SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN **GABON**

Like many countries in tropical regions, Gabon's forests are a valuable resource to protect and nurture. Rich in biodiversity and home to local communities and indigenous people, these forests also help preserve water and soil resources, support local and national economies, and serve as a carbon sink. Through EC-LEDS support, Gabon is developing a national land use plan to support sustainable management of many natural resource sectors.

PHOTO FROM ISTOCK 26705487

THE **EC-LEDS** PROGRAM

Low emission development strategies (LEDS) are development plans that promote sustainable social and economic development while reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over the medium to long term.

Enhancing Capacity for Low Emission Development Strategies (EC-LEDS) is a flagship U.S. government-led effort that assists countries in developing and implementing LEDS. The program enhances partner country efforts by (1) providing targeted technical assistance and (2) building a shared global knowledge base on LEDS.

EC-LEDS country partners include Albania, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Gabon, Georgia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Macedonia, Malawi, Mexico, Moldova, Peru, the Philippines, Serbia, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, Vietnam, and Zambia.

Gabon is home to an abundance of natural resources. Over the last couple decades, exports of oil and mineral resources have allowed the country to preserve its vast tropical forests. Today, the country's high forest cover and low rate of deforestation offer tremendous opportunities for ecotourism development, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation through reduced emissions and carbon absorption.

QUICK FACT: Gabon's tropical forests cover 88% of the country's land area, comprise over 8,000 plant species, and serve as an important global carbon reservoir sequestering an estimated 1 – 5 gigatons of carbon.

At the same time, Gabon is implementing an economic diversification strategy to develop competitive manufacturing and service sector industries that complement the dominant oil sector. Achieving these national development goals will require new transportation, water, energy, and communications infrastructure, increasing pressure on Gabon's natural resources and GHG emissions. Gabon's top-level leadership has committed to sustainable economic development and minimizing the country's GHG emissions.

Through the EC-LEDS program, Gabon and the United States are working together to further develop and implement the LEDS laid out in Gabon's Plan Climat. This includes improving coordination among the country's partners and stakeholders and building capacity to assess and compare the climate impacts of proposed sector development scenarios.

Gabon's national climate council, Le Counseil National Climat, as technical partner, collaborates with EC-LEDS to: prepare and review Gabon's Third National Communication; evaluate and analyze the economics and emissions impacts of proposed development pathways; measure and monitor forest carbon; and support the development of a national land use plan to support Gabon's LEDS.

SUPPORTING GABON'S LEDS PRIORITIES

EC-LEDS assistance is targeted to a country's needs. Two examples of working areas within the EC-LEDS-Gabon partnership are identifying sustainable development pathways and strengthening forest management.

EC-LEDS
ENHANCING CAPACITY FOR LOW EMISSION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

COORDINATING LOW EMISSION DEVELOPMENT IN GABON

Addressing affordable power and pirated electricity is a challenge for Gabon. An estimated 40% of its population does not have access to electricity.

PHOTO BY ELIZA HOTCHKISS, NREL

IDENTIFYING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS

To achieve Gabon's low emission development goals, detailed understanding of the tradeoffs—considering economic, social, and emissions mitigation priorities— among proposed development projects is essential. EC-LEDS is partnering with Gabon to provide training and technical support to assess the economic and emissions impacts of these projects and use the results to inform LEDS planning and actions.

Joint activities include:

- Conducting energy analyses of the Gabonese public sector to estimate its energy efficiency potential and identify the best opportunities for energy efficiency demonstration projects
- Building Gabon's expertise in conducting carbon footprint analyses of infrastructure and economic development projects
- Supporting development of a model and conducting an inter-sectorial analysis to identify the paths to economic growth through reduced emissions
- Quantifying and monetizing the public benefits of specific infrastructure

development projects using Sustainable Return on Investment (SROI) methodology.

IMPROVING FOREST AND LAND-USE PLANNING

Improved forest management is a vital component of the country's strategy to protect its vast forest resources and reduce GHG emissions from land-use changes. EC-LEDS is helping Gabon assess the impacts of economic development activities on forest carbon and land use in Gabon, contributing to the development of a national land-use plan.

In terms of forest carbon measuring and monitoring, EC-LEDS activities include:

- Reviewing the Government of Gabon's current technical approach for estimating forest carbon and identifying the areas in need of improvement
- Comparing methodologies, measurement and follow-up approaches for forest carbon in Gabon, and monitoring progress on their implementation
- Developing a nationwide forest carbon inventory
- Training Gabonese field teams in the collection of forest and soil measurements and assisting in the analysis of field data to quantify forest biomass and carbon stocks
- Establishing a national system for Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) of carbon and forest metrics.

In terms of land use planning, activities include:

- Coordinating technical and legal working groups to compile and analyze geographic data and legal texts relating to land use across ten sectors, including oil, mining, logging, agriculture, fisheries, transportation infrastructure, and others
- Elaborating a document and database explaining the current state of land use across these sectors, and identifying issues to address in future phases of the project
- Mentoring and training Gabonese teams in land use assessment and planning techniques.

EC-LEDS ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN **GABON**

Several notable accomplishments have been achieved through the EC-LEDS program:

Improved Coordination Among LEDS Stakeholders: A dedicated technical assistant, sponsored by the EC-LEDS program, is supporting climate change activities and coordinating technical exchanges between the United States and Gabon. Strong government leadership and coordinated efforts across public and private institutions are critical components of effective LEDS.

Measured and Monitored Forest Carbon: U.S. and Gabonese forestry experts completed a nationwide forest carbon assessment. In addition, with U.S. assistance, Gabonese field teams established forest plots nationwide, and developed and implemented soil carbon data collection methodologies to quantify terrestrial carbon stocks. Robust forest carbon data help to clarify the impact of economic development activities on forest carbon and land use in Gabon and contribute to the development of a national land-use plan.

Coordinated Land-Use Planning Efforts: The U.S. Forest Service is working with Gabon to develop a national land-use plan (LUP). As a first step, Gabon's key ministries and agencies met to discuss their respective allocations of land for different activities, such as logging, mining, agriculture, communities, and infrastructure, to share data and to work together on an integrated LUP for Gabon. Completion of an integrated LUP represents a critical first step toward sustainable land-use management.

Assessed Public Sector Emissions and Energy Efficiency Opportunities: The U.S. Department of Energy National Laboratories are working with Gabon on public sector emissions footprint and energy efficiency assessments, as well as economic, social, and environmental impact analysis of economic development and infrastructure projects. Results will be used to identify possible public sector energy efficiency demonstration projects and inform LEDS-related planning and actions going forward.

EC-LEDS is managed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and U.S. Department of State with support from the U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Forest Service.

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For more information: visit the EC-LEDS website: www.ec-leds.org

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