IUFRO-EFI Young scientists Initiative: Activities Report

Photo credit: Second international forest policy meeting, Wageningen April 2018

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Introduction

The IUFRO-EFI young scientists initiative is a collaboration program between the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) and the European Union Forest Institute (EFI) aiming at connecting young scientist in addressing forestry issues. The specific objectives being to accompany young forest scientist in creating and sustaining a strong international research network on forest and forest related issues, I could totally identify myself in this. Therefore, I applied in December 2017 to be part of this initiative and got luckily selected on January 2018. After some administrative and logistical exigencies, my research stay started in March at the University of Göttingen, precisely at the Chair of Forest and Nature conservation policies.

The choice of this institution as my host institution was motivated by the fact that I was already registered there as PhD student since one year. However, due to funding limitations I could not permanently stay there to take advantage of the multiple research and scientific opportunities available.

The IUFRO-EFI young scientist initiative thus offered me the opportunity to move forward with my PhD focusing on the politics of forest and climate change cooperation in the Congo basin while working on developing a strong research network around this thematic for me and for the upcoming researchers of this domain.

For an impregnation in my research stay I have develop the actual report in two subsequent parts hence the development of the research stay (I) and the first outputs the stay (II).

I- Development of the research stay

The research stay started in March 2018 and consisted essentially of two main activities: The desktop work and the participation and preparation of conferences.

I-1 Desktop work

First of all the desktop consisted of codifying and analyzing datas I collected in Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville and Germany from September 2017 to November 2018 on the
preparation of Congo basin countries before forest negotiations masses as well on the implementation of their negotiation strategies in context.

The data collection tools having been mostly qualitative, we spent the majority of time in decrypting interviews and group discussion feedbacks.

The second axes of our desktop work consisted on doing a literature review on forest diplomacy in general and particularly on Congo Basin Countries forest diplomacy. We ended up finding out that the notion of Forest diplomacy was quasi inexistent on both forestry research as well as political science work. We thus decided to guide our analysis in that direction as to come out at the end with an innovative work on forest diplomacy.

I-2 Participation to conference

The key of scientific excellence residing in exchange with counterparts as it always brings up pertinent feedbacks, I set as a major objective of this research stay to participate at least to an international scientific conference. Therefore, with the support of my Supervisor Prof. Max Krott I elaborated a paper abstract with my datas on forest diplomacy in Congo basin and submitted it the Second international meeting on forest policy to be held at the University of Wageningen from the 11 to 13 April 2018.

Luckily, my abstract got selected giving me the possibility to participate to this high level forest policy meeting. I received at that meeting many pertinent feedbacks to improve my paper from eminent professors and these have been very much valuable to me throughout my research stay. Besides the scientific aspect, I met a lot of people there helping me to develop my networks for future initiatives.

II- Output of the research stay

The outputs of this research stay can be organized in two main categories: scientific output, networking output.
II-1 Production of a scientific paper

The main scientific output of this research is the production of my second PhD paper entitled: *Forest diplomacy: A case study of Congo basin under environmental governance*. The substantial contribution of this paper was to scrutinize the causes of the Cbc forest diplomacy failures observed and denounced by many independent observers. The research approach used was qualitative rooted both on the rational choice and organizational behavior theories as well as on an extensive empirical work including document analysis, participant observation, group discussions and in-depth expert interviews. The majority of data used in this paper were collected during: (i) climate change negotiations’ rounds (Bonn/Germany in Mai and November 2017), and (ii) a Congo Basin countries CoP23 preparation workshop (Brazzaville/Congo, August 2017). As main result, this research reveals that the repetitive failures observed within Cbc forest diplomacy seems as being planned by the actors involved. Indeed, due to the limitation in negotiation’s human and financial resources of Cbc on one side and to their silencing by developed countries through their financial assistance to negotiation on the other side, it seems as existing no possibility for a success story of forest diplomacy in Congo Basin at least in terms of conservation. This paper will be submitted in the comings days to the global environmental change journal of Elsevier.

II-2 Co-organization of the first IUFRO conference on African forest governance in Yaoundé/Cameroon

Except the scientific aspects, this research stay also enabled me to develop a strong network within forestry research area. As a matter of fact, I was even co-opted as member of the Organizing committee of the first IUFRO conference on the governance of African forest to be held in Yaoudé-Cameroon from the 24 to the 27 September 2018.

In the Organizing process of this conference, I developed strong connections with many institutions among which The Congo Basin Forest Partnership, The Los Angeles University, GIZ, the Wolverhampton University etc.

I am also planning to capitalize on my participation to this conference in Yaoundé to develop further connections.
Conclusion

In conclusion, I can affirm without any reserve that the IUFRO-EFI young scientist initiative is a unique opportunity for junior forestry scientist to gain in maturity. Indeed, as far as I am concerned, this initiative helped me to produce in excellent conditions the second paper of my PhD thesis, to participate to one international meeting on forest policy in order to discover new theoretical frameworks and to meet brilliant scientists and research sponsors with who I could discuss on future collaboration opportunities.

Young scientist definitely need such initiatives which can help them to move smoothly from their status of junior to senior. Of course I am not yet a senior scientist, this can definitely not be accomplished in few months. But at least through this initiative, I got closer to the seniors as to be able to learn from them and take the lead when the time will come.

Acknowledgement

My participation to this initiative would have never leaded to the current results without the professional and discreet support of the EFI-IUFRO young scientist initiative´s administrative staff represented by Daniel Boehnke; You have been following me up throughout this process with kindness and availability; kindly receive my heartiest gratitude. I would also like to thank the member of the Chair of forest and nature conservation policy of the university of Göttingen namely Prof. Dr. Max Krott and Dr. Symphorien Ongolo who have been supervising me without any reserve all along my stay. My specific thanks to all the members of the Chair group who through their kindness made me feel comfortable at the Chair.

To all those who from close or far have contributed to my participation to this initiative and to the production of the above outputs, I humbly say Thank you!