

The RFGI Bulletin

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The Newsletter of the Responsive Forest Governance Initiative

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RFGI research team at the final research methods meeting in Cape Town, South Africa

RFGI in 2014: How Far Have We Come? A brief from the directors of the Responsive Forest Governance Initiative

The Responsive Forest Governance Initiative (RFGI) was launched on January 9, 2012, at a ceremony in the historic island of Goree, Senegal. In attendance were the 34 researchers recruited by the RFGI; the RFGI directors (Ebrima Sall, Jesse Ribot, James Murombedzi, Edmund Barrow and Gretchen Walters) from the implementing institutions (CODESRIA, IUCN, and University of Illinois Urbana Champaign); and representatives (Drs. Goran Bjorkdahl, Sara Gräslund, and Susanne Von Walter) from our funders, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

The launching also served as a research methods meeting clarifying the RFGI concepts, research variables, expected outcome and timelines. The RFGI is grateful to key resource persons that made the methods meeting a success; these included Prof. Bernard Lututala (CODESRIA), Cheikh Mbow (Universite Cheikh Anta Diop), Prakash Kashwan (University of Connecticut) and Marta Monjane (IUCN).

By March 2012, our researchers were already in the field, and by June 2012, they had submitted a first draft of their working papers. The papers were reviewed at the second RFGI research methods meeting from July 30 to August 4, 2012, in Saly, Senegal. Participants at Saly included the RFGI directors, researchers, and two partner researchers (Patrick Matata and Billy Mbilizi) from TROPENBOS International DR Congo program. In attendance also was Susanne Von Walter representing SIDA, and Prakash Kashwan, the quantitative research methods resource person.

At the end of this meeting, the RFGI researchers proceeded on the second phase of field research. They were tasked to complete their field research by end of 2012, and update their research working papers in preparation for rigorous review at the final research methods meeting scheduled for early 2013.

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RFGI young researchers speak about their participation in the program

As part of RFGI capacity building component, a quarter of the researchers recruited are young upstarts; below are excerpts from interviews with four young researchers on their perception of the RFGI program.



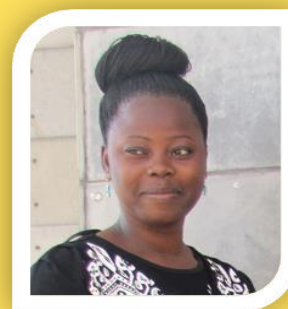
Adja Coumba Dem Samb (Senegal) – The RFGI has improved my research and writing abilities, and also my ability to do critical scientific work. The program has been well managed. Providing RFGI researchers the opportunity to obtain any article or published material we need has been particularly helpful. I also like the way time was managed during the research methods meetings and the entire research program. What could be improved? I would have loved there to have been more research meetings so as to build stronger relationships with other RFGI researchers.



Frank Agyei (Ghana) – What has excited me most about the RFGI is the mix of researchers from diverse backgrounds with rich experiences. I have learnt to appreciate others' perspectives and understand issues from unfamiliar context. Whilst most of the researchers were more experienced, RFGI made room for young scientists like me. The blend helped a lot. Participating in RFGI has enhanced my team work skills, writing and analytical skills, and speaking skills. Now, I see myself as well trained in governance policy analyses and on issues of democratic representation in forestry.



David Eteme (Cameroon) – RFGI has expanded my field of knowledge. I was excited to meet internationally renowned scientists. The dynamism of the core team, solidarity of the researchers, dedication and patience of my team leader Rene Oyono, and the online RFGI library are all unforgettable aspects of the RFGI. The only downside was the bureaucratic delays before research funds get released. My most ardent wish is to have a second phase in this research program in order to continue this big adventure. I say from the deepest part of my heart, thank you to the core team, my team leader, all RFGI researchers, all administrative and financial staff, to the villagers of Akwen and Bache who welcomed me, and finally to the external peer-reviewers.



Mawa Karambiri (Burkina Faso) – An exciting aspect of the RFGI was the interaction with experienced researchers. The availability of published materials was very helpful. I joined the RFGI as a young researcher but now I am a part of a family of committed experts on forest governance in Africa. The great discovery I made from the RFGI is how local democracy can be analysed through institutional choice, political representation, citizenship and public domain. Bureaucratic delays of research funds are the only negative; sometimes the reviewers comments in our working papers were in conflict. RFGI meetings were in pleasant places and this was just great. I wish to thank IUCN, CIFOR and SIDA in Burkina Faso for the support I received from them.

RFGI in 2014: How Far Have We Come?



L-R: Sara Gräslund, Ebrima Sall, and James Murombedzi at the launch of the RFGI Program in January 2012



The RFGI research team at the research methods meeting in Saly, Senegal

In addition to our 34 field researchers, the RFGI recruited three post-doctoral fellows to carry out studying up research and provide additional support to the field researchers. Drs. Emmanuel Nuesiri and Jacques Pollini were recruited at the University of Illinois, while Dr. Bakary Doucoure joined the RFGI CODESRIA team, in Senegal.

To integrate research results into national policy processes, our teams in Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Cameroon, DR Congo and Uganda set up National Policy Advisory Boards with representatives of forest departments, local governments, University researchers, IUCN and other NGOs working on forest and climate change mitigation (including REDD+ initiatives). We also sought to engage with international organizations such as the Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (COMIFAC) in the Congo Basin.

