

ITTO Fellow from DRC studies community forestry in USA

By Danielle Fuchs (WFI)

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Note: details of ITTO's next round of Fellowship awards are provided on page 29.

Mr. Zahinda Elikia Amani, President of an NGO in the Democratic Republic of Congo, received an ITTO Fellowship in 2009 to undertake a research project entitled “Sustainable Community Forest Management Practices: Experiences from Oregon to be used for preserving the tropical rainforest in Eastern region of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)” through the Fellowship Program at World Forestry Institute in Portland, USA. In addition to completing the project, he was able to meet with many forestry organizations, network with forestry communities and exchange information with American foresters and stakeholders. He successfully completed his 6-month research training in March 2010 and returned home to apply what he learned from the training to address the challenges facing the tropical rainforests in his country. At the end of his training, he was interviewed for the journal *The Forestry Source* about his fellowship activities at WFI as its first DRC Fellow. This article, based on that interview, was first published in *The Forestry Source* (copyright The Society of American Foresters, 2010), and is reproduced here with permission from *The Forestry Source*.

The World Forest Institute (WFI) in Portland, Oregon, USA hosts foresters from around the world for fellowships lasting six to twelve months (details on next page), during which fellows network with forestry professionals in the Pacific Northwest and integrate the knowledge they gain with the forestry practices used in their home countries. Elikia Amani is the first fellow the WFI has hosted from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He arrived in Oregon in September, 2009, for a six-month fellowship sponsored by the International Tropical Timber Organization. Elikia is president of the Trustee Board of the Congolese Foresters Network, a local NGO in his hometown of Bukavu, in eastern DRC. He has been a field manager at a plantation and reforestation company for 14 years.

What is the biggest challenge that foresters face in the DRC?

We have a problem with mastering forest management. Only 10 percent of our forests are managed. This small percentage consists entirely of the forests that are protected as national parks in order to provide habitat for gorillas and other endangered species. That leaves 90 percent of the forests of the DRC unmanaged, however. That is quite a gap.

The lack of forest management persists despite the existence of a *Code Forestier* (Forestry Code), the law designated to regulate forest use. The social and political climate in DRC is very complex. The Congolese people have been at war, so forest management has been a low priority. Also, the Congolese government has a very small budget for the forest sector, and even that small amount of money is stolen by the authorities. The people do not see the budget; management cannot work without money. The lack of well-trained managers and policy-makers is exacerbated by high illiteracy rates in the population and a lack of information about conservation.

A huge challenge is how to confront the authorities who are illegally selling the forest land to foreigners, who come in and do illegal logging. Most of the logging that takes place in the DRC



DRC Fellow: Elikia Amani at Oregon State University's College of Forestry. Photo: Chandalin Bennett/WFI

is by anonymous foreign companies who make a deal with the government. These companies care about forests for logging, not for conservation of streams, wildlife, and so on. Illegal exploitation threatens endangered species and deprives local populations of their natural resources. However, if I report the illegal logging, I could be killed.

What about the effects of subsistence farming?

Illegal logging also takes place in small-scale, one- to two-person operations for commercial reasons. The poverty of the people living around the forests makes them destroy the forest resources for money and fuel. Farming in rural populations also has an impact on the forests. About 70 million hectares have been brought into cultivation, at a rate of 4 million hectares per year. A lot of communities have bad agricultural practices such as slash and burn. Other important threats to the forests are mining activities, which leads to polluted streams and runoff into the forests.

Over-hunting is another threat. The primary threat to biodiversity in the Congo Basin is the commercial bushmeat trade, which is often linked to the arrival of logging roads and workers in remote areas. Also, more forestland is being converted to roads due to population increases and urban sprawl. In South Kivu, the province where I live, the demographic pressure is 400 persons per square kilometer. Because of all this stress, the forests have almost disappeared, the soil is impoverished, and climate change is evident in this area.

The recent international climate change meeting in Copenhagen resulted in a commitment by some developed nations to provide significant funding for REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) activities in nations with tropical forests, such as DRC. Is it likely that any funding... will reach DRC — and that it will be passed on to foresters such as you, who can initiate REDD projects?

I hope that the DRC will be the first country in Africa to benefit from this agreement, if any funding becomes available. However, if the donor nations provide funding to the government, it is not likely that the funding will be passed on to NGOs, such as the Congolese Foresters Network, that are capable of initiating REDD projects. If the partnership of nations can directly fund

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