



REPORTING TEMPLATE FOR PREPARATORY GRANTS FUNDED BY THE CENTRAL AFRICAN FOREST INITIATIVE (CAFI)¹

The reporting requirements (narrative and financial) for projects receiving CAFI funding are outlined in a note available to the public [here](#)

2025 Annual Report

Period from January 1st, 2025 **to** December 31st, 2025

Title of the preparatory grant:	Identification of eligible and priority sites for HIFOR in Central Africa
MPTFO number of the preparatory grant: ²	00141098
Implementing organization:	Wildlife Conservation Society
Report submitted by: Name: Title: Organization: Email address:	Clelia WATT Program Officer WCS cwatt@wcs.org
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Please indicate whether this report has been approved by the project steering committee:

Yes

No

If yes, when: Click or tap to enter a date

If no, anticipated date of review by the project steering committee: Given the fact that this is a preparatory grant there is no formal steering committee.

¹ This template is for the presentation of annual and half-yearly reports by organisations implementing programmes funded by CAFI, including via FONAREDD in the DRC. Annual reports cover the period from 1 January to 31 December. Half-yearly reports cover the period from 1 January to 30 June.

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1 Key project data

Project title	Identification of eligible and priority sites for HIFOR in Central Africa
Preparatory Grant Number	00141098
Project document hyperlink ²	https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1mcqw7ZpNsF14wpY4wflFs-a-6MXZCbuMQ?usp=drive_link
Project intervention area(s)	CAFI partner countries - with a focus on Gabon, the Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo
Major participating partner organizations ³	Wildlife Conservation Society
Total project budget (USD)	USD 467,836
Total project duration (months)	18
Date of approval of the preparatory grant by the CAFI Board of Directors	26/03/2025
Date of receipt of first funds from MPTF	01/04/2025
Date of approval of the 1 st Annual Budgeted Work Plan by the project COPIL	NA
Initial closing date	25/09/2026
Revised closing date, if applicable	NA
Expenditure from January 1 to December 31 of the reporting year	170 869 USD
Cumulative total expenditure (USD) as of December 31 of the reporting year	170 869 USD
Consumption rate for all tranches received	36,5%

² All project documents can be found on the CAFI Drive: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RhAT_Hc5jycgw40xr7YZM57jV4zQFadQ

³ These are organizations that have received direct funding from the MPTF Office as part of the project.

List of abbreviations

CAFI	Central African Forest Initiative
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FCC	Forest and Climate Change team (of WCS)
HCV	High Conservation Values
HCS	High Carbon Stocks
HIFOR	High Integrity FOrEst Initiative
NA	Not applicable
PTAB	Budgetised Annual WorkPlan (in french)
REDD+	Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation +
TBD	To be determined
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society

2 Executive Summary

This is the second narrative report of the HIFOR regional assessment that aims at:

- Output 1: Identifying High Integrity Forests and HIFOR-eligible sites in each CAFI partner country.
- Output 2: Identifying priority sites in target countries (Gabon, Congo and DRC)
- Output 3: Presenting the next legal, technical, and financial steps for the potential scaling of the initiative in the Congo Basin in identified priority sites.

Output 1: An assessment of the High Integrity Forests across the six CAFI Partner countries estimates a total of ~154Mha, with 80.4Mha in DRC, 15.4Mha in Congo, 10.9Mha in Gabon, 37.1Mha in CAR, 11Mha in Cameroon and 0.4Mha in Equatorial Guinea.

In the first months of the project (June through August), we conducted the assessment of the HIFOR-eligible sites. We compiled a spatial database of existing management units across the six CAFI partner countries. We started by collecting a relevant set of management units primarily consisting of protected areas, with the addition of conservation concessions and community forests in DRC. A total of 468 management units were compiled from public sources. The applicability and eligibility criteria from the HIFOR methodology were applied: minimum size and 4 ecological integrity criteria. **It led to the identification of 51 potentially eligible HIFOR sites, accounting for circa 24Mha of High Integrity Forests in the 6 partner countries.** The eligibility screening is still ongoing with the application of an exclusion criterion that removes units that overlaps with active gas, oil, mining and forest permits/concessions as well as REDD and biodiversity credit projects. The exclusion criteria (in particular gas, oil and mining permits) are evolving quite significantly in some countries or are not easily publicly available. Therefore, the final eligible management units should be less than 51 sites.

An overview of the methodology to determine HIFOR-eligible areas and preliminary screening results in the CAFI partner countries is provided in Annexe 1. We have developed a map-based dashboard that integrates spatial data, key indicators, and interactive visualizations of the eligible units into a single, dynamic platform. It is available at this [link](#). The dashboard is designed to translate complex information into clear, actionable insights for stakeholders.

Output 2: Between September and December, we developed a prioritization framework based on 13 criteria capturing both risks (such as occurrence of fire, armed conflicts, climate change and land use change risk) and opportunities (such as carbon and biodiversity values, presence of peatlands) for implementation of HIFOR projects. Using this framework, eligible units were classified as high/medium/low risk and high/medium/least opportunity.

An overview of the prioritization methodology and preliminary priority results in the target countries are provided in Annexe 1. We also developed a dashboard for the visualization of the prioritization criteria for the eligible sites, which can be found at this [link](#).

Output 3: A framework for the development of a HIFOR pre-feasibility study has been developed according to the project document requirements. It is presented in Annexe 2.

The consultation of stakeholders in each target country has been delayed as we are facing uncertainty about the financial viability and scalability of the HIFOR approach so that we don't raise expectations in a context of financial uncertainty.

3 Implementation challenges

3.1 Challenges related to the country context

We faced several challenges in acquiring the spatial data needed to compile the database of management units. Countries in Central Africa do not maintain publicly accessible online databases of this kind. As a result, the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) were used as a starting point and then close work with WCS regional and country teams allowed to validate and complement the data. This process took longer than expected, but it allowed us to build a robust spatial database that will be then used to produce both the eligible HIFOR sites (output 1) and the priority sites (output2).

One additional challenge that remains only partially resolved is access to up-to-date spatial data on oil, gas, and mining permits. These data are critical because they serve as an exclusion criterion for HIFOR-eligible management units. However, we do not yet have complete information for all countries (see Annexe 1 for the set of data that has been gathered and used so far). As a result, we consider the current list of 51 eligible units to be conservative, and this number will likely decrease as more comprehensive data become available.

