

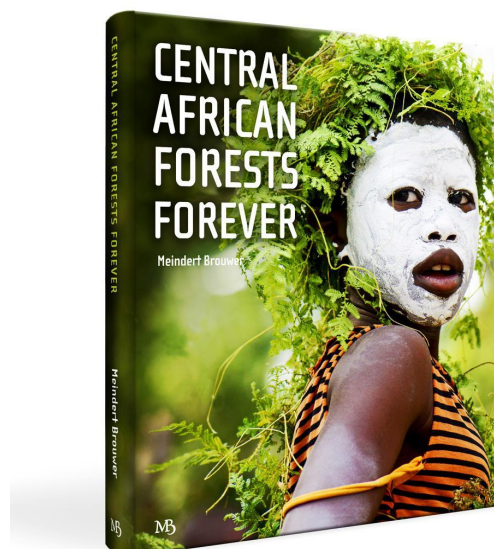


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### Interview of the month

We spoke to Mr. Meindert Brouwer, a writer and publisher based in the Netherlands, and editor of the recently published second edition of the book 'Central African Forests Forever' with 17 new chapters. His passion for conservation, grasp of the subject, writing & presentation skills shine through in this book. The new edition of the book 'Central African Forests Forever' is open access and can be downloaded free in English, French, and Chinese at [www.centralafricanforests.org](http://www.centralafricanforests.org) Printed copies can be ordered from there too.



How did you get the idea to write a book on the Congo Basin?

I met with the Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai at the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009. She agreed to have a photo clicked with me, but not with my book, 'Amazon Your Business' which I was promoting. She asked me to write a book on the Congo Basin rainforest she would like to hold and pose for a picture. I promised Wangari to write this book, fulfilled it, dedicated it to her, but sadly she passed away before it came out.

What were the challenges in writing the book?

Well, firstly it involved 6 trips to the main Congo Basin countries - DRC, Republic of Congo, Cameroon, & Gabon. The book presents the vision of the local communities and African experts about sustainable use of forest resources and conservation. Because several Chinese timber and mining companies operate in the region, interviews with Chinese experts in sustainable forestry was included in this second edition to encourage the Chinese companies to act responsibly given their disrepute in the region. That's why the book was translated into Mandarin, which took time to produce, publish, and release in China. It was well received, as also the French version to the Francophone readership, and the original English version too. So, I bit more than I could chew many times over!

What makes information transfer easy across African countries in your opinion?

Local NGOs are most helpful with this because they have their ears to the ground and work with the local communities in ways outsiders can't match. The African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests/Réseau des Femmes Africaines pour la Gestion Communautaire des Forêts, [REFACOF](#) was my go-to NGO to address women's rights in rural areas, and I learnt so much from them, as also from other stakeholders in the region.

Could you please summarize some main findings from your book?

1. Sedentary farming is a viable alternative to slash and burn agriculture as I saw in the vicinity of the Salonga National Park, DRC. Sedentary farming is a very important solution to end slash and burn which is still a big driver of deforestation in the Congo Basin.
2. In Gabon, I was happy to find a transition to sustainable forest management, and FSC-certified practices being adopted.
3. Illegal wildlife trade not only threatens biodiversity, but also the economy of the Congo basin countries because it can shutdown ecotourism. Who would want to view empty forests? In the book, Alain Bernard Ononino, Head of Policy of the Central Africa Wildlife Crime Programme at Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), explains how illegal wildlife trade can be stopped at both local and international levels.
4. The Responsible Cobalt Initiative (RCI) seeks to eliminate child labour in artisanal cobalt mines of DRC, and provide safety, fair wages, schools for the children and develop alternative livelihoods. Their pilot project is promising and a good example to emulate in other mining areas.