

Elikia Amani: Challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The World Forest Institute (WFI) in Portland, Oregon, hosts foresters from around the world for a fellowship program lasting six to 12 months, 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 (DR Congo). He arrived in the United States 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 nongovernmental organization in his hometown of Bukavu, in eastern DR Congo. He has been a field manager at a plantation and reforestation company for 14 years. As an intern for the WFI, I interviewed Elikia to learn about the problems facing sustainable forestry in the DR Congo and how he hopes to address those problems with help from his network at the WFI.

Elikia is very soft spoken. He speaks slowly, deliberately, choosing his English words carefully. I have to lean in closer to make sure I catch everything he says. He also is quick to smile and eager to talk about forestry in his home country.

DF: What is the biggest challenge that foresters face in the DR Congo?

EA: 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 to provide habitat for gorillas and other endangered species.

The lack of forest management persists despite the existence of a *Code Forestier* (The Foresters Code), the law designated to regulate forest use. The social and political climate in DR Congo 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 and management cannot work without money. The lack of well-trained managers and policymakers 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 forestland to foreigners, who come in and log illegally. Most of the logging that takes

place in the DR Congo is by anonymous foreign companies that 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 four 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 lead 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 Forest Degradation) activities in nations with tropical forests, such as DR Congo. Is it likely that any funding will reach DR Congo—and that it will be passed on to foresters such as you, who can initiate REDD projects?

I hope that the DR Congo will be the first country in Africa to benefit from this agreement, if any funding be-

Chandalin Bennett/World Forest Institute



Elikia Amani, president of the Trustee Board of the Congolese Foresters Network, a nongovernmental organization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

comes available. However, if the donor nations provide funding to the government, it is not likely that the funding will be passed on to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Congolese Foresters Network, that are capable of initiating REDD projects. If the partnership of nations can directly fund the Congolese Forest Network for such work, then we can use it for many already scheduled activities related to environment protection and climate-change fighting. Otherwise, we will continue to work in our own capacity, but with a feeble impact, due to the small scale of our activities.

Overall, the lack of the funding for most NGOs acting in the forest and environment sector in the DR Congo leads to an ongoing deforestation and degradation that impacts climate change. It is time for the nations to wake up and act to fight climate change through associations such as the Congolese Foresters Network and mobilize their

human and financial resources to take up these global challenges.

How will you use the knowledge you gain while at the WFI?

My goal is to learn how people manage the forests here, so that I can take those practices back to the DR Congo. I wish to contribute to the preservation of Congolese forests through the use of modern forest management techniques. The goal of the Congolese Forest Network is to get community participation to constitute 80 percent of forest management. We are intensifying reforestation efforts, reviewing the laws concerning conservation, and promoting an attitude of respect toward forests. Through this [WFI] platform I can have an exchange about the challenges of our country. I can give the other members a briefing on the management practices I learned here, and I can also organize workshops to which I can invite local communities and other organizations, such as local and international NGOs, to have a dialog about the management of our natural resources. I want to get the Congolese people to care about their forests and show them how to sustainably manage them.

Contact Mr. Amani at elkiamani@yahoo.fr.

NEWS BRIEFS

Industry Emissions

The results of the first comprehensive evaluation of greenhouse gas impacts from the US forest products industry was described in a recent *Environmental Science and Technology* paper, "Greenhouse Gas and Carbon Profile of the US Forest Products Industry Value Chain."

The study's authors calculated that annual net additions of carbon to the stock of wood and paper products was sufficient to offset all direct emissions plus all indirect emissions associated with purchased electricity, which amounts to about one-half of the industry's total emissions, or 104 of 212 million metric tons CO₂-equivalent in 2004–2005.

The study was a joint effort of the US Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory (FPL) and Northern Research Station (NRS) office at Durham, New Hampshire; and the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement Inc. (NCASI), in Raleigh, North Carolina. The article, by Linda S. Heath et al., is available at <http://pubs.acs.org/doi/pdf/10.1021/es902723x>.

Big Trees

The *National Register of Big Trees* marks its 70th anniversary this year with a total of 733 champion and cochampion trees from 637 native and naturalized tree species in the United States. This year, 175 new champions or cochampions were listed, while 164 were dethroned. The 2010 edition also features a revised list of eligible species.

The *National Register* is updated bi-annually by American Forests and is sponsored by The Davey Tree Expert Company. Trees receive a point total based on their height, circumference, and one-quarter of their crown spread. State coordinators verify the nominations and conduct a variety of education and outreach programs to complement and extend the national program.

Sequoia National Park's General Sherman giant sequoia, the *Register's* highest scoring tree, with 1,321 points, has been listed since the first edition in 1940. See www.americanforests.org/resources/bigtrees.

Forest Planning Collaborative

The Open Space Institute (OSI, www.osiny.org) has established a Private Forestland Planning Collaborative that will create maps and a report that

describes the public benefits of protecting large tracts of private forestland in the eastern United States. The study is designed to identify the role of the largest forest ownerships in holding together the mosaic of privately owned lands, creating and retaining jobs, providing drinking water, and protecting wildlife in the region. To conduct the study, OSI is seeking to collaborate directly with the 30 largest landowners who control 11 percent of eastern timberlands to map the exact location of these holdings.

The report is funded by independent foundations, including the US Endowment for Forests and Communities, and is being authored by a select committee of industry experts, including Ann Bartuska, deputy chief, research & development, US Forest Service; Clark Binkley managing director, International Forestry Investment Advisors; Mike Clutter, dean of the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources at the University of Georgia; and six others.

For more information, contact Abigail Weinberg, aweinberg@osiny.org, or Peter Howell, phowell@osiny.org.

For more news, visit the "Featured News" section of the SAF website, www.eforester.org.

("Letters" continued from page 4)

Editor's note: On May 12, the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced its assessment of ArborGen's field trials and issued a finding of no significant impact.

Recovery Act Spending

According to the "In Brief" item in the April edition about American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) spending, the US Forest Service reported that it had "spent \$500 million to treat more than 134,000 acres of forest to reduce the risk of wildfire." \$3,730 per acre? Really? I understand that the Forest Service is held to a higher standard for environmental documentation, but these costs are ridiculous. How much of the money was skimmed off as it filtered its way down from the Washington, DC, office, to the regions, to the forests, to the districts? It is widely held that government spending is the least efficient way to "create" jobs. These numbers support of that notion.

Rick Kuykendall
Chehalis, Washington

Send letters to Source Editor Steve Wilent at wilents@safnet.org.

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*.

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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.

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

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