Individual interviews • Focus group discussion
Donors and/or organizations providing technical support	• Individual interviews

In the existing literature, several other analyses of civil society organizations and networks used surveys to identify broad trends or documented the authors' experience supporting capacity development to draw conclusions on opportunities and challenges.[8] The case studies in this report complement the existing literature identified on civil society network effectiveness and organization development in Central Africa. Each case study presents a detailed analysis of how each network is governed and structured, impacts and success factors, and how they have adapted to address challenges including sustainability, finance, inclusion, and managing conflict. It is critical to note that the goal of these case studies is not to complete an impact evaluation, directly compare performance of the selected networks, or critique the networks identified. Rather, it is to understand how these networks formed, operate, and their perception of strengths and challenges they face.

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[8] See for example: https://well-grounded.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Coll-Action-Paper_Eng.pdf and https://www.recoftc.org/sites/default/files/publications/resources/recoftc-0000400-0001-en.pdf

3.0 OVERVIEW OF CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

3.1 OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL NETWORK IDENTIFICATION

A desk review compiled a list of 76 civil society networks, of which nearly one-third had an explicit regional focus (Figure 2). The importance of regional networks as convening and knowledge sharing platforms has been supported through the Congo Basin Forests Partnership (CBFP), the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC), and the several regional networks established at the *Conférence sur les Ecosystèmes de Forêts denses et humides d'Afrique Centrale* (CEFDHAC) in 2005. However, to date many of these regional institutions are dependent on project cycles, or are no longer active. In particular, regional networks organized around a general advocacy or dialogue goals struggle to achieve steady funding and long-term sustainability. By contrast, networks such as Eco-Activists for Governance and Law Enforcement (EAGLE) achieved regional scale through focused expansion of national affiliates.

Figure 2. Geographic focus of identified civil society networks
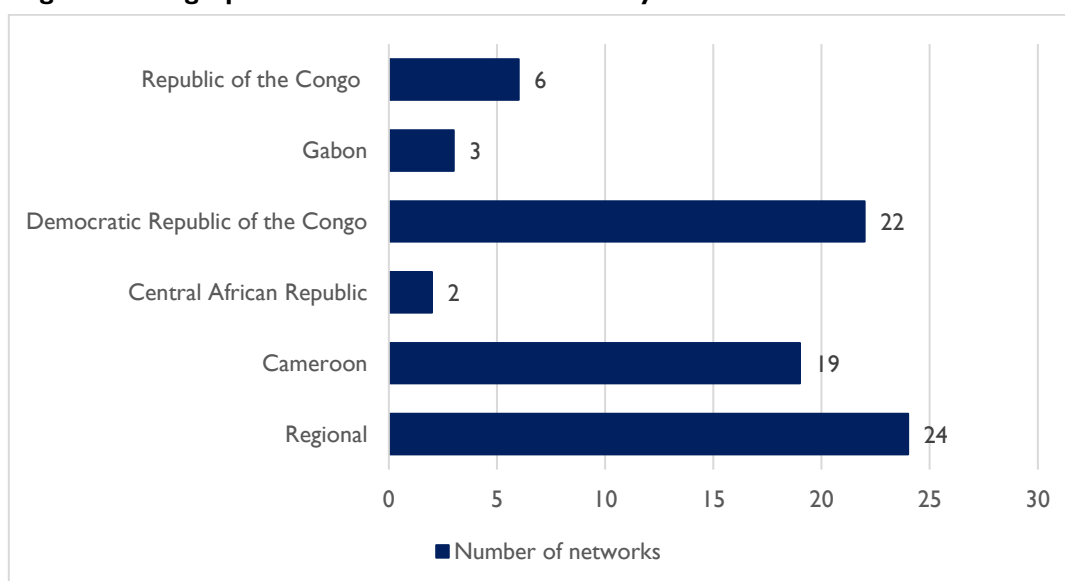
National and sub-national networks based in Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo comprised another 60 percent of the networks identified, with a more limited number found in Central African Republic, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo. Sub-national or smaller networks operating in difficult contexts or rural areas within the region may be less likely to have an online presence and therefore may be underrepresented in these results.

3.2 NETWORK CREATION TIMELINE

In most Central African countries, the right to form associations and civil society organizations did not emerge until the reforms of the early 1990s. Several studies note the proliferation of civil society organizations and networks following the institution of these reforms, and the need for sustained organizational development over time.[9] As shown in Figure 3, many of the 76 platforms identified for this study were created in the early 2000s. During that time period, new initiatives such as the EU's

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[9] Bonis Charancle, J.M. 1996. Diagnostic des ONG de l'Afrique centrale : Cas du Cameroun, du Congo, du Gabon, et de la République Centrafricaine. PVO-NGO/NRMS Project, Biodiversity Support Program & USAID.

Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreement process, and subsequent emergence of dialogue on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) were instrumental to creation of policy dialogue and increased space for civil society to engage in forest policy discussions.[10] The inventory found that networks originated for a host of reasons, in some cases from a perceived gap or need on the part of its member organizations (e.g., lack of dedicated platforms on indigenous peoples or women's representation), whereas others were created by donor-funded projects, supported by international NGOs, or in some instances led by government agencies.

Figure 3. Creation timeline of identified civil society networks[11]
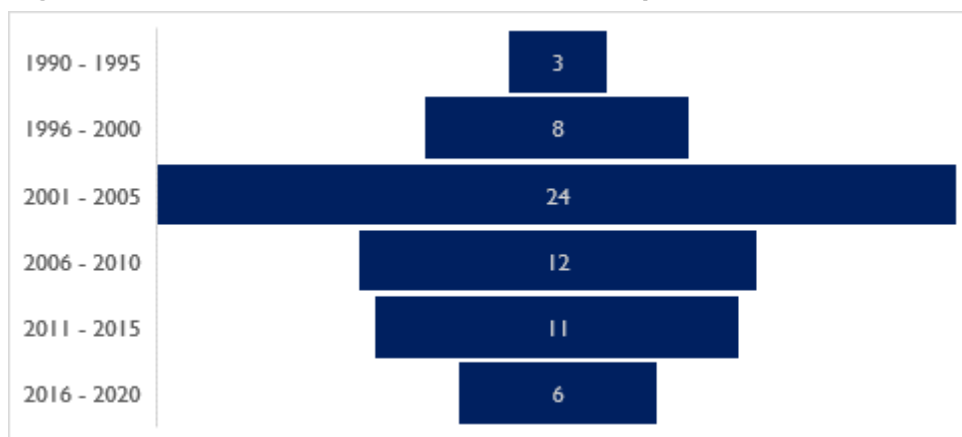
3.3 INTERVENTIONS AND THEMATIC FOCUS

A network study by the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC) focusing on networks in Africa and Asia noted that "coalition building has emerged as a promising approach to expanding democratic opportunities and ensuring success of development and policy efforts. Civil society organizations (CSOs), public and private donors and development agencies are turning to these networks to deliver aid effectiveness."[12] CSOs and networks in Central Africa have taken on a range of objectives designed to strengthen overall transparency, inclusion, and accountability of natural resource management. The network analysis identified five major functions that these networks provide (Figure 4):

- **Advocacy.** Two-thirds of the networks frame advocacy on a range of conservation and natural resource management issues as a primary objective. Of the 46 networks focused on advocacy, 30 percent focused on rights of Indigenous Peoples and about 10 percent prioritized women's empowerment.
- **Policy dialogue.** About 7 percent of networks identified are multi-stakeholder networks created to inform a specific policy process (e.g., FLEGT VPA platforms or similar initiatives). Several of these platforms are focused on increasing civil society's voice in policy discussions, but may be convened by government agencies rather than initiated and led by civil society actors themselves.
- **Skills-based**. About 13 percent of identified networks organize around a common practice or technical niche, which presents opportunities for training and exchange among organizations conducting similar activities. Most of these groups are focused on independent monitoring of

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[10] RECOFTC. 2021. Defining and assessing the effectiveness of civil society networks working on forest governance issues in Africa and Asia. Bangkok, RECOFTC.

[11] Twelve networks did not have a clear date of establishment and are not reflected in Figure 3.

[12] Ibid

forest or conservation sector actions, with a few examples of networks focused on environmental communications and education.

- **Community-based natural resource management**. Approximately 9 percent indicated a focus on community-based natural resource management, typically at a subnational scale focusing on improving management practices in target landscapes.
- **Knowledge generation and sharing**. This category refers to networks focused on generating and sharing knowledge. The majority of these, representing 11 percent of identified networks, operated at a regional scale.

Figure 4. Percent breakdown of identified networks' main objective
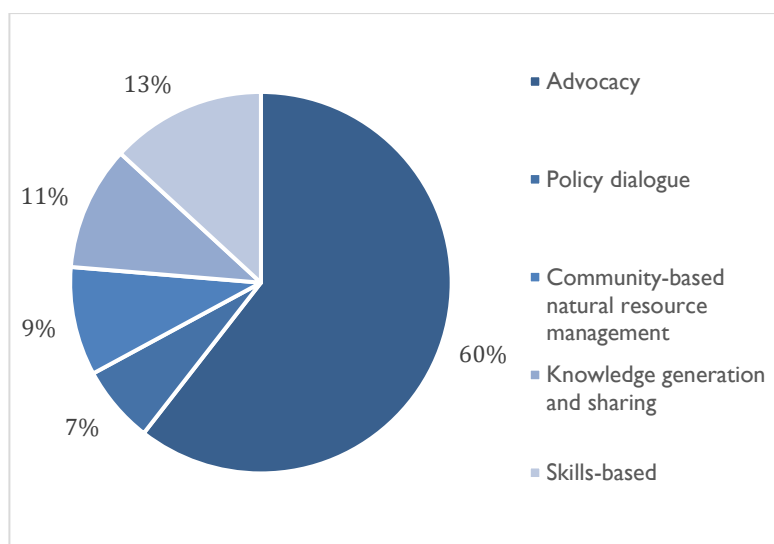
3.4 DISCUSSION

Networks in the region have evolved as a response to both internal priorities (e.g., achieving greater voice and participation in decision-making) and external drivers including new projects and policy opportunities. While formation of some networks is perceived as opportunistic, the expansion of networks as an effective strategy for collective action to improve resource governance has led to new interactions and dialogue between state actors and civil society across the Central African region and documented improvements in policy and its implementation, as shown in the case studies in the following section.

