

# THE AFRICAMUSEUM AND THE DR CONGO TODAY

Partnerships in  
the framework of  
the Belgian  
Cooperation  
programme

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## MAIN PARTNERS IN THE DR CONGO:

- Académie des Beaux-Arts de Kinshasa
- Centre de Recherche en Sciences naturelles, Lwiro
- Centre de Recherches géologiques et minières
- Centre de Surveillance de la Biodiversité
- École régionale postuniversitaire d'Aménagement et de Gestion intégrés des Forêts et Territoires tropicaux
- Institut des Musées nationaux du Congo
- Institut géographique du Congo
- Institut national de Recherche biomédicale
- Institut supérieur pédagogique de Bukavu
- Institut supérieur pédagogique de Goma
- Institut national pour l'Étude et la Recherche agronomiques
- Musée géologique de Bukavu
- Protection civile
- Texaf Bilembo
- Université de Goma
- Université de Kinshasa
- Université de Kisangani
- Université de Lubumbashi
- Université officielle de Bukavu
- Université Président Kasa-Vubu

# THE AFRICAMUSEUM AND THE DR CONGO TODAY: PARTNERSHIPS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE BELGIAN COOPERATION PROGRAMME

The Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA-AfricaMuseum) aspires to be a leading center for research and knowledge on the natural and cultural heritage of Sub-Saharan Africa. Through its collections, research and outreach, the museum plays a pivotal role in fostering mutual understanding, promoting sustainability, and contributing to societal well-being, both in Belgium and Africa. Partnerships are at the heart of the institute's work.

For its cooperation partnerships in Africa, the AfricaMuseum is financially supported by the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD). Although the activities in this framework take place in eight African countries, a major part focusses on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo ). Key themes are the study, management and conservation of cultural heritage; the assessment of natural hazards; the conservation of biodiversity; the fight against tropical diseases; and the sustainable management of natural resources. Partnerships of equality, quality and empowerment are built through co-creation. Sustainable capacity development and a focus on gender equality are the guiding principles for all activities. The projects aim to harness scientific results and data to address societal needs and global challenges.

In this leaflet, you will find an overview of the partnerships of the AfricaMuseum with partners in DR Congo in the framework of the Belgian Cooperation programme from 2024 to 2029, listed according to the main fields of work.

# STUDY, MANAGEMENT, AND CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

## Leveraging history and heritage for sustainable and inclusive development in the city of Boma

History and heritage are leveraged to promote inclusive and sustainable development in the city of Boma, a former colonial capital along the lower Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Through joint research and training of local researchers in history and museology, new historical information about Boma is uncovered and made widely accessible. To this end, a partnership has been established between the Université de Kinshasa (UNIKIN), the Université Président Kasa-Vubu (UKV) in Boma, and the AfricaMuseum. It is expected that the training of Congolese researchers on history and heritage and the dissemination of new information and narratives will fuel new interest at various policy levels and create opportunities for local economic development.

## Cultural and ecological knowledge in undocumented languages in the DR Congo

The Université de Lubumbashi (UNILU), the Université de Kinshasa (UNIKIN) and the AfricaMuseum are documenting around fifty local languages in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Documenting these languages, some of which are endangered, gives voice to local knowledge, promotes the cultures involved, and integrates them in the discourse on global societal and environmental sustainability. This way, the project wants to acknowledge the indispensable but often neglected role of local languages and the importance of anchoring development initiatives locally.



*Study of the archives as part of the FORMARCH training at the AfricaMuseum in 2023.*

## **Training in collections, archives, storage operations, provenance and historical methods**

In collaboration with the École du Patrimoine africain (EPA) in Benin, the AfricaMuseum organizes training modules for participants, mainly from Central Africa, in security and storage organization, collection management, historical research, archival operations and provenance research. These training programmes target professionals active in museums, libraries, archival centers, arts centers, and academic settings. After a short online module, the selected participants undergo intensive onsite training in Benin. The training may also include a research visit to the AfricaMuseum.

