

Remarks by Executive Secretary on 10th Anniversary of the African Forest Forum

May 22, 2019

The Guest of Honour, The Conservation Secretary for Environment and Forestry

The Representative of the African Union Commission,

The Representative of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF),

The Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO),

The Representative of United Nations Environment Programme-Regional Office for Africa

The Head of Regional Development Cooperation in Sub-Sahara Africa, Embassy of Sweden, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

The Representative of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC),

The Representative of the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)

The Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities of ECOWAS, EAC, and ECCAS,

The Chair of the Governing Council of the African Forest Forum (AFF)

Heads and representatives of other institutions,

Representative of various media,

All invited guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning!

I wish to welcome all of you to this celebration of a decade of active service of the African Forest Forum in African forestry.

However, before I continue, I wish to introduce you to the people who have guided the process of establishment and running this institution.

I wish to introduce to you the Founder Members of AFF: (All to stand up)

They were members of a Steering Committee for an Africa-wide project on “Lessons Learnt on Sustainable Forest Management in Africa”. This project was instrumental in conceiving the idea of an African Forest Forum. The Founder Members constituted the members of the first Governing Council of AFF. Gradually the Governing Council built up its membership and operational structure.

I wish to introduce to you past and present Members of the Governing Council of AFF: (All to stand up).

The Governing Council provides policy direction to the institution, among other responsibilities.

I wish to introduce to you the staff at AFF Secretariat: (All to stand up)

Mr. Guest of Honour, ladies and gentlemen,

When AFF was conceived the nature and type of challenges we saw the sector could address at that time (2006/2007) were much easier to handle than the challenges we see today in front of us. At that time priority was on improving livelihoods of rural people, national incomes and the environment, largely through better policies, legislation and investments into the forestry sector. These are still issues we continue to face and will remain central to forestry for a long time.... because they are part of the whole process of socio-economic development.

Since then the landscape has changed considerably. We now have this monster of global warming and its associated and increasingly complex challenges hanging above our heads. In this regard, the forests and trees outside forests are now seen as critically important to saving our world from adverse effects of climate change.

As this is not enough the supply of adequate quality water on the planet and more specifically on the continent is an emerging serious problem, also threatening human, animal, plant life on land. We often hear of people dying from thirst! And conflicts over water are not far fetched, we see many of them on a small scale, but they hold potential to escalate. Again, we see forests and trees on the solution equation.

In many places land quality has been eroded and agricultural crop productivity is rapidly on decline. Fixing our soils is now an emerging problem in many countries. This is constraining our efforts to feed ourselves, and again this is yet another problem pointing to human survival. Trees are capable of fixing declining soil fertility and restoring soil structure.

The emerging scenario from these three examples is of one of mounting and serious threats to human survival that has been caused by our neglect to take good care of the air we breathe, the water sources for the water we drink, the soils on which we grow our food. However, we still can address these by timely interventions using forests and trees in the solution equation. This requires the African forestry fraternity to change the narrative on forestry from the simplistic impression many people unfortunately have on forest and tree resources, to one that places forests and trees outside forests at the centre of human, animal and plant survival on the continent. We have to wake up to these undeniable realities of our time. There might not be meaningful sustainable socio-economic development on the continent if we do not move very swiftly and take very good care of our forests, and trees on farms and other areas.

Having said that, what has AFF done in the last ten years?

We have a booklet summarizing some of the things we have done and the challenges we have encountered on the way. However, let me highlight a few:

At the outset, AF had to move very swiftly **to link with the international forestry community** given that many issues in global discourses had a bearing on African forestry. To this end AFF facilitated the creation of the African Group at meetings of the United Nations Forum on Forests and has continued to provide technical support to African delegates to UNFF meetings. This has made Africa speak with one voice, become more articulate and effective in such meetings and make meaningful contributions to shaping global forestry policies. AFF is now extending similar support to delegates to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). AFF is accredited to the conference of parties (COPs) of UNCCD and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as to sessions of UNFF.

With respect to **our continent** AFF has a memorandum of understanding with the African Union Commission to develop forestry on the continent. We also work

closely with our regional economic communities. For example, we have worked with SADC to raise the profile of the private sector in forestry in SADC countries by facilitating the establishment of the SADC Timber Association. We are also working along similar lines in ECOWAS countries, and the private sector has already laid the framework for the establishment of a sub-regional forest products association. While waiting for this to materialize some private sector actors are, on their own volition, operating a WhatsApp group that enables them share marketing and trade information of forest products. Further, ECOWAS has nominated AFF as a lead institution in implementing one of its seven pillars for its forest convergence plan; that is the pillar on “Information, education and communication”. In East and West Africa we are still babysitting the creation of Professional Forestry Associations for these two regions.

AFF has also **carried out continent wide studies on various pressing issues** including the following:

1. An assessment of the continent’s capacity to meet its afforestation and reforestation requirement for tree planting material, and how the demand and supply of such material is managed. This was in response to the many initiatives that come with a requirement for afforestation and reforestation like CDM and REDD+ embodied in the Paris Agreement, AFR100, the Bonn Challenge, LDN of UNCCD, in addition to national requirements for tree planting material. In this regard few countries in Sub-Sahara Africa can meet their requirements for planting material, let alone planting material to take advantage of these global and regional initiatives. Also, many countries have reduced investments in forest research and development in tree breeding and deployment of tree germplasm, resulting in poor quality tree germplasm being used for planting as well as minimal operation or even closure of national tree seed centres.
2. Another area of concern is the capacity of the continent to protect its investments in forests (planted and natural) from pests and diseases. In this regard, we also undertook a survey on our capacity for surveillance on pests and diseases for forests and trees outside forests. The emerging picture is one of a shortage of technical skills for undertaking surveillance for tree pests

and diseases as well as inadequate infrastructure to support necessary field and laboratory investigations.