The inventory noted that many networks once established were not necessarily maintained over time, suggesting that maintenance of connections within networks and funding to sustain interactions represents a persistent challenge for both CSOs and their networks. Analysis of collective action by Well-Grounded specifically cites this challenge, noting that very few networks—even those originally formed for a specific policy purpose—view their work as complete, leading to a challenge of networks "existing just to exist, lack of focus, and conflicting agendas of members. They conclude that the "most effective networks . . . are those which have emerged around an issue and that have developed a very concrete and focused response."[13]

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[13] Long. C. 2018. Collective Action between Civil Society Organizations: How can networks be effective?" Well Grounded Discussion Series. https://well-grounded.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Coll-Action-Paper_Eng.pdf

Furthermore, the network inventory noted that many networks that form around advocacy roles lack a specific focus or purpose, or define their remit very broadly to cover a vast range of technical and social issues related to natural resource management and conservation. An analysis of African CSOs by Maliasili and Well Grounded also observed this trend, noting that many organizations and networks dilute their potential impact by spreading themselves thin across different initiatives, and particularly struggle with developing clear strategies with respect to advocacy; in their survey, "[a] number of respondents identified that while CSOs have been reasonably effective in certain situations at getting a seat at the table, some have struggled in then making strategic use of that seat to achieve impact."[14]

Based on the literature review and network inventory, bringing together civil society groups to work collectively for common goals provides an important function in improving transparency and accountability of decisions over natural resource governance. Yet, many of these groups face critical questions of defining a clear mission, role, and competing for a limited pool of human, financial, and technical resources. The proliferation of networks, frequent overlap in membership between platforms with broad policy advocacy and dialogue objectives, and resource constraints identified by many CSOs and networks within the region suggest that institutions, projects, and donor programs interested in creating or supporting networks should assess their need and build in decision points on when a network has served its purpose. The following section examines how four active civil society networks in Central Africa have confronted these challenges as part of their efforts to sustain their networks and achieve greater impact over time.

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[14] Maliasili Initiatives and Well Grounded. 2015. Strengthening African Civil Society Organizations for Improved Natural Resource Governance and Conservation. Maliasili Initiatives and Well Grounded: Underhill, VT and London, UK.

4.0 CASE STUDIES

4.1 ECO ACTIVISTS FOR GOVERNANCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT (EAGLE)

4.1.1 NETWORK OVERVIEW

Establishment and History. The Last Great Apes organization (LAGA) was created in Cameroon in 2003. As a pioneer NGO in the wildlife law enforcement field, LAGA operated in Cameroon for a decade before extending its network into additional African countries. Based on its success in Cameroon, LAGA made a strategic decision to replicate its model rather than trying to expand its operations. At the outset, LAGA staff spearheaded the process of replication in other countries; however, soon the increasing demands in other countries became untenable and the idea of different organizations affiliated through a network emerged. The Eco-Activists for Governance and Law Enforcement (EAGLE) network was created with a centralized administration in charge of managing and overseeing the whole network. The advent of EAGLE was endorsed by the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), which perceived its model of wildlife law enforcement as an effective solution to increasing trends of wildlife crime in the region. COMIFAC sent a letter to all the *Communauté économique et monétaire de l'Afrique centrale* (CEMAC) countries expressing their wish to see such a model implemented in their various countries. EAGLE network currently operates in nine countries in West and Central Africa, including Cameroon, Gabon and Republic of Congo (Figure 5).

Figure 5. EAGLE network in Africa (Source: EAGLE, 2021)
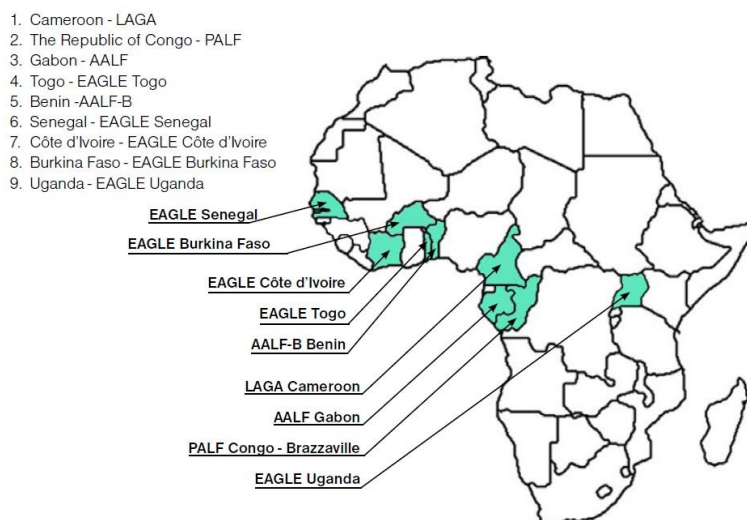
Mission and Focus. EAGLE's mission is to assist governments in applying wildlife laws. EAGLE collaborates with governments and civil society to improve the application of national and international environmental legislation through a four-step model:

- *Step 1: Investigations*: Investigators, undercover agents and informers gather precise information so that traders in bushmeat and the products of threatened species can be arrested in the act, producing concrete evidence for the courts.

- *Step 2: Arrest operations*: EAGLE members provide technical assistance to law enforcement agencies to investigate, implement enforcement actions, and send cases to the courts. EAGLE closely supervises operations in the field.

- *Step 3: Prosecutions*: EAGLE's legal team assists in administrative follow-up on prosecutions in the courts.

- *Step 4: Publicity*: EAGLE puts newsflashes into national TV news, national radio news, and written press sharing the success of the operations and court rulings. By using media to inform the public that the law is actively enforced, EAGLE members aim to educate the public on wildlife crime, to increase deterrence, and to classify the illegal trade in endangered wildlife and wildlife products as criminal.

EAGLE members document bribery attempts in 85 percent of field arrest operations, and in 80 percent of all court cases within the legal system, citing the importance of fighting corruption as central to their approach and to shift away from "business as usual" practices. Its founder notes that most countries in which EAGLE operates "have sufficient provisions to jail wildlife traffickers. We say, by far, the problem is the application of the laws rather than the laws themselves. What we can see is that corruption always likes to hide behind lack of capacity."

Though capacity building is not their core activity, members of the network might be called upon to assist in training and workshops organized by other organizations or to host trainees. EAGLE still prioritizes training as part of its approach, with an emphasis on practical methods and implementation: "We train wildlife officials; this is part of our responsibility. We have our own notion of training, not workshops. We understand the weakness of workshops. We see how much conservation money has gone into workshops without any result. We do train wildlife officials on the spot. When we do investigation and operation we tell them, we show them. We train continuously, but training on the spot." (LAGA Deputy Director, personal communication).

4.1.2 NETWORK GOVERNANCE

Membership. Recruitment for EAGLE members and staff prioritizes the key criteria of activism, as it is believed that bringing a positive change to countries is beyond the "business as usual services" typically provided by NGOs. Members are recruited not according to mere skills, but are examined in their values and potential to become independent activists. This makes the recruitment of members and staff particularly demanding; what is expected from them is "exceptional devotion, commitment, sacrifice, initiatives, and self-discipline fitting a fight for a cause." As one of the leaders stated, "Before becoming a member, as we call ourselves, we are activists. We understand that activism is part of our daily life. We ensure that our successes are on the back of activism, because we quickly understood that to make things work in a country like Cameroon and other African countries, you need to have a lot of activism. Pushing your agenda, pushing for your successes, pushing people to work… that is why we consider ourselves as members."

Each member signs a membership agreement confirming adherence to network standards and procedures:
- EAGLE Reporting & Verification Procedure
- EAGLE Replication Protocol & Membership Support System
- EAGLE Network Organizational Structure
- EAGLE Charter
- EAGLE Operational and Management Procedure Manual

Network structure. The network is structured around a steering committee, a central coordination unit, and country coordination units.

- The *Steering Committee* is the governance and senior management body of the network. It is composed of three founding directors of The Last Great Ape Organization, Conservation Justice; and *Projet d'Appui à l'application de la loi sur la faune sauvage* (PALF).
- The *Central Coordination Unit* (CCU) is based in Nairobi, Kenya and operates as the network headquarters. The role of the CCU is to monitor, review and evaluate the performance of the national members, as well as support, service and help the national members improve their performance and uphold the EAGLE Network model. Its staff includes a finance officer, a monitoring and evaluation officer, an investigation officer, and a support officer.
- *Country Coordination* is headed by a coordinator or director who works directly with CCU. Under the coordinators, there are four department heads: investigation, operations, media, and legal units. Country coordination offices are designed to balance maintenance of an independent structure to enable efficiency and effectiveness, and to respect the engagement and hierarchical structures of the network.

The founder explained how EAGLE maintains a balance between upholding the independence of member organizations while maintaining strong connection with the network by saying, "…the independence comes from the fact that these are projects who can raise funds directly. These are independent projects, with an independent coordinator. But there are certain issues we do in common: as respect for standards, we do have a code of ethics for example which is respected by all EAGLE members in the EAGLE family. There are some controls because some of the finances also come from the EAGLE network. The network searches for finances for the whole network, as well as the countries looking for their funding. So, you see that kind of independence and connection at the same time. We are connected through our rules, through the code of ethics, through funds, and the EAGLE charter… it is a kind of social franchise."

In its nine countries, EAGLE operates either through projects run by an NGO in the country or through an EAGLE country office, depending on the country context. The network has established representation in fourteen African countries of which nine are currently functioning (Table 4).

Table 3. EAGLE's in-country member organizations

Country	Member organizations	Year established (status)
Cameroon	LAGA – Last Great Apes Organization	2003
Republic of Congo	PALF – *Projet d'Appui à l'application de la loi sur la faune sauvage* (Aspinall Foundation, WCS)	2008
Central African Republic	WWF	2009 (Inactive)
Gabon	AALF - *Appui à l'Application de la Loi sur la Faune* (Conservation Justice)	2010
Togo	EAGLE Togo	2013; 2017[15]
Senegal	EAGLE Senegal	2014; 2019[16]
Benin	AALF-B - *Appui à l'Application des Lois sur la Faune et la Flore au Bénin* (Nature Tropicale)	2014 (Inactive; ended 2021)
Côte d'Ivoire	EAGLE Côte d'Ivoire	2017
Burkina Faso	EAGLE Burkina Faso	2018
Uganda	EAGLE Uganda	2015; 2019[17]
Guinea Conakry	WARA and USFS EAGLE Guinea	2012[18] (Inactive)
Kenya	WildlifeDirect	2014

[15] Launched with Alliance Nationale des Consommateurs et de l'Environnement (ANCE) in 2013; re-launched with EAGLE Togo in 2017.

[16] Launched with WARA Conservation Project in 2014; re-launched with EAGLE Senegal in 2019.

[17] Launched with NCRN in 2015; re-launched with EAGLE Uganda in 2019.

[18] Launched in 2012 but stalled in recent years; efforts to re-launch with EAGLE Guinea were planned for 2022.

Chad	African Parks Network	(Inactive)
Madagascar	Alliance Vohary Gasy	2016 (Inactive)

Finance, management, and human resources. EAGLE network is supported by donor funding. The network assists its members with the aim of developing self-sufficiency for country affiliates over time. The network expects that as member organizations develop, they will seek matching funds with support from EAGLE to ensure that members develop direct relations with a strong donor base. The central funding system has the flexibility to react to opportunities or unexpected funding gaps of a member organization. The network put in place strict financial practices and adherence to systems and procedures to ensure financial efficiency. A Financial Officer is tasked with monthly financial audits of projects in all countries to ensure accountability, transparency, and adherence to strict financial procedures. Financial reports are regularly published on the network's website.[19] The procedures also play an important role in discouraging corruption within the network's organizations and activities' financial management. Failure to abide by the standards can result in being expelled from the network, at least until matters were sufficiently resolved. For instance, the Uganda and Guinea offices were shut down because of management issues, before being reopened on a new basis. The enforcement of the network's strict procedures (activities and finance) reveals its capacity and willingness to practice integrity as a key principle. Integrity also applies in the fundraising activity, as the network does not accept funding from all sources.

