



The University of Oregon in Eugene

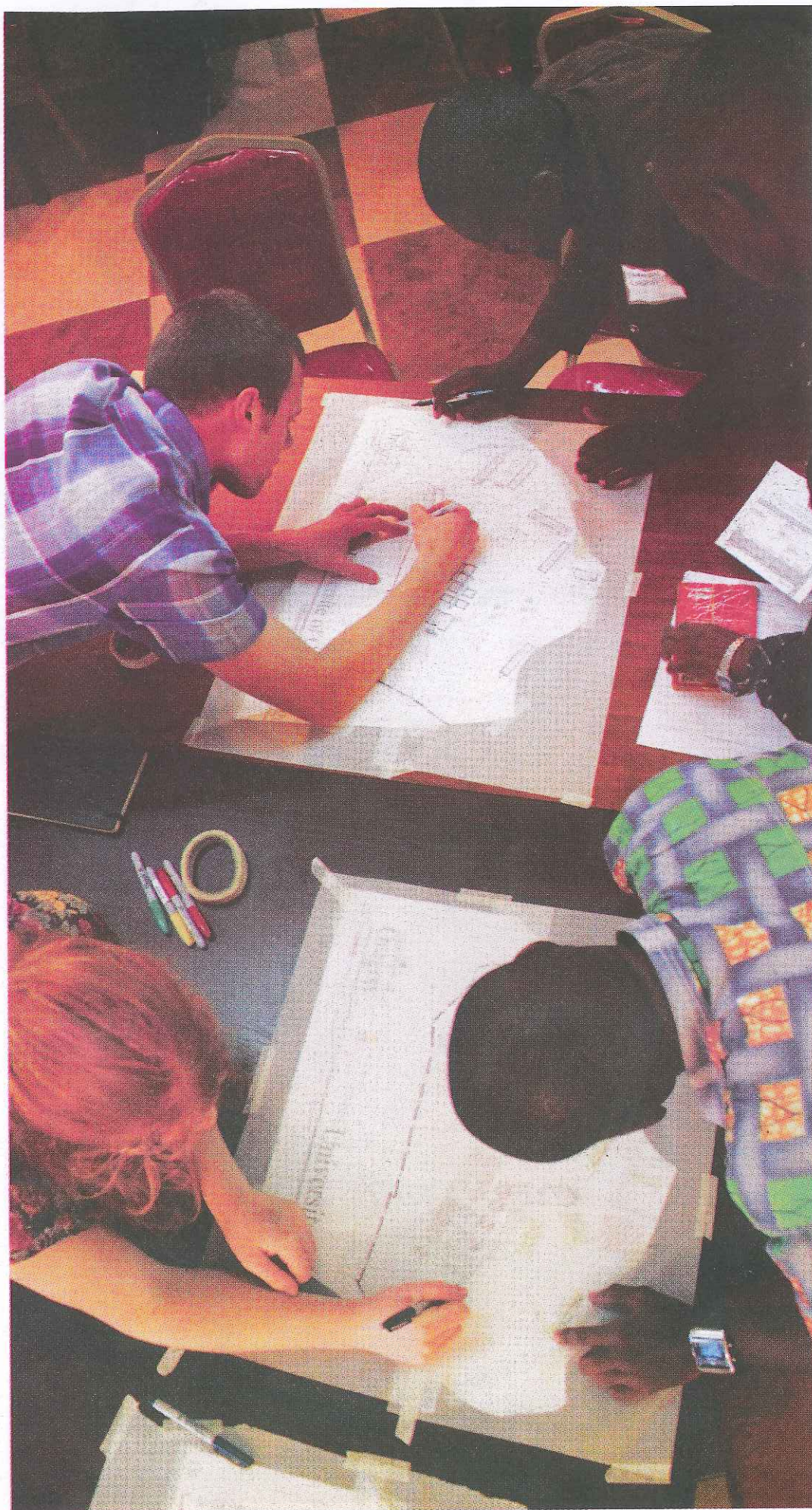
SPECIAL REPORT

Gabon-Oregon cooperation: A unique collaboration for progress

Simply referred to as the Gabon-Oregon Center (GOC), the University of Oregon's Gabon-Oregon Transnational Research Center on Environment and Development was established in March 2013 with the primary purpose of developing collaborative research and public outreach partnerships between the U.S. state of Oregon and the Republic of Gabon.



