



CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Joint workshops on the use of digital platforms for investigating illegal activities in the forestry sector in Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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An exchange of experiences between members of civil society organizations, researchers, and investigative journalists covering tropical forests, in order to identify potential areas of collaboration and strengthen the fight against illegal logging in the Congo Basin.

Introduction

In the Congo Basin, independent forest monitoring carried out by civil society organizations (CSOs) and investigative journalists shares common objectives: combating illegal logging and establishing sustainable forest management and governance. Unfortunately, even though these two groups generally rely on similar open-source digital data platforms to document their analyses and findings, they operate in isolation. There have been almost no opportunities to share experiences regarding the methodological approaches used or the joint dissemination of results from field missions and investigations. This results in a lack of synergy in the work undertaken.

Establishing formal or informal collaboration between CSOs active in the field of independent forest monitoring and investigative journalists could yield significant results in the fight against illegal logging. This can include providing key evidence that the relevant authorities can readily rely on in their legal proceedings. A more collaborative approach will enhance the effectiveness and credibility of investigative journalism on illegal logging and the work of CSOs conducting independent forest monitoring.

Two workshops were held on June 24–25, 2025, in Douala, Cameroon, and on September 23–24, 2025, in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the use of digital platforms for investigating illegal activities in the forestry sector. These workshops helped identify areas of mutual interest and led to the consensus adoption of a shared vision and areas for collaboration.

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These conference proceedings reflect the presentations and discussions of participants and do not necessarily represent the views of the World Resources Institute or other participating institutions.

Workshop objectives

- To learn about the approaches, techniques, and tools of investigative journalism and those used in the independent monitoring of tropical forests by CSOs.
- To discuss the differences and synergies between the methods used by CSOs and investigative journalists from the Pulitzer Center to gather information on illegal logging.
- To exchange best practices regarding the use of data from open-source platforms to document and expose illegal logging networks, launch advocacy campaigns, and provide evidence to policymakers and other stakeholders.
- To discuss professional, legal, and ethical strategies for collaboration and pooling efforts to enhance the credibility and reliability of published information.

During the workshops

The workshops were crucial for addressing the challenges faced by stakeholders in the timber sector in Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These challenges can be summarized as follows:

1. The ineffectiveness of sanctions imposed on illegal loggers, which fail to deter those with substantial financial resources
2. The lack of human, material, and financial resources within forestry administrations to cover all logging areas
3. The lack of coordination among sectoral agencies in the enforcement and monitoring of forestry laws and regulations
4. The lack of involvement by other agencies in consultation frameworks for monitoring compliance in the timber industry
5. The delays in making revenues from forest resource exploitation available to local communities
6. The peddling of influence and complicity of certain officials in logging operations
7. The mobility or relocation of illegal logging operators

Summary of group discussions

The group work made it possible to assess the collaboration needs of CSOs and investigative journalists to strengthen the effectiveness of the fight against illegal logging in the three target countries. These needs and expectations, consolidated during focus group discussions, informed the formulation of areas for collaboration.

The participants adopted by consensus an overarching vision and the areas of collaboration described below.

FIGURE 1 | Douala workshop, June 24-25, 2025



FIGURE 2 | Kinshasa workshop bringing together participants from the two Congos (DRC and Congo-Brazzaville), September 23-24, 2025



1. A vision for collaboration between CSOs active in independent forest monitoring and environmental investigative journalists

The vision for collaboration between CSOs and investigative journalists is as follows:

To deepen and strengthen collaboration between CSOs active in independent forest monitoring and investigative journalists, to further professionalize their work, and to amplify information related to the fight against illegal logging in order to strengthen the sustainable management of forests in the Congo Basin.

Or:

To revitalize collaboration between CSOs and investigative journalists through data and information sharing, the implementation of joint activities, and the facilitation of platforms for consultation and collaboration, to amplify and strengthen the fight against illegal logging and have a positive and significant impact on the sustainable management of forests in the Congo Basin.

2. Potential areas of collaboration

The framework for collaboration between CSOs and investigative journalists consists of three areas of mutual interest: better documentation of illegal logging sites; the production of evidence usable by law enforcement officials at the national, regional, and international levels; and, finally, the strategic coordination of advocacy actions.