Operations in the field consist of implementing EAGLE's Law Enforcement Model. A Monitoring & Evaluation Officer is tasked with monthly audits of projects in all countries to ensure results, monthly reporting of activities, transparency in publishing monthly reports online, and adherence to project proposals and strict activity procedures. Unlike most NGOs, whereby they must establish their whole structure and operation when entering a new country, an EAGLE network member benefits significantly from the social franchise model, which enables the operations to be established rapidly and achieve strong sustainability and results. During interviews, network personnel indicated challenges maintaining enough staff in several of their countries, particularly in legal and investigation departments. Staff shortages relate both to limited funding and the demanding member selection criteria.

Network's activities and stakeholder involvement. Wildlife trafficking in Central Africa is a regional issue and requires regional coordination among government and civil society stakeholders to address it. The EAGLE network enables member organizations to work together and share information across borders; the connection between groups can also help coordinate with or leverage the established relationships each member holds with relevant stakeholders in their respective country. As one senior EAGLE network member noted, "One of the main reasons that we succeed now is that we are able to work as a group. We might start an investigation here in Cameroon and finally arrest in Uganda. We move people around to work in other countries. It is a collective effort and exchanges with other countries has created a positive dynamic between groups."

Beyond the network, collaborating with other relevant stakeholders is challenging because of the sensitivity of the network's actions (tackling corruption, illegal wildlife exploitation). However, the network has been able to create opportunities to work with several national and international entities. EAGLE collaborates closely with national government partners via Memorandums of Understanding with agencies responsible for wildlife, and in some instances Ministries of Justice, police, police, Ministry of Defence, Anti-Corruption Commission and Presidency are also consulted on various issues and activities. EAGLE also collaborates closely with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered

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[19] See: https://www.eagle-enforcement.org/financial-records/

Species Management Authorities, Interpol, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, World Customs Organization, Great Apes Survival Project, CBFP, other NGOs, the diplomatic community, and Donors.

4.1.3 IMPACTS

Since inception, through its first member LAGA in Cameroon in 2003, the EAGLE network has changed the "business as usual" situation in countries from a baseline of limited wildlife prosecution to an enforcement rate of one major wildlife dealer arrested and prosecuted per week in a country like Cameroon. The replication of the model elsewhere brought about an increase in arrests, subsequent prosecutions, and imprisonments of major wildlife traffickers and has been instrumental in clamping down on criminal syndicates (Table 5).

Table 4. Estimated number of arrests and convictions supported by EAGLE network

Country	Estimated number of arrests and convictions
Cameroon	867
Republic of Congo	276
Central African Republic	30
Gabon	584
Togo	96
Benin	116
Guinea	107
Senegal	87
Uganda	371
Madagascar	19
Côte d'Ivoire	70
Burkina Faso	17

Beyond the increasing numbers of wildlife traffickers that are apprehended and jailed, the other key achievements of the network include:

Raising the profile of wildlife crime. It was common that wildlife crime was not perceived as a crime in EAGLE's countries. With the arrests, prosecutions, imprisonments, and public awareness actions, EAGLE has found that public attitudes and perceptions are changing, including the attitude of civil servants in charge of enforcing the law. As one senior EAGLE network member notes: "Prior to our activities even people in charge of enforcing wildlife law would mock the law themselves. Today people are talking about wildlife crime to be a high-profile crime. Changing the mind of wildlife law enforcement officers that it is a serious crime. Therefore, the shared discourse has been changing every year."

Gaining recognition and legitimacy for EAGLE members. With the impact of its work, EAGLE has established working relationships with governments in countries where it operates and has gained legitimacy for the assistance it provides. As one leader puts it, "We are equal partners. We succeeded to be talking with the governments on equal grounds." Beyond the government, EAGLE members have built their legitimacy and reputation among forest and conservation actors in the region. In several instances, the network or its member organizations have been awarded notable international awards recognizing the impact of their activities and achievements. This includes but is not limited to an Interpol Award for Investigation (LAGA, 2007); Future for Nature Award (2011); The Duke of Edinburgh Conservation Medal (2012); Conde Nast Traveler Environment Award (2012); and several Ian Redmond Conservation Awards (2013; 2015).

Influence on wildlife policies. Though the core of EAGLE's work is on wildlife law enforcement, not on policy formulation, network members have in some instances contributed to broader policy reform. For example, LAGA worked to influence the definition of wildlife crime in Cameroon's "National Anti-poaching and Wildlife Crime Strategy 2020-2030." Focus on anti-poaching in and around protected areas was not sufficient, and EAGLE supported incorporation of a broader component on wildlife crime at the national level designed to address systemic challenges. This advocacy helps shift from a focus on small poachers in specific sites to the need to address organized criminal networks.

EAGLE's work complements conservation efforts. By filling an important link between strengthening wildlife crime prevention and traditional biodiversity conservation activities, EAGLE perceives that it has amplified conservation success: "The fact that we stop people, we are helping the others to succeed. Other conservation measures are able to succeed if you have a law enforcement component. We are giving a helping hand to other conservation measures to succeed because we are stopping those who are disseminating wildlife species."

4.1.4 BEST PRACTICES

Network leadership cited the following as best practices that have contributed to EAGLE's success:

Setting measurable standards/indicators to measure progress. The EAGLE network has built-in procedures for the network and its member organizations to use to determine the success or failure of its activities. This includes case follow-up reports, objective verifiable indicators of achievement (e.g., the number of wildlife criminals receiving and serving a deterring punishment). This approach institutes the practice of aligning activities with intended results—or conversely, enables comparison of results achieved against/through activities—and enables the network to report-out on impact achieved in a structured way.

Ensuring transparency of operations. Having an effective knowledge management system helps facilitate easy access to the network's results, which are published on the EAGLE website (https://www.eagle-enforcement.org/) on a regular basis for all members to access. The website presents a diversity of information in different formats: project proposals, financial reports, accounting documents, operations documented in video, media coverage recorded and filed, monthly financial audit of projects, and monthly reporting of activities.

Institutionalizing new member capacity building and network exchange. EAGLE network has instituted a membership assessment as a practice that helps identify the types of support required by the network members and uses a categorization system to classify members according to certain criteria. EAGLE uses a three-stage membership development model. Stage 1 members (0-10 months of membership) have little autonomy but participate in undercover investigations to identify and locate major traffickers. The structure of their organization is being developed with the recruiting and training of lawyers, investigators, and staff focused on media engagement. Stage II members (10-18 months of membership) are able to practice all stages of the EAGLE model of law enforcement and may have achieved their first prosecutions. All positions are in place and are increasingly performing. Stage III members (>18 months of membership) are fully established network members and are achieving all results indicators. The development of the network structure takes time and is critical to support and build the expanding EAGLE network. To support Stage I and II members, member exchange pairs new members with more experienced members to help them develop their Law Enforcement Model and its implementation. With time it is expected that newer members will develop areas of expertise thus creating a mutual exchange of assistance and collaboration across countries.

Leveraging connections. Members bring to the network their connections in different countries, which are leveraged and shared across the network to facilitate shared, organized approaches when

actions against perpetrators of wildlife crime are conducted. A mutual understanding and respect for sharing these information and connections among member organizations in different countries has been critical in supporting the EAGLE network's regional efforts to address wildlife trafficking. If members were to act independently from each other instead of collaborating, the cross-border impact may not have been as successful.

Maintaining flexibility to integrate new ideas. Although the network maintains clear, structured systems and processes, the EAGLE network still provides opportunities for new ideas, systems, activities, or processes to be considered and integrated into network operations. Network leadership summarizes this best practice by saying, "We gather recommendations and inputs them into organizational rules, into how we function, how we carry activities. This is important because we are in the domain where we need to be changing all the time. Because we need to be thinking and making changes. For example, in the investigation department we need to be thinking about the next move. The traffickers are proactive. So, we have an open door policy, we have a whistle blower email where you can write anonymously and the problem would be looked into. We want to be transparent as possible."

4.1.5 CHALLENGES

The following areas are challenges identified by the EAGLE network:

Maintaining standards and a shared identity as the network grows. Although the network's high standards (against corruption, on governance issues, requirements on activities) are keys to its success, they also constitute challenges in practice, especially in regard to bringing on new members as the network has expanded over the years. It has been a challenge for the network to balance expansion while ensuring that new countries follow the Law Enforcement Model despite the systems in place that are meant to facilitate ease of replication (i.e., members exchange). Maintaining the quality of member staff, such as ensuring they have the network's preferred characteristics (i.e., an advocate at heart), across the network is also a challenge as there is not enough oversight from the governance structure to maintain these levels in each organization. As a representative stated, "Trying to get people who are hardworking with that kind of stamina and internal motivation, that kind of ambition to build themselves, rather than to gain some money. That for us is a big issue."

Sustainable funding. Although the network has a model in place to secure funding for and among members, the amount secured often does not cover all the pressing needs of the network. Additional training on fundraising for newly recruited staff is a pressing need. Another compounding challenge is the limited number of long-term commitments from donors at the network level. Funding at the network level emphasizes the importance of country-specific fundraising by country coordinators; however, so far this has not been as effective as fundraising work conducted from headquarters. Country coordinators are encouraged and pushed to assume those fundraising activities.

Sustaining leadership development and staff mobility. The current situation of the network could be characterized as stable due to the current group of strong leaders in the steering group. However, there is a question as to whether the network will survive after the departure of the current strong leadership, especially given the perception of limited upward mobility for staff within the network. The possibility for personnel progression within the network is limited, and positions are described as static and very closed. The change of staff from one position to another does not occur often.

4.2 RÉSEAU POUR LA CONSERVATION ET LA RÉHABILITATION DES ECOSYSTÈMES FORESTIERS (RÉSEAU CREF)

4.2.1 OVERVIEW

Establishment and History. Réseau CREF was created in 2003 in North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During this period, an influx of refugees into North Kivu due to ongoing conflicts nearby placed additional pressure on natural resources in the region, such as increased need for wood as an energy source. As a result, the network initially focused on reforestation as a primary focus, which was later extended to forest governance in the province. The network was created under the leadership of the local NGO Program d'Actions Locales (PAL). The secretary general of PAL was transferred to serve as the secretary general of Réseau CREF. The network's initial financial support came from International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Netherlands and later Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN).

Mission and Focus. The network seeks to value biodiversity and natural resources of North Kivu province at the local, national, and international level to support the well-being of communities. The network focuses on benefiting local communities and Indigenous Peoples' rights to lands and natural resources, while supporting sustainable development and the preservation of forest ecosystems. It provides technical support to member organizations, aims to create synergies between members, and promotes and defends the strategic interests of members and of local and Indigenous communities in natural resources management.

