

Minutes

Visit of CBFP Facilitators to Yaoundé: Brief but Fruitful

A meeting on "Forest Research and Adaptation to Climate Change" was organised by the CBFP members in Yaoundé on 14 September 2011.

This third visit of the Congo Basin Facilitator was marked, among other things, by an internal retreat to update the Facilitation working plan, a consultation meeting between CBFP members present in Yaoundé on the implementation-status of the roadmap, examination of current major challenges in scientific research in the Congo Basin and dedicated working sessions with some partners at their request.

Major Conclusions:

- One of the partners proposed that CBFP should select two or three common issues and focus their efforts on them: *«it is necessary to have a minimum consensus between partners and COMIFAC countries ».*
- It was pointed out that the role of the CBFP is not to solve problems but to provide support – work on common issues and orient dialogue on issues raised by member-countries. *“The co-operation framework between partners constitutes the basis for dialogue”.*
- The CIFOR explained that there are many appraisal tools including “briefing memos on policies”, “peer review”, Porex.... He urged partners to always ask for these tools;
- He advised that a Research advisory dialogue group on research should be set up in the Congo Basin which shall draw up a research programme for the sub-region.
- It was pointed out that IRD should support COMIFAC in the promotion of collaboration with other research institutions (Cifor, Cirad ...) and coordination in research within COMIFAC.
- The Facilitation announced the holding of the CBFP (ex-RAC) partners’ meeting by the end of February.

Next Steps:

- The Facilitation will advocate for the scheduling of a meeting between partners and COMIFAC on a harmonized research programme that would meet the needs of COMIFAC ;
- The Facilitation will work in collaboration with partners and COMIFAC in order to draft a research programme on forest issues.

A) Meeting of Partners

The meeting of partners took place in the conference hall of the Canadian Cooperation Support Office in Yaoundé (Cameroon), on 14 September 2011, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. It was organised by the CBFP Facilitation with the support of the Canadian Government. About forty participants including mainly CBFP members attended the meeting, which focused on the following points: (1) Introduction of participants (2) Presentation of the implementation-status of the 2010-2012 Facilitation roadmap: Priorities and prospects (3) Scientific research strategy on forest ecosystems in Central Africa by IRD (4) Research findings on adaptation to climate change in Central Africa by CIFOR.

1. Introduction of participants

Before the start of the meeting, the Facilitator gave the floor in turns to participants to introduce themselves including their position and duties. After this exercise, participants recognized the pertinence of the multifaceted composition of the CBFP thanks to the diversity and complexity of its actors, which explains why it was necessary to create the partnership. It comprises representatives from States, intergovernmental organisations from CBFP member States, non-governmental organisations, research institutes and private sector stakeholders.

2. Presentation of the 2010-2012 Facilitation Roadmap Implementation Status: Priorities and Prospects

Examining the second point of the agenda, the CBFP Facilitator reiterated the importance of the meeting between CBFP partners. He made a review of the cooperation framework, vision, mission, values and operational goals of the CBFP. To this end, he urged members to take ownership of CBFP. He said CBFP provides a cooperation framework that is translated into a free dialogue and consultation forum that can help each partner to achieve their respective objectives. Consequently, Mr Grenier reminded participants of the CBFP vision: ***“Sustainable management of Central African Ecosystems, biodiversity preservation for the welfare of communities through mutual technical contributions and financial partnership”***. Concerning the mission to ***harmonize the actions of partners***, he underscored that this should be achieved by rallying CBFP members around the 10 points of the Convergence Plan, by facilitating understanding of each of these points by members and sharing information among partners. Concerning CBFP guiding principles, he noted that there is need to ***“respect differences in opinion between partners, respect knowledge acquired (local and/or scientific) and equitable distribution of profits”***. **At the operational level, Mr. Grenier** emphasized the role of the Facilitation which involves the harmonisation and coordination of the actions of partners in order to improve the efficiency of technical and financial contributions by partners. Closing this point on the agenda, he presented the results obtained by CBFP Facilitation since the last CBFP Regional Advisory meeting in Bujumbura (25-27 May 2011), describing the support and contributions of the Facilitation to various issues in the Congo Basin, including the COMIFAC Self-Financing Mechanism, the COMIFAC Working Group, events on the sidelines of international meetings, agreements and CEFDHAC. Talking about challenges, he presented the difficulties involved in the harmonisation of policies, conflicts in the certification of timber from the Congo Basin and the issue of participation of the civil society. He said the absence of a significant representation and an efficient civil society lobby in political organs is slowing down the implementation of good governance in the management of forest ecosystems.

