Forest Inventory Expert in the Republic of Congo Shares Experience and Expertise with Neighboring Country

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Mr. Mpati (blue vest) describes to technicians the differences between peat and mineral soils during a training in Mbandaka, Democratic Republic of Congo.

"We may be two separate countries, but we share the same forests."

Mr. Mpati (blue vest) listens as technicians describe the tree species in the peatland forests—important observations that will allow the technicians to more easily identify possible peatlands using satellite images.

Photos courtesy of Eva McNamara,
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When Basile Mpati steps into the forest, he transforms. His eyes sparkle, his smile is infectious, and he doesn't seem to notice the cloying humidity, endless biting insects, and thick mud. Instead, every once in a while, he'll stop, look up at the canopy, and sigh. "Do you hear that?" he'll ask. "That is the sound of peace."

For Mr. Mpati, it is in these forests of the Congo Basin—some of the least studied and understood in the world—where he feels most at home. But he doesn't just go into the forest for enjoyment, although he makes it clear that he would spend all his time here if he could. Instead, Mr. Mpati is here to help his government ensure that these vast and valuable forests remain intact.

In 2014 the U.S. Forest Service, supported by USAID's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment, began working with the Ministry of Environment in the Republic of the Congo to help the government complete its national forest inventory. At the time, this meant working with government technicians to adapt existing inventory methodologies for wetland and peatland forest areas, many of which are difficult to access and measure as they are inundated throughout the year. After training technicians in specialized methods to inventory wetland and peatland forests, the government formally recognized and ratified the recommended approach to be used in all wetland forests throughout the country. This partnership is ensuring that these carbon-rich forests are accurately measured, providing the baseline measurements needed for the government to take adequate steps to protect and manage these areas.

Since being trained, Mr. Mpati, the Technical Supervisor for the Republic of the Congo's of National Forest Inventory, has become both a recognized expert and trainer on wetland forests and peatlands in his country.

In January 2018, during a mission supported by the SilvaCarbon program, Mr. Mpati crossed the Congo River to meet with a group of government technicians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to offer them the same training on wetland forest inventory that he received. The extent of the peatland forests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has only recently been estimated, and these forests have not yet been inventoried.

When the training was finished, Mr. Mpati accompanied a team of technicians deep into the forest to help them complete the first inventory mission of the peatland forest areas in the county. This immersive training is ensuring that the Democratic Republic of the Congo will now have experienced technicians who are able to carry out the rest of the peatland forest inventory by themselves.

For Mpati, being able to participate in workshops like this is more than just a day job. "We may be two separate countries, but we share the same forests," he says. "To be able to transfer this knowledge about wetland forests and train my government counterparts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is hugely important and essential work. If we as a region fail to protect these forests, the ecological results will not only be damaging for the people here, who depend on the forests for food and fuel, but the amount of carbon that will be released into the atmosphere will be devastating for the rest of the world as well."

The U.S. Forest Service is committed to helping governments obtain the most up-to-date skills and tools to ensure that they can make informed decisions about the management and conservation of their forest resources. Along with trainings in methods for measuring peat, the U.S. Forest Service has offered a wide range of technical trainings and tools to build the capacity of the forestry ministries in both Congos. Trainings have covered soil sampling techniques and analysis, sustainable fire and rangeland management, and remote sensing techniques to measure and monitor forest cover.

USAID's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment has worked since 1995 to help protect and preserve forests and biodiversity within the region. Building capacity of government staff is an essential part in ensuring that effective environmental management policies are enacted at national and regional levels. As an implementing partner, the U.S. Forest Service is committed to working with partner governments to offer specialized programs, tools and approaches that help them succeed in protecting and preserving their forests and natural resources.