



DRC

COMMUNITY-BASED REAL TIME MONITORING

NOVEMBER 2021

INTRODUCTION

RFUK in-country partners: GASHE, APEM

Forest area: 130,560,000 ha¹ (2016)

Forest loss: 1.3 million ha² (2020)

Percentage of timber production estimated to be illegal: c. 90%³ (2014)

Principal threats to forests: Industrial logging, palm oil and rubber plantations, mining, associated infrastructure development

Snapshot: In the DRC, the 2002 Forest Moratorium outlawed the allocation of new logging concessions due to widespread corruption and malpractice in the industry. However, illegal logging remains widespread both within and outside existing concessions, and there is an imminent threat that the moratorium will be lifted without adequate improvements to forest governance.

Since 2015, Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK), its partners and local communities have used the **ForestLink Real Time Monitoring system (ForestLink RTM)** in DRC to combat illegal logging, environmental destruction and human rights abuses. Our ForestLink technology connects communities and law enforcement to carry out real-time monitoring of tropical forests, and put power back into the hands of those who call them home.

Communities trained: 13

Regions active: Equateur, Tshopo and Tshuapa provinces

Alerts sent: Over 500

Civil Society Organisations using ForestLink: GASHE and OCEAN

¹ Chatham House, Forest Governance and Legality – Democratic Republic of Congo

² Global Forest Watch Dashboard – DRC

³ Lawson, S (2014) Illegal Logging in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

HOW FORESTLINK WORKS

With this unique smartphone app, forest communities can report illegal activities via satellite link from even the most remote locations, without telecommunications networks. ForestLink empowers them to use their unique knowledge of the forest to defend their rights and to have a say in how extractive industries operate within their territories.



MONITORING & COLLECTION

Community monitors use a smartphone app (Collectaur) to collect evidence of illegalities and to document their alerts using photos, videos or audio recordings.



REPORTING & DATABASE

The collected evidence, bearing precise GPS coordinates of where incidents were observed, is transmitted to a secure database using a portable satellite transmitter or via SMS or internet.



VERIFICATION

Once the transmitted alerts are received on the online platform (Monitaur), they are analysed and verified by partner organisations.




ENFORCEMENT

Details of the illegal activities are passed on to the appropriate authorities so they can take action, such as sanctioning illegal operators.



ADVOCACY

The data collected using ForestLink helps CSOs to promote accountability of companies and authorities, thus increasing transparency and good governance more broadly.

A photograph of a lush tropical forest. The scene is dominated by large, gnarled tree trunks and thick, hanging vines. The foliage is dense and green, with sunlight filtering through the canopy, creating a dappled light effect. The overall atmosphere is one of a wild, undisturbed natural environment.

RFUK'S LONG-TIME PARTNER GASHE HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN DRIVING THE USE OF FORESTLINK AMONGST COMMUNITIES. THEY ALSO COORDINATE WITH ANOTHER LONG-TERM RFUK PARTNER, APEM, WHO CARRY OUT NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO FORESTLINK ALERTS.

OUR IMPACT

When communities send alerts, we advocate for these alerts to be investigated. If illegalities are confirmed, we use our collective voice to ensure authorities sanction those responsible. Through this process, ForestLink has improved law enforcement and empowered communities to defend their rights and lands. Civil society has become stronger and has developed deeper links to the forest communities it serves.

In DRC, ForestLink RTM is being used by 49 observers to monitor:



LOGGING IN NATURAL FORESTS



HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS



ILLEGAL MINING



ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION



FPIC PROCESSES IN RELATION TO LOGGING AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Law enforcement:** An alert sent by a community in Equateur Province led to the first ever prosecution of a forestry company under the DRC Forest Code. GASHE and APEM were crucial in keeping media attention focused on the case, and used this leverage to ensure that authorities took action against the company. While the case is still ongoing, this has sent a vital message to other forest operators in the country that the state will prosecute illegalities.
- **Legal reform:** Thanks to GASHE's training and awareness raising with the authorities, the Environment Ministry passed new legislation recognising community forest monitoring, and information collected in real time. This vital step has further legitimised the work of forest monitors, ensuring that local monitors can refer to the law when challenged on their right to monitor their territory.
- **Community empowerment:** The level of engagement from local communities has been exceptional. They have been courageous in denouncing illegalities and demanding respect for their rights, and have invested their time and limited resources to monitor their forests effectively. Their work has inspired neighbouring communities too, with whom they have shared their knowledge and training.
- **Enhanced government oversight:** Prior to the project commencing in 2015, authorities were conducting company site visits every two to three years, usually at the behest of the companies themselves. However, with the information provided by ForestLink as well as advocacy efforts from communities and partners, the authorities are now accompanying civil society on independent investigations four times a year.



"We have been enlightened, and now the loggers can no longer make us believe just anything and take us as ignorant. We know what is allowed in the forest, and what is not. We also know what is due to us, and how to claim it."

Community member from Ingende, Equateur province, DRC.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Whilst we are very proud of the incredible impact that the communities and our partners have every day in DRC, our funding means that we can only monitor a fraction of DRC's remaining forest. To learn more about how your support could transform the future of tropical rainforests, please contact us.

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Visit us at www.forestlink.org



FORESTLINK

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