The Central Campus of Gabon's Omar Bongo University, the site of the Gabon-Oregon Center's flagship project on sustainable renovation of the university.



Although this partnership may seem similar to other U.S.-global agreements, it is unique. For example, it links scholars, students and practitioners in Gabon and Oregon for the utilization of comparative analytical methods to address urgent sustainable development challenges specific to Gabon and Oregon.

Furthermore, the GOC's uniqueness also lies in the fact that it has two bona fide executive directors with equal administrative status, one based in Eugene, Oregon, and the other operating from the Gabonese capital of Libreville.

The center has employees simultaneously working in the Gabonese capital and on the campus of University of Oregon (UO) in Eugene.

The executive directors, who possess equal status in rank and functions are: Francis Bivigou, a biomedical engineer and researcher in Libreville, and Eric Benjaminson, a retired U.S. diplomat and former ambassador to Gabon, who is serving in a similar capacity at the Eugene office.

The GOC has been de-

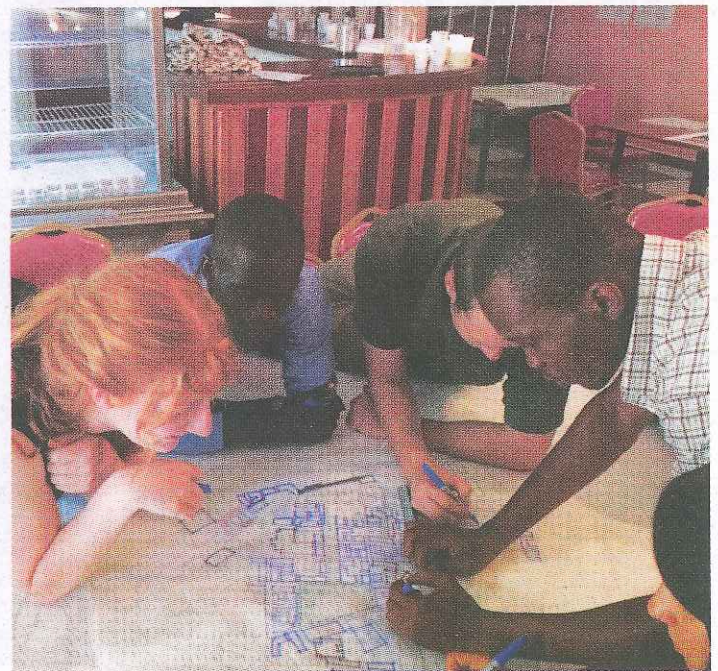
signed to ensure a true North-South partnership in the development of applied research on sustainable developmental challenges.

Mutual collaborative activities between Gabonese and Oregon scholars

Since its establishment in March 2013, the Gabon-Oregon Center has expanded its overall activities in a genuine progressive and collaborative spirit, including mutual student and faculty exchanges. For example, a delegation of university officials and students from Omar Bongo University (UOB) in Libreville was hosted in June 2014 on the Eugene campus of the University of Oregon. They came to familiarize themselves with the activities of the center. While in Eugene, members of the delegation interacted with Eugene students in UO's Urban Design Lab. They were joined by a representative of the Agence Nationale des Grands Travaux, the Gabonese Public Works Agency, which has been actively involved in the project. ANGT has funded part of the Center's Urban Sustainability Program.

The foregoing events were a reciprocal gesture, as there were earlier visits to Gabon in the Spring of 2014 by Oregon

Oregon and Gabonese architecture and geography students work together on the University Renovation Master Plan.



faculty, students and scientific colleagues, a presence that enabled the Eugene visitors to help with promoting several key Gabon-Oregon programs. Previously, several Gabonese partners, which included the first group of students, had visited Eugene to work on a local project for the ongoing partnership. Between April and May 2014, there were bilateral visits by professors and administrators, including the trip to Libreville by colleagues of the American English Institute (AEI) for a two-week successful workshop, aimed at training Gabonese teachers of English as well as identifying future partners for the establishment of an AEI training and testing center in Libreville.

To ensure accruing benefits to other Oregon institutions, faculty from Oregon State University, Portland State University and the University of Oregon participated in a May 2014 planning session to delineate possible cooperative ventures in The Nature Conservancy's multifaceted project for studying and improving the sustainable management of the Ogooué River basin, supported in part by the Gabon-Oregon Center. This program will fund an OSU fisheries biologist's trip to Gabon to conduct preliminary project research, to be dovetailed with a later visit in 2014 by a member of UO's biology faculty who specializes in Riverine Ecology. PSU, UO and OSU hydrologists, geographers and biologists are also scheduled to visit Gabon for research purposes. It is exciting to know that Oregon-based scholars have begun to work hard at identifying Gabonese counterparts with whom to forge partnerships.