4.2.2 NETWORK GOVERNANCE

Membership. Network members are organizations that are based in the North Kivu province. There are 31 current member organizations in the network that are distributed across the province (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Location of Réseau CREF members in North Kivu
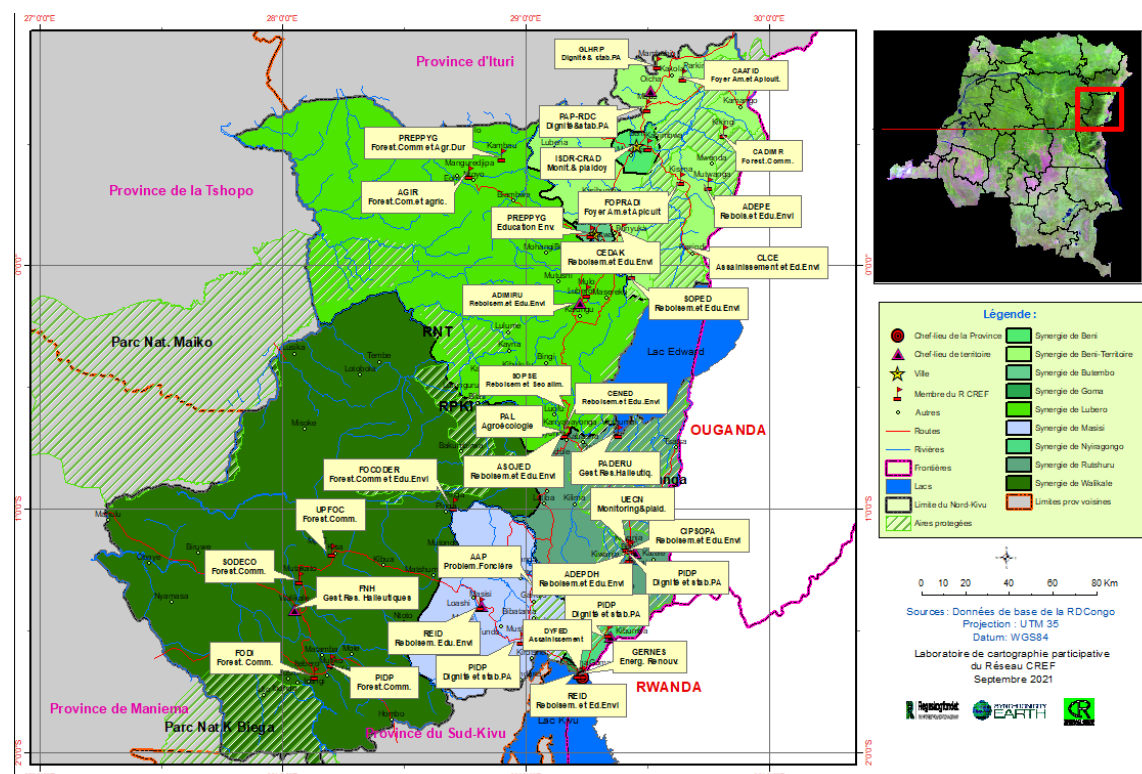
The recruitment of members is based on the following criteria:

- Local organizations based in North Kivu and involved in natural resources management.

- Legally registered to operate in DRC.
- Acceptance of the network's statutes, rules and specific policies.
- Demonstrate good performance as identified through an organizational pre-diagnostics assessment. This exercise aims at assessing the organizational performance, the quality of relations with other stakeholders (e.g., administrative authorities), and to appraise the member's field activities' effectiveness.
- Payment of admission fee and annual fees.
- Promotes the core-values of the network: transparency, solidarity, synergy, love of a job well done, and gender and equity.
- Provide added value to existing network members

The Decision to accept a new member is based on its performance. All members are re-assessed every two years and must score at least 50 percent to remain in the network.

Management body and field organization. Réseau CREF's management bodies and their functions are organized as follows:
- The **General assembly (GA)** makes decisions on the network's policies. It is composed of delegates from the members' organizations. To attend the GA, all members must have covered its annual fee.
- The **Advisory Board** provides guidance on the different network management aspects (administration, technical, financial, and social). Board Members are representatives of the five geographical axes and are appointed for three-year terms. The board bureau is composed of a president, a vice-president, and a secretary. The bureau conducts regular monitoring of the network's activities.
- The **Oversight Commission** oversees internal audits within the network. It also assesses the level of implementation of decisions made by the GA.
- The **Secretary General (SG)** is the technical body in charge of the daily management of the network. Its function includes technical activities, human resources, finance and logistics, representation of the network, and reporting.

Field-based member organizations are grouped in two ways:
- **Thematic sub-areas:** Indigenous Peoples, community land tenure, and environmental education.
- **Geographical:** Based on five geographical axes (following the Territory as administrative unit): 1. Beni Axis, 2. Butembo-Lubero Axis, 3. Rutshuru-Nyiragongo Axis, 4. Goma-Masisi Axis, and 5. Walikale Axis. The Representatives of the 'Axis' play a key role in the recruitment of new members as they provide their endorsement before the general assembly makes the final decision.

The working approach of the network is described as "faire-faire," meaning all activities are conducted through the members' organizations. The job of the secretariat is to find opportunities (with partners) and the activities are implemented by members in their geographic area. Implementation by members is based on contracts signed with the secretariat. Group dynamics in the network show different types of interactions between the management bodies and field members. The representatives of each geographical axis collect information from members and share it with the Advisory Board. The SG interacts regularly with members on activities planning and implementation. When there is a conflict that cannot be managed by the SG, the matter is addressed by an ad hoc conflict management commission created by the Board. All key decisions are made during the general assembly. A whistle blower policy provides the members with the opportunity to submit grievances informally.

Between 2016 and 2018, Réseau CREF went through a period of internal conflict that resulted in a change in network leadership and impacted the financial standing of the network, as a few donors withdrew funds. This significantly reduced its operating budget, and required placement of some staff on leave. Réseau CREF management renegotiated with certain partners and in time re-built trust with donors. Technical Director Francois Biloko reflects, "We were lucky to have a team that understood. Everything was at stake in the management of interpersonal relations, also the relationship with the network bodies and the SG. We shared the same pain, the same concern. With the members, the strategy of "faire-faire" proved to be the most appropriate. It was important in keeping the network operating." The crisis also pushed Réseau CREF to adopt a whistle blower policy to give members the opportunity to share their grievances in anonymity.

Finance, management, and human resources. Since the inception of the network in 2003, Réseau CREF has received funding from various donors. Most funding is secured through the secretariat and channeled to members through specific contracts. Members pay annual membership fees, though the total contributes less than 1 percent of the annual budget. The network owns the land on which its office in Goma was built. As a strategy to increase the network's financial autonomy, part of the office facility is undergoing construction with the aim to create a conference hall that is available for rent. The network does not accept all funding that comes its way: funding for activities must align the network's vision and the protection of community land and resource rights. The network's Administrative and Financial Management Manual, adopted in 2019, outlines administrative, financial, operations, and monitoring and evaluation procedures, as well as guidance for the revision of the manual.

The Secretariat currently has 12 staff: seven staff in the administration and finance department and five technical staff covering environment, biology/wildlife, mapping and GIS, community rights, socio-economic development, and communication. Secretariat staff are recruited through a competitive process. Current staffing level is seen as "sufficient" to cover the workload in the current program. When needed, consultants are also recruited to cover specific technical assignments that cannot be covered by the technical staff. The network has chosen to have permanent staff, rather than recruiting personnel for projects, to create more stability in the network's human resources. Should the network receive more projects and/or members, there will be a demand for more personnel. However, for the time being the Board has decided not to increase the number of members given the challenge of resource mobilization.

The network has specific policies on 1) gender, 2) protection of children and women, 3) anti-corruption, 3) environment, 4) whistle blower, 5) sexual harassment, and 6) security. The general assembly endorsed these policies one year ago and the assessment of their implementation is planned by the GA. Policies adopted by the general assembly apply *mutatis mutandis* to all network member's organizations. Recruitment of the secretariat personnel are based on competence and merit, with preference given to women candidates in the case of an equal scoring with male candidates. Women candidates are privileged in case of an equal score with men.

Network activities and stakeholder involvement. Current Réseau CREF members collaborate with non-member organizations, sometimes through specific projects through partnership contracts. At the local level, the network initiates and leads territorial concertation councils (CCT, Conseil de concertation territorial). This framework involves all relevant stakeholders (administration, NGOs, Réseau CREF members) to collectively address issues that arise at the level of a Territory. Réseau CREF is also part of larger national networks such as *Réseau Ressources Naturelles* (RRN) and the REDD+ Climate Working Group.

4.2.3 IMPACTS

Since its inception, the Réseau CREF network has made progress and achieved success in several areas. The network is portrayed as an "essential actor on environmental issues in North Kivu" and is regularly consulted and involved in several policy processes. Thanks to its performance and achievements, the network has received requests from organizations of other provinces (Ituri, Maniema, South Kivu) to become members. However, the network has not yet decided to extend to other provinces. Other provinces (such as Equateur and South Kivu) have requested technical support from the network. Réseau CREF organized capacity building sessions in the concerned provinces. Key successes according to network members are described below.

Breakthrough on artisanal logging in North Kivu. Prior to 2013-2014, no legal artisanal logging permits were issued in North Kivu, meaning all artisanal logging activity was illegal. Réseau CREF conducted a long process of sensitizing authorities and artisanal loggers which led to a start of delivering permits in the province.

Contribution to establishing community forestry in DRC and in North Kivu. The network implemented experimental field projects before the national regulation on *Concession Forestière des Communautés Locales* (CFCL) was adopted in 2014. Réseau CREF's experience contributed to national discussions on CFCL. Despite their impact at the national level, authorities of the province resisted the idea of community forestry due to misunderstanding of the concept. A breakthrough in the advocacy work of the network occurred in 2020 and the authorities started to issue CFCL to communities. As Réseau CREF's Technical Director François Biloko said, "Réseau CREF is a reference on community forestry as many people, including parliamentarians, consult us on the matter."

Advocacy against the SOCO International oil exploration in Virunga National Park. DRC authorities signed an agreement with SOCO to allow the company to explore and exploit oil resources from within Virunga National Park. The agreement was not only seen as a threat to the Park's natural resources and biodiversity, but also posed a threat to communities who lived in and near the Park where the exploitation would occur. Members of the network participated in a successful advocacy campaign which pushed the company to stop oil exploration in Virunga National Park.

Réseau CREF is perceived as an essential actor on environmental matters in North Kivu. In recognition of the network's technical capacity, local authorities often consult Réseau CREF in important issues concerning the environment. As an example, the secretariat was appointed as a member of the provincial steering committee for REDD+ projects and plays a key role within the committee.

Reforestation success in Masisi. In the context of rapid depletion of woodfuel energy in the province, there is a huge demand for reforestation initiatives. Members of the network, such as *Réseau d'Initiatives Locales pour un Développement Durable Réseau* (REID), with Réseau CREF's support have been able to reforest a large forest in Masisi following deforestation and forest degradation caused by woodfuel extraction.

Pioneering work on securing land for marginalized Indigenous Peoples in the province. Members have supported a process to deliver land certificates for some Indigenous Peoples in North Kivu, thereby ensuring continued access to their lands.

4.2.4 BEST PRACTICES

Table 15 presents best practices identified during a participatory meeting organized with a group of Réseau CREF members, with additional insights from the range of interviews with network leadership and support partners summarized below.

