Survey on the needs and expectations of academic and non-academic stakeholders

In order to better understand the needs in terms of infrastructure, equipment and training, we would be grateful if you could take a few minutes to read and fill in the questionnaire below.

All nominative information collected via this questionnaire will remain confidential, will not be published or divulged, and will only be used to define the strategy for setting up the Centre for Biogeosciences of the Environment.

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# Personal details

Title: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ First name (s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Institution's address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Type of institution:

□ Administration / public authority

□ Research and/or higher education institution

□ Technical ministry or public agency

□ Company

□ NGO

□ Other - Specify: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Can you name three to five key words in the field of environmental biogeosciences that are closest to your interests or work?

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# Background

In the Congo forest basin and the Gulf of Guinea region, many socio-environmental challenges need to be addressed in order to provide answers to several of the Sustainable Development Goals. The challenges include mitigating climate change (within the framework of the national INDCs[[1]](#footnote-1)), adapting to its effects, conserving biodiversity, combating soil degradation and erosion, curbing the depletion of carbon stocks and various forms of pollution, limiting greenhouse gas emissions, and managing and reducing disaster risks. Meeting these challenges requires bringing together the existing scientific forces, which are real but dispersed, and associating them in a transdisciplinary approach with national and local authorities, private operators and civil society actors working in the field of the environment in order to promote the implementation of policies guaranteeing the sustainability of the ways in which natural resources are used and their greater contribution to local economies.

Among the challenges related to climate, forests, coastal management and cities that require inter- and transdisciplinary approaches are the improvement of (1) climate services and environmental risk management, (2) sustainable management and conservation of coastal, littoral and marine environments, (3) sustainable management of forest resources and carbon storage, (4) sustainable management of soil and water resources, and (5) management of the development of the urban fabric towards sustainable, inclusive and resilient cities. All of these challenges cut across the broad theme of environmental biogeosciences, a field of study integrating geosciences and biological sciences, approached through disciplinary (geology, geography, geospatial analysis, etc.) and interdisciplinary (environmental sciences) approaches at the crossroads of natural, human and social sciences.

# CBE objectives

In order to fill the knowledge gap in Central Africa on climate change, soil erosion and degradation, deterioration of water quality, eutrophication of hydrosystems, loss of biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, depletion of carbon stocks and disaster risk management and reduction, it is important to federate these existing forces.

To meet these multiple challenges, the **Cameroonian Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation** (**MINRESI**) aims to create a Centre for Biogeosciences of the Environment (CBE), with a sub-regional vocation, in line with the national development strategy thanks to financing from the Debt Reduction and Development Contract (C2D). MINRESI is in charge of the project management for the creation of the CBE by virtue of its regalian missions in terms of the implementation of the Cameroonian government's research policy. The scientific campus of Nkolbisson in Yaounde will host the CBE which will occupy an area of about one hectare.

The **Institut de Recherche pour le Développement** (**IRD**), a French public science and technology establishment and partner of MINRESI, is initially responsible for carrying out a feasibility study for the implementation of the CBE, then, if the study is validated, for supporting MINRESI in the implementation of the project. This preliminary study is essential to ensure the long-term viability of the project in view of the many issues at stake, be they strategic, financial, technical, legal, partnership, etc. Moreover, it is envisaged that the CBE will host the IRD representation in Cameroon with extension of competence to Gabon, Congo and DRC and its field vehicle fleet.

The CBE will combine spaces and infrastructures for high-level research with high-performance technical platforms (geochemistry laboratory dedicated to the preparation and conditioning of samples and elementary analyses - e.g. carbon-nitrogen-phosphorus-, plant biology, geomatics and database, modelling laboratory), functional and user-friendly office spaces, storage rooms for soil, water and plant material samples, and both guesthouse and catering area. It will also include permanent environmental observation systems. The observatories are strategic and operational devices that, based on data collected over time, validated and qualified, make it possible to strengthen the link between fundamental research, innovations and operational applications.

The CBE's mission will be to define scientific orientations broken down into research and development projects (e.g. impact studies, urban observatories), produce publications of international standard, develop accessible databases and inform decision-makers and operational actors. It will also aim to strengthen scientific capacities and cooperation with stakeholders.

