

Opening remarks by Executive Secretary- Prof Godwin Kowero

for workshop

on

Regional workshop on sharing information and experiences on forest and tree-based ecosystem services for socio-ecological resilience to climate change in Africa

03 – 07 July 2023,

Nairobi, Kenya

The Guest of Honour: The Director of Kenya Forest Research Institute-Dr. Joshua Cheboiwo

The Chair of The Members' Forum for the African Forest Forum, *doubling as* the Deputy Vice Chancellor at The Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology-Prof Suzana Augustino

The Executive Secretary of the Network for Natural Gums and Resins in Africa-NGARA-Dr. Ben Chikamai

Members of the Governing Council of the African Forest Forum

Heads and representatives of various institutions,

The media

Workshop delegates, AFF staff, and resource persons,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning.

It is a great pleasure to see all of you here. Allow me to welcome you all to this workshop that has been organized by staff from the African Forest Forum and all those who are going to make presentations on various aspects.

It is essentially a workshop for sharing results of AFF work done by a team of 18 postgraduate students that AFF sponsored their research for MSc and PhD dissertations.

This work addressed the complex relationships between climate change and forests and tree-resources. The results of their work, when combined with other available information from other sources, are expected to enable those in the forestry sector to develop appropriate

mitigation and adaptation responses to address the impacts of climate change and variability for the forest sector and the people who depend on these resources.

We are also sharing results of our initial work on sawmill value chains. AFF engaged some experts to conduct studies on the efficiency of the sawmilling industry. The expectation is to generate information that will inform the design of strategies for securing sustainability of the forest resources.

Having said that, let me take this opportunity to thank Dr. Joshua Cheboiwo, the Director of KEFRI for accepting to grace this opening ceremony as our Chief Guest. AFF and KEFRI have over the years enjoyed very good relations, and this is yet another event in which we join hands.

I would also wish to register our profound appreciation and thanks to the management and staff AFF, resources persons, and related Government ministries and agencies, for all efforts that have gone into the organization of this event. Everything has gone extremely well.

Many thanks go to you all delegates for putting aside your normal duties in order to participate in this important event.

Allow me to say a few things about the African forestry industry to which sawmilling belongs.

With the population of Africa expected to rise to 2.5 billion by 2050 and a projected demand for industrial wood estimated to grow from about 75 million m³/per year in 2020 to 250 million m³ per year by 2030, the strain on the African forests and trees outside forests has to be carefully managed, especially in the context of increasing deforestation and forest degradation on the continent that are increasingly been made worse by adverse effects of climate change.

Also, these resources consist of a myriad of different tree species, good for timber and other building materials, as well as abundance of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), thus offering the resources the capacity to serve the people on the continent with many products to meet their many and varied demands.

And one good way such demands could be met is largely through adding value on the resources through processing, if they are not just gathered for immediate consumption. This forward linkage to primary forest production is critical to Africa's development, and especially so when the population is rising rapidly, urbanization is accelerating very rapidly. Also, disposable incomes of African people are also increasing, and with them changes in tastes and preferences for quality forest and tree-based products to match their better housing and workspace demands.

Accompanying these changes are policy changes that encourage better integration among African countries, including Agenda 2063 (*An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance; Africa shall be a*

continent where the free movement of people, capital, goods and services will result in significant increases in trade and investments amongst African countries rising to unprecedented levels, and strengthen Africa's place in global trade.)

Other policy changes have led to the creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). At present, Africa 's share in global trade is a meagre 2%. Worse still intra-continental trade in Africa is estimated at 17%, and this compares unfavourably with 59% for Asia and 68% for Europe. Given the low level of intra-continental trade in Africa, there is considerable potential to increase this through appropriate mechanisms that could create such transformation. If successful, AfCFTA holds the potential to become the largest global free trade area in the world, given the big number of countries on the continent

Other global policy directions include the Paris Agreement (*Enhance public and private sector participation in the implementation of nationally determined contributions;*), the Sustainable Development Goals (Like Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, *promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*), and other agreements arising from multilateral environmental agreements and initiatives, including the International Arrangement on Forests of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) that seeks to achieve six global forest goals.

Given these developments, the potential for the forestry sector to contribute to the aspirations of both Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA, needs to be addressed, especially given the already noted considerable exchanges of forest products among African countries, albeit most of them being traded informally.

Also, practically all African countries are implementing *macro-economic policies that put the private sector*, in which the sawmilling industry resides, at the centre of socio-economic development, in other words, the engine for growth, and operating within a market framework.

This *scenario compels the continent to undertake a serious introspection of its forestry sector*, and possibly guided by several questions including:

How will Africa meet the wood products needs of this growing population?

Will Africa simply depend on imports for the ever-increasing demand for wood products?

The intention is to change Africa into a relatively wood products self-sufficient continent, thus saving considerable foreign currency spent on importing similar products; savings that can be spent on other important domestic needs without recourse to expensive international capital markets.

To make this a reality will require considerable reforms in the way African develops, manages, and sustains its forests and trees outside forests, resources that could support the

industrialization process, as well as how it handles industrialization in African forestry. This could include, among other things:

- the development of entrepreneurial and technical/vocational skills;
- development of trade and management of tools and equipment for refined products and accessories;
- uses of new technologies to improve development, management, and monitoring of forest and trees outside forests ;
- access to finance;
- putting in place good policies and governance systems that could contain the current shortcomings in the sector that include curbing illicit production and trade in forest products.

In this respect, the African forest forum joins players like African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA), AfDB and AUC in promoting regional integration through better use of natural forest resources and industrialization.

As an initial step in this direction, AFF has initiated studies on the most traded industrial wood commodity, sawn timber, with the intention on identifying investment areas in its value chain with a view to improve efficiency along the value chain. Sawn timber is a forest product that can increase intra-African trade considerably, and therefore enhance the forest sector's contribution towards more integration of the continent through trade.

A value chain study is simply a useful way of understanding how the world of producing, processing, and buying things works. We are all part of value chains in one way or the other as producers, processors, retailers, finance providers, consumers of goods and services, and so on.

In an effective value chain, people at different stages of the chain actively support each other. When everyone in the chain supports everyone else, everyone does their job more efficiently, and everyone's livelihood is improved. Each person in the chain shares the common goal of satisfying consumer needs in order to increase their own profits.

The value chain approach considers the role of existing chain actors, supporting actors, and the policy and regulatory environment.

It allows us to look at current challenges in a value chain, as well as the opportunities for improving the efficiency of the value chain, and consequently the benefits for everyone involved.

Analyzing a value chain, that is, identifying its challenges, weakness, and strengths – can help to identify new income-generating opportunities.

Sometimes, participating in a well- functioning value chain brings actors not only to higher incomes or prices, but to more stable and predictable incomes. Further, participating in value chain activities can help actors learn new skills and adopt improved practices.

Well-functioning markets and value chains can attract young people to rural activities like those found in forestry, that is, those in the realm of timber and non-timber forest products, and therefore incentivize them not to leave rural areas by offering them better opportunities for earning money in rural areas.

In summary, value chain analysis can provide very useful information that could be used to: increase livelihood support options and livelihood incomes, employment opportunities, help reverse rural-urban migration, contribute to national incomes, improve environmental stability; all of which can contribute to lifting people out of poverty and increasing their resilience to climatic and other shocks.

Therefore, such studies as those undertaken by AFF should be spread to more countries and other forest products, should be facilitated, and their results put into good use.

I welcome you all to listen to the interesting findings from both the students on climate change issues, and from our experts on sawn timber value chains that will be shared with us in this workshop.

I thank you for your attention

02/07/2023