RAINFOREST FOUNDATION UK
SECURING LANDS, SUSTAINING LIVES

MAPPING FOR RIGHTS: PUTTING RAINFOREST COMMUNITIES ON THE MAP

MAPPING FOR RIGHTS
Putting communities on the map

1. SUMMARY

MappingforRights, an initiative of RFUK and civil society organisations in the Congo Basin, aims literally to put forest communities on the map. Since its launch in 2011 it has supported more than a thousand communities to map and share highly detailed geographical information about their lands and resources so that decisions on forests do not neglect those who depend on them most.

This series of short information briefs looks at some of the community maps in more detail and explores the wider implications for various forest policy processes and programmes underway in the region. It covers community forestry, conservation, industrial logging, agribusiness expansion, participatory land use planning and REDD+. In this introductory briefing, we address the root causes land-based conflict in Central African forests, how MappingForRights aims to help tackle these and why such initiatives are essential to sustainable and equitable forest management.
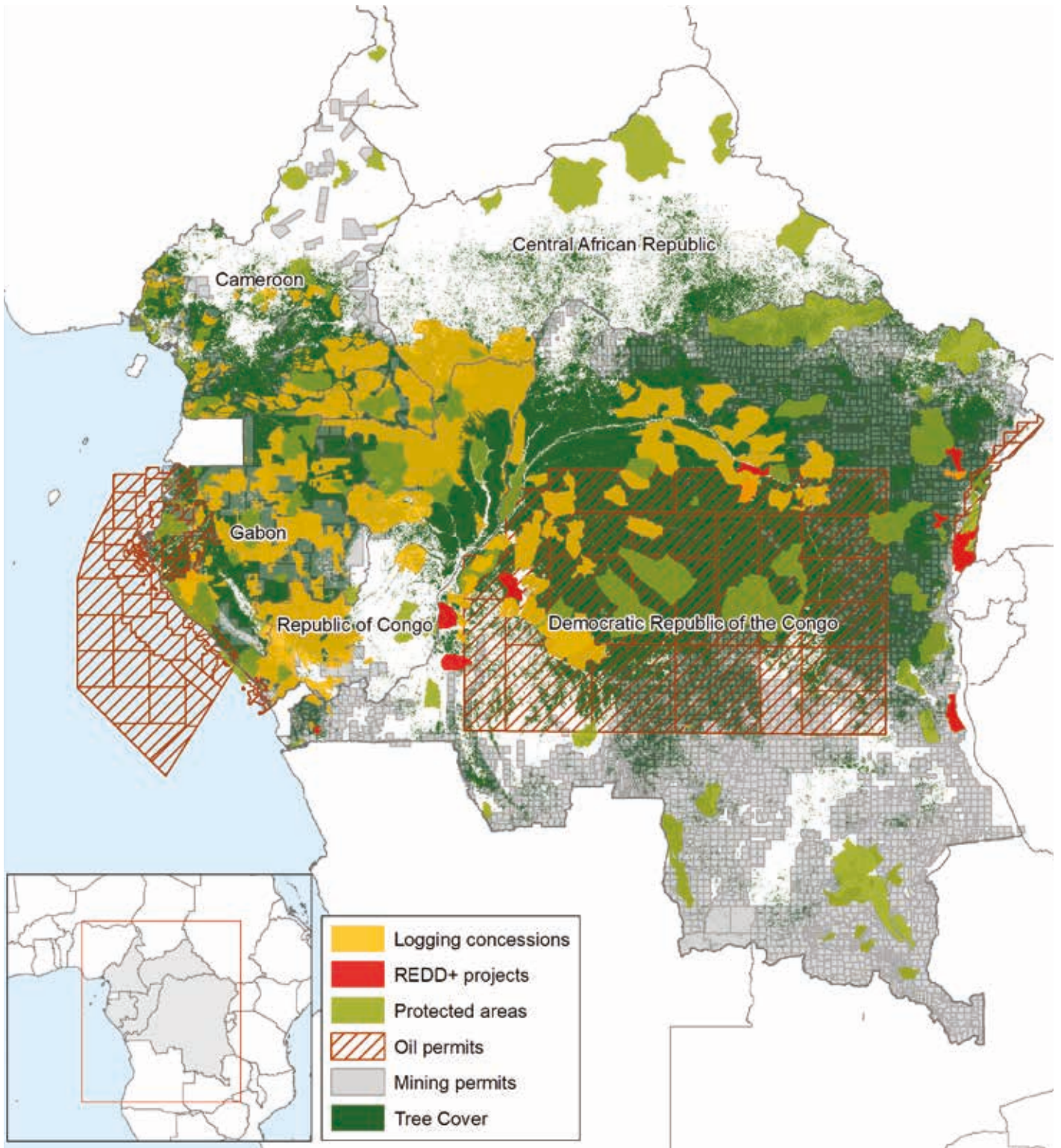
2. BACKGROUND TO FORESTS AND LAND RIGHTS IN THE CONGO BASIN