These objectives call for an intensification of research and aim to foster an increase in the national scientific potential in the fields of competence of the CBE, which will mainly be hydro-climatology, biogeochemical cycles and vegetation ecology, territorial dynamics and inclusive and resilient sustainable cities. Transversal methodological research in modelling, analysis of geolocalised data and processing of spatial observations will also be necessary.

# Operating principles of the CBE

The centre will function as a "project hotel". The proposed project-based approach will be interdisciplinary between geosciences, biosciences and human and social sciences. It will seek to promote transdisciplinary knowledge, co-constructed in an equitable partnership between scientists and actors in society. This integrated approach open to all countries of the Congo forest basin and the Gulf of Guinea is considered essential to find more global solutions to socio-environmental challenges as committed to by the United Nations Agenda 2030 and a sub-regional vocation.

The CBE project is based on the following general principles:

* **Alignment with national priorities**: coherence of the research projects investigated by the centre with the major ecological, environmental and scientific challenges of Cameroon and the sub-region, with a view to contributing to sustainable economic growth,
* **Animation of the Cameroonian research ecosystem in the field of biogeosciences**: search for synergies and complementarities with university and institutional actors,
* **Project hotel model**: subject to their technical feasibility, the technical platforms will be made available to teams of researchers and academics on the basis of calls for projects. The centre that will house these platforms will therefore be designed to function as a "project hotel". The researchers and academics hosted will continue to belong to their home institution and the contractual partners linked to the projects will also have a dual affiliation,
* **Funding on sheltered projects**: the Centre’s funding will be provided through a percentage taken from each project funding granted by national and international donors. One of the challenges of the centre's governance and steering will therefore be to proactively seek to attract international research projects in order to ensure its financial sustainability,
* **Mixed governance**: subject to its feasibility, the Centre will have a shared governance with a scientific management of the IRD under the authority of the Director General of the Institut de Recherches Géologiques et Minières (IRGM), attached to MINRESI.

# Assessment of strengths and weaknesses in environmental biogeosciences in the Central Africa sub-region

* How do you assess the current state of research and innovation in environmental biogeosciences?

□ Very appropriate

□ Appropriate

□ Average

□ Weak

□ Deficient

* According to you, the laboratories, office space and dedicated equipment in the institutions in which you work (and others) are ...

□ Very appropriate

□ Appropriate

□ Average

□ Weak

□ Deficient

In your opinion, are the human resources allocated sufficient?

□ Yes

□ No

□ If not, why not?

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# Identification of strengths and shortcomings

* According to you, in your personal practice, what are the points of satisfaction in terms of team resources? *If more than one answer, prioritise: 1 for the most important factor*

□ Dedicated areas

□ Access to high-performance equipment

□ Access to numerical calculation facilities and geomatic platforms

□ Access to online documentary resources and bibliographical research tools

□ Access to sustainable field or observation facilities

□ Internet access

□ Other, specify:

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* In your personal practice, what do you think is most important for the supervision and performance of students (Master's and PhD)?  
  *If more than one answer, prioritise: 1 for the most important factor*

□ Dedicated areas

□ Access to high-performance equipment

□ Access to numerical calculation facilities

□ Access to sustainable field or observation facilities

□ Internet access

□ Opening up to the international market (mobility)

□ Other, specify:

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* In your opinion, what areas of research need to be strengthened?  
  *If more than one answer, prioritise: 1 for the most important factor*

□ Hydrological and climatic variability

□ Land use geography

□ Coastal areas, lagoon systems and mangroves

□ Continent-ocean continuum for the major rivers of the sub-region

□ Forest dynamics

□ Biogeochemical cycles: processes and balances (e.g. carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, etc.)

□ Anthropogenic determinants versus climate forcings over the past millennia: impacts on ecosystems and biogeochemical processes

□ Disaster risk management and reduction (e.g. floods and landslides)

□ Pollution (diffuse, point, mining, domestic, agricultural, industrial, etc.)