3. A growing area in global forestry is the **sustainable management of our forests**. To this end we **assessed the status of forest certification on the continent**. In this regard, certified forests are very few on the continent and the capacity for forest certification is very inadequate. **If the continent has to ensure that its forest products are originating from sustainably managed forests and are procured legally then forest certification has to become an integral component of forest management.**
4. AFF facilitated five countries to **develop strategies on how the Green Great Wall of the Sahara and Sahel Initiative can be implemented**. These strategies have since formed the basis for developing field operations in these countries.
5. As far as **climate change and variability** is concerned, we had to first organize our scientific understanding of this in African forestry by compiling all scientific information we could muster into **a book on “Climate change and African forest and wildlife resources”**; which then opened a plethora of issues the continent has to address. As the momentum on carbon trade increased pace, we had to very quickly **train a critical mass of 574 people in 16 African countries, Kenya included (trained 56 people), who could rapidly assess forest carbon, develop the required documentation to facilitate trade in carbon, and also understand the regulatory frameworks and markets for such trade**. We have reports that many people have made good use of such training. Further, it was realized that education and training establishments need support on how to handle climate change in forestry training. We have since **developed training modules to guide such training**. We are also informed that these have been widely used to improve courses, curricula and other aspects of forestry, natural resources and environment education and training. More recently, **we have developed, in a pedagogical manner, eight compendiums, based on the training modules to provide**

relevant institutions with text to support forestry and related education and training. They will be launched at this event.

6. Another milestone is related to **how we share the information and knowledge products** we generate. We organize **workshops**, but these bring only a few people. We therefore rely on **info mail** to reach our 2214 members and **social media**. However, our most important avenue is our **website**. For example, in 2018 our website received about **1.5 million visits** from **141 countries**. This resulted in a download of **22,608 document** and opening of **24 million pages**. This demonstrates that AFF has a global reach, it is not restricted to Africa. An examination of the top ten countries visiting our website gives the following picture:
Kenya, **USA, India**, Nigeria, **France**, Ethiopia, Cameroon, **Germany**, Tanzania and **China**
7. Many of us enjoyed using the regular publication of the FAO state of world forest resources. We thought that African could **develop regular updates on the state of forestry on the continent**. We have compiled the first issue of such a series and this will also be launched shortly.

Finally, these and many more accomplishment, together with the way they are being used are summarized in a booklet prepared for this event.

Mr. Guest of Honour, ladies and gentlemen,

In short, we can say that AFF has **linked very well with the international community** with respect to participating in international discourses that are relevant to forestry. On the **African continent, AFF has established close links with regional, sub-regional and national institutions, as well as with key individuals in forestry and related areas**. AFF is also **firming its links with the donor community and global financial institutions** in the area of forestry and environment. Further, the **Secretariat has been firmly established and with good capacity for facilitating undertaking of studies on a wide-ranging forestry and related issues, in addition to managing and sharing information and knowledge**. All these attributes combine to enable me to **present to AFF**

members today an institution that is ready and capable, and in collaboration with partners, to face the present-day forestry related opportunities and challenges.

The theme or pitch for AFF and partners in the coming decade had better be “forests for human, animal and plant survival”.....and nothing less.

All that we have done, together with the accomplishments we have achieved thus far, would not have been possible without:

1. The Government of the Republic of Kenya hosting us in this beautiful country and the excellent cooperation we continue to receive from our parent ministry, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, together with its key institutions namely the Kenya Forest Service and Kenya Forest Research Institute (KEFRI). In fact, we have jointly organized today’s event with KEFRI and KFS. We wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Kenya for these and other forms of support.
2. AFF has been hosted by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), in an environment that is very conducive for its operations. We outsource some services from ICRAF which have been provided very efficiently. We are very grateful to ICRAF for its continued support.
3. Finances underline the survival of an institution. Right from the beginning the **Swedish International Development and Cooperation Agency (Sida)** has been supporting us. Three years into our existence the **Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency (SDC)** joined Sida as our other main development partner up to the present moment. We gratefully thank the people of Sweden and Switzerland through Sida and SDC, respectively, for their trust in such a young institution and the support that has made AFF to grow to what it is now and the achievements it has made. We look forward to your maintaining this noble cause of sustaining the management of African forests, not only for African themselves, but also because African forests provide international public goods and services that are enjoyed globally.

4. We also continue to enjoy the good will and support from several UN agencies including UNFF, FAO, UNEP; African institutions like the AUC, RECs, African governments, civil society, private sector, academia, research, and individuals. We are very much indebted to their support.
5. And to all of you members of AFF, for trusting us at the Secretariat to grow and develop your institution. We thank you very much for the opportunity.
6. I cannot forget the **staff of the AFF Secretariat** and members of the **AFF Governing Council** as well as **Founder Members** of AFF for all their efforts during this decade as well as in organizing this event. I salute you all.
7. Finally, all we did would not have been possible without the hand of God on this institution. We pray that He continues to grow and develop this wonderful institution.

I thank you all for your kind attention.