With virtually all land in the Congo Basin countries either under state ownership (DRC, CAR) or custody (Congo, Cameroon, Gabon), forest communities are largely absent from official government geographical data. This has led to a situation whereby thousands of communities have seen their traditional lands handed out for extractive industries, for biodiversity conservation and increasingly for commercial agriculture. Such policies have essentially left them as either squatters on their own lands or entirely landless, but have not brought about the expected wealth creation or environmental benefits in forest areas.

In recent years, there has been a growing acknowledgement that recognition of forest peoples' rights and role in the management of forests is essential to avoid conflict and ensure long-term sustainability. Internationally accepted norms - such as on community land rights, human rights, free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), and others - have become increasingly evident in the policies of international donors, the large conservation agencies and national ministries in charge of forests in recent years.

However, in practice, the goal of turning paper policies into tangible change on the ground has so far proved elusive. Deep-rooted resistance to rights-based approaches to forest management from business interests, conservationists and high-level officials, weak government institutions to monitor and enforce laws as well as perceived high costs of documenting customary rights and forest uses at scale mean that most decisions on forests continue to be made in ignorance of communities that live and depend on them.

MAP 1 – LAND ALLOCATIONS IN THE CONGO BASIN

Logging concessions
REDD+ projects
Protected areas
Oil permits
Mining permits
Tree Cover

Large-scale allocations for commercial logging, the extractive industries and strict nature conservation have generally not delivered the expected economic, social and environmental benefits in forest areas. Their overlap with areas under customary ownership has led to widespread land and resource-related conflict in the region and a growing realisation among policy makers that new approaches to land and forest management are needed. Source: MappingForRights, WRI

3. MAPPINGFORRIGHTS – PUTTING COMMUNITIES ON THE MAP

MappingForRights aims to help change this by both simplifying the process of community mapping of forests and by making the data collected about their presence, claims and use of these areas easily accessible to decision-makers.

At the village level, communities are supported through RFUK's MappingForRights programme to map their lands according to a specific methodology to ensure effective participation in the mapping process developed on the back of more than 15 years' experience in this field. Mappers are equipped with easy-to-use, low-cost technologies which enable them to record geographical features they themselves define as important such as clan tenure boundaries, fishing areas and sacred sites. The mobilisation of mobile mapping support units (teams of mapping facilitators and GIS technicians from local civil society organisations) support the process, by conducting technical GIS work inside the villages alongside local people rather than in a remote town or city.

These advances have made the participatory mapping process much more responsive to local needs but have also broken down costs to such an extent that it is now possible to map community use of forests for less than a US$1 per hectare. Since 2013 alone, the programme has supported nearly 1,000 communities to produce highly accurate maps of their lands and resources covering more than five million hectares - an area one quarter the size of Great Britain.