□ Digital and geomatic modelling (remote sensing / image processing, complex systems, sensor networks, data mining, deep learning)

□ Others:

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* In your opinion, what are the priority projects for the sub-region?  
  *If more than one answer, prioritise: 1 for the most important factor*

□ Sustainable, inclusive and resilient cities

□ Conservation of coastal, littoral and marine environments

□ Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+)

□ Integration of knowledge for land use and spatial planning

□ Disaster risk management and reduction

□ Water resource (quantity & quality)

□ Environmental quality (air, soil, vegetation)

□ Ecosystem evolution and human-environment interaction

□ Others:

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# Identification of priorities

* In your opinion, what are the physical/chemical measurements and numerical modelling means to be put in place for optimal observation of the environment?  
  *If more than one answer, prioritise: 1 for the most important factor*

□ Measurement of meteorological and hydrological variations

□ Climate change modelling and adaptation/mitigation

□ Modelling of carbon stocks and greenhouse gas emissions

□ Calculation and massive database

□ Chemical analyses in different types of matrices (soil, sediment, water...) (carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, major elements, metallic trace elements, etc.).

□ Conservation and analysis of biological samples (herbarium, xylotheque, phytoliths, etc.).

□ Others:

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* In what areas, in your opinion, is it necessary to set up training courses (potentially leading to ad hoc qualifications) to upgrade the skills of students, engineers, researchers, etc.?

□ Chemical/physical analyses (e.g. operational hydrology, analytical chemistry, etc.)

□ Numerical modelling

□ Geomatics

□ Others:

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* Lack of specialised interdisciplinary skills

□ Complex systems, data mining, deep learning

□ Geomatics (geospatial analysis)

□ Others:

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* In your opinion, what technical platforms would be needed to meet the challenges?

□ Calculation and massive data warehouse

□ Chemical analysis laboratory (if yes, for which elements?)

□ Laboratory for the analysis of biological, micro-paleontological samples (pollens, phytoliths, etc.)

□ Geoarchaeology laboratory

□ Sample storage rooms (aquatheque, pedagogical library, herbaria, xylotheque, archaeological library, etc.).

□ Geospatial analysis with in situ data validation

□ Others:

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* In your opinion, what kind of observatories would be needed to address the issues at stake?

□ Network of observations of meteorological and hydrological variations

□ Instrumental reference ecosystems (forest plots, watershed)

□ Urban and peri-urban socio-ecosystems

□ Others:

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# Establishment of the Centre for Environmental Biogeosciences in Cameroon

If a centre equipped with technical platforms and dedicated, well-equipped spaces capable of accommodating project staff and sub-regional training courses were to be set up,

* Would you be interested in its creation?

□ Yes

□ No

* what do you consider to be the priority area(s) or theme(s)?

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* What sources of funding could ensure the sustainability of scientific activities?  
  *Several possible responses*

□ Project hospitality expenses

□ Recurrent grants from national or regional bodies

□ Recurrent grants from international donors (bilateral, multi ...)

□ Project-based funding of the centre itself (e.g. World Bank African Center of Excellence)

□ Corporate partnerships (e.g. Carnot institutes in France) public-private partnership

* Would you be interested in positioning your activities there?

□ Yes all

□ Yes in part (e.g. access to laboratories but no offices). Please specify

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

□ No

# Domiciliation of the IRD representation at the CBE

* Have you been in contact with the IRD-Cameroon representation for various reasons, and if so which ones?

□ Student/researcher/technician/engineer mobility,

□ Financing management,

□ Services,

□ Access to IRD vehicles,

□ Others:

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* Were you satisfied with the services provided:

□ Yes

□ No

□ If not, why not:

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* Would you agree that the IRD representation in Cameroon should be housed within the EBC?

□ Yes

□ No

□ If not, why not:

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# Additional information

* Please let us know if you have any comments or additional information

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* Would you like to be kept regularly informed of the follow-up of the project to create the CBE?

□ Yes

□ No

* Please let us know the names and e-mail addresses of people who may be interested in the creation of this Centre

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# Contacts:

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| DESCHAMPS | Pierre | Directeur de recherche, géochimiste | pierre.deschamps@ird.fr |

1. Intended Nationally Determined Contributions to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)