

MDP EXCHANGE PROGRAM: DEVELOPMENT IN THE SAHEL

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We had the opportunity to be part of the MDP exchange program for sustainable development in the Sahel, a year-long collaboration between students and faculty from the Masters in Sustainable Development Practice (MDP) programs of the University of Florida (Gainesville, USA), Sciences Po (Paris, France), and Cheikh Anta Diop University (Dakar, Senegal).

The program took off with the “Demography and the Challenge of Social Change in the African Sahel” symposium in the fall of 2014 at the University of Florida. After brainstorming sessions about areas of interest and expertise, we partnered to work in three different collaborative projects that explored the impact of climate change in the Sahel from different perspectives: sustainable housing and sustainable cities, the use of technology as a tool for climate change adaptation, and the gender dimensions of food security.

Discussions with advisors, experts, and faculty members helped us mold our initial ideas into final concepts. In March 2015 our teams presented to faculty and students at Sciences Po and received critical

feedback on ways to improve our research; and in May 2015 we met again in Dakar, Senegal, where we had the opportunity to visit multiple field sites and meet with professionals working in these issues and see, first-hand, how certain projects and initiatives relevant to the areas of our research were looking at climate change in the Sahel. Before the end of our visit in Senegal, we presented our progress and received instrumental feedback from a diverse audience of professors, students, development practitioners, and representatives from NGOs and the Senegalese government.

Throughout the year, we had the opportunity to not only work with and learn from students from around the world, but also to create lasting friendships, grow our professional network, and experience how solutions are being already implemented in the field. We learned and experienced how synergies can be used positively to integrate different disciplines in order to tackle development issues from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Moreover, this program helped one of our team members, Whitney Turientine, to have a better understanding

of how indigenous and scientific climate knowledge could be integrated as part of climate information, which was important for a more in-depth study carried in northern Tanzania to assess the gender dimensions of climate information services.

As a final step in this year-long collaboration, we also had the opportunity to present our research at the International Conference on Sustainable Development at Columbia University in September 2015. It was a true honor to play a role in a conference focused on these key issues, at such an important year for sustainable development.

Irving Chan Gomez, Whitney Turientine, and Rugiyatu Kane are second-year MDP students in the at the University of Florida. Tzviatko Chiderov and Mamycor Ndione are MDP from Sciences Po and Cheikh Anta Diop University, respectively. Support for this project was provided by the France-Florida Research Institute, the Sahel Research Group, the Center for African Studies, and the International Center.