Table 5. Réseau CREF strengths and weaknesses[20]

Strengths	Weaknesses
● Diversity of members covering diverse thematic issues on the ground ● Members receive technical and financial capacity development ● There is an appreciable fundraising effort by the secretariat ● The secretariat is close to members ● Field monitoring by the secretariat is effective ● Members sign contracts and are responsible for managing project funds ● The network has a good national and international reputation ● All bodies of the network are functioning ● Members are submitted to audits at the end of the year ● Members pay their membership fees ● The network is formally recognized and has the legal capability to sue a third party ● The network pays the state taxes regularly and received appreciations from the administration ● The network adopted rules and enforces them effectively ● The network has a property (land) which contributes to its stability	● Organizations with poor performance are excluded from the network ● Vision imposed by donors in some cases prioritizes certain issues and therefore limits diversity of themes in the network's strategic plan ● Members are weak in fundraising ● Too many rules and rigidity of decisions ● General assembly is convened every two years while there are needs to make frequent decisions ● Deployment in all the five Territories of North Kivu is challenging ● Audits of members are not effective in recent years ● Financial autonomy is weak and membership fees are not enough to fund the bodies of the network ● Limited understanding of the network strategic plan among members creates significant member expectations

The network's "faire-faire" working approach. The network's "faire-faire" working approach focuses on implementation by member organizations in the field and not by the secretariat, which makes it possible for Réseau CREF to scale-up and implement activities across the province. This approach supports more presence in the field and greater reach of the network's activities with target communities.

Building institutional memory supports network resilience. With almost two decades of existence, Réseau CREF has built an institutional memory thanks to the stability of network members and some key staff. Having committed members and staff was critical during the period of instability between 2016-2018 to keep the network from failing during peak crises, as well as rebuilding trust and relationships with donors that enabled the network to transition into the new leadership phase.

Diversifying funding and revenue streams. Although it is true that donor funding remains the most prominent source of revenue for Réseau CREF, the network has made good progress in diversifying how they receive funding. Membership fees, even if they comprise a small portion of the budget, ensures that members provide their financial contribution (annual fee) to the network. Members who do not pay membership fees are excluded from decision-making and participation in the General Assembly. Réseau CREF also leverages its reputation and stakeholder connections in the province and offers capacity building interventions for non-member entities. The revenue generated through these interventions contributes to the budget of the network, but also continues to strengthen the visibility and reputation

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[20] This table represent perceptions of strengths and weaknesses as reported by Reseau CREF members directly during focus group discussions.

of the network. Once complete, the conference facility that Réseau CREF's is building on their land will provide an additional source of income for the network when rented out for events.

Rigorous recruitment and assessment processes. An effective strategy has proved to be the rigor of the member recruitment process, which is meant to ensure organizations are committed and meet the network's selection criteria. It also helps keep the size of the network manageable: "The adhesion process is tough because we realized we cannot manage fifty organizations. We wonder whether the capacity of the secretariat could be effective in accompanying and strengthening field activities of such a number of members," explains a Réseau CREF leader. By maintaining a geographic target area of North Kivu province and only recruiting members from within its boundaries, the network maintains a clear network of members who are very in-tuned with matters happening across the province. This enables an effective coverage of the province across the network, which is critical given the challenging transport and communications infrastructure as well as insecurity in the zone. Another aspect of such a strategy is the effectiveness of the exclusion and reintegration of members. Once a member is excluded for a reason (e.g., non-payment of fees, mismanagement of funds), the reintegration process takes time, as the organization will be submitted to an organizational review process and the result must be approved by the General Assembly. This ensures that the issues that led to the member's departure have been appropriately addressed before they re-join the network.

Democratic participation in the network. Any member can elect or to be elected. Any member has a rapport with all the bodies or entities of the network. At the local level, all members of thematic synergies or geographical axes participate in CCT with non-members. Once the operational plan is adopted by members during the GA, the role of the secretary general is to enforce it, not to change it. Members are the ones to implement the plan on the ground. As REID's leader puts it, "Réseau CREF is one of the rare platforms that leaves its governance and management to members. All is done by members for members. The role of the secretary general is limited to daily management."

Instituting audits for member organizations. Réseau CREF completes audits on funding that is channeled through the secretariat as well as other donor funding received. Regular audits on all funding reinforces the network's credibility and will help facilitate access to more funding if it is clear and well-documented that the network and members are in good financial standing.

4.2.5 CHALLENGES

The following are challenges that Réseau CREF faces as a network:

Strengthening network leadership and supporting staff mobility. Réseau CREF could benefit from having clearer expectations and management styles by network leaders, especially those who have been in his or her role for many years. Well Grounded has initiated the process to help define the network's leaders' leadership style, which in turn will help strengthen their legitimacy with members. Beyond leadership, a need for more training and internal opportunities for staff is needed, both to ensure staff are effective in their current role but also to help build professional development opportunities for progression or new learning among current staff.

Knowledge management. Since its inception, Réseau CREF members have implemented a number of projects, but their learning, impact and results have not been clearly or regularly captured. As one representative explained, "Members of the network live from project to project without capitalizing them in the story of the network." Weak knowledge management and learning fails to properly capitalize on their successes and benefit the network.

Funding model. The network has been funded through its secretariat for almost 20 years and the model has not changed. Member organizations struggle to raise their own funds, despite member-focused fundraising capacity building efforts. The continued dependency on one sole donor, RFN, is also

a challenge and poses two risks: 1) Réseau CREF could go out of business in case of a disagreement with or loss of funds from the principal donor; and 2) only members working on the priorities of the donor have the chance to remain active while others focused on different priorities are inactive. Members who are not working on forestry related issues are presented as "abandoned children of the network" and this leads to frustration. Sometimes, the secretariat is perceived as discriminating among members while "distributing funding" on behalf of the network. Misunderstanding of how the donor selects its priorities and sites leads to conflict and mistrust between the secretariat and some members. Lastly, some members who receive funding from external sources (not the secretariat) do not feel obligated to share information on activities and funding.

Building a common network vision. There is still a need to define the charter of members to clarify more clearly some issues. Is the network the sum of its members or the secretary general? Is one organization present in the network because the SG provides funding for its activities? Or are members in the network because they pull the strength of all members (common effort)? These are key questions to address because certain members have been asking to be connected directly to donors with the argument that they have reached their maturity. There is still a weakness among members on the shared vision of the network. Some members still believe that Réseau CREF is a donor for members. This implies that the on-going organizational and institutional assessment of members should be improved to emphasize the extent to which members are sharing the missions, vision, and strategic objectives of Réseau CREF. This would lead to ways to conciliate the perceptions of members and those of the secretariat. For members who consider themselves "mature enough" to directly interact with donors, there is no clear procedure to release those members from the network. There is a need to discuss this issue and to find an easy way out for such organizations. Such organizations are less flexible and have strong opinions that are not always appropriate for the democratic game in the network.

Limited reach of advocacy. Being a network focused solely on activities and presence in North Kivu, Réseau CREF has limited opportunity to gain national and international recognition of their advocacy efforts and activities. Although the narrowed geographic scope is central to the network's purpose, it limits the network's potential to influence policy dialogue or decision making. Having a Réseau CREF liaison office at the Kinshasa level is missing and could help to amplify advocacy of specific issues at the national and international levels.

4.3 COALITION DES FEMMES LEADERS POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT ET LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE (CFLEDD)

4.3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL DESCRIPTION

Establishment and History. CFLEDD was founded when women from several CSOs within existing networks focused on REDD+ and natural resources developed the idea to select women leaders in CSOs and build a network to promote female leadership within their organizations. Building women's leadership was meant to be a strategy through which these leaders would push for mainstreaming gender requirements within their organizations, going beyond the "business as usual" practices of donors.

The network launched in 2010-2011 with adoption of bylaws and thematic groups focused on gender, Indigenous knowledge, land tenure, forests, and climate change. The first general assembly was organized in 2012 and the network governance bodies were established. The network finalized its legal registration in 2014. Its founding members agreed that all of the positions in the network bodies should be held by women to demonstrate the environmental CSOs in DRC that women are able to effectively manage a national network and to ensure that women's contributions were seen and recognized within the sector. Speaking to this, the Vice Coordinator of CFLEDD, said "…what women are achieving in their organizations was not recognized. Our expertise was put under the table."

Mission. CFLEDD's vision is: "A world where fulfilled women enjoy their rights, train implement their different skills, and actively participate in decision-making bodies in environmental management and sustainable development." Specific objectives include:

- Ensure the participation of women in decision-making processes undertaken in the DR Congo (REDD+, FLEGT VPA);
- Lead and encourage decision-makers to take account of the interests of local and Indigenous women in the sustainable management of forests;
- Inform, train and sensitize national and international women on the protection and sustainable management of natural resources, health, education, income-generating activities;
- Encourage states to implement concrete actions through women for community development;
- Fight against poverty and all forms of violence and discrimination against women;
- Improve the socio-economic living conditions of local and Indigenous women;
- Maintain relations between national, regional and international civil society partners involved in the defense and protection of women;
- Consolidate women's relations at the local, national, sub-regional, regional and international levels through the various ministries and bilateral and multilateral partners;
- Strengthen the capacities of rural and Indigenous women in general, in particular on the various themes of the environment and sustainable development;
- Defend the rights of local and Indigenous women; and
- Implement advocacy and lobbying with states and national and international partners.

4.3.2 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING

Membership. CLFEDD currently has 225 member organizations and many pending member applications. Among members, there are both women's organizations and organizations with mixed membership of men and women. The key membership criterion is to be a gender-sensitive organization. The network allows flexibility with the criterion of legal registration of members' organizations for organizations that have not yet received legal recognition; among the network's objectives is providing support to new organizations in navigating the process of becoming a fully recognized formal organization.

Network bodies. CFLEDD bodies include:

- A *General assembly* (made of all members);
- A *Board* ("conseil d'administration"), comprised of four members;
- A *National coordination,* tasked with the daily management of activities, comprised of eight staff: a national coordinator, a program officer, two accountants, a secretary, a deputy secretary, a communication officer, and a logistics officer;
- *Provincial coordinations*, comprised of 11 coordinations, following the former administrative organization of the country, with the intent to post focal points in all provinces and territories;
- An *Internal auditor*; and
- A *Control committee*.

Under the national coordination, there are five main thematic areas under which member organizations are organized:

- Indigenous knowledge (to promote Indigenous women)
- Gender (as a cross-cutting area)
- Forest, agriculture, and REDD+
- Demography and land tenure
- Information, education, and communication

The creation of thematic areas was meant to involve members that do not hold a position in the network bodies. This provides members with the opportunity to gain awareness of what is happening within the platform and to contribute through sharing their experience. As different member organizations bring different areas of expertise, projects are implemented and tasks distributed according to areas of specialization. Positions in the coordination are filled through an election process among women leaders that are already part of the network rather than using an open recruitment process.

Finance, management and human resources. Between 2015 and 2022, the network implemented several projects with the following partners:

- WWF (2015-2017): Project on building capacity of women leaders on REDD+ socio-environmental standards in DRC and for involving women in decision making on REDD+.
- Rights Resources Initiative (since 2016): Project on the recognition of women's land tenure and forest rights in DRC; National workshop on mainstreaming gender in REDD+, community forestry and conservation; Project for the effective consideration of local and Indigenous women's rights in the drafting of new land tenure policy in DRC.
- Landesa (2019): Development of a note on the recognition of women's land and forest rights in DRC.
- Rainforest Foundation Norway (since 2017): Project on the recognition of women's land and forest rights at all levels, through their involvement in deforestation reduction activities in Mai-Ndombe and Equateur provinces; Project on securing women's land rights through participatory mapping; Project on applications for land tenure certificates recognizing women rights.
- Synchronicity Earth (2018): Support on the governance of land and forest in DRC.