At the end of his presentation, the CBFP Facilitator, Mr. Grenier, gave the floor to participants for discussions that focused mainly on the expectations of partners from the Facilitation. One of the key issues examined was the dilemma faced by the Facilitation; on the one hand, while COMIFAC member countries are expecting and expressing the wish that CBFP and its Facilitation actions should generate financial resources for member States, on the other hand, technical and financial partners, are asking States to first show concrete proof of their political will towards COMIFAC by their financial support. The challenge here is to find a way of reconciling these expectations.

Another point: Should the CBFP become a real leader in the strategic changes necessary for the sustainable management of forests in the sub-region or should this role be the main responsibility of COMIFAC? What is the added value brought in by the CBFP and is there no sub-regional institution that could play this role successfully?

Opening the discussions, a participant underscored the difficulty involved in harmonising actions both at the level of countries and at the level of partners. In this light, the role played by the Facilitation is “not recognized”. A participant called for the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity which consists in decision-making at the lowest local level among partners in order to avoid any duplication of activities. He cited the example of the consultation framework for partners in Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) in Cameroon to illustrate that there is very little visibility at the level of countries on the contributions of sub-regional organisations, including COMIFAC. Another participant who took the floor, subsequently, said COMIFAC and CBFP are not different from “constellations”. CBFP from its inception was faced with the reconciliation of many difficult interests and differences. It is therefore urgent for CBFP to choose two or three points of convergence and focus on them: ***“it is necessary to have a minimum consensus between partners and COMIFAC countries”***.

Referring to the effective lack of political will of the Congo Basin countries, a participant noted that “a political will should be translated into a budget line and not only words”. Concerning the added value by CBFP, several speakers noted that the complaints by countries on financing are neither founded nor true because since its creation in 2002, CBFP has attracted lots of financing to the sub-region. Some participants even noted the problem of under-consumption of funds as it the case with the “Joint Fund” in Cameroon.

One proposal was to reflect on capacity building in the Congo Basin in order to attract financing: “It is the role of CBFP to mobilize funds for the sub-region”. To this end, CBFP members should embark more on capacity building in the COMIFAC member countries and turn towards the capital markets. It is even more urgent because capital flow (raising capital) towards the Congo Basin remains very low compared to financing to other tropical forest basins.

One of the speakers, going back to history, noted that COMIFAC was created on the basis of the convergence plan and that the technical and financial partners that met under the umbrella of CBFP undertook to support the implementation of this plan. Consequently, the role of CBFP is not to solve problems but to provide support – work on common issues and orient dialogue on issues that member-countries will develop: **“COMIFAC meets and defines the issues - partners lend their support for their implementation”**. Consequently, it was proposed to the Facilitation that it was necessary to bring back those who were questioning the importance of the CBFP to a partnership cooperation framework, **given that one of the main missions of the Facilitation is to orient dialogue.**

In his closing statement, the Facilitator reminded participants of the document produced by the Facilitation which explicitly describes these [three institutions including COMIFAC, CBFP and the Facilitation](#). He underscored the need to continue with serious and fruitful reflections during the next meeting of CBFP partners. Mr. Grenier also urged partners to work towards a real mobilisation around the COMIFAC Working Groups, who for the most part lack permanent support and regular financing. **Finally, the constructive discussions and concrete results that came out of the meeting confirmed the important contribution that CBFP is making towards the implementation of the Yaoundé declaration.**

