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PRESS RELEASE

WHY THE CONGO BASIN MATTERS: LANDMARK ASSESSMENT REPORT WARNS THE NEXT DECADE WILL DECIDE THE FATE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST TROPICAL FOREST CARBON SINK

- The 'Congo Basin Assessment Report – Congo Basin Resilience and Sustainability: From the Past to the Future' report provides the most comprehensive and rigorous ever scientific stocktaking of the Congo Basin.
- The work by the Science Panel for the Congo Basin (SPCB), convened by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), was presented today at Kintele International Conference Center in the Republic of Congo.
- The report's Scientific leadership are now available for interview to provide in-depth analysis and discussion of this groundbreaking report.

Brazzaville, Republic of Congo (May 26, 2026) — The Science Panel for the Congo Basin (SPCB), convened by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), today officially presented the ***2025 Congo Basin Assessment Report – Congo Basin Resilience and Sustainability: From the Past to the Future*** at the Kintele International Conference Center in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, on the occasion of the 61st Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank. The report, comprising 40 chapters across four sections, is being published online through the SPCB website and Springer Nature. An Executive Summary of the report was previously released at COP30 in Belém, Brazil.

The SPCB is the first independent scientific panel dedicated to the Congo Basin, established to address persistent gaps in scientific knowledge and investment in the region. The Panel mobilises leading scientists – primarily from Congo Basin countries – to synthesise existing evidence on the state of the Basin, its ecosystems, and the pressures it faces. Its work is designed to directly inform policy, strengthen scientific

capacity in the region, and support evidence-based pathways for sustainable development.

The 2025 Congo Basin Assessment Report developed by the SPCB provides the most comprehensive regional scientific assessment to date of the Congo Basin, a system of global importance for climate regulation, biodiversity, and sustainable development. Spanning over 3.46 million square kilometres, the Congo Basin is the largest tropical carbon sink, one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on Earth, and a region of rich cultural diversity, functioning as a continental “green engine” that regulates rainfall and sustains livelihoods across Africa.

Developed by more than 180 scientists primarily from the region, the report synthesizes current knowledge across ecological, social, and economic dimensions, tracing the Basin’s evolution from its geological origins through centuries of human interaction to present-day transformations while identifying pathways to secure its long-term resilience. It examines the Basin’s role in the Earth system, patterns of human-environment interaction over time, the post-1992 transition toward sustainable development, and the solutions required to build a resilient future.

Professor Lee White, Special Envoy of the Science Panel for the Congo Basin, said: “The Congo Basin is not just the Green Heart of Africa, it is a planetary asset. The chapters now being released show, in detail, how the Basin supports climate stability and rainfall systems, and why the world cannot afford to treat it as an afterthought. The science is clear: the Basin’s carbon absorption is falling, and the next decade is decisive.”

The findings underscore that the Congo Basin faces mounting pressures from unsustainable resource use, climate change, and governance gaps. The report highlights that viable solutions are within reach, provided there is strategic investment, strengthened governance, and coordinated action across sectors and scales.

Emma Torres, Vice President of the Americas & Strategic Partnerships at SDSN and Strategic Coordinator of the SPCB, said: “The Congo Basin is central to Africa’s future and to global climate stability. This report provides a scientific foundation for decision-making and shows that sustainable pathways are within reach, but they require coordinated action, long-term investment, and strong institutions. The Congo Basin is at a crossroads with the potential to advance a transformative sustainable development for tropical forests”.

As the flagship output of the SPCB, this assessment positions the Panel as a leading independent scientific voice for the Congo Basin, informing policy dialogue, investment priorities, and international cooperation. It calls on governments, the private sector, and the international community to act decisively to safeguard one of the world's most vital ecosystems and to support sustainable development pathways for the region.

The official presentation event in Brazzaville brought together high-level policymakers, scientists, and development partners. Opening remarks were given by Professor Lee White, followed by an overview of the report presented by SPCB Co-Chairs Bonaventure Sonké and Lydie-Stella Koutika, alongside SPCB Science Officer Bila-Isia Inogwabini. A keynote address was delivered by Her Excellency, Mrs Arlette Soudan-Nonault, Minister of the Environment, Sustainable Development and the Congo Basin, Republic of the Congo.

