Enabel

Executive Summary of the Climate Neutrality, Conservation and Green Economy Project Based on an Inclusive Rubber Value Chain in the Territories of Lomela and Lodja in Sankuru Province (DeSIRA Agro-Forestry Project)

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1 Introduction to the evaluation

Within the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sankuru Province is one of the country's major forest areas, but it is experiencing significant deforestation, mainly driven by agricultural expansion. Between 2001 and 2021, the province lost 1.17 million hectares of tree cover (42% of which concerned humid primary forests, whose surface area declined by 6% over this period). One of the Province's key challenges is to reverse the degradation of forests and land, while revitalising existing rubber plantations and promoting the sustainable management of forest resources. The development of the rubber value chain forms part of a broader vision to stimulate economic activity around the edges of the Salonga landscape, with the aim of encouraging the stabilisation of agriculture, reducing poaching, and restoring value to degraded land.[1]

The Climate Neutrality, Conservation and Green Economy Project Based on an Inclusive Rubber Value Chain in the Territories of Lomela and Lodja in Sankuru Province (DeSIRA Agro-Forestry Project) is part of the global "Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture" (DeSIRA) initiative, funded by the European Union, which aims to promote the role of agriculture in combating climate change. Its overall objective is to "contribute to maintaining forest cover, and to protecting and restoring the biodiversity of the Congo's equatorial forests, which provide income, food and ecosystem services for local and global populations". The project is based on an integrated systemic approach structured around three complementary intervention areas: (i) the revitalisation of the rubber value chain; (ii) the transition towards sustainable agricultural systems; and (iii) support for community-based natural resource management.

This project, implemented by Enabel, was planned to be carried out over a period of 48 months (1 October 2021 – 30 September 2025). Its budget amounts to EUR 4,150,000.

The expected evaluation serves a dual purpose of accountability and learning for all stakeholders involved. It aims to assess the project's performance rigorously, identifying both the success factors and the constraints encountered during its implementation.

The evaluation team adopted a flexible approach tailored to the contexts encountered. Various data collection tools were used to meet the information needs of a broad range of stakeholders (document review, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, focus groups, working meetings and field observations). The conclusions are based on verified and triangulated information.

The mission took place from **20 August 2025 to 16 September 2025 (initial debriefing), with a field phase in the DRC from 24 August to 5 September 2025**. Despite the challenging context in Sankuru, the mission was able to proceed under satisfactory conditions.

[1] The development of this value chain will directly contribute to the objectives of the European Union (EU) Delegation in the DRC, which are to reduce deforestation and increase carbon sequestration, with a particular focus on five reserves and national parks, including Salonga (Green Corridor).