In addition, despite extensive online research and consultations with our network (with the PUDT project (HCV/HCS in Congo), the Missouri Botanical Garden (HVC in Gabon) and the PGDF in DRC (High value forests)), we were unable to access HCV/HCS spatial datasets for the six CAFI countries as they are not publicly available. As a result, we could not assess potential synergies between the HIFOR framework and the HCV-HCS initiatives.

3.2 Challenges inherent to the project

The nature of the challenges facing HIFOR has evolved globally. The primary constraint is no longer analytical uncertainty, but the lack of coordinated, decision-ready investor demand for the outcomes identified in the assessment. While the technical foundation of the model is strong, some international stakeholders remain uncertain about the financial viability and scalability of the HIFOR approach. Therefore, we decided to delay the stakeholders' consultations until more opportunities arise to undertake the consultations so that we don't raise expectations in a context of financial uncertainty.

3.3 Corrective measures taken or planned

To address the gap between the supply and demand of the HIFOR units, WCS has worked closely with partners to strengthen investor confidence and clarify the HIFOR value proposition. In this context, we made a strategic decision to delay and narrow the scope of partner-country consultations until there is clearer alignment and stronger market signals. However the stakeholders' consultation plan has been finalized and we will be ready to undertake the consultations as soon as possible (planned second quarter 2026).

Regarding spatial data challenges, we will ask the national interviewed stakeholders' assistance and continue to work closely with WCS regional and country teams to obtain the latest available data on extractive permits and on HCV/HCS data that would become available. We are also formally request access to HCV and HCS datasets from CAFI funded projects.

4 Progress of the preparatory grant based on the indicators in the logical framework

Outputs	Indicators	Targets			Results				Percentage of indicator achieved in relation to the initial target (or revised target, if applicable) ⁵	Comments ⁶
		Initial (as in the signed project document)	Revised (if applicable) ⁴	Targeted for the reporting period	Baseline	Cumulative value at the end of the previous annual reporting period	Value achieved during the reporting period	Cumulative value at the end of the reporting period		
Output 1 Map of high integrity forest and HIFOR-eligible sites	A detailed report on the methodology for identifying HIFOR-eligible sites, including results of its application in CAFI partner countries, is developed and is made available on the CAFI collaborative space.	1		1	0	NA	1	1	100%	See Annexe 1

⁴ Provide official documentation (**decision of governing bodies**) supporting **the revision of the target**, if applicable, in the comments section of the table.

⁵ Calculate when these are numerical indicators. Indicate an estimated value between 0% and 100% for non-numerical indicators (0% if the activities contributing to the achievement of the result in question have not started and 100% if the activities have been completed and the result achieved).

⁶ Comments should include reasons for significant progress, delays or changes.

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		Targets			Results					
Outputs	Indicators	Initial (as in the signed project document)	Revised (if applicable) ⁴	Targeted for the reporting period	Baseline	Cumulative value at the end of the previous annual reporting period	Value achieved during the reporting period	Cumulative value at the end of the reporting period	Percentage of indicator achieved in relation to the initial target (or revised target, if applicable) ⁵	Comments ⁶
	A spatial database for each CAFI partner country with eligible HIFOR sites is established and made accessible on the CAFI collaborative platform.	6		6	0	NA	6	6	90% (pending datasets on active concessions for the application of exclusion criteria)	see link to the google drive
	At least one stakeholder consultation campaign is conducted by target country, to present the HIFOR methodology and the results of its application to country management units.	3		3	0	NA	0	0	0%	The consultations have been delayed to Q2 of 2026.
	Assessment of synergies between HIFOR and other initiatives developed at the regional level (REDD, HVC-HCS).	1		0	0	NA	0	0	0%	There are currently no available datasets on HCV or HCS.
	Number of national workshops held in all 3 target countries to present the HIFOR methodology and identify eligible sites in target countries	3		0	0	NA	0	0	0	This is planned for 2026.

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		Targets			Results					
Outputs	Indicators	Initial (as in the signed project document)	Revised (if applicable) ⁴	Targeted for the reporting period	Baseline	Cumulative value at the end of the previous annual reporting period	Value achieved during the reporting period	Cumulative value at the end of the reporting period	Percentage of indicator achieved in relation to the initial target (or revised target, if applicable) ⁵	Comments ⁶
Output 2 Identification of priority sites for HIFOR implementation	A spatial database by target country with priority HIFOR sites is established and accessible on the CAFI collaborative space.	3		3	0	NA	3	3	100%	see link to the google drive
	A detailed report is developed presenting the methodology for prioritizing potential HIFOR sites and the results of its application in the 3 target countries	1		1	0	NA	1	1	100%	See Annexe 1
	At least one stakeholder consultation campaigns are conducted, by target country, to present the methodology for identifying priority HIFOR sites and its results.	3		3	0	NA	0	0	0%	The consultations have been delayed to Q2 of 2026.
	Number of national workshops held in all 3 target countries to present the prioritization methodology and identified priority sites	3		0	0	NA	0	0	0%	This is planned for 2026.
Output 3 Feasibility study for the continued implementation of HIFOR in	A pre-feasibility study completed that identifies the main steps and key legal, technical, and financial elements necessary for scaling up HIFOR.	4 (3 national + 1 regional)		0	0	NA	0	0	15%	The structure and content of the pre-feasibility study have been drafted (Annexe 2)

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		Targets			Results					
Outputs	Indicators	Initial (as in the signed project document)	Revised (if applicable) ⁴	Targeted for the reporting period	Baseline	Cumulative value at the end of the previous annual reporting period	Value achieved during the reporting period	Cumulative value at the end of the reporting period	Percentage of indicator achieved in relation to the initial target (or revised target, if applicable) ⁵	Comments ⁶
the Congo Basin	At least one stakeholder consultation campaigns is conducted by target country, on the next steps for implementing HIFOR in the Congo Basin.	3		3	0	NA	0	0	0%	The consultations have been delayed to Q2 of 2026.
	Analysis made on the alignment with bilateral donors' investment opportunities in the region and countries' interest in continuing HIFOR implementation.	4 (3 national + 1 regional)		4	0	NA	0	0	0%	The consultations have been delayed to Q2 of 2026.
	Number of national workshops held in each target country to present the main steps and key legal, technical, and financial elements needed to scale up HIFOR.	3		0	0	NA	0	0	0%	This is planned for 2026.

