Participation to the COP 13 Youth Forum: a golden opportunity

As youth and involved in combatting desertification and land degradation we had a lot of points in common. However, we all come from different parts of the world and we therefore have different points of views and experiences shaped by the various territorial contexts. The gathering of 22 young people from every part of the world: representatives from all continents, from affected and non-affected countries, from small islands countries ... allowed to share experiences and points of views in order to forge a global position on the Youth involvement in combatting desertification and land degradation.

This Youth Forum, kindly hosted and organized by the Chinese Academy of Forestry (CAF), the State Forestry Administration of China (SFA), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Secretariat, All-China Youth Federation (ACYF) and the United Nations Environment of China (UNEC China), took place from the 8th of September to the 10th of September. It was a place of riches exchanges and debates.

The 8th of September was organized as a sharing experiences day by showing the interest and the need to involve youth in combatting desertification and land degradation by a variety of panellists. Then we had the opportunity to present our success stories according to our belonging region. This part was very interesting by showing the various modes of actions for youth. I had the opportunity to present my own experience as advocacy officer in CARI association and to share with all the people
present was truly rewarding. In the afternoon, we discussed in group about how to promote and engage young people in SLM or land restoration work. It was a role playing talk: we were split in 6 groups and each group was representing one specific stakeholder. The discussion and the outputs produced were very satisfactory. It allowed to make proof of imagination to see from every points of view how to involve more concretely the youth in sustainable land management. Moreover, as the group were mixed between the foreign and Chinese youth representatives, it was a good initiative to share our experiences and ideas with the Chinese representatives. Finally, we concluded this day by the adoption of the Youth declaration. This declaration represents perfectly what we outlined before and during this forum and could be introduced in the final outcome of this COP by member states.

The 9th of September we had the opportunity to attend the open dialogue session on land and climate change in order to present our outcomes and our position on land, climate change and youth. Andrew gave such a powerful speech in plenary showing the necessity to involve formally the youth in combatting desertification and climate change. This session was strongly constructive by allowing us to present our position as the Youth and to take part in the debate and exchanges with the other actors: civil society, member states representatives, etc... Moreover, we had the opportunity to seat within our own delegation and to exchange with our representative. During the afternoon, we could attend the different COP 13 events scheduled on this day. I assisted to the GEF day in Rio pavilion. A session on “Innovation, science and technology” gathering numerous scientists was very interesting by presenting us numerous tools to assess land degradation in order to plan land restoration actions or to implement sustainable land management. Then, a session organized with civil society took place in order to see how the GEF grants programs could be improved. It was also very rich in its content and CARI’s speaker emphasized the need to involve youth, quoting Andrew after its morning speech.
On the 10th of September, the last day of the forum, we went to a field trip to visit the desert and the Chinese initiative in regreening it. It was the occasion to conclude this forum altogether on a more informal note by seeing what China reached to implement. We went by bus within Kubuqi desert where we had three short stops: one to observe the desert resort created to ensure job opportunities for local people in desert (leisure activities to attract tourists); one to observe the materials and objects created with desert resources to show that a desert, sustainably managed can create some benefits; and the last one to observe the afforestation Chinese strategy where we could observe their action plan to extend a natural oases by stopping dunes and sand to displace. This trip was very interesting and well-organized with informative videos all along the bus-trip and guides giving us rich explanations, I would just have preferred if we could go closer to the resort to observe the leisure activities which are there because we only had the opportunity to observe it from far. Moreover, it was a long journey in bus for only few time of observance on the field, I would have appreciated if we could have longer time on the field sites and more opportunity to exchange with people on what we could see.

To conclude, this forum was a golden opportunity by allowing me to meet and share with my fellow from all over the world. Desertification and land degradation are a global concern due to its worldwide consequences. In my country, it is still relatively unknown by most of the people and particularly the youth. I am very happy and proud to have participated in this forum to contribute to the Youth involvement. Youth is one of the main victims of this state of affair and still we are most of the time ignored and forgotten. This forum allowed to show our engagement, to forge relations and a network and I strongly hope that it has been a starting point of a real long-term initiative of Youth involvement. Moreover, as it was organized parallel to the COP 13, we had the opportunity to participate in COP 13 official events and to meet various stakeholders: national delegates, private sector representatives, civil society organisation representatives, etc... This was therefore really educative, formative and essential in our starting careers. A COP is a momentum moment allowing to gather actors from various fields and countries and to make them communicate, exchange and sometimes forge partnerships and it is consequently a great opportunity for all of us to have been participated in this one!
Magali Pausin (CARI/GTD)

Two other articles of Pausin could be found via:


- [http://www.cariassociation.org/Actualites/COP13-Visite-de-terrain-au-desert-de-Kubuqi](http://www.cariassociation.org/Actualites/COP13-Visite-de-terrain-au-desert-de-Kubuqi)