2 Findings

2.1 Findings by DAC Criterion

Relevance	**C**	The DeSIRA Agro-Forestry Project offers responses that are well aligned with the expectations and needs of target groups and final beneficiaries and is consistent with the objectives and results of the DRC's national, sectoral and territorial policies (DSCRP2, PPALCPI, PNSD 2024–2028, REDD+ Initiative, Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor, Sankuru Development Plan). Support for the development of the rubber value chain was based on the commitment of a private operator (TEXAF). The challenges of implementing this intervention in Sankuru were insufficiently anticipated, particularly in relation to travel and accommodation constraints, the institutional context and procedures that were not well adapted to the local reality. The relationship between the private operator (TEXAF) and Enabel would have benefited from being formalised before the contribution agreement was signed.
Coherence	**B**	The DeSIRA Agro-Forestry Project follows a logic of indirect contribution to the sustainable management of protected areas, given its proximity to the Salonga landscape. Exchanges, experience-sharing and collaboration were maintained with actors from the Alliance for Sustainable Development (Salonga, Yangambi), as well as with programmes within Enabel's portfolio in the DRC (PIREDD[2] Mongala, PIREDD Kasaï Lomami, Korlom Project, etc.). This enabled the mobilisation of confirmed expertise to support the DeSIRA Agro-Forestry team on both technical aspects (seed systems, etc.) and contractual matters. The project worked in close alignment with territorial and traditional authorities, as well as with technical services. The Strategic Consultation and Monitoring Committee (CSCS), representing the project's stakeholders and meeting annually, ensured internal coherence within the project, its alignment with national strategies, and its complementarity with other actors.
Efficacity	**B**	The difficulties linked to the specific context of Sankuru, the limited applicability of Enabel's procedures, and the full (TEXAF) or partial withdrawal of certain partners (ULiège, MRAC) required a reduction in the project's initial ambitions. A proposal to adjust the logical framework was submitted to the CSCS in June 2023. The project's effectiveness has been assessed on the basis of this document. Result 1: an indicative recovery plan for the rubber value chain served as the basis for drafting a MoU between Enabel and the company TEXAF. This MoU was not signed, and TEXAF withdrew from the action in July 2024. Some planned activities were nevertheless continued: production of selected seedlings involving IINERA and village nurserymen (249,000 seedlings plants[3],, a 1.5-ha timber plot at the station), training and equipping tappers (530 tappers trained, 40 local trainers and 20 master trainers, all members of supported organisations, mainly young women and men), and the structuring of producers (25 OACs and one cooperative formalised). The

[2] Integrated Project for the Reduction of Deforestation and Forest Degradation.
[3] Corresponding to approximately 500 hectares of plantations.

		involvement of research institutions focused mainly on academic work and training, largely carried out by ERAIFT. The added value of these actions is closely linked to the engagement of a rubber buyer[4]. **No new plantations were established (500 ha planned), and no latex collection was organised. The revival of the value chain therefore remains uncertain.** Result 2: The main achievements are based on the development of a local seed system involving INERA's Mukumari station, which allocated 5.5 ha to the production of certified basic and R1 seeds (maize, rice, cowpea, groundnut and soya) and cassava cuttings. These were entrusted to 15 seed multipliers (R1 and R2) and disseminated among farmers. The National Seed Service (SENASEM) oversaw the entire process of production pathway control and quality assurance, as well as the certification of the seeds produced. A total of 46 tonnes of seeds and 338 kml l[5] were distributed to 20 Community-Based Organisations (OACs) comprising 173 Farmers' Organisations (FOs). Forty-one demonstration sites were established, involving 2,579 producers, based on a cascade training approach. The dissemination of agroecological practices is constrained by the lack of agricultural advisory services. For the same reason, the levels of adoption of the proposed practices were not measured. Result 3: Two Local Community Forest Concessions (CFCL) were officially created, thanks to strong support from local communities, the commitment of the province's political, administrative and technical authorities, and the quality of the support provided by the partner NGO CFLEDD. These CFCLs resulted from an information and awareness-raising process on biodiversity protection that engaged 1,413 people (including 633 women) and led three communities, representing 20 villages, to carry out two Free, Prior and Informed Consents (FPIC), the initial step in establishing a CFCL. Today, 89,350 ha are officially under community management. Several communities have expressed interest in receiving support to establish a CFCL. Significant efforts were made to strengthen the technical and operational capacities of research institutions, NGOs and technical services. In addition to training sessions, this support included the establishment of three digital libraries (UNILOD, ISEA Lodja and ISEA Lomani), the installation of internet kits (UNILOD, ISEA Lodja) combined with solar kits (ISEA Lomela, INERA), as well as office equipment. The three NGOs received a package comprising internet and solar kits and full office equipment. Eight motorbikes were made available to technical services and territorial administrations. The extent to which this equipment has been used to improve service quality varies across institutions.
Efficiency	**C**	As of 30 June 2025, 83% of the project's resources had been committed, and this rate is expected to approach 100% by the end of September of the same year. Sixty-one percent of the project's resources were allocated to achieving the three project results (31% for Result 1, 21% for Result 3, and 9% for Result 2), and 39% to the

[4] An operator has been approached by the NGO ISCO, which will be involved in supporting the rubber recovery plan. The conditions for a potential partnership have yet to be formalised.

