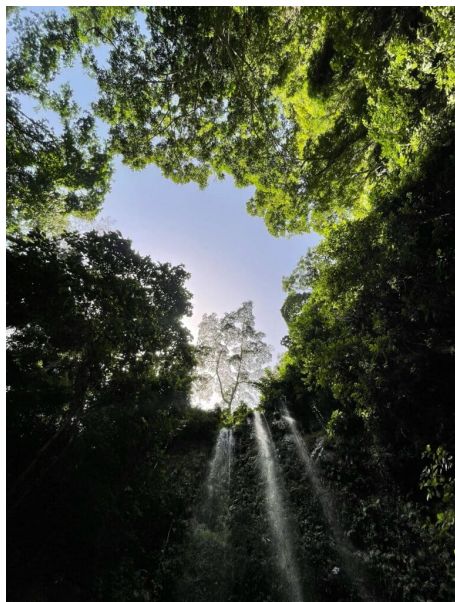


Congo launches pilot project to protect high integrity forests

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The Congolese Ministry of Forest Economy and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) have formally launched Africa's first High Integrity Forest Investment Initiative (HIFOR) project in Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park.

HIFOR is a groundbreaking initiative designed to address the lack of market-based finance for tropical forests that maintain high ecological integrity. These forests play a crucial role in climate regulation, biodiversity conservation, and supporting sustainable livelihoods.

The project, launched on August 30, aims to generate HIFOR units, representing one hectare of well-conserved high integrity tropical forest. These units can be sold to generate revenue for forest conservation and support sustainable development in the region.

Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, a key biodiversity area, is the first site in Africa to be recognized for its ecological integrity and selected for the HIFOR pilot project. The park covers over 0.4 million hectares of high-integrity tropical forest and has absorbed an estimated 11 million tons of CO₂ over the past decade.

"This project marks a significant step in developing innovative financial mechanisms to protect our forests and ecosystems," commented Forest Economy Minister Rosalie Matondo at the launch ceremony.

HIFOR complements existing financing instruments by offering a non-compensatory tradeable asset that cannot be used for offsetting purposes. The initiative seeks to unlock a continuous stream of finance to support governments and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IP&LCs) in protecting high integrity forests while promoting sustainable, low-carbon rural economies.

“With increasing threats to high integrity forests, our efforts to protect them must be relentless,” emphasized Richard Malonga, WCS Congo Country Director. “The Congo is fortunate to have many of these forests, and we are committed to working with the government to ensure their long-term protection.”

WCS is initially piloting HIFOR in areas where they have strong partnerships with governments and communities. The goal is to demonstrate the viability of this new financial mechanism and scale its impact across broader geographies.