## **Heritage management and conservation**

The Académie des Beaux-Arts (ABA), the Institut des Musées nationaux de Congo (IMNC, which includes the Musée national de la République démocratique du Congo (MNRDC) and all provincial museums), and the Université de Kinshasa (UNIKIN), together

with the AfricaMuseum, build capacity for the management, conservation and promotion of museum collections. To achieve this, the project has four main axes of activity: supporting academic research, providing training courses, fostering synergies among involved actors, and offering technical support to improve the accessibility of collections.

## **CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY**

### **Central african fish diversity**

The Congo Basin is home to an exceptional diversity of fish species. These fishes are also a major source of animal protein for many human populations living in the basin. However, little is known about them. There is also a lack of species-level taxonomic knowledge, hindering research into their biology and the impact of fishing and other human activities on existing and exploited fish populations.

Three key partner institutions in the DR Congo (the Université de Lubumbashi (UNILU), the ISP-Bukavu and the Université de Kisangani (UNIKIS)), one in the Republic of the Congo (the Université Marien Ngouabi (UMNG)), one in Burundi (the Université du Burundi (UB)), and the AfricaMuseum conduct research and develop common expertise on this subject, both in the field and using the museum's existing fish collections in order to study their species-level diversity and evolution in the Congo Basin. More specifically, the study of fish diversity in ten protected areas in the Congo Basin, seven of which are in the DR Congo, is further targeted. The goal is to document the fish diversity of each of these protected areas and make proposals to further improve the protection and sustainable use, as a source of food caught mainly using traditional fishing gear, of this natural resource.

## **ASSESSMENT OF NATURAL HAZARDS**

### **Natural hazards, risks and society in central Africa**

Natural hazards in Central Africa have a significant negative impact on development. The African Great Lakes region is prone to frequent volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, flooding, and landslides that often have dramatic consequences in these dynamic environments where population growth is high and land use change significant. These events, however, remain relatively under-researched.

Several scientific and academic institutions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda will cooperate with the AfricaMuseum to assess natural hazards and associated risks. Citizen science and awareness-raising are among the approaches implemented, in collaboration with disaster risk management institutions, laying the groundwork for effective disaster risk reduction and early warning strategies in Central Africa. Sustainability of the results is assured

through the development of expertise in relevant fields via support for academic and technical training programmes.

## FIGHT AGAINST TROPICAL DISEASES

### Malaria and bilharzia, vector-borne diseases

Vector-borne diseases are a major global public health burden, affecting more than 1 billion people worldwide. Malaria and bilharzia (also known as schistosomiasis or snail fever), are the two most common vector-borne diseases and, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), the main causes of morbidity and mortality.

To reduce the burden of these vector-borne diseases, the Institut national de Recherche biomédicale (INRB), the department of tropical medicine at the Université de Kinshasa (UNIKIN) and the AfricaMuseum work closely with communities and stakeholders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to develop co-created alternative prevention strategies.

These strategies involve innovative approaches such as community-based vector trapping and advanced diagnostic techniques to detect infections directly in the field. Since schistosomiasis and malaria are co-endemic in Kongo central, both mosquitos and snails are collected and tested. This will allow detailed mapping of risk areas for increased morbidity. Community mobilization efforts through citizen science and inclusive health communication in schools are being implemented to maximize the success and sustainability of these interventions.



*Data collection on snail populations by citizen scientists.*

# SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

## A major contribution to capacity building and sustainable development related to georesources

The development of modern societies relies heavily on the consumption of georesources (mineral, water, construction materials, and critical resources).



*Water samples collected by the Kongo team from Brazzaville for the hydrogeological study of karst.*

Geological research is increasingly taking into account environmental, biological, hydrographic, economic, social and public health aspects of the use of georesources, including strategic mineral deposits in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

To ensure sound management of georesources, countries must

have the public capacity to carry out academic research and manage information, as well as an administrative framework that ensures the collection and management of strategic information on the ground.

In DR Congo, the Centre de Recherches géologiques et minières (CRGM), the universities of Kinshasa (UNIKIN), Bukavu (UOB) and Lubumbashi (UNILU), the Musée géologique de Bukavu (MGB) and the AfricaMuseum work together to improve academic expertise on closely related themes: geology of Central Africa; history of past mountains; development of karstic networks; and mineral resources and their societal impact through integrated management involving all parties concerned: communities, experts, economic stakeholders and political decision-makers. The ultimate objective is that the georesources of the DR Congo contribute more to its development, by redistributing and equitably sharing the benefits between all layers of society and minimizing the impact of their exploitation on the population and the environment.