5 Financial execution

5.1 Disbursements

For transfers received, indicate the overall disbursement level and the annual disbursement level, including the projected budget for the year and the actual disbursement.

Amounts committed but not disbursed may be added in the last column of the table.

a) Table 8.1 - Project disbursement rates.

A) Results	B) Total budget (USD) as in the project document (indicate if revised)	C) Budget planned for the reporting period (Jan-Dec-2025)	D) Expenses 2025	E) Balance as of Dec 2025	F) Disbursement rate for the reporting period	G) Cumulative disbursement rate since the start of the project	H) Amounts committed but not spent
Outcome 1 Identification of eligible and priority sites for HIFOR in Central Africa							
Output 1 Map of high integrity forest and HIFOR eligible sites	245 207	121 615	102 495	159 877	42%	42%	0
Activity 1.a	154 313	121 615	72 226	86 419	47%	47%	0
Activity 1.b	90 893	0	30 269	73 459	33%	33%	0
Output 2 Identification of priority sites for HIFOR implementation	114 457	34 010	41 253	81 301	36%	36%	0
Activity 2.a	32 668	16 715	36 019	5 750	110%	110%	0
Activity 2.b	81 788	17 295	5 233	75 552	6%	6%	0
Output 3 Pre-Feasibility study for the potential implementation of HIFOR in the Congo Basin	77 567	13 775	15 943	67 171	21%	21%	0
Activity 3.a	77 567	13 775	15 740	67 171	21%	21%	0
Total Costs Results	437 230	169 400	159 690	277 539	36,5%	36,5%	0
Total Indirect Costs	30 606	11 858	11 178	25 130	36,5%	36,5%	0
Total	467 836	181 258	170 869	296 967	36,5%	36,5%	0

b) Table 8.2

Please find the table 8.2 [here](#).

c) Table 9 - Cost-effectiveness: Table of progress and disbursements by effect and by product

Results	Current progress of the indicator ⁷	Cumulative expenditure in US dollars	Comments
Outcome 1 Identification of eligible and priority sites for HIFOR in Central Africa			
Output 1 Map of high integrity forest and HIFOR eligible sites	On-going	109 669	The ongoing eligibility assessment of management units in the Congo Basin has used the criteria of the international HIFOR methodology that has been published. The preliminary results can be found in Annexe 1 and the database can be found on the project folder .
Output 2 Identification of priority sites for HIFOR implementation	On-going	44 140	The application of the prioritization framework to the potentially eligible management units in the Congo Basin is presented in Annexe 1.
Output 3 Feasibility study for the potential implementation of HIFOR in the Congo Basin	On-going	16 842	The framework for the Pre-feasibility assessment for the potential implementation of HIFOR in the Congo Basin has been developed and is presented in Annexe 2
Total		170 869	

5.2 Contracts

Not applicable: this project does not foresee the use of subcontractors.

Table 10 - Contract monitoring

⁷ Report the value indicated in Table 2.

Contract No.	Title and subject matter	Type (international NGO, national NGO, public entity, private sector, other)	Sub-type (see list below)	Contract Amount	Contract signature date	Start date of activities	Contract end date	Expected completion date	Comments

Subtype

National NGO	Public entity	Private sector
National non-governmental organisation (NGO)	National public administration	National company
Local Development Committee (CLD)	Provincial public administration	Consultancy
Local Management Committee (CLG) for Local Community Forest Concessions (CFCL)	University	Cooperative
Other	Research Centre	International company
	Rural Agricultural Management Council (CARG)	Other
	Other	

5.3 Financial management, procurement and human resources

The financial expenditures are slightly lower than the PTAB forecasts due to a slower internal start of the project than anticipated, and because stakeholder’s consultations have been delayed to 2026. However, it is planned to spend the remaining part of the budget by completing the consultations by mid-2026, the output 3 and the Workshop by September 2026.

There are no stand-alone costs allocated for activities focused exclusively on gender equality. These costs and considerations have been integrated within the stakeholders consultation activities, which were planned and budgeted in a consolidated manner rather than specified separately.

5.4 Resource mobilisation

To date no additional resources have been mobilized from other partners.

5.5 Budget revisions

No revision of the project budget is currently planned.

6 Project monitoring

6.1 Programmatic revisions (if applicable)

There has been a delay in the planification of the stakeholders' consultations. They will be planned for the second quarter of 2026. (as explained in the paragraph 3.2). The stakeholders' consultation plan has been finalized (see Annexe 3) and we will be ready to undertake the consultations as soon as possible (planned second quarter 2026).

This delay is reflected in the workplan and following table (blue crosses) and how it impacts others activities (purple crosses).

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Outputs	Sub-Activities	Activity implementation schedule during the reference period (months)																	
		Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			Q5			Q6		
		Apr 25	May 25	Jun 25	Jul 25	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	Nov 25	Dec 25	Jan 26	Feb 26	Mar 26	Apr 26	May 26	Jun 26	Jul 26	Aug 26	Sep 26
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Output 1 Map of high integrity forest and HIFOR eligible sites	1.a Produce a provisional map of HIFOR eligible sites based on GIS data collected and according to the methodology in force	X	X	X	X	X													
	1.a Map stakeholders in target countries				X	X	X												
	1.a Consult stakeholders on the HIFOR methodology and the results of its application												X	X	X				
	1.a Assess synergies with other concepts																X	X	X
	1.b Incorporate any feedback from stakeholders to establish an updated map of HIFOR-eligible sites														X	X			
	1.b Present the final map of HIFOR-eligible sites at national workshops.																		X
	1.b Upload final shapefiles of eligible sites to the CAFI collaborative space, and share the accompanying reports.																		X
Output 2 Identification of priority sites for HIFOR implementation	2. a Identify prioritization criteria and develop a methodology for identifying priority sites.			X	X														
	2.a Apply the prioritization criteria to eligible sites and identify priority sites.					X	X												
	2.a Consult stakeholders on the methodology and results of its application.												X	X	X				
	2.b Incorporate any feedback from stakeholders to establish a map of priority HIFOR sites.														X	X			
	2.b Present the final map of priority HIFOR sites at national workshops.																		X