2.1 Area 1: The sharing of information and data on legal and illegal logging

Activities to be carried out:

1. Identify the types of information and data produced by the CSOs and investigative journalists. This includes analyses of legal texts governing forest logging operations, thematic analyses and policy briefs, reports from independent forest monitoring missions, reports from investigative missions, findings from journalistic investigations, and so on.
2. Identify reliable sources for the information and data produced by the CSOs and investigative journalists.
3. Collaborate and provide technical support for the processing of information and data produced by the CSOs and investigative journalists.
4. Establish guidelines for sharing information and data on logging and suspected cases of illegal logging.
5. Improve the format of information sharing platforms, data on logging, and suspected cases of illegal logging.

The ultimate goal of this action area is to break down barriers, build a foundation of trust and mutual understanding, and create a climate of—and space for—sustainable collaboration.

Participants from Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo identified the types of data to be shared; the methods and tools to be shared; and the joint activities to be carried out to increase effectiveness, efficiency, and credibility while amplifying the impacts.

2.1.1 TYPES OF DATA TO BE SHARED

1. From CSOs to investigative journalists

- Reports from independent observation missions
- Mapping data (maps, GPS coordinates)
- Details of key contacts and experts
- Evidence types, such as photos and videos
- Official documents (forest titles, agreements, legal texts, specifications, institutional frameworks, policy decisions, land-use plans, simplified management plans, annual logging permits, operational plans, five-year plans, proof of payment of forest taxes and fees, implementation status of social agreements, etc.)
- List of concessionaires (the actual owners of the titles)
- Exact location of the titles
- Histories of forest litigation
- Relevant analyses, links, and online resources

2. From investigative journalists to CSOs

- Journalistic outputs (reports and investigations; press interviews; radio, TV, and social media content; etc.)
- Contacts (institutional and practitioner, other journalists, etc.)
- Professional networks for sharing information

2.1.2 METHODS AND TOOLS FOR COLLABORATION

1. Methods

- Informal or formal collaboration, depending on the circumstances and expectations of the various parties

However, in accordance with the code of journalistic ethics, a journalist must not sign a pre-collaboration agreement or a confidentiality agreement with a CSO or any other source, in order to ensure independence, objectivity, and balance in the reporting of information.

2. Tools

Prioritize the following collaborative workspaces and platforms for sharing confidential or sensitive information:

- Signal
- Proton
- Google Drive
- Dropbox
- Asana
- Zoom
- Confluence (paid)

3. Types of data to share

- Raw data in various formats: digital, paper-based, etc.
- Public and non-public (confidential) data
- Mapping data

4. Data sharing terms

- Use of secure platforms as a means of sharing
- Formal and informal meetings for discussions

5. Use of data

- Requirement to cite sources
- Requirement for prior consent from the data provider before any publication
- Respect for anonymity where necessary

2.2 Area 2: Implementation of joint or sequential activities

Joint activities to be carried out may include:

1. Conducting further investigations following a publication by a journalist or a CSO
2. Joint training sessions on investigative techniques, fact checking, digital security, forestry legislation, land legislation, mining legislation, and international conventions (CITES, Convention on Biological Diversity, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, etc.)

2.3 Area 3: Facilitating platforms for consultation, networking, and collaboration between CSOs and investigative journalists

The activities selected for this area of mutual interest are:

1. Facilitating consultation and networking platforms between CSOs and journalists;
2. Establishing an informal framework for collaboration between CSOs and journalists, based on secure data sharing;
3. Strengthening the capacities of stakeholders, particularly through regular training in environmental investigation, as well as technical sessions on the use of digital platforms (GFW, Interactive Forest Atlas, OTP, Sayari, etc.);
4. Developing tailored operational strategies to overcome the challenges encountered in the field, particularly those related to security, access to information, and mobility in forested areas;
5. Establishing a monitoring and evaluation system to measure the impact of published investigations and articles, as well as the effectiveness of CSO–investigative journalist collaborations in combating illegal logging; and
6. Promoting strategic communication and the dissemination of investigation findings to public decision-makers, donors, and the general public to enhance the credibility and impact of these efforts.