[5] Linear kilometre.

		intervention mechanism. The distribution of the project's resources is consistent with the realities of the intervention area. Its budget execution is satisfactory. Access to the inputs required for implementing activities (inputs, equipment, mobilisation of service providers, etc.) was heavily constrained by Enabel's procedures. Beyond this, very high transport costs, unstable flight schedules, and challenging local mobility, communication and accommodation conditions delayed the start of activities governed by demanding agricultural calendars, as well as the involvement of all initially planned Northern expertise. The arrival of a financial controller significantly helped to streamline the project's financial management. The implementation difficulties required a reduction in the project's ambitions and the adjustment of its indicators and targets (validated by the CSCS). The indicators retained are mainly output-based rather than outcome-based, which reflects an efficiency deficit compared with the initial action document, even though all the revised targets for these indicators have been met.
Sustainability	**C**	The position of the private operator TEXAF within the value chain remains ambiguous. There is no reference to a business plan demonstrating a long-term "industrial" commitment (required by the new plantations component), rather than an opportunistic role as a "collector", which is not structurally transformative. This operator appears more as a beneficiary of the project than as a driver of a recovery plan that it should have led over the long term. The future of the value chain depends on the involvement of an investor with a genuine vision for the sector's development in Sankuru Province. Some notable interventions open up promising avenues for change for households and for the local economy of the province: - The development of a seed value chain, structured around INERA, SENASEM and seed multipliers. In the short term, maintaining the current system depends on programmes purchasing seed to subsidise producers within and outside the province. Few viable economic models for seed production exist. The emergence of OACs within promising value chains (rice, groundnut, etc.) creates opportunities to establish a solvent market for seed. - The two CFCLs established are based on appropriate tools, committed village organisations, and the support of an engaged local grassroots organisation (CFLEDD), which has backed both the technical process and advocacy efforts with limited means, as well as the commitment of environmental services and territorial administrations. Numerous requests have already been registered, reflecting strong interest in continuing the experience. - Skills have been developed within the rubber value chain to support replanting (INERA, nurserymen) and, above all, the exploitation of existing plantations within an organised framework (establishment of OACs/cooperatives, master trainers, trainers and tappers). This constitutes a key asset and an argument to convince a private operator to invest in the development of the value chain. - Institutional strengthening and capacity-building actions targeting academic institutions, technical services, NGOs and OACs should enable certain improvements in the delivery of their service functions, despite their respective limitations.

Impact	C	By providing responses to the priority needs of farming households (access to improved planting material, mastery of good agricultural practices, etc.), the project contributes to improving incomes and strengthening household food security. The system established around community fields should enable wide dissemination of planting material and its long-term use (4 to 5 years), provided it is used appropriately (respect of production pathways, mass selection, etc.). The absence of a local support/advisory system limits the potential spillover effects of the innovations introduced. Opportunities to structure the seed value chain depend both on the commitment of INERA's General Directorate to developing the seed-production role of the Mukumari station and on the existence of a network of confirmed seed multipliers supported by SENASEM. Community-based forest management represents a major shift. It is essential that this "pilot experiment", which is perceived as a success, be scaled up at provincial level, and potentially nationally. The involvement of CFLEDD's national bodies—whose provincial representation led this process—could act as a lever to facilitate this scaling-up. The province's universities have been equipped with tools, skills and resources to further develop their teaching and scientific potential. Actions undertaken within the rubber sector have generated strong enthusiasm and hope among young people (access to adequately remunerated work). However, if the current deadlock continues, it is likely to lead to significant disappointment and distrust regarding future interventions.

