

PARTENARIAT UNIVERSITÉ DU WISCONSIN & RIFFEAC
Enjeux et Perspectives

Aliko SONGOLO
&
Donald WALLER

Introduction

I would like to convey at the outset my colleague Donald Waller's apologies for not being able to make the trip to N'Djamena because of other pressing professional engagements. He sends his greetings and hopes to be able to make the next meeting.

Donald and I represent the University of Wisconsin-Madison as a new member of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. Our university became a member only 2 months ago, in July 2012, at the time we were arriving in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on an exploratory trip that covered some 4000 km. We traveled to the North, the Center, the Center-South, and the West. We visited École de Faune de Garoua, Université de Dschang, The African Network of Model Forests, Université des Montagnes, Ecole Nationale des Eaux et Forêts (Mbalmayo). We also visited Parc National de la Bénoué, and Parc National de Campo Ma'an. At all these sites we held important meetings with officials and sometimes with faculty. We also held a meeting with representatives of RIFFEAC, PFBC, UICN, CARPE, and BAD; we met with the Facilitator-Delegate, Mr. Ndikumagenge. We participated in a one-day symposium organized jointly by the African Model Forests Network and other partners. At the end of our trip, we paid a courtesy visit at the United States Embassy to brief the public affairs officer on our journey.

The subject of this presentation is to assess the stakes and future prospects of partnership between RIFFEAC and the University of Wisconsin. I must say that such a relationship is still in the realm of desires and hopes because it has not yet become effective. However, it is clear to us that we cannot accomplish any of the objectives that I will outline below without close collaboration with RIFFEAC, which is the organization that fosters training in the kinds of institutions in which we are interested. In this respect, then, it is easy for me to assert that the stakes are quite high and the prospects are quite promising. Both sides expressed this hope when we met in Yaoundé on 25 July.

The observations that follow, then, are essentially the same we made to RIFFEAC and the other organizations with which we met during our mission. They aim to explain who we are, why we wish to get involved in the Central Africa, and how we hope and plan to contribute to sustainability and development in the sub-region.

Who we are

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is a public university located in Madison, a city of about 250,000 inhabitants. Madison is the capital of the state of Wisconsin located about 250 km NW of Chicago in the north central region (Midwestern) United States. The University has about 42,000 students and 2500 faculty and staff. It is a premier research university that is comprehensive in its scope, granting degrees in many academic and

professional fields, from the BA/BS to the PhD. In the latest rankings of world universities by Shanghai's Jiao Tong University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison was ranked 19th. It ranks second in annual research expenditures among American universities. It is also part of a consortium of a dozen large universities in the region. Additional facts may be found here: <http://www.wisc.edu/about/facts/>

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is especially strong in:

- Agricultural research and training
- Biomedical and energy research
- Environmental studies and sciences
- Ecology and conservation biology

Many specialists in these areas and related areas—more than 100 of them—are members of the Nelson Institute <http://www.nelson.wisc.edu/>, a world-renowned interdisciplinary center for environmental studies.

Why we are in Central Africa

We decided recently to launch the Central Africa Initiative because we see complementary needs and opportunities between our university and the dynamic landscape of development and conservation in Central Africa. In particular, we see many opportunities for collaboration between UW and partner institutions in Central Africa. These efforts will focus on addressing opportunities and needs in both locations including:

Opportunities and needs in Central Africa:

1. Rich diversity of landscapes, cultures, habitats, and wildlife
2. Economic and social development – community building
3. Sustainable exploitation and use of natural resources
4. Accurate monitoring and analysis of the condition of natural resources
5. Effective conservation of wildlife, forests, and other natural resources
6. Innovative programs to connect and apply education and research to both conservation and development

UW opportunities and needs:

1. Wide-ranging expertise in many fields that are consonant with the needs of Central Africa
2. Training African leaders of tomorrow and enhance the training of UW students
3. Development of new knowledge that will be beneficial both to Central Africa, UW, and the wider world.
4. Collaboration with African institutions to pursue education and research for African and US students
5. Joint pursuit of funding sources to sustain research and development
6. Enhance research opportunities for faculty and students
7. Enhance opportunities for UW and African students and researchers to collaborate and work together in teams to engage significant international issues & programs
8. Pursue research of immediate use and significance for African peoples and wildlife

What we are doing : first steps

The Central Africa Initiative at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has mounted a team comprising a dozen scholars and researchers with strong potential of adding more members. It is interdisciplinary, as exemplified by the two founding members, one in the humanities, and the other in Biology.

Broadly, we seek to enhance the infrastructure for training and research in the areas of wildlife conservation, the monitoring of wildlife populations and habitat conditions, and the socioeconomic and cultural factors crucial for sustaining wildlife while alleviating poverty in Central Africa.

To accomplish this, we specifically propose to:

1. Initiate reciprocal exchanges of students and faculty between our university and Central African institutions of higher learning;
2. Engage faculty from these institutions in training students jointly with faculty from the University of Wisconsin-Madison;
3. Enhance and extend the training of instructors from African institutions at the University of Wisconsin-Madison;
4. Create opportunities for University of Wisconsin-Madison students and faculty to collaborate with African staff and students on research in Central Africa;
5. Tailor academic programs at African institutions to meet the needs and challenges of conserving Central African biodiversity in the 21st century.

Our presence here has the following purposes:

1. Learning about existing programs and agencies
2. Visiting and talking with potential partner institutions
3. Reviewing existing programs and institutions
4. Discuss ideas for appropriate projects

Next steps

1. We spent four days at École de Faune de Garoua in July. At the end of the visit, we agreed that an international team of evaluators should travel there to assess the needs that must be addressed to transform that important school into a center of excellence. We are collaborating with the African Development Bank and PACEPCo in this endeavor and expect to welcome several trainees to our university in the near future.
2. Having signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Dschang in the US last May, we visited that University and laid out a plan to pursue research themes of mutual interest, and to jointly pursue funds from donors. The University of Dschang and the University of Wisconsin are looking into the possibility of having ENEF-Cap Estérias in Gabon join them in a three-way cooperative venture.
3. We very much hope to sign a formal agreement with RIFFEAC in the near future in order for us to become more involved in training projects developed by RIFFEAC.
4. We will reinforce and broaden our agreement with the African Network of Model Forests.

Summary Statement

In joining the CBFP we agreed to comply with the principles of sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa, to work in accordance with the cooperation framework of the CBFP partners and to support the implementation of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan. We are eager to find partners to work with; we will seek common ground with these partners and work towards shared goals. We will move forward with the opportunities we have already identified and will remain open to new partnerships. Although our efforts will be situated in Cameroon initially, we expect these activities to lead to collaborations in other countries of Central Africa. Already the Ecole de Faune de Garoua and the African Model Forest Network operate across the sub-region instead of a single country. We will seek out other similar opportunities to engage institutions of the sub-region. We are convinced of our ability to develop active and effective programs that will prove beneficial to the pressing conservation needs of the sub-region and that will be consonant with COMIFAC's long-term ability to protect wildlife while enhancing human welfare in Central Africa.