Major and innovative Gabon-Oregon Center projects

Meanwhile the Gabon-Oregon Center has embarked on an urban sustainability project in Libreville, in other areas, Ethno-botany and Anthelmintic Drug development, Subsoil Microbial Biodiversity, and Ogooué River Basin Sustainable Management pro-

grams, all of which collaborate with UO's American English Institute (AEI) in its creation of an English-language academy that benefits Gabonese English teachers.

Also, under the leadership of Zoe Anton, program manager of the Urban Sustainability Program, a master plan has been designed for the regeneration of the Omar Bongo University (UOB) campus in collaboration with UO, the Urban Design Lab of the University of Oregon (UDL) and ANGT.

Consequently, in January 2014, there was a visit to Gabon by students and faculty from UO's Urban Design Lab and, between June 9 and 14, 2014, an additional five of UO Lab's students traveled to Libreville accompanied by faculty supervisors Dr. Mark Gillem and Barry Gordon for the purpose of organizing a second workshop at Omar Bongo University.

A group of nine Gabonese students working with the design and planning processes as part of the team were in Eugene in June. There are subsequent plans for the Fall of 2014 for UDL students and faculty from UO to return to UOB for a final presentation with all collaborators. The foregoing events helped in cementing the working relation-

ship between University of Oregon – represented by its visiting faculty and students – and Omar Bongo University; events which helped to bring about the formal signing of a memorandum of understanding between both institutions, which was blessed with the financial support of the Govern-

ment of Gabon. There is also a plan funded by ANGT for the renovation of the UOB campus in Libreville.

A priority focus of the entire program is for the partnership to elevate Omar Bongo University into a sustainable and innovative institution representative of modern African

design.

As recently as June, a senior delegation from UOB arrived on the Eugene campus as part of the innovative plans for strengthening formal relationship between UO and UOB. The delegation of five, led by UOB Law School dean on behalf of the rector included the dean of the UOB College of Arts and Sciences. The delegation attended the final review session organized by the Urban Sustainability Program, after which the leading Gabonese educational leaders paid visits to officials of the UO-based Sustainable Cities Initiative, the UO Law School, AEI and the departments of biology and geography.

For the formal setup of the Gabon-Oregon Center, a delegation from the University of Oregon, led by the equity and inclusion vice-president, Dr. Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh, who was accompanied by the University of Oregon Foundation chief investment officer, Jay Namyet, international affairs vice provost, Dennis Galvan, and associate vice president for international advancement, John Manotti, traveled in Fall 2012 to the Gabonese capital of Libreville to sign an agreement with the country's minister of higher education.



Gabon's Ogooué River, the lifeline of the country and the subject of several joint research projects by the GOC on river and fisheries, health and conservation.

Summary Table of Transnational Sustainability Research Projects Now Underway

Gabon-Oregon Center Projects Table

Date	Project Title	Travel Details	Number of Travelers
Jul-13	mHealth: Mobile Phone Health Network for Young Women in Rural Gabon	From Oregon	1
Sep-13	Microbial Biodiversity in Tropical Rainforests	From Oregon	2
Oct-13	Ethnobotany and Anthelmintic Drug Development	From Oregon	2
Jan-14	Participative Workshop for UOB Campus Planning (1)	From Oregon	15
Jan-14	Visit by Gabonese Presidency Official	From Gabon	1
Mar-14	Sustainable Cities Initiative	From Oregon	2
Apr-14	English Language Workshop in Libreville	From Oregon	2
Apr-14	Cooperative Project Visit by UOB Geography Department Professors	From Gabon	4
May-14	Worm and Soil Study by visiting Biology Researcher	From Gabon	1
Jun-14	Official Visit from UOB Delegates	From Gabon	5
Jun-14	Participative Workshop for UOB Campus Planning (2)	From Oregon	7
Jun-14	Participative Workshop for UOB Campus Planning (3)	From Gabon	9
Jun-14	Visit to UO by ANGT manager	From Gabon	1
Sep-14	Ogooué River Basin Sustainable Management Program	From Oregon	1
Sep-14	Visit by UO Professor in the Department of Geography	From Oregon	1