2.2 Findings Related to the Evaluation Questions

The implementation of this project in a Province and a value chain that Enabel was discovering proved particularly complex. Beyond the constraints already mentioned, inherent to Sankuru Province, the DeSIRA Agro-Forestry Project encountered adverse events for which it cannot be held directly responsible:

- The private operator identified to link producers with international rubber markets withdrew after two years of unsuccessful discussions, calling into question the expected outcomes of investments made and planned (training and equipping tappers, production of planting material, producer structuring, etc.). TEXAF's reluctance to sign the MoU had already signalled its likely withdrawal.
- The involvement of academic and research partners fell short of the missions and results set out in the grant agreements and other specific arrangements. On the one hand, scientific production requirements delayed the publication of planned studies (and their use within this intervention). On the other hand, the reduced number of missions by Northern experts to the province (resignations, reduced time on site, etc.) prevented adequate support in establishing key activities (agroecology). This contributed to the technical isolation of the field team.
- The death of a key field team member, who was not replaced.
- Institutional instability within the province, which significantly slowed down the implementation of activities.

The combination of these difficulties and events required a refocusing of the project's activities. One of the key outcomes of this shift was the development of a seed value chain centred around INERA's Mukumari station, SENASEM and seed multipliers (Result 2).

The implementation of Result 1 was adjusted in response to TEXAF's withdrawal and the delays in producing the research/action deliverables intended to inform decision-making. Despite significant uncertainties regarding the future of the value chain, the project continued to implement planned activities: training and organising the network of tappers, producing planting material, and structuring producers. Continuing these activities is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it ensures immediate operational readiness should a new private operator be identified quickly; on the other hand, it risks generating strong resentment towards the DeSIRA+ project if market access is not secured in the medium term. Several critical questions remain unresolved: what is the realistic farm-gate floor price that the value chain can offer? What is the current status and productive capacity of the plantations? These key elements of the value chain's economics must be clarified, as they are decisive for securing the commitment of a private operator.

The implementation of Result 3 was carried out very effectively. The two supported communities obtained their decrees establishing the CFCLs and are in the process of operationalising them. The involvement of a competent and committed local operator partly explains this success.

From the outset, the project defined an exit strategy based on strengthening existing actors and supporting them in their respective roles. The long-term results appear satisfactory in terms of the seed value chain and the development of community forestry. However, the absence of private partners in the rubber sector, the lack of an extension system, and the still-emerging professional structures need to be addressed in the next phase to avoid losing the gains achieved in the previous one.

Despite an initial situation that generated a degree of scepticism, the commitment of the project's small field team, its direct partners (ASBL CDKN, ASBL CFLEDD), and the establishment of a patient dialogue with local and traditional authorities (in particular the territorial administrators, who were members of the CSCS), technical services, INERA and SENASEM, helped to establish the project's legitimacy, ensure their involvement in the management of sensitive activities (notably community forestry), and mobilise households to improve their agricultural practices and organise themselves to manage, in the long term, a number of services for the benefit of their members (OACs, SCOOPAS).

Support from ERAIFT, and to a lesser extent from MRAC, contributed to strengthening the pedagogical content of Sankuru's academic institutions. These institutions nevertheless continue to face governance challenges and difficulties in making effective use of the tools provided to them (digital libraries, internet connectivity management, etc.).

The DeSIRA Agro-Forestry Project took measures to ensure genuine results in terms of the involvement and economic empowerment of women, young women and young men. Women occupy a central place across the food crop value chains supported by the project. They represent 47.5% of the beneficiaries. They participated equally in the various training sessions organised, insofar as they met the required literacy criteria. Many of them hold leadership positions within OACs. This gender-responsive approach was reflected in particular in the creation of a gender officer position, occupied by a woman within the field team.