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Outputs	Sub-Activities	Activity implementation schedule during the reference period (months)																	
		Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			Q5			Q6		
		Apr 25	May 25	Jun 25	Jul 25	Aug 25	Sep 25	Oct 25	Nov 25	Dec 25	Jan 26	Feb 26	Mar 26	Apr 26	May 26	Jun 26	Jul 26	Aug 26	Sep 26
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	2.b Upload the final shapefiles of the identified priority sites to the CAFI collaborative space, along with the report presenting the methodology for prioritisation.																		X
Output 3 Pre-feasibility study for the potential implementation of HIFOR in the Congo Basin	3.a Identify the main steps and key legal, technical, and financial elements enabling the implementation of HIFOR in the target countries for scaling up (pre-feasibility study)										X	X	X	X	X				
	3.a Identify investment opportunities for bilateral donors													X	X	X			
	3.a Consult stakeholders on the results of the pre-feasibility study, in particular to identify the interest of potential project proponents, including country administrations.													X	X	X			
	3.a Incorporate feedback from stakeholders to finalize the pre-feasibility study report.															X	X		
	3.a Present the main results of the pre-feasibility study at national workshops.																		X
	3.a Analyze countries' interest in continuing HIFOR implementation.																		X
	3.a Post the pre-feasibility report on the CAFI collaborative space																		X

7 Cross-cutting themes

7.1 Gender

Table 12 - Monitoring gender aspects

Criterion	Actions taken to integrate gender	Results	Cost in USD	Challenges faced
Implementation / Activities	Stakeholder mapping exercises in each target country will specifically identify groups advocating for gender equality. These specific consultations will be conducted by women only interviewers and will focus on specific aspects that enable gender to be taken into account in the HIFOR implementation and will be therefore reflected in the pre-feasibility study.	The identification of gender equality advocate groups have been identified in DRC and in Gabon.	0	NA
Monitoring and evaluation	Number of consultations about gender inclusion	To be determined	0	

8 Risk management

8.1 Update your risk management matrix based on the analysis performed.

Table 15 - Risk management

Risk identification			Risk treatment			
Risk description	Identification period	Risk category	Risk evolution compared to the last report	Action(s)	Responsibility	Deadline
Reproducing discriminations against women based on gender	Consultation phases (one-on-one interview and workshop)	Low	NA	One-on-one interview specifically targeted at addressing gender equality from the start	Regional coordinator	2 nd Quarter 2026
				Integration of gender issues into the pre-feasibility assessment	Regional coordinator	Third quarter of 2026
impacts (positive or negative) to the human rights, lands, natural resources, territories,	Consultation phases (one-on-one interview and workshop)	Moderate	NA	One-on-one interview specifically targeted at addressing IP issues from the start	Regional coordinator ES safeguards coordinator and IP coordinator (if any)	2 nd Quarter 2026

Risk identification			Risk treatment			
and traditional livelihoods of indigenous peoples				Integration of IP and LC issues into the pre-feasibility assessment	Regional coordinator ES safeguards coordinator and IP coordinator (if any)	Third quarter of 2026
Exposure to unfamiliar security and health risks during travel	Consultation phases (one-on-one interview and workshop)	Low	NA	Travel preparation with security officer	Security officer	Second and Third quarter of 2026

8.2 9.2 Assessment of transparency and integrity

Table 16

Cases of fraud, misuse of funds, and corruption	Yes (how many for the reporting period and a brief description of each)	No
Allegations		x
Investigations		x
Sanctions (including recoveries made and amounts)		x
Cases of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment		x
Allegations		x
Investigations		x
Sanctions		x

As a reminder, in cases where the investigation department of an implementing organisation determines that an allegation relating to the implementation of activities for which that IO is responsible is sufficiently credible to warrant an investigation, the IO must promptly notify the Board of Directors and the Fund's administrative agent, provided that such notification does not compromise the conduct of the investigation, including, but not limited to, the prospects for recovery of funds or the safety or security of persons or assets.

9 Summary of deliverables

The preliminary databases have been uploaded to the [collaborative space folder](#).

Annexe 1 Draft methodology of the regional assessment of HIFOR potential in Central Africa

9.1.1.1 Context

The proposed project takes a regional, systematic approach to map and assess high integrity forest landscapes and the potential for HIFOR implementation in CAFI partner countries. This builds and expands on WCS experience in developing a regional assessment in the Amazon Basin and WCS ongoing work on HIFOR pilots in the Republic of Congo, Brazil and Colombia. The regional assessment of HIFOR potential in Central Africa consists of the following stages:

- Output 1: Identify and map high integrity forests and HIFOR eligible areas in the Congo Basin.
- Output 2: Identify priority landscapes for HIFOR development within these eligible areas.
- Output 3: Identify the necessary steps to operationalize the initiative (legal, financial, and technical feasibility).

This document outlines the proposed methodology to be employed in the regional assessment of HIFOR potential of sites in Central Africa (Outputs 1&2 of the CAFI-funded project).

9.1.1.2 Determining the HIFOR eligibility of management units

The first stage of the regional assessment for HIFOR potential is an eligibility screening. For that purpose, we compile a spatial database of existing management units across the CAFI partner countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. We start with protected area polygons from the Protected Planet database (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2025). Additional management unit types were obtained via national web portals or databases, including country-specific categories such as Community Managed Hunting Area and Nature Reserve. The database was then validated by the WCS staff of the countries where WCS operates.

Potential HIFOR eligibility of the management units was assessed using two sets of filters, drawn from the HIFOR Methodology⁸: a) size and ecological integrity criteria and b) management exclusion criteria. The first set of criteria is described as follows:

- Applicability condition: The total area of the unit shall meet a minimum threshold of 100,000 ha to ensure that nature- and climate-positive impacts will be significant and to increase the likelihood of delivering sustained results.
- Ecological integrity criterion 1 (*total forest extent*): the total forest extent within the unit must be $\geq 80,000$ ha.
- Ecological integrity criterion 2 (*proportion of high integrity forest*): the proportion of the forest in the unit that is of high integrity (as determined by a Forest Landscape Integrity Index (FLII) score at the pixel level of ≥ 9.8) must be $\geq 80\%$.