4.3.3 IMPACTS

Based on discussions with network representation, the network considers the following as some of their major achievements and impacts:

Capacity development among women leaders. CFLEDD is presented as an effective framework that improves the capacities of and empowers members. Many members recognized what they gained in terms of capacity development: knowledge of various policy processes, mapping, gender, women rights, community rights, financial management, leadership, and project design. As one leader indicated, "CFLEDD opened my mind. Before, I thought politics was for men. Today I listen to the news."

Contribution to gender-related laws and regulations. CFLEDD contributed to the adoption and/or revision of legislations relevant to women in DRC, including the 2015 Parity Law; revision of the Family Code; and the Ministry of Environment's decree on gender. CFLEDD has also contributed to the discussions on the land tenure reform in DRC through position papers and participation in multi-stakeholder dialogues.

Contribution to the visibility of women leaders. With the support of RFN, CFLEDD regularly publishes a newsletter titled "News des Femmes Leaders" that focuses on women-related issues.

Land secured for women in Kasai. Under a project funded by Synchronicity Earth, CFLEDD secured a land agreement, signed by the customary chiefs, that granted 500 hectares of arable land in Kasai to women. Women committed to use this land to support sustainable natural resource management.

In addition, CFLEDD won the 2018 "Gender-just solution advocacy award" of the Women & Gender Constituency[21] for its work on innovative solutions around gender and climate change, titled "Access of women to land rights to contribute to reducing deforestation." Overall, CFLEDD's experience is now recognized and shared regionally, and the network has gained national and international recognition as shown by frequent invitations to international events and involvement in a number of policy processes.

4.3.4 BEST PRACTICES

Positioning women's leadership and empowerment as a change agent. As a network, CFLEDD brought not only a new narrative on women's organizational leadership, but also concrete actions on women's issues. They brought an innovation, a way to think and to collaborate with communities. It mobilized women who are willing to initiate change and who are empowered to influence the required change. The primary approach focused on positioning women leaders as agents of change within their organizations to transform the practices while staying connected with other women leaders through the network. A capacity-building expert who has provided support to the network summarized the approach as "women leaders taking fuel from CFLEDD to initiate change within their organization." This original idea of CFLEDD is less visible in the way the network is currently functioning.

A leadership program allows permanent capacity development. The Forum Masolo Leadership program was designed with the technical support of Well Grounded. It trains women and network members in several key areas such as "co-development" and "leadership" skills.

Integrating both Bantu and Indigenous women. CFLEDD has both Bantu and Indigenous women within the organization. Having both groups active within the network provides the opportunity to promote their competence and skills and integrate their participation in the network. Empowerment of Indigenous women is reflected in the organizational structure, with an Indigenous woman being elected as the national coordinator of CFLEDD.

Adopting the principle of volunteerism as a key criterion for membership. All members enrolled in the network bodies must understand that, whether there is funding or not, women leaders are committed to implement actions.

4.3.5 CHALLENGES

The CFLEDD network identified several gaps and challenges:

Challenges of empowerment model. CFLEDD's model aimed to build women champions within environmental CSOs, yet some members feel this model has not been sufficiently transformative and the network is now seen as a group of women's organizations.

Unclear process of member recruitment and membership status. Unclear and slow processes for adding new members or removing inactive members is limiting the network's effectiveness. There are inactive members as well as many applications from potential members that are not yet assessed.

Weak coordination between national and provincial units. Information-sharing and fundraising roles between national and provincial coordination units are cited as a persistent challenge. Many members, even at the national level, continue to consider fundraising as the responsibility of the national coordination.

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[21] The Women & Gender Constituency is a platform for observer organizations working to ensure women's rights and gender justice within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Integrating Indigenous women in a Bantu-dominated environment. The communication or interaction with some Bantu women leaders that are perceived as lacking diplomacy and respect for Indigenous women. Differences in communication styles even resulted in a group of Indigenous women leaving CFLEDD to establish a new network of Indigenous women (FECOFFA).

Limited resources of members. Many members do not pay membership fees, and many also lack a dedicated office space. This generates additional expectations for the network secretariat to cover needs including meeting space.

Conflicting approaches for funding the national coordination. The national coordination was designed to be led by eight volunteer staff. However, a donor project proposed to fund the salary of three of the eight staff. The staff of the coordination could not find a consensus on what to do with the three salaries. Some proposed to put the salaries in a common basket with a redistribution mechanism to all eight staff. This proposition was contested and refused by the three staff receiving the salaries, leading to conflict between those receiving a salary and those not receiving it. The value of volunteerism and solidarity among women leaders were seen as compromised.

4.4 DYNAMIQUE DES GROUPES DES PEUPLES AUTOCHTONES (DGPA)

4.4.1 ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION

Establishment and history. DGPA was created within the context of a World Bank-supported review of certain provisions of the 2002 Forest Code and the identified need to create a network that could help advocate for Indigenous Peoples rights in relation to a potential project on forest zoning. Such a network was also seen as a viable framework that can channel grassroots concerns to decision makers. The DGPA was officially created in 2009; since its creation, it has gone through several management shifts and leadership changes. The current bylaws were developed in 2015.

Mission and focus. DGPA works for the protection and promotion of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. It aims to support the protection of the environment by promoting actions aimed at combating deforestation and forest degradation, sustainable management of forest resources, enhancement of their Indigenous knowledge and traditional modes of governance; and reducing poverty among Indigenous populations, in particular through the development of income-generating activities resulting from the development of non-timber forest resources (NTFPs) while ensuring the sustainability of these forest resources, activities and revenues.

4.4.2 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING

Membership. There are three categories of member organizations: founding members, honorary members and effective members. Effective members are made of organizations of Indigenous Peoples and organizations that support, organize and structure Indigenous Peoples' organizations. The network currently has 45 members: 30 are full members, 15 have applied to become members and have already been endorsed by the board, but still awaiting a general assembly decision on membership. DGPA is present in 22 over 26 provinces of the country.

Network bodies. DGPA network bodies include:

- *General Assembly*: Composed of all member organizations, the General Assembly serves as a framework for decision making and guidance.
- *Board* **(Conseil d'administration):** The Board oversees the implementation of decisions made by the GA. There are five members: a president, a vice-president, a rapporteur, a vice-rapporteur and an adviser. Two members are elected by the GA, while three Indigenous representatives are identified based on gender and competence criteria. The Board term is three years and is renewable once.

- *Control commission*: The Control Commission is responsible for overseeing the management of assets and verifying the accounts. It is composed of three members; one Indigenous representative identified following FPIC procedure and two elected by the GA.
- *National Coordination*: The National Coordination implements decisions from the GA and the Board. It is the technical body in charge of the daily functioning of the network. It is led by a national coordinator who oversees three departments: administration and finance, planning and external relations, and logistics. Currently, 15 staff work under the national coordination.
- *Provincial branches*: Responsible for project implementation.

The DGPA network functions through consensus as the principle for decision making. Additionally, the structure considers 1) geographic balance, and 2) the presence of Indigenous representatives. At times there has been conflict over role clarity between the national coordinator and the president of the board due to overlapping roles and unclear reporting lines with some of the coordination staff. A close collaboration is now instituted between the two leaders, with clearer definition of respective roles and shared responsibilities. For instance, all contracts are signed by both; decisions from the coordination are submitted to the board for analysis and validation. Decisions require the board president to consult the other board members. The current stability in the network is due to clarity on signatures, approvals, and lines of communication. The network is also expanding to improve internal coordination, with recruitment of directors of programs and administration and finance.

Finance, management and human resources. The network has received funding from various partners, including Rainforest Foundation Norway, Rights and Resources Initiative, Forest Peoples Programme, Synchronicity Earth, FNUD, UNDP-UNOPS. In addition to donor funding, DGPA members contribute $50 annually as a membership fee. Member contributions are meant to fund the meetings of the network's bodies.

Financial management has improved over time as the network revised procedures and recruited staff to oversee finances. Policies and tools used by DGPA to govern the network include a Gender policy; anti-corruption policy; teleworking policy; code of ethics and good conduct; procedures and management manual.

Human resources needs at the national coordination-level are not yet covered. There is still a need to strengthen the coordination with individuals who bring specific expertise, such as communications. After internal crises (e.g., conflict between the board and the coordination), the network recognized the need to improve their recruitment practices and strengthen recruitment criteria.

The network developed a strategic plan for 2021-2035 with 17 well-articulated areas of work. The goal of the plan is: "By 2035, enable the Indigenous Peoples of the DRC to participate actively in the governance of their lands, in the sustainable management of forests, to access the security of their ancestral lands and the benefits derived from the natural resources they contain, thanks to the consideration of their rights, their interests and their habits and customs by decision-makers with a view to improving the living conditions of current and future generations."

4.4.3 IMPACTS

To date, DGPA has achieved the following successes and impact:

Increasing awareness of Indigenous Peoples issues. DGPA's advocacy and awareness-raising over a decade has contributed to increasing awareness on Indigenous Peoples issues within Congolese society.

Progress on the recognition of collective rights to land. DGPA is making progress on increasing the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights to land, not only as private but also as collective rights.

Advocacy for the adoption of a national law on the protection and promotion of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. As a result of a long period of advocacy (2012-2021), DGPA played an important role that resulted in the formal adoption of the law by the lower house of parliament on April 07, 2021. At the time of writing this report, the law was approved by the Senate and was signed into law by the President.

Progress in the advocacy targeting sectoral reforms. Specific concerns for Indigenous Peoples have been discussed within reforms related to land tenure and land-use planning, and in the community forestry tools. DGPA developed several positions notes targeting the different policy processes.

Institutional support for Indigenous Peoples issues. In 2017, advocacy to create specific state institutions in charge of Indigenous issues led to the establishment of a Directorate of Indigenous Peoples within the Vice Prime Minister of the Interior, Security and Customary Affairs. It also led to the recruitment of Indigenous Peoples representatives in the management frameworks of several other public institutions including a 2015 Decree and a 2017 Order which require the integration of Indigenous Peoples into provincial coordination of CONAREF and in the consultative commissions for the settlement of customary conflicts.

Advocacy for provincial regulations. In the context of an uncertain process for adopting a national law on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, DGPA advocated for provincial regulations in three provinces (Mai-Ndombe, Sud-Ubangi, and Equateur). The Mai-Ndombe regulation has already been adopted and published in the official gazette. The Governor of Mai-Ndombe has created a provincial agency for the promotion of Indigenous People and has recruited some Indigenous Peoples in the provincial administration as an implementation measure of the regulation.

Indigenous Peoples Atlas. A first version of the Atlas of Indigenous People in DRC was published in 2013, and a second version is in progress. This work supports discussions on public policy on Indigenous Peoples that can be based on concrete data, in a context where statistics on these groups are lacking. This important tool presents the location of Indigenous populations and their history, and would be an asset for land tenure and land use planning reforms.

Progress in an innovative experience of "pacific cohabitation between Indigenous communities and Bantu." The network has sustained dialogue between Bantu groups and Indigenous Peoples groups to address discrimination, marginalization, and violence. One of the strategies used is to build common infrastructure, such as school and health centers that benefit and are managed by both groups.