On February 22-24, 2013, the RFGI held a planning meeting in Accra, Ghana, hosted by Dr. Emmanuel Marfo, the Ghana team leader. The meeting was attended by the RFGI directors, postdoctoral fellows, country team leaders, Ghana research team, and members of the Ghana Policy Advisory Board (Robert Bamfo, Jo Koba, Alex Asare, Lyja Damaso and Adewale Adeleke). The meeting discussed progress reports from the country team leaders, identified the main themes emerging from the RFGI research and drew up an agenda for the final methods meeting planned for Cape Town. Adewale Adeleke (Head of IUCN Ghana) also presented IUCN's proposal to develop an action learning module based on RFGI research findings.

The last RFGI methods' meeting was held in Cape Town, South Africa from April 9-24, 2013 in collaboration with the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), University of the Western Cape. The meeting was attended by RFGI core team, all RFGI researchers, and a number of experts invited to share their experience and policy insights with the RFGI family.

These included Gonzalo Oviedo (Senior Advisor, IUCN Social Policy Programme), Lorena Aguilera (Senior Advisor, IUCN Gender Programme), Jennifer Mohamed-Katerere (IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy), Edmund Barrow (Head, IUCN Global Ecosystems Management Programme), Prof. Ben Cousins (PLAAS), and Prof. Lungisile Ntsebeza (University of Cape Town). In September 2013, James Murombedzi and Jesse Ribot participated in a USAID convened meeting to review and assess natural resources governance assessment tools. The draft RFGI Local Environmental Governance Assessment Handbook was one of three tools discussed in this meeting.

In October 2013, IUCN held a meeting in Nairobi for its staff from Ghana, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Mozambique and the IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office; others present included RFGI directors and East Africa researchers. The meeting trained IUCN staff on RFGI concepts, laid the ground work for testing the RFGI Handbook using Action Learning, and explored links between RFGI and IUCN's Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF). Invited guests to this meeting included Jennifer Mohamed-Katerere (IUCN-CEESP).

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RFGI in 2014: How Far Have We Come?



Jesse Ribot and Edmund Barrow in the ferry to Goree, Senegal



RFGI researchers visit Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned during apartheid for 18 years



L-R: Manali, Raymond, Martin, Susan and Muriel at the top of Table Mountain, Cape Town, South Africa

On February 20-22, 2014, the RFGI held a “Workshop on Forestry: Making REDD+ Democratic?” at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign. The workshop was facilitated by the RFGI core team (Jesse Ribot, Edmund Barrow, James Murombedzi and Gretchen Walters). The workshop was used to discuss in detail the content of the RFGI Local Environmental Governance Handbook to be published at the end of 2014.

Presently, RFGI researchers are in the final stages of completing their working papers. In addition, six background working papers for RFGI researchers are now freely available to the public, these are:

- 1) The Effects of REDD+ on Forest People in Africa: Access, Distribution, and Participation in Governance. **Emily Anderson & Hisham Zerriffi**
- 2) Review of REDD+ and Carbon-Forestry Projects in RFGI Countries. **Mukundi Mutasa**
- 3) Social Protection in REDD+ Initiatives: A Review. **Rebecca L. Rutt**
- 4) Studying Local Representation: A Critical Review. **Prakash Kashwan**
- 5) Choix, Reconnaissance et Effets de la Décentralisation sur la Démocratie. **Jesse C. Ribot**
- 6) The Re-Emergence of Customary Authority and its Relation with Local Democratic Government. **Emmanuel O. Nuesiri**

Copies of the working papers are available online at <http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?rubrique38&lang=en>.

Our researchers have gone on to doctorate studies thanks partly to their participation in RFGI; these include Rocio Hiraldo, Alois Mandondo and Barbara Nakangu (IUCN/RFGI). RFGI directors and researchers also participated in other notable international initiatives:

- Edmund Barrow and Marta Monjane from IUCN represented RFGI at the 17th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-17) in Durban, South Africa, from 28 November to 9 December 2011.
- RFGI was at the 3rd Initiative for Climate Adaptation Research and Understanding through the Social Sciences (ICARUS III) in New York, from May 17-20, 2012. RFGI researchers organized a panel on “Choice and Recognition in Forest Governance in Africa”.
- CODESRIA, co-organized with the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, and Environment and Development in the Third World (ENDA), a side event titled “Occupy Nature: Environmental Justice under a Changing Sky” at the Rio+20 meeting in Brazil from June 20-22, 2012.
- RFGI researchers attended a colloquium in Orléans, France, titled “Geography, Ecology and Politics: A Climate of Change”, from September 6-8, 2012. The meeting discussed changing perspectives in disciplines such as geography and political ecology.
- IUCN, USAID CARPE program, and James Cook University Australia, held a session at the World Conservation Congress, 6-15 September, 2012, titled “Is REDD+ An Opportunity for, or A Constraint on Economic Development in Central Africa?”

It is not possible to capture all we have achieved in this bulletin. We have provided just a snapshot of how far we have come from the January 2012 launching of the RFGI to date. We are grateful to staff of IUCN for their support to RFGI in several countries, particularly Burkina Faso, Ghana, Cameroon, Uganda, and Mozambique, in providing office space, hosting research seminars and working to integrate RFGI findings into policy documents. We are also grateful to staff at CODESRIA and University of Illinois Urbana Champaign. Lastly, we thank our researchers, collaborators, resource persons, and SIDA, who have all contributed to making this an exciting and rewarding initiative.

Jesse Ribot, James Murombedzi, Ebrima Sall, Edmund Barrow and Gretchen Walters