3. IRD Scientific Research Programme on the Forest Zone in Central Africa and Findings on Adaptation to Climate Change in Central Africa by CIFOR

This session of the meeting was marked by two communications from two international scientific research organisations present in Central Africa. To this end, participants listened to presentations on the COMIFAC “Research” themes, including: (1) IRD Scientific Research Programme on the Forest Zone in Central Africa (2) Findings on Adaptation to Climate Change in Central Africa by CIFOR

- **IRD Scientific Research Programme on the Forest Zone in Central Africa**

Two presentations were made under this theme: **The first on IRD was done by Dr. Xavier Garde, IRD Resident Representative for Cameroon - Gabon – Equatorial Guinea – Congo- DR Congo – CAR**, who briefed participants on this French research institution (which is original and unique in the international research landscape) with emphasis on its principles, activities and priorities (fight against poverty, migrations, diseases, climate change and natural disasters, access to water and ecosystems). Concerning IRD partnership initiatives in Central Africa, Dr. Garde listed many projects financed by IRD, in partnership with French institutions (ANR, ANRS, FSP SEP) and the EU as well as partners in the South (Brazil: training centre linked to the Libreville satellite branch), (For details see the presentation below and the description of the Regional Pilot Programme (RPP)).

The second IRD presentation was made by Dr Pierre Couteron (Director of Joint Centre for Botanical Research and Bioinformatics on Plant Architecture - (AMAP) in Montpellier) and it focussed on IRD research themes in the Central African Forest Zone based on the **Regional Pilot Programme (RPP) : Global changes, biodiversity and health in humid tropical forests of Central Africa (PPR FTH-AC)**. While explaining the meaning of the RPP, Dr. Couteron said it was a pluridisciplinary research programme, co-piloted by IRD (operator and agency), which is the thematic and geographical correspondent to the IRD strategic priorities and its partners in the South and North. It comprises a series of coordinated scientific objectives and research and training actions, as well as innovations, concerning one or (exceptionally) several regions of the South zones. The presentation by Pierre Couteron also revealed that RPP was the outcome of consultations between partners – reflections prior to the ‘PPR FTH-AC’ of November 2008: Mission B. Dreyfus, X. Garde, P. Couteron (Gabon, Guinea, Cameroon), among others, in September 2009 - March 2010 contacts with Central African partners;

Workshop of “Researchers” in Yaounde (09/09) : 70 participants, from 6 African countries, SE COMIFAC, Facilitation, CBFP, CIFOR, Tridom Project, IUCN, WCS, WWF, etc. - 30 March 2011: Scientific Project (“White Paper”) submitted to IRD Scientific Committee for expertise and validated later in June 2011. The RPP is based on 6 innovative research themes:

- ✓ Theme 1 : Paleo-environmental interactions and early human settlements
- ✓ Theme 2 : Infectious risks in a changing forest environment
- ✓ Theme 3 : Origin, Functioning and Evolution of Biodiversity
- ✓ Theme 4 : Interactions between communities and forest resources
- ✓ Theme 5 : Impact of climate variability and human activities on water and soil resources
- ✓ Theme 6 : Role of vegetation in biogeochemical cycles (carbon, nutrients, metals) et and the water cycle.

At the end of the two presentations, a participant asked how IRD could better liaise with other partners who are stakeholders in the sector, and how the research findings could be better exploited. The speakers explained that the RPP is an opened and not a closed programme. “IRD is there to promote dialogue and not the contrary “. It is therefore necessary for partners to better examine the issue in order to ensure better coordination. They also underscored the need to digitalize and computerize research findings, especially on herbariums.