Communications and public awareness. The DGPA has supported the organization of the International Festival of Indigenous Peoples, which creates a framework for promoting Indigenous knowledge, sharing of experiences on the fight for Indigenous Peoples rights and lobbying for policy change. They have also supported creation of a journal focused on Indigenous Peoples entitled "African Journal on Indigenous Peoples."

DGPA was also among the 21 recipients of The Equator Initiative in 2015 in recognition for its work on the development of a legal framework in the DRC that promotes and protects the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

4.4.4 BEST PRACTICES

Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations working together. Though Indigenous People are the network's focus, it includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations. This approach is appropriate for the context of DRC (and Central Africa) where Indigenous Peoples' issues cannot be addressed in isolation. Engagement of non-Indigenous organizations is an asset.

Participatory approach is an effective way to work with Indigenous Peoples. Innovation of DGPA members in the field has contributed to the development of specific approaches and tools which proved to be instrumental for the ownership of messages by Indigenous Peoples themselves. In one instance, participatory video played an important role in facilitating exchanges between two conflicting communities.

Develop a panoramic and cross-cutting vision. The advocacy for a national law on Indigenous People was conducted in hand with provincial legislation on the same matter. This was a pragmatic approach in the context of the long process (more than a decade) to adopt the national law and a way to prepare the ground for its implementation in provinces.

The flexibility of DGPA governance in the context of conflict helps to put in place safeguards. The current governance of the network, portrayed as effective and more professional, is the result of conflicts of the past. The flexible approach in the implementation of response tools enables the establishment of safeguards and a more stable situation.

4.4.5 CHALLENGES

Policy advocacy vs. poverty alleviation. So far, the work in the network has been more focused on policy advocacy with some tangible results. However, some members question the focus on advocacy versus more direct implementation of activities to address poverty in Indigenous communities.

Weak knowledge management. Weak knowledge management has not yet created a network culture of learning, and communication on activities often targets donors more than other relevant national stakeholders. On the ground, Indigenous communities are not always aware of the network activities and impact at the policy level. Quite often, communication on activities is targeting the donors, not the national relevant stakeholders.

Participation and ownership of Indigenous leaders and their organizations is still weak. Only 20 of 45 member organizations are managed by Indigenous Peoples, and there is a need for progress beyond representation to ensure more effective participation of Indigenous leadership.

Weak coordination between national and provincial level. Provincial branches are not active and there is limited liaison with the administrative units where Indigenous Peoples are located to share information from the ground on challenges and needs with the national coordination. The structure also created communication challenges to maintain connections between administrative levels.

Membership process. The 13 organizations who created the network could not cover all areas inhabited by Indigenous Peoples in DRC, which prompted the addition of new member organizations. New members were included without evaluation of their commitment to the network vision, leading to some opportunistic membership. There is an ongoing reflection to better define and enforce the responsibilities of members for the network.

Conflicting approaches to supporting Indigenous Peoples' rights. Network members in some cases adopt different methods to addressing Indigenous Peoples rights (sometimes within the same communities) that created conflicts. One example is the eviction of Batwa communities from Kahuzi Biega National Park is South Kivu. Two members used different approaches to finding solutions. *Environnement Ressources Naturelles et Développement* (ERND) used a judiciary approach through supporting the evicted communities to sue the DRC state and Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) in DRC courts and to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. While Centre d'Accompagnement des Autochtones Pygmées et Minoritaires Vulnérables (CAMV) used a dialogue approach called Wakatane to find pragmatic solutions between evicted communities and ICCN. The two approaches were incoherent in the field (sometimes within the same communities) and

created conflicts and physical confrontations. Each organization was funded by different donors, meaning it was also a confrontation of donor's strategies and interests.

Insufficient diversification of funding sources. One primary donor currently contributes 60 to 90 percent of the DGPA budget. Donor dependence can determine the network's agenda, creating tension for groups that work on themes that are not identified as priorities. There is a need for a diversification of both funding sources and intervention areas in the network.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The case studies examined how four active civil society networks in Central Africa have built their collaborations and confronted challenges as part of their efforts to sustain their networks and achieve greater impact over time. Insights from the four case studies are discussed below (Section 5.1), as well as recommendations on ways to strengthen civil society networks to guide network leaders and members, individual civil society organizations, technical partners, and donors funding programs that support natural resource governance or civil society strengthening (Section 5.2).

5.1 DISCUSSION

This section discusses insights across the four case studies and presents recommendations for networks, civil society organizations, technical partners, and donors to strengthen the effectiveness of these groups. Analysis is presented according to five criteria for assessing CSO network effectiveness, adapted from a guidebook produced by RECOFTC.[22]

5.1.1 NETWORK STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

All the networks interviewed had given significant thought to how to structure and govern their network in relation to their overall objectives and faced similar challenges with respect to defining roles and ensuring that network structure is well-adapted to its central objectives and management approach. Key insights regarding network structure and governance include:

- *Clear definition of roles and responsibilities*. The role of the network's governing body in relation to member organizations must be clearly defined. It is strategic to ensure that network governance provides supporting functions to its members based on clear terms. For example, Réseau CREF's model ensures that the network's secretariat provides training, oversight, and fundraising support to members, but implementation itself is the role of member organizations. CREF members specifically cited this model as well-adapted to the difficult security context of North Kivu, creating added value through increasing network reach, and encouraging active network participation by members. EAGLE network follows a similar model, which ensures that there is a clear mutual benefit that maintains independence of structures while ensuring that members benefit from the services of the network.
- *Deliberative approach to network scale and structure*. Networks such as EAGLE have carefully managed their expansion to align with their organizational principles and standards. Likewise, Reseau CREF made a conscious decision not to expand to other provinces despite stated interest. These decisions are closely aligned with the overall mission and strategies of the networks and have enabled them to keep the number of members manageable. National networks such as DGPA and CFLEDD cited challenges with maintaining structures at different administrative levels of the country (national, provincial, local) and facilitating interactions between these levels – these include communication, misaligned expectations of roles for national and provincial representation, and a strong reliance on the national coordination for funding support.
- *Clearly defined and enforced membership criteria*. Each network establishes membership criteria to varying degrees of rigor and application, often linked to the overall network purpose. EAGLE's law enforcement focus facilitates a more structured membership model as the convening principle of the network is focused on a core set of tasks (e.g.,

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investigations and monitoring of wildlife crime law enforcement) for which clear operating standards can be set. Similarly, Reseau CREF adopted criteria on how new members will add value to the network, including related to geographic spread and thematic focus, and to keep the number of members limited. Both networks also have a robust process for evaluating member participation and performance which are perceived as core strengths by members. CFLEDD's focus on voluntary participation is aligned with its model, which focuses on creating champions within a larger number of organizations as a means of strengthening women's voice in natural resource management decisions at scale, although members cited challenges with ensuring that network members remain active.

- *Leadership development and transition planning*. The four networks in the case studies all identified long-term leadership development and continuity as a priority. Network members recognized the critical importance of building institutional memory and leadership within their networks, citing specific examples of network staffing changes and shifts which created tensions and challenges for overall network functioning. While some of the network governance structures provide training to member organizations, such as CFLEDD's Forum Masolo, most of the networks did not describe formalized approaches to mentoring and identifying new leadership.

5.1.2 IMPACT

Each of the networks interviewed formed to strengthen overall natural resource governance through collective action designed to achieve greater impact than individual organizations could achieve. All of these networks cited results in terms of awareness raising and advocacy, support to policy design, and strengthening of implementation.

Insights from the in-depth case studies include the identification of selected networks' achievements and impact on policies and practices. As a network concerned with wildlife law enforcement, EAGLE has been instrumental in changing the statistics of wildlife crime from zero prosecution to more than 2,500 wildlife criminals arrested, convicted and jailed in twelve countries and has contributed to question the prevailing practice of conservation without a law enforcement dimension. Réseau CREF's role in establishing community forestry in North Kivu province is well recognized, as well as its successful advocacy on the implementation of the regulation on artisanal logging. CFLEDD initiated capacity development among women leaders in DRC and contributed to the adoption and/or revision of legislations relevant to women in DRC. Following a decade of advocacy on Indigenous people rights, DGPA has achieved what could be considered as a breakthrough: the adoption of a national law on the protection and promotion of the rights of Indigenous Peoples in DRC. Several lessons and practices identified across these case studies include:

- *Strategic vision*. Consistent, long-term vision and shared objectives are critical to achieving impact. DGPA cites the example of its work over more than a decade to advocate for the passing of a national law on Indigenous Peoples, which was recently signed into law by the Government of the DRC. Several networks cited the challenge of establishing a common vision for the network while balancing the different approaches and expectations of its member organizations. In some instances, network members indicated that the vision and objectives of the network are neither clear to all members nor owned by all members, citing disconnects between network governing bodies and their member organizations and reinforcing the importance of transparency in network communications.
- *Standards and procedures*. Networks focused on a common geography or intervention typically indicated a more standardized approach to operations than those focused on general advocacy or representation. EAGLE cited the critical importance of maintaining standards and procedures, as well as the tension between expanding its work and ensuring that new members

uphold these standards. In the case of DGPA, they noted that maintaining common approaches across network members was not always feasible, and cited examples of conflicting ideologies on how to best address the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in achieving a balance of work on policy advocacy and grassroots action on poverty alleviation. DGPA and Réseau CREF noted the importance of using the network approach to achieve complementarity among network members specialized in different thematic areas or geographies.

5.1.3 RESOURCE AVAILABILITY

Maintaining both human and financial resources over time is a key preoccupation for the network members interviewed; many of the challenges cited point to structural limitations that may limit growth and organizational development of both networks and their individual member organizations. These include:

- *Centralized network funding and fundraising*. Each case study organization indicated that network governance structures had a key role in fundraising, but with varying degrees of dependence of member organizations on these structures to provide funding. For example, Réseau CREF's model centralizes a significant amount of fundraising at the secretariat level, but with a process for distribution of funds to facilitate implementation of activities by members. EAGLE, on the other hand, emphasizes fundraising at both the network and country coordination level; the intent is to empower national coordination units to fundraise independently, while the network at times can provide resources to cover shortfalls or respond to opportunities. CFLEDD and DGPA, the two largest networks interviewed, cited challenges of overreliance and outsize expectations of the role of the coordinating body in providing funding to its members. These examples reinforce the importance of network structure, governance, and bylaws in clarifying the benefits and services provided by network membership to avoid creation of additional layers of bureaucracy and ensure that the benefits of network membership go beyond funding.
- *Project-focused funding*. The case study networks operate based on donor funding through short and medium-term projects, although there are some instances of innovation to generate new revenue streams such as Reseau CREF's investment in its space to hold workshops and trainings. As a result, there is less investment in strengthening systems and processes including knowledge management, communications, leadership, and member capacity development. As is also the case for direct support to civil society organizations, many donors or technical partners providing grant funding emphasize labor and activity costs, with only limited funds allocated to administrative or overhead costs that can support overall system strengthening.
- *Dependence on core donors*. Support to networks has, in some cases, evolved as a strategy for donors and technical partners to support a broader group of civil society through a single structure. Several of the networks studied in this report received over half of their support from a single funding source, often based on long-term relationships maintained over time. Staff of these networks expressed concerns, including from member organizations, that this overreliance on a limited funding pool has restricted the range and types of activities that are supported by the network and limits the independence of the network. Donor priorities are perceived as driving which member organizations receive more support, which can lead to conflict among members. In addition, CFLEDD cited an example of donor funding disrupting network cohesion when the intent to fund salaries was not well-adapted to its volunteer-based model.