3 Conclusions

On the basis of this overall assessment, and in a context where the achievements of the current phase must be consolidated and its results extended within the future DeSIRA+ project, the main conclusions that can be drawn are as follows:

Conclusions Related to Result 1

1. **The knowledge required to inform investment decisions in the development of the rubber value chain—for a private operator, the EU Delegation and Enabel—remains insufficient.** The results of academic work and studies carried out by ERAIFT, as well as those conducted by Enabel[6], do not provide the elements needed to develop a realistic business plan that would offer medium- and long-term visibility to a private operator and clarify the respective contributions of the EU Delegation and Enabel to its implementation. The specific, validated information still needed concerns: (i) an estimate of the current productive capacity of the existing plantations, (ii) a pricing model for latex that allows the establishment of a realistic farm-gate price range, and (iii) clarification of the status of the former rubber plantations (regenerated secondary forests? plots intended for industrial use?). The exploitation of secondary forests falls under the forthcoming EU zero-deforestation regulation[7]. This could jeopardise the use of European funds.
2. The revitalisation of the rubber value chain requires the establishment of new plantations (without deforestation) to succeed the still poorly understood productive potential of the current orchards. **Such investments only make sense if there is a guarantee of securing a private operator committed over the long term**. Investigations should be broadened to approach professional partners and assess their interest in investing. This prospecting is urgent, particularly in view of the launch of the DeSIRA+ project. The revitalisation of the value chain will not be possible without the mobilisation of a professional operator committed to steering this process over time and ensuring its financing on the basis of a realistic business plan. DeSIRA+ may contribute to the implementation of this plan.
3. A process of professional structuring has been initiated, resulting in the creation of SCOOPAS, intended to bring together the key actors of the Sankuru rubber basin. For it to play its role effectively, **it is now essential to equip this cooperative with a clear vision and a consolidation strategy based on member services (which services?), supported by well-organised local branches (primary cooperatives), optimal subsidiarity between the different levels of the structure, sound governance, transparent management and a viable economic model.**
4. The project has contributed to the revitalisation of the university institutes in Sankuru. To enhance efficiency, **training activities and teaching missions need to be supported by coaching — not only in terms of curriculum adaptation, the organisation and supervision of internships, and the management of infrastructure, equipment and teaching tools, but also in relation to the institution's governance. The WhatsApp group established for this purpose was appreciated but insufficiently utilised.**

Conclusions related to Result 2

[6] Technical Report: Study on Market Opportunities for the Rubber Sector in the Territories of Lodja and Lomela, Sankuru Province, DRC. Enabel.
[7] Guidance Document on Regulation **(EU) 2023/1115 on "Deforestation-Free" Products (C/2025/4524).**

5. **The dissemination and uptake of innovation in the agricultural sector are closely dependent on the existence of a sustainable, locally grounded agricultural advisory system.** The entry point is the CEP approach, which could not be developed during the current project. The development of this tool must be contextualised to the realities of Sankuru; the pedagogical approach should not focus exclusively on technical aspects and should above all serve as a means to establish both the need for, and the foundations of, a professional organisation capable of gradually addressing the service needs expressed by producers;

6. In a future phase**, strengthening the scientific partnership with INERA will be necessary, particularly with regard to the agroecology and rubber components, and in connection with engineers from private companies who could be mobilised** (selection and multiplication of clones, replanting strategies, tapping planning, assessment of price structures, etc.). Producers, as direct users of the results, must also be considered as actors in research/action and be involved throughout the entire process (identifying and prioritising needs, contributing to the design of protocols and their monitoring, as well as directly analysing the results). The DeSIRA Agro-Forest project did not in practice develop R/A activities. This gap must be addressed by the DeSIRA+ project.

Conclusions related to Result 3

7. The approach developed to establish the CFCLs has produced very encouraging results, with a genuine ripple effect that should be supported. To achieve this, the contractual arrangements for collaboration with the CFLEDD non-profit organisation must evolve to enable this organisation, whose activities currently rely on voluntary work, to professionalise itself, in particular by recruiting permanent staff. Enabel's procedures regarding such structures should evolve accordingly.