Professor Bonaventure Sonké, Co-Chair of the Science Panel for the Congo Basin, said: "For the first time we have managed to unite the majority of scientists from the Congo Basin along with their international colleagues to provide an in-depth analysis of the origins, past, present and future of the critical Congo Basin ecosystems. It is important that this report generates international attention and support for scientific research in the Congo Basin – the Earth's most important but least studied tropical rain forest."

Lydie-Stella Koutika, fellow Co-Chair of the Science Panel for the Congo Basin, said: "The chapters set out what the Congo Basin contributes to people, economies and ecosystems, and what is at stake if degradation continues. We want journalists to scrutinise the findings and help bring sustained attention to the solutions, the governance needs and the financing required for a just, durable transition."

The event also introduced the Panel's new website as the central platform for accessing the report and related materials. The report is now available in English, with the Executive Summary accessible in French.

Explore and download the report (English): https://www.spcongobasin.org/
Access the Executive Summary (French): https://bit.ly/resexefr

Notes for Editors:

Why This Matters

1. The Congo Basin is the world's second-largest tropical forest and a major

climate stabiliser, currently absorbing net around 600 million tonnes of CO_2 a year, a figure the Panel says is declining as deforestation accelerates.

2. The Basin's forests, wetlands and the world's largest tropical peatland regulate rainfall, water cycles and climate far beyond Central Africa. Loss of this 'water pump' effect would have knock-on impacts for food and water security across the continent, including the Sahel and the Nile system.
3. Despite its importance, the Congo Basin remains under-researched and chronically underinvested. Reporting has highlighted that, between 2008 and 2022, the Congo Basin received only around 16 percent of international funding directed to the world's three major rainforest regions, and only a tiny fraction of that funding was directed to scientific research.
4. Research output remains sharply imbalanced. Comparative analyses have found far fewer published scientific papers for the Congo Basin than for the Amazon, leaving decision-makers without the data they need as pressures rise.
5. The Science Panel for the Congo Basin was launched at COP28 in Dubai and is producing an independent assessment aimed at policy makers and partners working on sustainable development and conservation. The Panel's work underlines that decisions taken in the 2020s will shape whether the Basin remains a climate asset or becomes an additional source of emissions.

Available For Interview

1. Professor Lee White: Special Envoy to the Science Panel for the Congo Basin and a leading conservation scientist and policy adviser. He has held senior government and international conservation roles and is a prominent advocate for science-led protection and sustainable development in Central African forest ecosystems.
2. Dr Bila-Isia Inogwabini: Editor of the Congo Basin Assessment Report and a conservation scientist with deep expertise in Central African biodiversity, protected areas and conservation practice. His work has focused on linking field-based evidence to practical policy and management decisions.
3. Professor Bonaventure Sonke: Editor and Co-Chair of the Science Panel for the Congo Basin and a distinguished botanist from Cameroon. His research and academic leadership have focused on Central African forest ecosystems, plant diversity and the scientific foundations for long-term conservation planning.

4. Dr Lydie-Stella Koutika: Editor and Co-Chair of the Science Panel for the Congo Basin and a scientist specialising in tropical ecosystems and land-use management in the Congo Basin region. Her work bridges scientific research, policy relevance and sustainable development priorities.

About SDSN

The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) works under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General to mobilize universities, think tanks, and research centers to advance the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. Established in 2012 by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and economist Jeffrey Sachs, the SDSN promotes evidence-based solutions, policy analysis, education, and global cooperation at the intersection of science, policy, and practice.

About the SPCB

Launched at COP28, the SPCB is the first independent scientific body dedicated to assessing the region's ecosystems, their condition, and the threats they face, to guide policy for sustainable development and conservation. The Panel brings together over 180 experts and is co-chaired by Bonaventure Sonké (University of Yaoundé, Cameroon), Lydie-Stella Koutika (Centre de Recherche sur la Durabilité et la Productivité des Plantations Industrielles, Republic of Congo), and Corneille Ewango (University of Kisangani, DRC).

Media Enquiries

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