- **Findings on Adaptation to Climate Change in Central Africa by CIFOR**

After the presentation on IRD, Dr. Denis Sonwa of CIFOR came back to some achievements made within the framework of the “Congo Basin Forest and Climate Change” (Cofcca) and lessons for the CBFP. Beginning with the context of the project, Dr. Sonwa stated the main objective of the project which is to “contribute in the national adaptation process to climate change through the development of strategies geared at policies that also ensure the sustainable use of forest resources in the Congo Basin forests, which is the goal of the project”. He spelt out the various phases of the project before examining the issue of dialogue in political science, training of future officials, capacity building in communication, pilot activities on adaptation and their relation with other priorities. To conclude, he emphasized that: (1) special attention should be given to scientific research and training of officials, taking into account the always changing climate, (2) In rural areas with no support, it is difficult for people to sustainably check the impact of climate change,. (3) working towards adaptation does not undermine other priorities of the sub-region (biodiversity conservation , REDD+, etc....), on the contrary, it may instead reinforce them”.

At the end of his presentation, several questions were asked especially on how adaptation aspects were to be incorporated into COMIFAC Working Groups, questions on communication using early-warning systems, monitoring station, blog management, training of journalists..., science dialogue and policy: **“How can meaning be given to this research and arguments presented to decision-makers, and even how to communicate? What do we do with the research findings? Is a feedback on the findings given to the field?”** – Emphasizing on the need to exploit the research findings, Dr Sonwa explained that CIFOR as a whole has several communication tools for appraising the research findings including “policy briefing memos”, “peer reviews”, Polex... **« In order to make research findings relevant to policy makers, they should be made attractive to the latter »**, a participant noted.

Following the intense and fruitful exchanges that the IRD and CIFOR presentations triggered, participants recommended that a sub-regional research programme should be drawn up on forest issues and approved by all. During the next CBFP meeting, **recommendations were made for a wider consultation on research issues - This meeting would bring together interested researchers and partners in order to draft a research programme.** It was underscored in the discussions that IRD should support COMIFAC in the setting up of a coordination platform for research within COMIFAC and also support COMIFAC in its role as research coordination institution.

4. Conclusion

The Facilitator thanked the science experts who through their various presentations revealed the scientific research needs in Central Africa. He noted that there was a real quest for scientific research among partners and urged that the discussion should continue. Mr. Grenier called on all CBFP partners to take advantage of any opportunity that arises, to advocate the implementation of the COMIFAC research theme. He expressed the wish that a meeting be scheduled between partners and COMIFAC in view of drawing up a harmonized research programme that meets the needs of COMIFAC: "It is urgent to set up an advisory dialogue group on research which will draw up a research programme and entrust it to research partners who have the resources".

The Facilitator stated that all the discussions during the meeting were useful and interesting and thanked the partners for their massive and active participation as well as their various contributions which are necessary for the consolidation of the Partnership. Finally, he announced the holding of the next CBFP (ex-RAC) partners' meeting in February.

B) Internal Retreat

The Facilitation team organised an internal retreat in order to harmonize, among other things, the vision of the CBFP Facilitation and to effectively contribute to the implementation of the road map through

- internal and external communication,
- sharing lessons learnt in the Canadian Facilitation and
- exchanges on the synergies between the Facilitation and other sub-regional programmes.

The retreat was also an opportunity to use some working sessions to examine some strategic points such as the vision and operational objectives, appraise the report one year after the launching of the Canadian Facilitation, update the activity and communication plan, examine ongoing major priority and strategic files, prepare for the next meeting of partners, examine new prospects and actions such as **Rio+20, the CBFP 10th anniversary and opportunities offered by the new CBFP facilitation.**

C) Dedicated Working Sessions

In addition, the Facilitation team organised working sessions with the COMIFAC ES, US Forest service, WWF on collaboration themes and their contribution to the implementation of the road map.

Available Online for Downloading:

- Document : Three supplementary institutions
- CBFP Vision - Principles-Mission – Operational Objectives
- IRD Presentation (Cameroon - Gabon – Equatorial Guinea – DR Congo, Congo – CAR) by Dr. Xavier Garde.
- IRD – IRD research orientation in the Central African Forest Zone: - Dr. Pierre Couteron
- CIFOR – Research Findings on Adaptation in Central Africa – Dr. Denis Sonwa