Strategic conclusions

8. **The difficulties encountered in implementing the project stem from overly optimistic assumptions that were not confirmed during the project's start-up phase and resulted in execution delays.** This is due both to the quality of the conclusions in the documents that guided the project's design and to a formulation phase that was too short. In challenging contexts such as Sankuru Province, where Enabel had no prior experience, it would have been essential to invest more time in this phase in order to refine choices, calibrate them appropriately, and establish the foundations for partnerships before the request was validated by the European Union.
9. **The partnership established with a private operator must be formalised upstream of the formulation process**. The signing of an MoU marking the start— in this case, of the revival programme— should precede the signature of the financing agreement. A short-term project (3 to 4 years) cannot reasonably provide ad hoc support to a value-chain revival programme driven by a private operator that is expected to make substantial investments, unless a viable economic model exists. Such an intervention must be designed to support a private operator that has a realistic business plan (to which the project may contribute) and that implements transparent management tools (a pricing method shared by stakeholders, etc.). This business plan and these management mechanisms form the basis for signing an MoU.

4 Recommendations

Recommendation	Related conclusion (s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
R1. Conduct in-depth studies on the status, production potential, and likely price structure of latex in Sankuru, involving independent professional actors from the sector.	**1**	DESIRA+ team ISCO SCOOPAS	1	ST	Operational
Recommendation	**Related conclusion (s)**	**Targeted actor(s)**	**Level**	**Priority**	**Type**
R2. Launch a consultation process with operators in the rubber sector in order to identify those likely to engage in a dialogue that could lead to the signing of an MoU with Enabel.	**2**	DESIRA+ team ERAIFT ISCO SCOOPAS	1	ST	Operational
Recommendation	**Related conclusion (s)**	**Targeted actor(s)**	**Level**	**Priority**	**Type**
R3. Support SCOOPAS in developing its strategic plan and capacity-building plan, clarifying a viable long-term economic model and the conditions required to achieve financial autonomy in order to secure its services for members.	**3**	DeSIRA+ team SCOOPAS Private operator (if identified)	1	ST	Operational

Recommendation	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
R4: Formalise the implementation of a CEP approach adapted to the context, supporting the dissemination of innovations—particularly in the field of agroecology—while enabling a dialogue process on the development of a broader strategy to improve access to key services (advisory support, production inputs, financing).	**5**	Project DeSIRA+ SCOOPAS INERA ITAPEL Private operator (if identified)	1	ST	Operational

Recommendation	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
R5. Refocus the DeSIRA+ project's R/A strategy on operational dimensions by establishing a scientific pool in which INERA (Mukumari, Directorate-General) plays a central role.	**6**	Project DeSIRA+ INERA Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Sankuru ERAIFT	1, 2 & 3	ST	Operational and strategic

Recommendation	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
R6. Integrate institutional coaching into the support mechanisms for higher education institutes in Sankuru.	**4**	ERAIFT ISEA, UNILOD	1 & 2	ST	Operational and strategic

Recommendation	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
R7. Capitalise on, promote, and support the scaling up of the CFCL approach by drawing on the services of the Environment administration and CFLEDD.	**7**	Project DeSIRA+ Provincial Environment Services CFLEDD	1, 2 & 3	ST & MT	Operational and strategic

Recommendation	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)		Priority	Type
R 8. In "difficult" contexts, it is essential to allow sufficient time for the formulation process, to carefully assess assumptions and risks, to verify the relevance of the results framework (guidelines of the contribution agreement), and to allow time for dialogue to adjust it if necessary. It is also important to clarify and validate the operational and financial terms of strategic partnerships before signing the agreement with the European Union.	**9**	Private operator ENABEL and European Union	2 & 3	MT	Strategic

Recommendation	Related conclusion(s)	Targeted actor(s)	Level	Priority	Type
R 9. Establish partnership conditions between Enabel and an agro-industrial private operator based on robust economic models and mutual trust.	**2**	ENABEL and European Union	1, 2 & 3	CT & MT	Operational and strategic

5 Lessons learned

Lesson learned 1: Revitalisation of the seed sector in Sankuru Province through INERA Mukumari.