Final impressions of the workshop

In summary, the participants agreed on:

- The identification of areas of mutual interest through group work and presentations by the various mixed working groups.
- The need to develop a 24-month roadmap to organize meetings between the Pulitzer Center group, which brings together journalists, and WRI, which brings together CSOs.
- The imperative to include the economic dimension in the various themes and articles to be developed jointly by the two groups (CSOs and journalists).
- The need to innovate through the systematic inclusion of the international dimension in press articles to better connect national and regional issues with international ones, promote accountability at the international level, and attract more donors.
- The building of a relationship of trust so that collaboration does not require a charter or MOU that could violate journalistic ethics, would be overly formal, and could slow down the process in the event of requests through administrative channels and hinder actions requiring urgent intervention. However, networking and mutual assistance should be promoted.
- Recognition that CSOs should produce multiple copies of independent observation reports, one of which should be intended for the forestry administration, and others for various media outlets covering environmental issues. This would directly relay the information to reach the intended audience more quickly and elicit a rapid response from decision-makers.
- The urgency of collaboration in sustainable forest management in the Congo Basin in a context of complex supply chains and the multisectoral nature of illegal activities requires multidisciplinary interpretations.

Agenda

TABLE 1 | General agenda for workshops, focused on sharing experiences and lessons learned among CSOs, researchers, investigative journalists, and prospects for collaboration

Scheduled time	Educational objective of the module
DAY 1	
8 a.m. to 9 a.m.	<p>Opening ceremony:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Welcome, getting to know the participants ▪ Welcome remarks from WRI ▪ Welcome remarks from the Pulitzer Center (Augustine) ▪ Introduction of participants (interactive) (Madeleine) ▪ Presentation of pre-assessment results (pre-workshop) (Achille and Madeleine) ▪ Presentation of the training session objectives and agenda ▪ Clarification of participant consent and respect for anonymity (WRI and Pulitzer Center) ▪ Group photo
9 a.m. to 10 a.m.	<p>Module 1: Overview of CSO investigative approaches and techniques regarding illegal logging: An analysis of commissioned independent forest monitoring (IFM) practices</p> <p><i>Open discussion on the challenges posed by current practices</i></p>
10 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.	<p>Group photos</p> <p>Breakfast/Morning break</p>
10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.	<p>Module 2: Case Study 1. Publication of independent forest monitoring reports: Data, actions, and impacts</p> <p><i>Open discussion on the challenges posed by methods to sustainably reduce illegal logging</i></p>
12 p.m. to 1 p.m.	<p>Module 3: Investigative journalism on tropical forests: Tools, techniques, sources, data processing, actions, and impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Session 1: Approaches and techniques of investigative journalists ▪ Session 2: Investigations into illegal logging by Pulitzer Center fellows <p><i>Open discussion on the challenges posed by journalistic investigative methods regarding illegal logging</i></p>
1 p.m. to 2 p.m.	Lunch
2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.	<p>Access to data</p> <p>Open-source platform: WRI</p> <p>Module 4: Open Timber Portal (OTP) with use cases from CSOs and law enforcement officials</p> <p>Module 7: Overview of data platforms used by Pulitzer Center Fellows: Features and examples with practical case studies</p> <p>Tools: UN Comtrade, Sayari, RINData</p> <p><i>Open discussion on the opportunities and challenges of investigating using data from digital platforms (subscription-based, open access, paid, restricted, and secure for private and government systems)</i></p>
3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	<p>Module 8: Explore the platforms to assess their potential usefulness for investigations into timber supply chains and share experiences; in small groups (mixed CSO and journalist groups to discuss and draft an article on using this tool for a target media outlet—print media, radio, television, social media, etc.)</p> <p><i>Note: To be submitted on Day 2 of the workshop</i></p>
End of day 1	

TABLE 1 | General agenda for workshops, focused on sharing experiences and lessons learned among CSOs, researchers, investigative journalists, and prospects for collaboration (cont.)