The use of icon-based applications allows even those who can't read or write to participate, producing maps that more accurately reflect the whole community's interests.

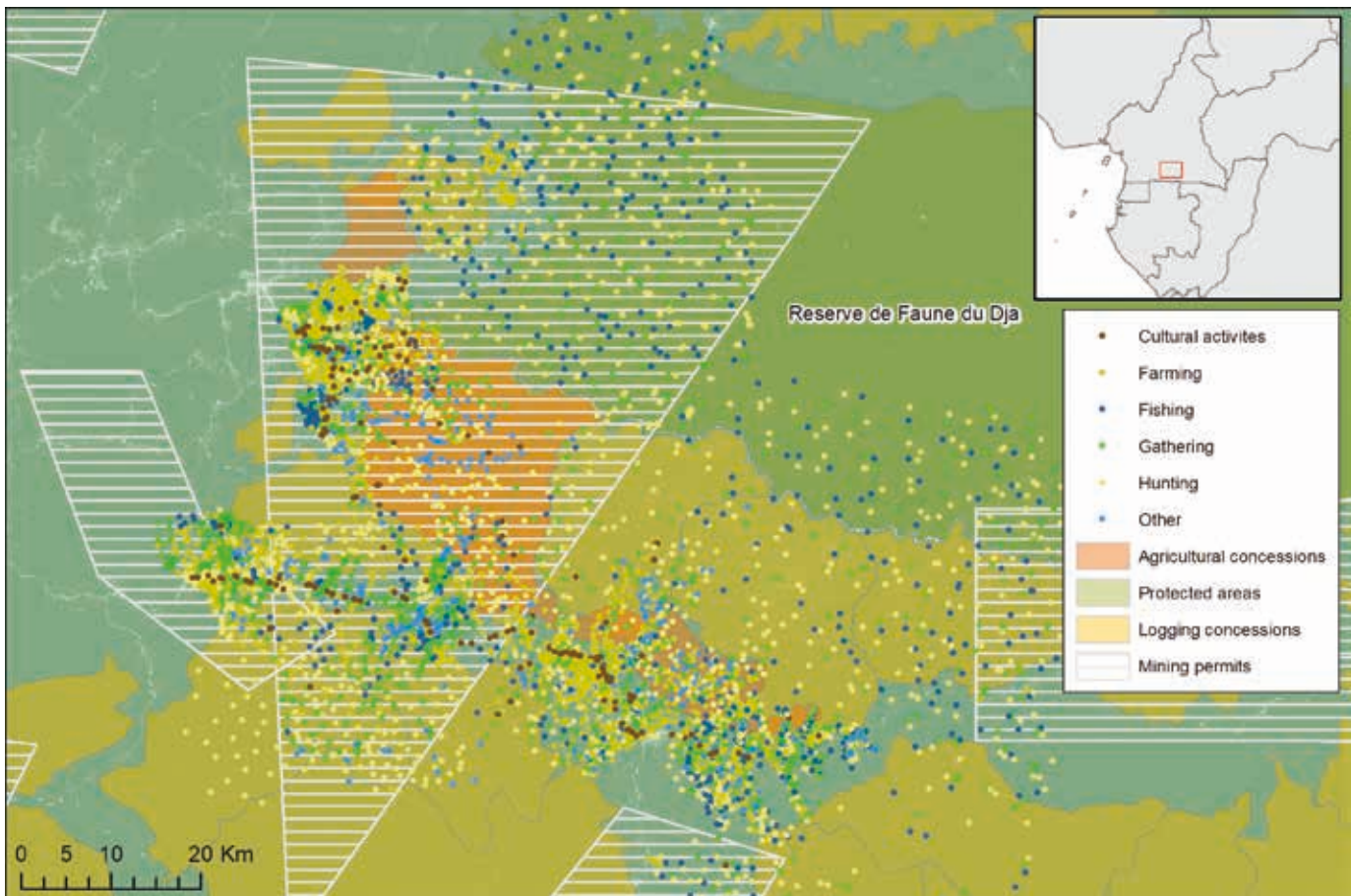# MAP 2 – EXAMPLE OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY MAPPING IN DRC

This map shows how clan-based customary rights run contiguously across the area mapped, and are generally very well defined and understood locally, even if they are not yet formally recognised. This provides an alternative vision of forest management to the industrial logging and strict nature conservation paradigm of recent decades. Source: MappingForRights.

