

Supporting Students in the Congo Basin: New Course Curriculums for Master’s Programs

In 2015, working closely with the Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions of Central Africa (RIFFEAC), the U.S. Forest Service published a set of four regional planning guides, focused on landscape-scale resource management. These guides covered topics such as community-based natural resource management, extractive resources, integrated land use, and protected area management. They resulted from a collaborative process, during which communities, academics, conservation organizations, and government policy officials across the region provided input, ensuring the training materials would offer a well-rounded and comprehensive approach to natural resource management planning.

Today, the regional planning guides have served as a starting point for a much larger project—to support universities in making a complex subject such as environmental management more accessible for students through new curriculums. In early 2020, the first teaching module developed based on the guides, focusing on integrated landscape management, was launched at CRESA Forêt-Bois, a regional professional education center in Cameroon.

“The module is very accessible, easy to understand, and very edifying,” commented Manguèle Fatou Gaëlle Steyie, one of the first master’s students at CRESA who took the course. “It allowed us to look at how all types of societal problems are connected to the environment.”



Students from CRESA take a photo with Olivier Sene, USFS Country Coordinator in Cameroon, (center, green shirt) during a field trip outside of Yaoundé.



“We all share our environmental resources, they are everything that surrounds us. The problems we are facing are the same ones the world is facing. And now is the time to act.”

Manguèle Fatou Gaëlle Steyie on a field trip visiting a farm outside of Yaoundé as part of the Integrated Landscape Management course at CRESA.

Since the launch at CRESA, more modules have been introduced across the region. In March 2021, a new Human Rights and Conservation course curriculum was introduced at Garoua Wildlife College in Cameroon, in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The course focuses on complex human rights issues and how they intersect with conservation practices. Lessons are focused on the region, allowing students to reflect on real and relevant challenges playing out within Central Africa’s protected areas. To date, over seventy-five students have taken the course, and it has been incorporated into curriculums at universities in Gabon and Rwanda.

In conjunction with its master’s program in Economics and Business Development, the University of Douala in Cameroon launched a five-day course on calculating the economic value of biodiversity in November 2021. Two experts in agricultural economics taught the course, and more than 50 second-year master’s students were in attendance. This short class is currently being expanded into a full master’s course for second-year master’s students to be able to explore financial concepts associated with biodiversity conservation and climate change.

There is no shortage of motivated students in Central Africa, but they can face challenges accessing the resources they need to prepare for roles in the environmental sector. Having access to up-to-date and region-specific materials when pursuing their education gives students the confidence and competence to combat a range of environmental challenges. For students like Manguèle Fatou Gaëlle Steyie, courses like these are the foundation for transformative careers.

“When we talk about the environment, we have to talk about climate change. It makes us ask questions—why is it so hot today? Why hasn’t it rained? And then we realize it is all connected to the state of our environment. We all share our environmental resources, they are everything that surrounds us. The problems we are facing are the same ones the world is facing. And now is the time to act.”



Supporting higher education has far-reaching impacts for sustainable development initiatives in the region. The U.S. Forest Service, through USAID’s Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), will continue to work with universities and regional bodies offering forest and natural resource management programs across Central Africa.

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