⁸ Available at www.wcs.org/hifor/methodology.

- Ecological integrity criterion 3 (*proportion of low integrity forest*): the proportion of the forest in the unit that is of low integrity (as determined by a Forest Landscape Integrity Index (FLII) score at the pixel level of ≤ 7.6) must be $\leq 5\%$.
- Ecological integrity criterion 4 (*proportion of anthropogenic non-forest land cover*): The proportion of the unit that is non-natural, non-forest land cover (e.g., agricultural land, intensively managed pastureland, mining, urban land, deforested but unused open lands etc), excluding from the area of the unit any areas of natural non-forest, must be $\leq 5\%$.

Estimates for ecological integrity criteria 1 through 3 are based on the Forest Landscape Integrity Index, FLII (Grantham et al. 2020). This index combines data on observed and inferred forest pressures, as well as lost forest connectivity, to produce the first globally consistent and continuous measure of forest integrity, reflecting the forests' degree of anthropogenic modification. FLII scores are calculated at a 300-meter resolution and range from 0 (lowest integrity) to 10 (highest integrity) (Grantham et al. 2020). Benchmarked thresholds were utilized to classify the continuous index into high, medium and low integrity forests. The FLII is conceptually aligned with the definition of ecological integrity in the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Ecological integrity criterion 4 can be assessed using various land use/land cover datasets, provided they include classifications that distinguish between anthropogenic and natural land cover types. In the Central Africa HIFOR assessment, we used data from the SBTN Natural Lands Map v1.1 (E. Mazur et al. 2025), a 2020 baseline map of natural and non-natural land covers intended for setting science-based targets for nature.

Next, we applied additional management exclusion criteria to rule out units overlapping with activities linked to significant deforestation, forest degradation, or greenhouse gas emissions (e.g., active mining, oil, gas, or timber concessions). We also rule out units where other ongoing projects could create conflicts with HIFOR project implementation (e.g., existing carbon or biodiversity projects). Figure 1 summarizes the eligibility screening stage.

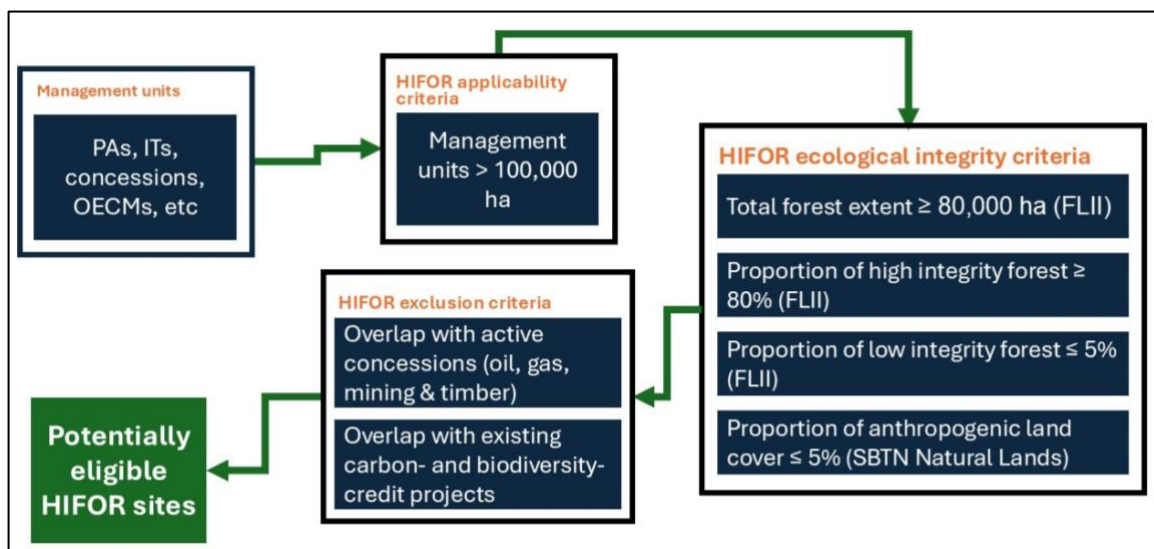


Figure 1. Steps to determine potential HIFOR eligibility of management units.

We use the term ‘potential eligibility’ because the criteria described in this note refers are only to a subset of the eligibility criteria outlined in the HIFOR methodology. Other key criteria — such as management quality, social considerations, and legal factors — depend on site-specific information. These are not suitable for an initial screening, which relies on public spatial datasets, and are instead assessed later during the feasibility stage using site-level data.

The results of the eligibility screening are presented through an interactive dashboard (Figure 2). The tool allows users to explore potentially eligible management units with filters by country, management category, and exclusion status. It provides a spatial overview of the distribution and characteristics of eligible sites and supports preliminary validation and stakeholder engagement.

