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Trees: A Win-Win-Win-Win-Win Proposition!

The 2nd World Congress of Agroforestry kicks off in Nairobi!

By Rebecca Selvarajah-Jaffery

*The 2nd World Congress of Agroforestry kicked off on 24 August 2009 at the UN Complex in Nairobi, Kenya. Present were over 800 delegates from 97 countries around the world. Students from Bahati Girls Secondary School in Nakuru, Kenya performed songs and dances, inspiring all those present with their calls to action. Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the United Nations Environmental Programme, officially welcomed the delegates. Dennis Garrity, Director General of the World Agroforestry Centre, introduced the congress theme: Agroforestry – The future of global land use; the keynote address was delivered by Nobel Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai, of the Green Belt Movement. His Excellency Kalonzo Musyoka, Vice President of the Republic of Kenya delivered the Host Country Address on behalf of Kenya's Head of State. Delegates watched a video titled *Trees for Life: The Story of Agroforestry in Malawi*.*

The opening ceremony of the much awaited 2nd World Congress of Agroforestry, started off with a performance by students from Bahati Girls Secondary School, who entertained the audience with songs and dances carrying environmental based messages.

Following this performance delegates watched a video depicting how Agroforestry practices such as fodder and fertilizer trees, fruit and fuelwood species are making a difference in the lives of farming families in Malawi. It was a poignant account of the story of Mary Sabutoni, a widow and mother of 8, who has been able to hugely improve quality of life for her family as a result of Agroforestry practices: “My children are drinking milk for the very first time. They used to fall ill so often, but now they are healthy.”

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, warmly welcomed all delegates to the Congress, on behalf of the two hosting institutions, the World Agroforestry Centre and the United Nations Environment Programme. He posed a heavy question: “How do we, in a world of more than six billion people ... feed everyone while simultaneously securing the ecosystem services such as forests and wetlands that underpin agriculture, and indeed life itself in the first place?” He emphasized to the gathering that the sustainability challenges we face today cannot be solved by polarized approaches but rather that, ‘We must take the best of the indigenous, traditional and farmers knowledge, forged over centuries of trial and error, and submit it to empirical, scientific and rigorous evaluation.’”

“Agroforestry is in many ways a shining example of this approach, merging centuries-old knowledge with modern science in a systems-led approach—and the concept of thinking small-scale to achieve potentially big and transformative outcomes,” Steiner said, adding that although

we view trees in a utilitarian way, we do not consider the potential custodianship role that they can play: If trees are viewed in this new role then it would be clear that whether we are talking about food security, climate change, poverty alleviation, or almost any of the challenges we face today, trees offer a Win-Win-Win-Win-Win Proposition – contributing to several aspects of sustainable development.”

In introducing the Congress theme, Dennis Garrity, Director General of the World Agroforestry Centre, asked, “Will agroforestry be the future of global land use? Does it seem far-fetched?” Showing delegates a slide on tree cover on agricultural land, he informed them that based on a detailed analysis of full-cover satellite imagery, World Agroforestry Centre scientists have found that “currently, almost one-half of all farmed landscapes in the world have significant-to-dense tree cover. This is over a billion hectares of agricultural landscapes with trees on them!”

Dr Garrity then spoke on the role of Agroforestry on all three sub-themes: Food Security, Conservation and Rehabilitation of Natural Resources, and Policy to enhance Agroforestry, before concluding with an inspiring quote from Albert Einstein: “Behind your diagrams and your equations, remember the face of the hungry man.”

Prof Wangari Maathai then took the floor, as always inspiring her listeners with her passion and eloquence. She spoke of her longstanding relationship with the two hosting institutions, then compared agricultural practices and environmental stewardship roles in the past and present saying, “There was always drought, but people used to be better prepared for it. Nature will never change to ensure us that there is no drought; we need to be prepared for these eventualities and trees can protect us, and shield us...”

She also urged governments to take firm steps to ensure action is taken on the ground because they have so much more influence than ordinary citizens. Citing the example of the Japanese who recycle chopsticks even though the wood is sourced from outside Japan, she said, ‘The trees may not be cut down in your country but the results of the felling may come back to haunt you.’”

She also urged that we be conscious about intergenerational responsibility: “Don’t use resources as if you are the last generation and there is no other generation after you!”

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Romano Kiome, who is also a member of the World Agroforestry Centre Board of Trustees, urged the meeting to “...develop plans of how to take this congress to the farms, where the difference is needed.”

The Vice President of the Republic of Kenya then read the President’s speech, but not before eliciting a huge round of applause from the audience for proposing that, ‘Every farm in Kenya should have a quarter acre dedicated to trees.’”

Quotable quotes from the Opening Session:

“We can empower people - not to wait for others to do something for them – but to take the initiative, one tree at a time. Trees are one of nature’s most ingenious answers to many of our problems” *Achim Steiner*

At the World Agroforestry Centre, we like to say that ‘The future of trees is on farm.’ What we now also know, is that the ‘future of forests is on farms’ as well. *Dennis Garrity*

[Achim Steiner’s Speech](#)

[Dennis Garrity’s Speech](#)

[Dennis Garrity’s Presentation](#)

[Prof Wangari Maathai’s Speech](#)

Host Country Address delivered by HE Kalonzo Musyoka