Congo Basin Forests Hold Trillions in Untapped Value: New Report Calls for Strategic Global Investment

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WASHINGTON, October 20, 2025 - The Congo Basin, home to the world's second-largest tropical rainforest, holds immense value for not only the six countries it spans, but for the planet. A new World Bank report reveals the region's forests are not only essential for climate stability and biodiversity, but also a foundation for economic resilience. The value of forest ecosystem services nearly doubled in just two decades, rising from $590 billion in 2000 to $1.15 trillion in 2020. During the same period, the total forest asset value surged from $11.4 trillion to $23.2 trillion.

The report shows that forest management, conservation, and data readiness vary widely across the region. Countries such as Gabon and the Republic of Congo stand out, embedding forest sustainability into national planning with relatively low deforestation rates and strong biodiversity indicators. Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea are in transition, strengthening forest governance and piloting policies that integrate ecosystem values. Meanwhile, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic face complex pressures — from rapid population growth to informal logging, mining, and agriculture — that threaten the region's forest resilience.

The **Congo Basin Forest Ecosystem Accounts report**, alongside the country reports, provides a basin-wide overview of how forests can be fully integrated into macroeconomic planning to support economic diversification and climate finance strategies. The findings show how the forest sector can drive new opportunities from community-based ecotourism, forest monitoring, to value-added processing of non-timber forest products, and results-based climate financing — shifting the development narrative toward long-term sustainability and resilience.

"For the first time, Congo Basin countries have developed a detailed forest ecosystem accounts showing the true value of their natural wealth," said **Ousmane Diagana**, **World Bank Vice President for Western and Central Africa**. "*These forests, managed sustainably, can serve as powerful engines for sustainable development contributing to creating jobs, supporting climate-smart growth, and strengthening local economies."*

The report highlights a critical imbalance: Congo forests generate over $1 trillion in global ecosystem services — with over 90% of that value stemming from climate regulation — yet local governments captured only $8 billion in domestic benefits in 2020, primarily from timber, bushmeat, wild foods, and ecotourism.

"*We can only manage what we can measure –this is why the forest ecosystem accounts for the Congo Basin will be so key for countries to unlock the power of their forests to drive development and jobs*," said **Valerie Hickey, World Bank Global Director for Climate Change**, "*This accounting can also help Congo Basin countries demonstrate the huge value that their forest conservation efforts bring to the rest of the world*."

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