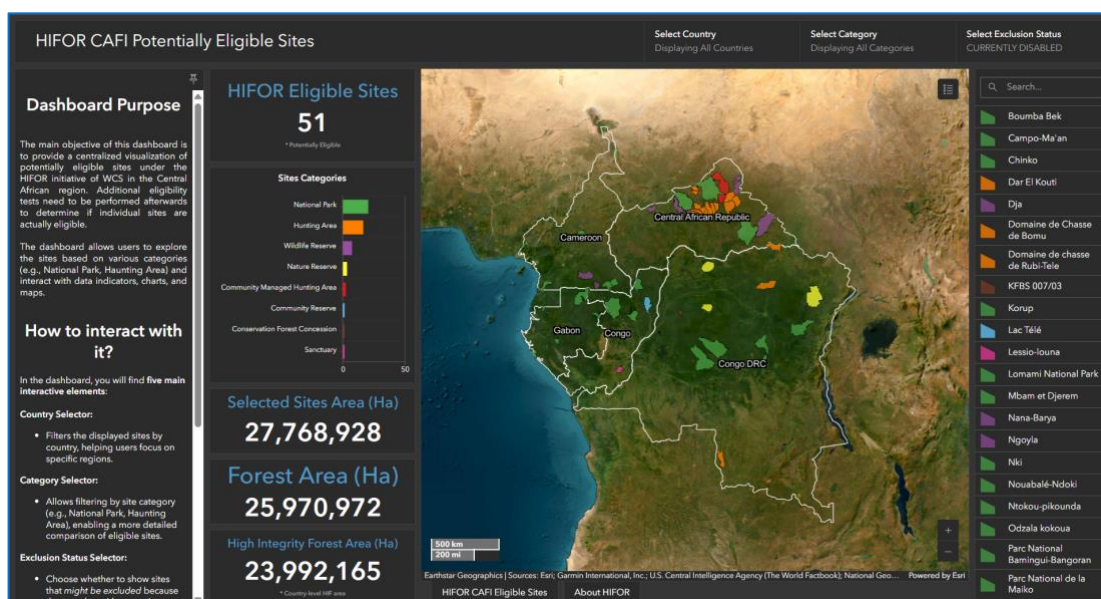


Figure 2. Interactive dashboard presenting the results of the HIFOR eligibility screening (available at <https://wcs-global.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/4bc73a2a48e5492cae4f76c7f7ba8c32>)

In the next stage, we prioritized management units that could potentially qualify as HIFOR. Only units located in the target countries — Gabon, the Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo — were assessed. This approach ensures access to reliable data and enables national WCS teams to engage stakeholders, validate the regional assessment, and identify steps to develop HIFOR projects at priority sites.

9.1.1.3 Prioritizing HIFOR-eligible management units

The prioritization exercise aimed at classifying eligible management units according to specific criteria. The proposed framework is adaptable to different political contexts or stakeholder groups. Sites were classified based on risk and opportunity for both implementing HIFOR projects and conserving high-integrity forests.

Working with WCS experts from the Forest and Climate Change, Spatial Planning, and regional Congo Basin teams, we evaluated spatially explicit datasets for their coverage and relevance to the prioritization objectives. By analyzing spatial patterns and statistical distributions across eligible management units, we defined the approach and thresholds for each dataset. Each unit is classified as ‘High’, ‘Medium’, or ‘Low Risk’ for risk criteria and ‘High’, ‘Medium’, or ‘Least Opportunity’ for opportunity criteria (Table 1). The process is flexible and can be refined following consultations with external stakeholders.

The proposed approach involved the following steps (Figure 3):

- **Assessment of risks.** Risks to forest integrity and HIFOR implementation, including armed conflict, climate change, and land-use change, were evaluated. Sites with high risk in any category are unlikely to be considered priority sites at this stage.
- **Assessment of opportunities.** Each unit was scored for carbon value (stocks, fluxes, and peatlands), biodiversity value (overlap with Key Biodiversity Areas, KBAs), management actions, and country-specific criteria such as overlap with Green Corridors.
- **Development of a decision-support tool.** An online interactive dashboard (Figure 4) was created to allow users to identify priority sites and tailor the prioritization to specific contexts using filters across different criteria.

Table 1. Description of prioritization criteria.

Dataset description	Effect	Source	Approach	Score design
Armed conflicts	Risk	ACLED database on human conflicts; Raleigh et al. 2010	Number of points of conflicts in the last 5 years inside management unit plus a buffer of 5 km	0 points of conflict - Low risk 1-4 points of conflict - Medium risk ≥ 5 points of conflict - High risk
Active and planned oil, gas & mining concessions	Risk	Government agencies	Overlap of the management unit with existing and planned oil, gas & mining concessions	No overlap - No risk Overlap with concessions under study/evaluation - Low risk Overlap with inactive & active exploration concessions - Medium risk Overlap with inactive exploitation concessions - High risk
Planned timber concessions	Risk	Government agencies	Overlap of the management unit with planned timber concessions	Overlap with planned concessions - High risk
Percentage of high integrity forests	Risk	HIFOR eligibility assessment	Percentage of high integrity forests per management unit	80-85 % - High risk 85-90 % - Medium risk > 90 % - Low risk
Active fire detections	Risk	FIRMS: Fire Information for Resource Management System (NASA)	Number of pixels within the last 5 years classified as fire pixels at least once per 100,000 ha	0-50 fire pixels - Low risk 50-100 fire pixels - Medium risk > 100 fire pixels - High Risk

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Climate unstable areas	Risk	Elsen et al. 2021	Percentage of climate unstable area (predicted to change life zones between current and future climate) per management unit	> 1% - No risk 1 - 5% - Low risk 5 - 10% - Medium risk > 10% - High risk
Predicted net loss of biomass	Risk	Uribe et al. 2023	Net biomass change between predictions of current and future biomass for the pixel covering the centroid of the management unit	> 0 Mg/ha - No risk (biomass gain) 0 - -2.5 Mg/ha - Low risk -2.5 - -10 Mg/ha - Medium risk < -10 Mg/ha - High risk
Forest Greenhouse Gas Net Flux	Opportunity	Harris et al. 2021	Average annual net forest carbon flux of the management unit	> -1.5 - Least opportunity -1.5 - -2.5 - Medium opportunity < 2.5 - High opportunity
Global Peatland extent	Opportunity	Melton et al. 2022	Percentage of peatland coverage per management unit	0-5% - Least opportunity 5-10% - Medium opportunity >10% - High opportunity
Global Above Ground Biomass	Opportunity	ESA CCI	Average above-ground biomass density of the management unit	< 200 Mg/ha - Least opportunity 200 -300 Mg/ha - Medium opportunity > 300 Mg/ha - High opportunity
Carbon Project Boundaries	Opportunity	Global Dataset of Nature-Based Carbon Offset Boundaries	Overlap with carbon projects within a 10km buffer around the management unit	Doesn't overlap - Least opportunity Overlaps - High opportunity
Key Biodiversity Areas	Opportunity	World Database of KBA (WDKBA)	Percentage of area overlap with existing KBAs per management unit	0-5% - Least opportunity 6-50% - Medium opportunity >50% - High opportunity