5.1.4 REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSIVENESS

Many of the networks identified in the inventory incorporate an explicit focus on strengthening voice and representation of women, Indigenous peoples, or other vulnerable groups in natural resource management and decision-making. Two of the case studies focused on networks organized around this concept; findings indicated that there has been progress in raising awareness and implementing advocacy, particularly in relation to Indigenous Peoples rights; however, effective social change approaches must go beyond identification and inclusion of these voices in dialogue and ensure that policy design and implementation are adapted to support improved outcomes for vulnerable populations. Key lessons on representation from the case studies are highlighted below.

- *Understanding progress and impact of social inclusion.* Networks such as DGPA and Réseau CREF have developed a gender policy which states principles and mechanisms for gender mainstreaming within the network and among members' organizations. CFLEDD adopted an innovative model devoted to creating champions via a volunteer network that would in turn push for change within their individual institutions. While there has been an increase in awareness and discourse on women's participation and representation, there is still limited assessment of the impact of these policies. CFLEDD noted that their approach has met with limitations in terms of the institutional change it envisioned at the outset, with some staff citing a lack of tools to address gender issues effectively in their activities. This underlines a need for appropriate technical support and management tools including gender and social inclusion analysis, monitoring and evaluation, human resources management and training, and communication. In several instances, application of the term "gender" refers primarily to women's participation and empowerment, rather than exploring the differential roles, responsibilities, and social norms attached to both men and women, as well as the intersection of these issues with other forms of marginalization including for Indigenous Peoples or youth.
- *Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples.* Three of the four network case studies have clear mechanisms for engaging Indigenous Peoples organizations and leaders. DGPA has a significant number of Indigenous Peoples organizations as members and is committed to increase this number. There are also several examples of Indigenous People's leadership in network bodies, including in DGPA and CFLEDD. In DGPA, there is a quota for Indigenous Peoples leaders in network bodies including 3/5 members in the board. DGPA has also adopted the use of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) for making decisions among the Indigenous Peoples leaders in the network. While there are stated examples of representation, ensuring real and effective participation and voice in decision-making is still cited as a challenge.

5.1.5 COMMUNICATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The profiled networks indicated that strengthening of communications and knowledge management is a priority, and that the overreliance on project funding limits long-term institutional learning. Many organizations had not invested in establishing processes or systems to support knowledge management including building staff capacity and developing strong procedures for monitoring, evaluation and learning. Key takeaways regarding communications and knowledge management are summarized below.

- *Knowledge management systems.* While most of the networks have invested in communications—for example all have active websites—development of robust knowledge management systems is an ongoing challenge. For example, both Reseau CREF and DPGA cited knowledge management as a key area for strengthening; institutional memory is perceived as present within network leadership, but not necessarily codified through systems and processes that can be easily transferred and tell the story of the network. Several leaders also identified the need to strengthen an overall culture of learning – while all groups could point to specific impacts and shared insights on success factors, there is opportunity for more analysis of what factors led to success as well as which approaches have not been effective and should not be

replicated as part of network strategy. The research identified a need for more effective learning mechanisms to develop member capacity, create awareness at the level of grassroots' members and communities. Developing systems of sharing institutional history and success stories of networks was cited as a strategy to build network resilience that would have improved ability to navigate leadership transitions and other difficult periods. Improving knowledge management is also critical to strengthening evidence-based approaches regionally by ensuring that proposed strategies are well-adapted to local conditions and avoiding duplication of effort and investment of funds in strategies that have proven ineffective.

- *Member exchange and best practices*. Related to the need for knowledge management systems, proactive sharing of lessons and even facilitation of member exchange between organizations was identified as a best practice. For example, EAGLE network has institutionalized member exchange as well as ensuring that steering group members are available to provide mentorship to country staff. Exchange on methods and practices could also serve as a potential conflict resolution mechanism between organizations with different experiences, with network leadership playing the role of facilitator to encourage members to evaluate their approaches and learn from others.

- *Communications*. Maintaining effective internal communications, particularly for networks with representation across larger geographies, is an ongoing challenge that is critical to building support and buy-in for network vision. Regarding external communications, as noted by DGPA leadership, in some cases networks focus more on targeting donors than in communicating with national stakeholders and constituents. Investing in communications infrastructure and regular practices is a potentially critical role for network governance structures to strengthen cohesion and two-way exchange of information.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature review, network inventory, and case studies there are numerous positive examples of civil society groups working collectively for common goals to improve transparency and accountability of decisions over natural resource governance. Yet, many of these groups face critical questions of defining a clear mission, role, and competing for a limited pool of human, financial, and technical resources. The proliferation of networks, frequent overlap in membership between platforms with broad policy advocacy and dialogue objectives, and resource constraints identified by many CSOs and networks within the region suggest programs interested in creating or supporting civil society networks should align support strategies with the needs of target actors, and work closely with civil society networks and member organizations to design locally-led capacity strengthening strategies that strengthen institutional support alongside support to core labor and activity costs. Table 16 synthesizes recommendations for civil society networks and their member organizations, as well as donor and technical partners focused on organizational development and capacity strengthening.

Table 16: Summary of Recommendations

	Civil Society Networks and Members	Donors and Technical Partners
Network Governance	- Establish clear criteria and targets for network size - Establish clear membership criteria and regular review of member performance to encourage network cohesion - Create clear channels for members to influence decisions on governance and management of networks.	- Ensure that new programs and initiatives identify and build on existing local civil society networks - Through existing or future activities, support civil society networks and member organizations in conducting governance self-assessment to identify issues and develop strategies to address them

	• Adopt and implement clear policies for review and updating of strategy, network organization, membership criteria, and planning processes into network procedures	
Impact	• Implement strategic planning and ensure that network objectives are clearly shared, understood, and communicated across network membership (e.g., through annual/quarterly strategy updates to members) • Develop measurable standards/indicators and procedures to measure progress that enable mutual learning among members • Create opportunities for network exchange that facilitate collaboration, for example through exchange programs or skill-sharing to match to needs across network membership	• Convene "listening sessions" to facilitate opportunities for civil society networks and their members to communicate on priorities, challenges, and needs to inform design of technical and financial interventions • In projects that support or partner with civil society networks and member organizations, incorporate indicators and targets that relate to their long-term institutional capacity and sustainability, not just short-term outputs or outcomes within project life cycles
Resource Availability	• Establish strategies to diversify funding, achieve a sustainable funding model, and increase financial autonomy • Design criteria to assess the capacities of each member of the network on a regular basis • Institute strong financial controls and transparent financial reporting including sharing financial performance with network members	• Create funding windows to support more flexible institutional funding for civil society organizations • Review regulations and procedures that limit overhead and administrative costs for small local organizations and networks and identify opportunities to cover costs of internal systems strengthening (e.g., knowledge management, communications, leadership development, and financial management)
Representation and Inclusiveness	• Develop and review implementation of inclusive policies on gender, Indigenous Peoples, and other relevant vulnerable groups, and provide principles and procedures on how the network will proactively address and measure progress on these objectives • Develop strategies to track outcomes beyond participation and representation metrics to evaluate success of social inclusion strategies	• Integrate gender and social analysis into strategy, program design, and planning including for grants and other support windows • For technical partners collaborating with civil society organizations, develop simple tools and trainings that develop concepts of representation into actionable strategies • Provide support for evaluate frameworks to generate an evidence base for understanding how gender and social inclusion interventions influence outcomes for beneficiaries
Communications and Knowledge Sharing	• Establish long-term monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning processes that build institutional memory and learning • Define or clarify network target audiences and adapt messaging to each of these groups	• Create incentives for knowledge management and lesson-sharing through funding windows and calls for applications • Strengthen knowledge sharing and coordination between donors and technical partners in relation to civil society network support to avoid

	• Establish and evaluate internal communication mechanisms to facilitate regular exchange and ensure equitable access to information on network governance	duplication of efforts and proliferation of additional networks	

ANNEX I. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS AND MEETINGS

Date (2022)	Topic	Attendees
Yaoundé, Cameroon		
19/01	Introduction of the research Interview on EAGLE network	Eric Kaba Tah (EAGLE) Guy Patrice Dkamela
20/01	Introduction of the research Discussion on networks organizational development (Réseau CREF) and private sector issues.	Doudou Kalala (Well Grounded) Guy Patrice Dkamela
27/01	Introduction of the research Interview on EAGLE network	Ofir Drori (EAGLE) Guy Patrice Dkamela
27/01	Discussion on networks organizational development (DGPA, CFLEDD)	Doudou Kalala (Well Grounded) Guy Patrice Dkamela
Goma, DRC		
18/02	Trip In-briefing Meetings preparation	Francois Biloko (Réseau CREF)
19/02	Discussion on Réseau CREF	Francois Biloko (Réseau CREF), Floribert Masani (Réseau CREF), Guy Patrice Dkamela
21/02	Discussion on Réseau CREF	Francois Biloko (Réseau CREF), Floribert Masani (Réseau CREF), Guy Patrice Dkamela
21/02	Group discussion with sample Réseau CREF members	Buthelezi Kambale Kakevire (PREPPYG), Ramu Kasi Musafiri (PIDP), Tshilumba Ndaye Clovis (GERNES), Thomas d'Aquin Mviti Luanda (REID), Homeo Nkuba Ishunga (FNH), Thaddee Twendi Muruhya (FOCODER), Ishara Banza Jean (AAP), Emmanuel Mungazi Kibengo (FODI), Zawadi Muliwavyo (PREPPYG), Emerciane Kalengera (DYFED), Guy Patrice Dkamela
Kinshasa, DRC		
23/02	Trip In-briefing	Bocar Thiam (Tetra Tech), Guy Patrice Dkamela
23/02	Trip In-briefing Planning of meetings with CFLEDD	Chouchouna Losale Mpunga (CFLEDD)
24/02	Private sector issues	Faustin Ngassa (Connex Forestry), Guy Patrice Dkamela
25/02	Private sector issues	Jean Wabangawe (ACEFA), Guy Patrice Dkamela
25/02	Staff group discussion on CFLEDD	Dorothée Lisenga Bafalikike, Chouchouna Losale Mpunga, Suzanne Linyonga, Chimita Melebo, Guy Patrice Dkamela
28/02	Interview on CFLEDD	Dorothée Lisenga Bafalikike, Guy Patrice Dkamela
28/02	Group discussion on CFLEDD with Thematic group members	Elysee Mpenga, Christelle Belanga, Berthe Kamanga, Dady Makamzemi, Taty Inyanga, Alinea Fataki, Suzanne Linyonga, Guy Patrice Dkamela
02/03	Interview on DGPA network	Patrick Saidi Hemedi, Guy Patrice Dkamela
02/03	Group discussion on DGPA with the network staff	John Benani Nkumu, Jean Rene Nzape, Kally Kalala, Carole Litumbi, Assane Buro Sarah, Philomene Wembulila, Nyemba Kayeye, Gabriel Kingala, Richard Lokoka, Aristote Mumbere, Leonie Ngahla, Guy Patrice Dkamela
03/03	Context of networks in DRC	Alain Engunda (Tetra Tech), Guy Patrice Dkamela