Using a participatory approach can bring different segments of the community together and helps capture a more accurate and complete view of the community's land and resource use.

Once validated by the community and its neighbours, the community map is then made available to authorized users via an online interactive database. The results provide important insights into customary claims and forest usages that are likely to extend across the entire Congo Basin region, and also show where conflict may be occurring with other land users such as logging concessions, REDD+ projects and protected areas. Not only does this work challenge long-held assumptions that these forests are mostly empty wildernesses – and therefore available for resource extraction and strict nature conservation – but it also has profound implications for the governance of forests.

MAP 3 – EXAMPLE OF CONFLICTING LAND USE IN CAMEROON

This map illustrates overlapping land use in southern Cameroon. It shows resources used by local communities as compared to other land designations, such as logging concessions, palm oil plantations and a wildlife reserve in Dja et Lobo. Such overlapping land uses are common throughout the Congo Basin and illustrate the need for reliable data and effective land-use planning.

In this series of short information briefs we will take a closer look at the data collected so far in the MappingForRights initiative – exploring what this means for various reform processes and programmes in the region; what it says about where existing laws and policies protecting communities may not have been applied or need reform; and also how these kind of tools and approaches can be harnessed to promote more equitable and sustainable use of forests in the future. Issues that are explored include:

REDD+ and Mai Ndombe. How extensive forest tenure and resource mapping by local communities in Mai Ndombe province has major implications for DRC's flagship jurisdictional REDD+ programme, especially in terms of land and carbon rights, land management, and distribution of benefits from anticipated emissions reductions activities.

Protected areas. How community maps reveal deep flaws in the treatment of land and resource rights in protected areas' creation and management, contributing to highly conflictual relations between people and parks in many areas. This particular brief will show how community mapping should be incorporated into existing management

arrangements as well as for carrying out due diligence and consent processes for proposed protected areas or to serve as a basis for more progressive models such as indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCA).

Community forests. There is growing consensus on the social and environmental benefits of community based forest management. However, too many community forest models fail because they are not well adapted to local contexts. In DRC, detailed mapping of customary tenure and forest management systems is providing a logical starting point for some of the first community forest pilots in the country, with some promising early signs.

Participatory land-use planning. While there is general agreement on the need for participatory land-use planning in forest areas of the Congo Basin, there is much less so on how to actually do this in practice. This info brief explores how community mapping is feeding into innovative land-use planning, and captures some of the key lessons from pilot initiatives in south-west Cameroon and Maniema and Equateur provinces, DRC.

DRC logging moratorium. Community maps prepared in different parts of DRC show that any process to consider a potential lifting of the country's national logging moratorium must first include thorough documentation and clarification of customary rights in forests in order to avoid future conflict in these areas.

Agribusiness expansion. The expansion of commercial agriculture in the Congo Basin poses risks to both forests and people. There have been various palm oil suitability mapping initiatives aiming to divert agribusiness away from forests, but far less attention has been paid to the potential social impacts. Community mapping in Cameroon and elsewhere shows how such impacts are already starting to be felt, and highlights the need for more robust responses to these threats.

Important note: The absence of community presence, tenure or livelihoods in some of the maps displayed in this series of MappingForRights information briefs does not indicate that such presence or activities do not exist in that area. Due to limitations of resources, RFUK's mapping work has only taken place in selected areas, so the resulting maps should be taken as an indication where community activities occur, not where they *do not* occur.

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