



REQUEST FOR SUPPORT FROM  
**The Basandja Coalition**

**BASANDJA COALITION**



OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES  
FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE CONGO BASIN

# Why Congo Matters and the Challenges We Face:



The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) sits at the forefront of the climate emergency and the green energy transition. With an estimated 70% of the world's cobalt production—a mineral indispensable to rechargeable batteries that power green energy technologies—the DRC holds a pivotal role in our global future. Despite the country's estimated \$24 trillion in natural wealth, over two-thirds of the population lives in extreme poverty, creating dangerous and vulnerable situations for its inhabitants. A significant portion of cobalt is mined by artisanal miners, including children, who use rudimentary tools and sometimes crawl down 100-foot-deep holes to retrieve the mineral. Both children and adults face life-threatening risks, and these mining sites, often unregulated, pose severe health threats to surrounding communities, who often face deadly repercussions for speaking out.



The Congo Basin, spanning more than six countries, sequesters more carbon than all other tropical rainforests combined and is home to the world's largest tropical peatlands. These peatlands, threatened by extractive industries, are referred to as a “carbon bomb” that could release the equivalent of 20 years of U.S. fossil fuel emissions if disturbed. The Congo Basin's Indigenous peoples and local communities are vital for preserving and protecting this rainforest for the benefit of humanity. However, less than 2% of climate funding supports Indigenous and local communities in the region. As Indigenous and rural people, we face significant threats, and our ancestral lands—often labeled as “conservation” areas—are often made inaccessible to us. We experience intense discrimination, marginalization, and violence. While some of us are being invited to participate in national and global discussions, there is a critical need to increase our participation and influence. Our traditional knowledge must be valued as an essential contribution to addressing the climate crisis.

Communities across the region have been courageously organizing to protect our environment and families. However, our efforts are hindered by dilapidated and virtually non-existent infrastructure, including road, rail, and air transport. This lack of connectivity means we are often unaware of each other's efforts. The lack of connection and coordination among grassroots groups is due to very poor infrastructure, the high cost of fuel for transportation, lack of electricity, limited Internet access, and the absence of trusted communication networks.

Beyond the need for better coordination, one critical demand that has been identified is the importance of understanding the language used in global climate discourse. Terms like carbon credit, REDD+, nature-based solutions, net zero, and carbon markets carry significant political, financial, and practical implications, yet they are rarely understood at the community level. Moreover, they often work to the detriment of the local and Indigenous communities.



## Our Proposed Solution:

We believe that the health of our people, land, water, biodiversity, and the future of the world will greatly benefit from a strong Basandja Coalition of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. 'Basandja' is a Topoke word for the traditional code of conduct governing environmental stewardship that maintains a balance between human beings and all entities. Established as a coalition in 2022, we are comprised of organizations that have been working for social and environmental justice for decades. We aim to build collective power, protect our ecosystems, and enjoy dignified livelihoods. We are forest and river communities across the Congo Basin, communities living around mines, and also in the midst of the conflict in the east of the DRC. Although many funders may not yet be aware of us, we have been advocating for social and climate justice long before these terms were widely recognized.

Currently, our Coalition operates in **10%** of the DRC's 145 territories, impacting an estimated **2 million people**.

As we grow, we will welcome more member organizations from all Congo Basin countries. We collaborate with a diverse array of experts across sectors, including the DRC National Community Radio Network, Indigenous scientists in Isangi, peatland scientists in Mbandaka, university professors, environmental journalists, and both local and global environmental activists.

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## Our Coalition's Key Approaches:



### Organize and Strengthen Grassroots Networks:

Building relationships of trust, transparency, and accountability is foundational for our Coalition. We have already begun visiting and collaborating with other Indigenous and local organizations within the Congo Basin to better understand their efforts, needs, and strategies. Each Coalition member is receiving 'studio kits' and training for community journalism, creating podcasts, short videos, and ways to transmit safety alerts. As trust develops, we will be linking organizations into a secure communication network. Fundraising for our travel to deepen trust and plan together in person is one of our priorities in the short term. Once connected, we will be better equipped to support each other's efforts to address life-threatening emergencies, human rights violations, food insecurity, land grabs, and attacks on the environment.



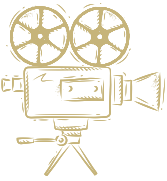
### Support Conservation, Environmental Defenders, Rapid Response, and Livelihood Work:

Each community within the Coalition has well-developed plans and small-scale projects to address critical livelihood needs. However, we have not been able to scale and fully implement them due to lack of funding. When communities' basic needs for food and security are met, there is more ability to engage in land tenure campaigns and larger-scale conservation efforts. Agroliberation is central to all Coalition member organizations. Income-generating projects and well-equipped, fully-staffed health clinics are priorities. In the mining region, alternative income programs have made it possible for children to leave the mines. Miners have formed collectives to collaboratively advocate for better pay, safety, and dignity. The Coalition's infrastructure is indispensable for the survival of marginalized communities and the defense of their land, such as the Mbuti of the Kivus. As Coalition members, the Mbuti are able to secure legal aid, humanitarian assistance, and resources to help maintain their land and keep their communities intact.