Scheduled time	Educational objective of the module
DAY 2	
9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback on Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open discussion on outstanding topics from Day 1 (hot topics) Brief overview of areas of mutual interest to be explored further during the group sessions Presentation of practical examples of collaboration between CSOs, government, media, and universities Presentation of group work Presentation of case studies by media type
10:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.	Breakfast/Morning break
11 a.m. to 1 p.m.	<p>Module 9: Reflections on collaboration between CSOs and environmental investigative journalists so that they can support each other in their work</p> <p>Group work to define areas of collaboration between CSOs and investigative journalists</p> <p><i>Open discussion of avenues for collaboration regarding data sharing, report production, and combined and/or joint actions to significantly reduce illegal logging in the countries of operation</i></p>
1 p.m. to 2 p.m.	Lunch
2 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.	<p>Presentation of group work in two sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Session 1: Presentation of key elements of collaboration and consolidated information sharing Session 2: Role-playing of collaboration <p>Each group will explain, based on the consolidated document on areas of collaboration, how they would work together as a team to investigate, report on instances of illegal logging in supply chains, advocate for action, and provide evidence to law enforcement officials to address legal issues</p> <p>Moderators: WRI and Pulitzer Center</p>
3:45 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.	Overview of current trends: Deforestation, EUDR, CITES, the CEMAC+DRC decision to halt log exports, etc.
4:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.	<p>Closing session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-workshop evaluation and next steps Message from the participants' representative for each group: CSOs and journalists Closing remarks by WRI Closing remarks from the Pulitzer Center
End of session and logistics	

Participants

June 24–25, 2025, Douala

	NAME	AFFILIATED ORGANIZATION
1	Alain Blaise Fotso	Planète Urgence/CEAS-GRNE Intern
2	Franck Ndjodo	SAILD/CEAS-GRNE Intern
3	Marie Clarissa Kengmo	GDA/CEAS-GRNE Intern
4	Alida Georgette Soudjeouda	ECODEV/CEAS-GRNE Intern
5	Harrison A. Nnoko Ngaaje	AJESH
6	Jean Cyrille Owada	FLAG
7	Angeline Modjo	FODER
8	Achille Wankeu	CED
9	Benoit Anthony Ndameu	Facilitator 1: Ethics
10	Dumont Fopi Tazo	Facilitator 2: Private database management
11	Patrice Bigombe Logo	Facilitator 3: Facilitation for the co-development of the strategic framework for collaboration between CSOs and investigative journalists
12	Duclair Mbouna	WRI National Coordinator
13	Maxwell Manga	Administration and finance specialist
14	Igerha Bampa	OTP/WRI Technical Assistant
15	Borice Mekok	FASA student
16	Dr. Achille Djeagou	OTP Manager/WRI
17	His Majesty Bruno Mvondo	ReCTrad
18	Line Renee Batongue	SciLife—Cameroon scientific journalism association
19	Dr. Denis Sonwa	Director of RDI-Africa/WRI
20	Stephane Kehou	Researcher, Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech—University of Liège; affiliated with WWF Cameroon
21	Dr. Christelle Kenne	Assistant Researcher, Rural Capital Advisory Academy
22	Madeleine Ngeunga	Pulitzer Center
23	Nadège Christelle Bowa	The Messenger
24	Jean Paul Mbia	Le360 Afrique
25	Boris Ngounou	Radio Tiemeni Siantou
26	Gibrile Kenfack Tsabdo	Cameroon Business Today
27	Fanta Mabo	Freelance journalist
28	Nyemeck Beat Christophe	Freelance journalist
29	Adrienne Engono	Science Watch
30	Elias Ngalame	Freelance journalist

September 23–24, 2025, Kinshasa

	NAME	AFFILIATED ORGANIZATION
1	Christelle Muamba	OGF
2	Essylot Lubala	OGF
3	Celine Ekavu	OGF
4	Julien Mathe	GASHE
5	Florent Kay	OCEAN
6	Jonas Bola	CADEM
7	Christian Bwenda	PREMICONGO
8	Pastor Bakulu	
9	Lilian Barros	CJJ
10	Maixent Fortunin Agnimbat Emeka	FGDH
11	Nina Kiyindou	OCDH
12	Daniel Ndinga	CAGDF
13	Trésor Nzila	CAD
14	Childéric Kilolo	OGF
15	Alphonse Daudet Towela Tokinda	OCEAN
16	Trésor Bondjembo	CTIDD
17	Amen Bazabana	CAGDF
18	Prof. Pi-Claude Bolaluembe	CERFOB
19	Jessy Tsoala	ERAIFT
20	Blanche Simona	Radio Congo
21	Denise Kavira	Naturel.cd
22	Jean Fundi	Karibu Newspaper
23	Peter Gbiako	Bonsomi Community Radio
24	JC Issey Ntwanza	The Primary Sovereign.cd
25	Marien Nzikou Massala	Mayilanews
26	Sarah Mangaza	Environews RDC
27	Bienfait Luganywa	7 out of 7.cd
28	Constance Tekitila	ACP
29	Myriam Iragi	Top Congo
30	Madeleine Ngeunga	Pulitzer Center
31	Augustine Kasambule	Pulitzer Center
32	Dr. Denis Jean Sonwa	WRI
33	Dr. Achille Djeagou Tchoffo	WRI
34	Joelle Nkosi	WRI
35	Roger Mambeta	WRI
36	Bora Masumbuko	WRI
37	Guy Shemisi	WRI
38	Patrick James Djakani Okoko	WRI