The improved seeds, which were in high demand among producers, had remained inaccessible to them prior to the arrival of the DeSIRA project. The key challenge was to supply the Mukumari station with pre-basic and basic seeds intended to produce basic and R1 seeds for agri-multipliers, building on the regulatory role of SENASEM (certification). The original material was to be provided by INERA, and institutional and material support was given to the actors involved: the Mukumari station, SENASEM, and the agri-multipliers so that they could fulfil their respective roles. The seeds were distributed through the OACs, whose representatives were trained at the station, along with their support organisations (ABSL CDKN, ITAPEL).

The development of the seed sector relied on INERA Mukumari, which received basic seeds (cassava, maize, rice, groundnut, cowpea and soya) from INERA Ngandajika. With a special exemption from SENASEM, it was able to multiply these seeds through three agri-multipliers. The seeds distributed through their OACs covered 274.5 ha and familiarised more than 2,500 households with the use of improved plant material, previously unknown to them.

With technical and financial support, the agronomic research station—paralysed for several years—has been able to be reactivated and provide services to the local population. It now benefits from support from its Directorate-General. The commitment of the Mukumari station team made it possible to "revive" the entire regional seed system (SENASEM, agri-multipliers) in order to meet the priority needs of farmers.

Lesson learned 2: Supporting local communities in the process of acquiring two Local Community Forest Concessions (CFCLs)

The forest of Sankuru is experiencing a loss of biodiversity. Aware of this threat, the population of the Bakela sector (Lomela Territory) initiated the creation of two Local Community Forest Concessions (CFCLs), which are forest areas legally granted by the State to a local community so that it can manage and use them sustainably. The aim is to strengthen the sustainable management of forests and wildlife, ensure biodiversity conservation, and promote the socio-economic development of the community, while enabling local populations to benefit from their natural resources.

The formal establishment of these two CFCLs was completed over a two-year period (2023–2025), which is rapid. The decrees granting the two CFCLs to the groupings of Ngombe, Djete-Mpombo & Fuluankema, Bakela Sector, Lomela Territory, Sankuru Province were signed in April 2025: CFCL Ngombe (43,407 ha) and CFCL POMODJE (45,938 ha). In this context, two Simple Management Plans (PSG) were developed by the communities.

Several challenges had to be addressed by the initiators: (i) the reluctance of the population towards any initiative seeking to regulate forest use ("they want to take our forest away from us"), (ii) the lack of

technical capacity and financial resources within the communities, (iii) land-use conflicts: property rights, usage rights, boundary disputes, (iv) stimulating the participation of all community members.

The effective implementation of the two Simple Management Plans (PSGs) may face difficulties with the end of the project. Continued support and additional financial assistance are necessary to ensure real ownership by the communities and to make these tools operational. Key lessons:

- The success of a project addressing the highly sensitive issue of forest resources necessarily depends on effective awareness-raising among the communities concerned, continuous dialogue with stakeholders, and genuine ownership by the community.
- The relevance of a project (its benefits for the communities) greatly contributes to its ownership and sustainability.
- Knowledge of the local context, expertise, commitment, and the strong presence of actors supporting the communities are important assets for the success of a project.
- The capacity of CFLEDD to act effectively and simultaneously at community, ETD, territorial and provincial administrative levels.

Lesson learned 3: The development of an industrial value chain depends on the involvement of a professional private operator with a clear vision, a commitment to long-term investment, and the capacity to lead the process in partnership with producers' professional organisations.

In the absence of real visibility regarding the future of this industrial value chain, and without a private operator willing to invest in its development—mobilising the project partner rather than the other way around—there is a strong likelihood that the current achievements will quickly be lost and that the social dynamics created will turn into mistrust, which would be detrimental to future interventions by Enabel and the EU in Sankuru.

The work carried out by the field teams made it possible to build genuine cohesion among planters, tappers and other members of the existing producer organisations, based on their shared interests and challenges. The producers, reassured of the existence of a market, were able to strengthen their ties and create a "family". It is essential that this enthusiasm and momentum do not turn against those who helped catalyse them.