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Proximity to Community Forest Concessions (CFCL, applies to DRC only)	Opportunity	WCS regional teams	Overlap with CFCL polygons + a 10 km buffer	No overlap with CFCLs + 10km buffer - Least Opportunity: Overlap with CFCLs + 10km buffer - High Opportunity:
Overlap with Green Corridors (applies to DRC only)	Opportunity	WCS regional teams	Overlap with Green Corridors	No overlap with Green Corridor - Least Opportunity Overlap with Green Corridor - High Opportunity
Active management actions (applies to DRC, ROC, and GBN only)	Opportunity	WCS regional teams	Support by official government management and/or by external partners or arrangements	No active management activities - Least Opportunity Active management activities - High Opportunity

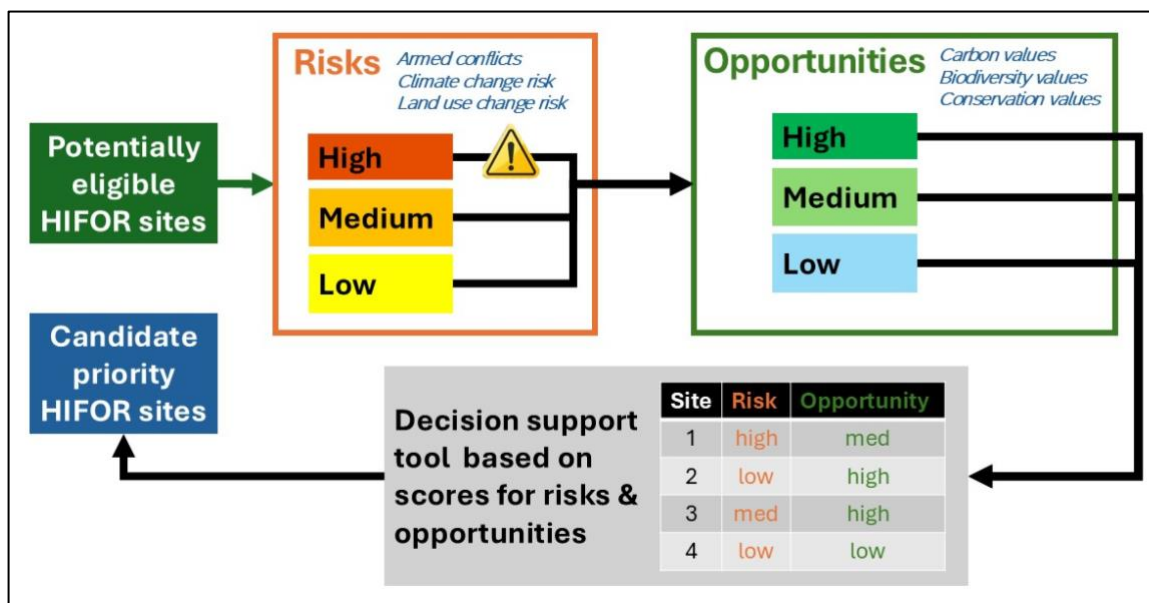


Figure 3. Framework for the prioritization of HIFOR-eligible management units.

This prioritization is appropriate for this stage in the growth of HIFOR as it will target resources to sites with a higher likelihood of successful implementation as well as high associated environmental values that may appeal to buyers. However, as HIFOR becomes better established, it may be appropriate to place an increased emphasis on sites with higher levels of risk, as these represent areas where impacts on the regional rate of decline in ecological integrity might be highest.

As a decision-support framework, multi-objective prioritization is well suited to evaluate multiple benefits under different priorities. WCS country programs and relevant stakeholders can provide guidance on political and governance considerations, which may help identify additional factors to include in the prioritization.

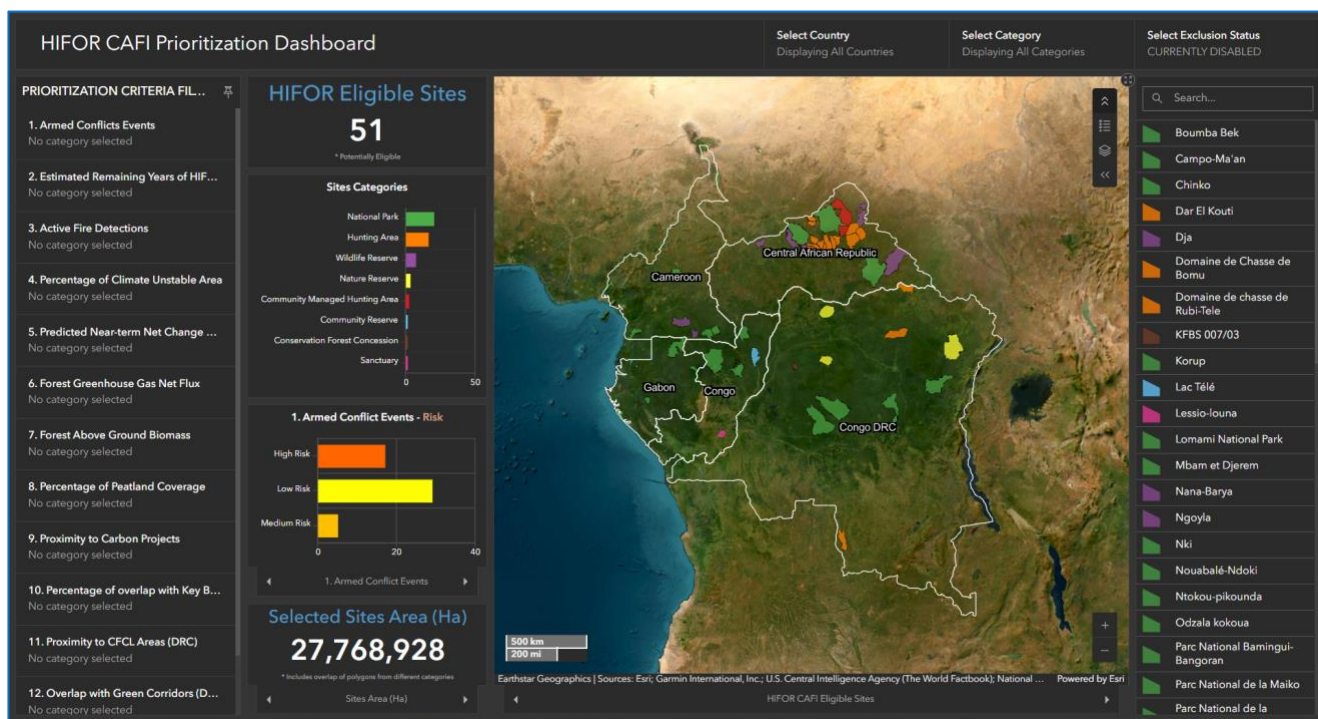


Figure 4. Interactive dashboard with HIFOR Prioritization Results (<https://wsglobal.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/99305dd4631a449dbf7f9baca2cad705>).

