

REMARKS BY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, AFRICAN FOREST FORUM (AFF)

THE REGIONAL WEBINAR ON SHARING OF INFORMATION AND EXPERIENCES ON NATIONAL FOREST GOVERNANCE RESPONSES TO THE PARIS AGREEMENT AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF FOREST RESOURCES IN BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENT

The representatives of the minister responsible for forestry, natural resources and environment in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo Niger, and Mali;

Heads of departments in charge of forestry and related institutions;

Representatives of related public, private institutions;

Representatives of research and academic institutions;

Representatives of civil society organisations;

Representatives of media organisations;

Resource persons;

Distinguished delegates;

All protocols observed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to start by thanking our Guest of Honour, the Deputy Executive Secretary of COMIFAC, and the Governments of Cameroon, Benin, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, and Mali for allowing these meetings to be held in their countries. In this regard, I wish to also thank the national governments in these six countries, and more specifically their ministries in charge of forests, natural resources, and environment for allowing many of their

officials, like directors and focal points of environmental conventions, to actively participate to this meeting

Also, let me thank the Guest of Honour for personally for taking interest in this event and to be at the meeting venue personally during this opening ceremony. We feel very privileged and honoured by your presence.

I also wish to thank all our national collaborators in these countries for making it possible to organize the meetings in different venues and at the same time; in addition to also coming up with scientific information that we will all share in these three days.

I would also wish to register our profound appreciation and thanks to the management and staff in various national institutions, including national government ministries and agencies, for all efforts that went into the preparation and hosting of this event. Everything has gone extremely well.

Many thanks go to you delegates to this webinar for putting aside your normal duties in order to join us in this event. I strongly believe that you will find it rewarding.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The African Forest Forum has for many years collaborated with institutions and individuals from these six countries; working on some common issues that are related to trees and forests and the way they can be used wisely to support our lives, incomes of our nations and the environment we live in. In fact, very recently we completed a study on non-timber forest products that have potential to raise incomes of women and youth, and other stakeholders in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, all these countries are participating in this webinar; and also including Chad, Senegal, and Nigeria. This is part of efforts to structure a concept note that the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) is preparing to solicit funding from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) for the Great Green Wall countries.

Apart from this work, we have also embarked on a few pan-African initiatives that are related to forests and trees, and in the context of climate change. This webinar provides us with the opportunity to share findings from our work and other experiences from our partners on these issues. This is very much in line with our mandate because the purpose of the African Forest Forum (AFF) is to provide a platform and create an enabling environment for independent and objective analysis, advocacy and advice on relevant policy and technical issues pertaining to achieving sustainable management, use and conservation of Africa’s forest and tree resources as part of efforts to reduce poverty, promote gender equality, economic and social development, and protect the environment.

With funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) AFF has been implementing two projects namely *“African forests, people and climate change”* and *“Strengthening management and use of forest ecosystems for sustainable development in Africa”*. Both projects seek to generate and share knowledge and information through partnerships in ways that will provide inputs into policy options and capacity building efforts that could lead to improved forest management that better addresses climate change impacts, as well as contribute to alleviating poverty and protecting the environment in Africa. Specifically, both projects aim to strengthen national forest governance by enhancing the capacity of African stakeholders to respond to the Paris Agreement and related global climate change policies and initiatives that are related to forestry.

This webinar will receive findings from our work that involved evaluating how countries have been responding to the Paris Agreement, and how the knowledge generated by the studies can be used to guide improvements in national forest governance processes that could eventually accelerate the pace of building sustainable forest management that responds better to adverse climate change impacts and takes advantages that come with climate change.

Further, the studies also addressed how to build resilience to adverse climate change impacts for local communities in African drylands by exploring the use of natural dryland resources to promote nature-based entrepreneurship

opportunities that hold good potential to improve livelihoods, national incomes and also protect the environment. The dryland resources explored are natural gums and resins. This arose from a request by the African Union Commission to AFF to explore how women and youth can be economically empowered through better use of gums and resins that occur in many arid and semi-arid regions of Africa. Given that the Network for Natural Gums and Resins in Africa (NGARA) has a long, good track record on working with these resources, it was therefore natural for AFF to partner with NGARA so that natural gums and resins could be addressed in the context of our work on climate change. Hence this webinar is organized jointly by AFF and NGARA, in addition to other partner institutions in your countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to encourage all of you to participate fully in the discussions and group work so that at the end of the webinar each one of us has something to take home.

For some of you who do not know AFF well, membership to this institution is free; you just go to our website and fill the application form on it. AFF is not an association of 'professional foresters' but one of people interested in forests and trees outside forests. And you know very well that all of us are in one way or another associated with products and services that come from these resources, and therefore have some interest in them. Professional foresters make up about 40% of our members. For example, we have many journalists as members, and some are participating in this webinar as members of AFF. So, feel free to join AFF. All information we generate is shared freely, and you can access it on our website.

Once again, I thank you all, and look forward to continued collaboration in future.

Thank you.