### **Participate in Regional and Global Decision Making:**

As we organize to address the lack of grassroots coordination, we have already witnessed the impact of Indigenous and local communities' voices in regional and global discussions. As a Coalition, we are already bridging the gap between local Indigenous communities and regional and global networks that affect the livelihoods of frontline communities. Additionally, we are laying the foundation for committed local youth engaged in climate justice work to access these networks, which will expand the representation of Congo Basin Indigenous voices globally.



### **Disseminate Knowledge, Struggles, and Successes:**

We are expanding the capacity of frontline communities to be the owners and producers of our own stories. We believe in the transformative power of storytelling. We are completing a film that elevates the experience of Coalition members in both the rainforest and the mining communities. Traditional practices used to maintain sustainable village life, preserve ancestral land, and push climate crisis debates to center Indigenous knowledge and leadership undergirds the rainforest portion of the film. It also delves into how traditional miners approach mining, balance, and earth care, in addition to how collectives of cobalt and copper miners keep children out of mines, protect women, and offer social welfare infrastructure for the miners and their families.

To address key challenges, we are expanding radio station power in the Congo Basin rainforest and equipping communities in our Coalition with the studio kits as described above. We utilize WhatsApp and other popular tools when able. In areas with no Internet access, expanding existing radio is essential. With the linked communication network, we will be able to quickly share the challenges groups are facing, solutions being implemented, and detailed invitations for solidarity. With our stories and improved coordination, we expect it to be easier to partner with other movements, reshape narratives, and scale and spread approaches that work.



# Founding Coalition Member Organizations:

## **Solidarity of Indigenous Mbuti Peoples for Development and Social Welfare Association**

Based in North Kivu, as local Mbuti leaders, we work to unify Mbuti in North and South Kivu. We face extreme injustices of displacement and discrimination. We seek to mobilize Mbuti about our rights through the use of radio, barazas (traditional community meetings), and trainings. Priorities include access to our ancestral lands, health needs, and education of both our traditional knowledge and contemporary schooling.

## **Group of Village Organizations for Autonomous Development (GOVA)**

In 1992, local leaders started GOVA as a collective initiative between the community, intellectuals, and traditional leaders for self-determination after experiencing much pain and broken promises from international aid organizations. GOVA is in 428 villages and runs a powerful community solidarity fund and community radio that are described as the lifeline of the region. Women's Agricultural Associations are at the heart of our work. Our region's struggles were first lifted up internationally in the 2007 article [The Fight to Save Congo's Forest](#). We have dealt with deforestation and river contamination by huge companies for years and are working to train an environmental protection brigade of at least 2,000 community members, 70% of whom are young people and women.

## **Indigenous Women and Local Communities for Sustainable and Participatory Development and the Coalition for Women Leaders for the Environment and Sustainable Development (CFLEDD)**

We are one of the few members of the Coalition who have representatives who are invited to international climate change convenings, however, we are still having to spend much time seeking funding to sustain and grow our work. CFLEDD started in 2016 and has passed new land and forest laws in eight provinces of the DRC that allow women to become landowners. We also train women all across the country in climate justice solutions.

## **The Association of Afro-European Committee of DRC (CAE)**

Founded in 2013, we work with communities in the Haut Katanga province which is a landscape dotted by industrial and artisanal mining. The communities' top priorities are to drastically improve access to health care, food security, education, and safe and dignified income. CAE supports children to be able to leave the mines and women farmers to channel the energies of the local community into farming rather than the dangerous and toxic artisanal mining sector. Many women stay in the mines because farming is seen as less lucrative, so CAE supports women miners organizing labor collectives.

### [Yole!Africa](#)

Based in Goma, since 2000, we have been fostering social innovation through art and a decolonial curriculum. In a region traumatized by a colonial legacy of atrocities, ongoing conflict, and international exploitation, we work with the Mbuti community who were expelled from their homes for 'fortress conservation,' families who have been displaced by natural disaster and violence, and young people working to recreate the narrative of the future. We provide space for self-expression and critical thinking through the arts, computer skills, and livelihood programs through agroliberation.

### [Gabon - Young Volunteers for the Environment \(JVE\)](#)

Founded in 2012, we develop young people's leadership and eco-citizenship. We focus on environmental education, peasant seed banks and farming systems, and green energy development. We support youth-led campaigns across Africa and lead one to stop monoculture eucalyptus projects. We have spoken at UN convenings and are committed to helping grow a powerful youth movement across Africa.

### [Friends of the Congo \(FOTC\)](#)

We are a U.S.-based advocacy and intermediary organization that has been partnering with grassroots community organizations in Congo since 2004. We host forums and workshops to educate advocates in the U.S., Latin America, and Africa about the Congo Basin and the impacts the current mining practices for the energy transition are having on people, land, and water. We also provide logistical and fundraising support.



# Join Us:

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**As the Coalition,** we are actively seeking partnerships with funders and climate justice movement organizations. The Congo has endured grave injustices and exploitation, yet, it has produced remarkable champions for justice and dignity, from Kimpa Vita to Patrice Lumumba. Today, as a Coalition, we are determined to disrupt the historic paradigm of plunder and exploitation and usher in a new era of self-determination in Congo. Join us in this dignified pursuit of fundamental and lasting change in the heart of the African continent by taking any of the following actions.

### Take Action

1. [Donate here](#) to **directly & immediately** support the Coalition
2. Share this appeal with at least 3 people in your network
3. Sign up to Join the Movement at [freecongo.org](https://freecongo.org)

### Contact Us

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SCAN ME