Annexe 2 - Feasibility Assessment Report: HIFOR Implementation in Republic of Congo, DRC, and Gabon

Below is the proposed framework of the feasibility assessment (output 3).

Feasibility Assessment Report Framework

1. Executive Summary

- Overview of HIFOR and the purpose of the feasibility assessment.
- Summary of feasibility findings (what we know - what still need to be assessed).
- Key recommendations and proposed scope of future assessments.
- Summary of the expression of country/site managers interest, alignment with CAFI priorities, alignment with bilateral donors.

2. Background and Context

- Introduction to HIFOR: objectives, principles, and relevance to Central Africa.
- Situation of HIFOR at the global level
- Summary of the results of the eligibility and prioritization exercises
- Overview of CAFI's strategic goals and how HIFOR aligns.

3. Determining legal and governance feasibility (at the national and provincial level)

- One section for each target country
- Summary of what we have already learned:
 - Preliminary review of national legal frameworks relevant to carbon finance, forest/carbon governance, key stakeholders and partners (including governmental bodies), land tenure, and benefit-sharing.
 - Identification of enabling conditions and legal gaps, including the government bodies we need to engage with, potential legal agreements that will need to be entered into and other structural considerations (setting up legal entities, tax, etc.)
 - Feedback from stakeholder consultations
- Recommendations for the scope of the legal and governance feasibility assessment

4. Determining technical feasibility (at the site level)

- Summary of what we have already learned/what the current situation is:
 - How to set up a pilot project in a way that supports a sectoral solution later
 - Level of capacity required from the organization proposing the pilot
 - Level of finance required for the feasibility and start-up phases.
- Recommendations for the scope of the technical feasibility assessment for a given site [please see note Tom shared separately - can be condensed as required]; it incorporates the following bullet, which can be deleted
 - the capacities needed to set up one of these projects, in general? Assessment of technical capacity for:
 - GHG flux monitoring and MRV systems.
 - Forest conservation.
 - Benefit sharing
 - Estimated costs of conservation
 - Etc...

- Feedback from stakeholder consultations [not communities at this stage - but possibly initial consultations with governments - under section 4]

5. Determining financial feasibility (both at site and market levels or even regional level)

- Summary of what we have already learnt/what the current situation is:
 - Looking for outcome payors, potential off takers for NNNP
 - Do we expect those challenges and opportunities to be the same for other HIFOR projects in the region? Yes/no and why
 - What are the different financial models we could use to finance future HIFOR projects in the region, including potential investors and off takers
 - Estimated costs of structuring financial arrangements
 - Potential revenue streams.
 - Feedback from stakeholder consultations, including opportunities for alignment with bilateral donor portfolios (UK, France, Germany, EU, US).
- Recommendations for the scope of the financial feasibility assessment (How would we go forward in the future based on the first 3 bullets)

6. Country Readiness and Interest

- Summary of each country's political will, institutional capacity, and interest in HIFOR. + alignment with bilateral donors portfolio

7. Annexes

- Maps
- Stakeholder consultation summaries.
- Technical data and reference

Annexe 3 - Stakeholders' consultation plans for Gabon and DRC

Objectives of the stakeholders' consultations :

- Introduce the HIFOR concept to the different stakeholders (relevant authorities : forests, PA, environment, carbon ; other potential implementers : NGOs, CSOs ; experts ; advocates for gender equality and IPs
- Explain the project and present the preliminary results on eligible sites and priority sites
- Collect the feedback of relevance of the initiative for the country
- Collect specific guidance on implementation

High level stakeholders

Country	Stakeholders	subjects
Gabon	Ministry for forests ANPN Executive Secretary and Scientific Department DGEPN CAFI Conseil National Climat (CNC)	Present the initiative (goal, brief description of the concept, etc.) Present where we are now : pilots and still marketing (we want to wait until we have a proof of concept before expanding) Present the project objectives Present the preliminary results (output 1 and 2) Questions on :
DRC	SG MEDD Carbon Task Force CAFI FONAREDD ICCN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance/applicability of the initiative for the country environmental context? Legal context ? any specificities ? • what do you think of the preliminary results ? both eligible and priority sites

Other stakeholders

Country	Stakeholders	subjects
Gabon	<u>CSOs</u> Brainforest, Croissance Saine Environnement, NADA, Terre et Communauté MINAPYGA, AGAFI EZENGUI, ADACO <u>Experts</u>	Present the initiative (goal, brief description of the concept, etc.) Present where we are now : pilots and still marketing (we want to wait until we have a proof of concept before expanding) Present the project objectives and methodologies Present the preliminary results (output 1 and 2)

	<p>IRET/CENAREST, Herbarium,</p> <p>NGOs WWF, TNC, KBA, Panthera</p>	<p>Questions on :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance/applicability of the initiative for the country environmental context? Legal context ? any specificities ? • what do you think of the preliminary results ? both eligible and priority sites • what are the local/national specificities that should be taken into account when reflecting about this initiative for political reasons, economical reasons, etc. • question on gender if relevant: dependency on forest, impacts on women ?, what should the initiative pay attention to in order to address the gender inequalities, how to best involve them in the design of an HIFOR project implementation, decision making process, FPIC process and benefit sharing mechanism process, GRM ? • question on IP if relevant: dependency on forest, impacts on IP ?, what should the initiative pay attention to in order to address the inequalities IP are facing, how to best involve them in the design of an HIFOR project implementation, decision making process, FPIC process and benefit sharing mechanism process, GRM ?
<p>DRC</p>	<p>CSOs Repalef IGEF CFLEDD ANAPAC JURISTRALE LYNAPICO PIDEP GTER IIDJ OECAN DGPA CAGFT APEM CODED</p> <p>Private sector conservation concession owners: SOFORMA, ERA et CFT</p> <p>NGOs WWF, WRI, APN, RRI, Tenure Facility</p>	