## Conserving the congo basin's forests

Globally, the Congo Basin is of top-priority conservation importance for several key ecosystem services (most importantly biodiversity, carbon storage, and carbon uptake) which are under increasing human pressure. Similar to other tropical forests, the Congo Basin occupies a key position for mitigating the effects of global climate change. There is however a striking discrepancy between the Congo Basin's paramount importance and its poor scientific coverage.

A strong network of partners, including the Université de Kisangani (UNIKIS), the Centre de Surveillance de la Biodiversité (CSB), the Institut national pour l'Étude et la Recherche agronomiques (INERA), the École régionale post-universitaire d'Aménagement et de Gestion intégrés des Forêts et Territoires tropicaux (ERAIFT), Texaf Bilemba, and the AfricaMuseum aims at achieving better knowledge, more effective conservation, and more sustainable (evidence-based) management of Congo Basin forest ecosystem services.

The project draws inspiration from the UNESCO 'Man And the Biosphere' (MAB) programme, which considers its focal areas (biosphere reserves) as 'living laboratories' for climate change research and sustainable development. The UNESCO MAB ambitions will be fulfilled by developing activities of multidisciplinary research (carbon cycling and biodiversity), training, institutional capacity building, and educational outreach in the Man and the Biosphere Reserves of both Yangambi and Luki (DR Congo). The project has the additional ambition of going beyond the MAB reserves, by exporting built-up expertise to continue quality research in the Salonga National Park and the Bafwasende Community Forest reserves.

## PROMOTING INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

### Global citizenship education

The AfricaMuseum's public outreach programme zooms in on contemporary societal issues through quality education, transforming the AfricaMuseum into a platform for informed knowledge

exchange, dialogue and debate. In the activities at the AfricaMuseum, as in all its research projects, the AfricaMuseum seeks to contribute to a united, equitable, inclusive and sustainable world by providing citizens with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify, support and participate in inclusive and sustainable practices.

To further integrate African perspectives and expertise, the



*Awareness campaign on forest ecology in schools surrounding the Yangambi Biosphere Reserve.*

AfricaMuseum launches a biennial Educator-in-Residence programme for educational experts from the African continent. This initiative aims to provide insights and contemporary pedagogy on local African realities, thereby enriching the AfricaMuseum's

awareness-raising efforts on topics such as colonial history, climate change, and African cultural heritage. Next to this, the goal of the annual Artist-in-Residence programme is to produce new narratives in the museum, its research, and its representations of Africa and Africans from a non-European point of view.

### Gender equality and diversity

The AfricaMuseum is committed to mainstreaming gender equality and diversity into all its activities and encourages its partners to seek a balanced participation of women and men from the academic and scientific community, while enhancing the presence of colleagues with a diaspora background in its staff and outreach in Belgium. As part of the specific actions set up for this purpose, the AfricaMuseum actively encourages the participation of women in training programmes, scholarships, and conferences, by establishing quotas to ensure balanced gender representation in certain training sessions. Moreover, the AfricaMuseum has been involved in the gender-balance enhancing in-

initiative on Southern exchanges, launched by the Engels Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR), Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement supérieur (ARES), and the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) during the strategic dialogue of the Common Strategic Framework for Belgium.

### **Knowledge exchange and strengthening of capacities**

Knowledge exchange is integrated in all levels of the projects, from spreading scientific research findings both physically and virtually within the scientific community, to awareness-raising for the general public, and using these scientific insights to support good governance. The development of synergies and complementary activities among all stakeholders involved is essential.

To foster sustainable partnerships, the AfricaMuseum aims to strengthen the institutional capacities of its partners. This is achieved, for example, through enhancing ICT equipment and skills.

In Belgium, the AfricaMuseum participates in the Joint Strategic Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, alongside thematic platforms such as the Joint Strategic Framework Social Ecological Resilience Network (SECORES) and Higher Education and Science for Development (HES4D). These platforms serve as important channels for exchanging valuable information and exploring potential synergies.