Abbreviations

ACP	Congolese Press Agency
AJESH	Ajemalebu Self-Help
CADEM	Mai Ndombe Community Development Support Center
CAGDF	Support Circle for Sustainable Forest Management
CEAS-GRNE	Center of Excellence and Application for Monitoring Natural Resources and Environmental Management
CED	Center for Environment and Development
CERAD	Centre for Research and Action for Sustainable Development in Central Africa
CERFOB	Center for Research in Forestry and Biodiversity
CJJ	Junior Legal Clinic
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CTIDD	Center for Innovative Technologies and Sustainable Development
ECODEV	Ecosystems and Development
EIA	Environmental Investigation Agency
ERAIFT	Regional Postgraduate School on Integrated Management of Tropical Forests and Lands
FASA	Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences
FGDH	Forum for Governance and Human Rights
FLAG	Field Legality Advisory Group
FODER	Forests and Rural Development
GASHE	Action Group to Save Humanity and the Environment
GDA	Green Development Advocates
IFM	Independent Forest Monitoring
NICFI	Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative
OCDH	Congolese Human Rights Observatory
OCEAN	Organization of Ecologists and Friends of Nature
OGF	Forest Governance Observatory
OTP	Open Timber Portal
PREMICONGO	Protection of Miombo Ecoregions in the Congo
RecTRAD	Network of Traditional Leaders for the Sustainable Management of Ecosystems in Central Africa
SAILD	Support Service for Local Development Initiatives
SciLife	Association of Science Journalists and Communicators of Cameroon
WRI	World Resources Institute

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Duclaire Mbouna, WRI Coordinator, Cameroon

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Joelle Nkossi, Partnerships Manager, WRI, DRC

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Lilian Barros, CJJ Coordinator, Republic of the Congo

Trésor Bondjembo, CEAS-GRNE Graduate, DRC

Blanche Simona, Journalist, Pulitzer Center Fellow, Republic of the Congo

About the Pulitzer Center

Our mission is to champion the power of stories to make complex issues relevant and inspire action.

The Pulitzer Center has a bold vision: to be the home of the world's most innovative and impactful reporting, with journalism as a key element in mobilizing society through public engagement strategies. Founded in 2006 by Jon Sawyer, the Center is a vital source of support for investigative reporting in the United States and around the world. The thousands of journalists and educators in our networks cover more than 80 countries. Our work reaches tens of millions of people each year through our media partners and a global and regional public engagement strategy.

We believe that when people and communities actively engage with systemic challenges, they will find solutions together. By supporting journalists in their in-depth investigations, the production of compelling stories, and the engagement of diverse audiences, we create a ripple effect of impact that changes the world. The result? Policy reforms, public awareness, and community empowerment.

About WRI

WRI works to improve people's lives, protect and restore nature, and stabilize the climate. As an independent research organization, we leverage our data, expertise, and global reach to influence policy and catalyze change across systems like food, land, water, energy, and cities. Our 2,000+ staff work on the ground in more than a dozen focus countries and with partners in over 50 nations.

Disclaimer

This compendium of roundtable discussions among members of CSOs, science journalists, and environmental investigative journalists reflects the participants' presentations and discussions and does not necessarily represent the views of the WRI, the Pulitzer Center, or other participating institutions. This manuscript was produced with financial support from NICFI and should in no way be considered to reflect the position of the Kingdom of Norway in the Republic of Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



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