

ICARUS III Conference Report

The third annual ICARUS conference was held at Columbia University, May 18th to 20th 2012.

[ICARUS](#), “The Initiative on Climate Adaptation Research and Understanding through the Social Sciences,” is an international association founded and directed by Arun Agrawal (University of Michigan), Maria-Carmen Lemos (University of Michigan), Ben Orlove (Columbia University), and Jesse Ribot (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). ICARUS III followed on the highly successful [ICARUS I](#) and [ICARUS II](#) conferences organized at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Michigan. The theme of [ICARUS III](#) was “Scales, Frameworks and Metrics.” With 14 panels and double panels, and a total of 81 presentations, participants considered ecological and social vulnerability and adaptation to climate change over multiple temporal, geographical, social, political and economic scales.

Ribot (UIUC), one of the founders of ICARUS, is also one of the directors of [SDEP’s Responsive Forest Governance Initiative](#) (RFGI), a collaborative pan-African research program with the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Eight RFGI researchers participated in ICARUS III, presenting their ongoing research on the Democracy Effects of REDD+ (the United Nations program for Reducing carbon Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation). These researchers are Emmanuel Nuesiri (RFGI postdoctoral research fellow at UIUC), Irmeli Mustalahti (RFGI research associate for Tanzania), Rocio Hiraldo (RFGI researcher in Senegal), Rene Oyono (RFGI team leader for Central Africa), Raymond Achu Samndong (RFGI researcher in DR Congo), David Boulon Eteme (RFGI researcher in Cameroon), Emmanuel Marfo (RFGI team leader in Ghana), and Robert Mbeche (RFGI co-team leader in Uganda).

On Friday, Emmanuel Nuesiri presented “Not by Participation Alone: Assessing the UN-REDD Programme and its Likely Impact on Local Democracy” in Panel 6a titled “REDD Dawn: Climate change, land grabs, and the commodification of nature.” The presentation inspired debates whether UN-REDD should be concerned about its democracy effect or leave this to other organizations. Ribot, as principal discussant responded that REDD would lead to significant enclosure of forest with huge impact on forest people, so organizations involved in delivering REDD like the UN have to engage with its negative social impact.

The RFGI panel was hosted on Saturday and was titled “Climate Arena, Multi-scale Arrangements and the Sharing of the Public Space in Africa.” The presentations were in two sessions, with David, Irmeli,

Raymond, and Rocio in Panel 10a, while Rene, Emmanuel Marfo and Robert were in Panel 10b. The RFGI researcher presentations focused on their field research, except for Rene whose presentation focused on the social theory of recognition. The researcher presentations enabled the participants in the panel sessions to have a better understanding of how the RFGI defines and operationalizes concepts including legitimacy, recognition, democratic representation, and citizenship. The passionate debates that resulted from the RFGI researchers' presentations in Panels 6a, 10a and 10b, is testament that RFGI research issues resonates with other social science and climate change researchers in both the developed and developing world.

Other SDEP-affiliated scholars were also active ICARUS III contributors. SDEP postdoctoral fellow [Malini Ranganathan](#) presented "The Production of Everyday Flood Risk and the Politics of Blame at the Urban Periphery" in panel 1a "Governing Environmental Risks and Vulnerabilities in Cities." Visiting SDEP Doctoral Student Yuting Zhou presented "Options and Choices: Biological Diversity and Adaptive Development" in panel 8 "Adaptive Development and Sustainable Adaptation."