

GFIS AFRICA WELCOMING ADDRESS

Atse Yapi

IUFRO-SPDC Deputy Coordinator for Africa
And FORNESSA Secretary

Distinguished Guests and Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have the unique honor on behalf of GFIS Africa to add my voice to others in welcoming you to this important meeting on the lands of Africa.

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly introduce to you the GFIS Africa project and its thematic networking and synthesis initiative, which is the object of our deliberations tomorrow.

Scientific knowledge generated through research is key to sound forest policy formulation and sustainable forest management. Yet, forestry research in many developing countries, especially in Africa, faces tremendous challenges due mainly to inadequate institutional capacities, human and financial resources for research.

These challenges were recognized during the 1981 World Congress in Kyoto, Japan, and the International Union of Forestry Research Organization (IUFRO) was formally requested in the Congress Declarations to expand its activities into "strengthening research related to forest resources in developing countries". Since 1983, therefore, the establishment of its Special Programme for Developing Countries (IUFRO-SPDC), IUFRO has initiated a number of projects to contribute its quota to this noble task. The **Global Forest Information Service (GFIS) project in Africa (GFIS Africa project, in short)** is an outstanding example of these.

The GFIS Africa Project:

It's an EC- funded project, which seek mainly to enhance access to and provision of quality forest-related information, especially that available through electronic media. In order to allow African forest research institutions to actively participate in this global information service, the project set up five GFIS nodes, one in Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and Zimbabwe. To date, all five nodes are equipped with the necessary hardware and software, including a "workflow" software package for GFIS operations; 24 information scientists trained within the project, as nodal Directors, webmasters, documentalists and Librarians; and Data inputting campaign is well advanced in some nodes and progressing well in others. As of January this year, we registered a total of 222 records entered in Zimbabwe, 316 in Kenya, 367 in Gabon, 423 in Senegal and 608 in Ghana. The GFIS metadatabase is thus up and working fairly well, and can be accessed online by visiting the following site:

http://iufro.ifs.tuwien.ac.at/gfis_is

The GFIS Africa Thematic Networking and Syntheses

The GFIS Africa project supports three thematic networking activities (i.e., Rehabilitation of degraded lands; Non-timber forest products; Community-based forestry). These activities, the first of which is part of this workshop, aim at demonstrating how an information system such as GFIS can facilitate value-added products created through better access to and utilisation of information.

Initial work to shape the networking activities on the "rehabilitation of degraded lands" theme started right here on this Campus in June 2002, during a workshop organized by VITRI and to which GFIS Africa sponsored a number of African forest scientists.

Synthesis Title and Coverage

Ladies and Gentlemen, it was at that first workshop that the title and contents of the above synthesis were developed through a group work. The Working Group felt that it was important to clearly define the title and coverage of the synthesis in view, and came up with the following:

"Rehabilitation of Degraded Lands in sub-Saharan Africa – A Synthesis".

Here both drylands and humid and sub-humid lands were in view. Dr. Ben Chikamai (KEFRI), Dr. Dominic Blay (FORIG) and Prof. Chamshama (University of Tanzania), volunteered to prepare each a "background paper" on the drylands, humid and sub-humid zones, respectively.

Intended End-Users

The intended end users identified for the synthesis included: students, trainers, researchers, NGOs and other involved in land management. The synthesis was intended also to form the basis for the production of popular press articles (brochures, radio messages, posters, etc...) for other stakeholders.

Contents of the synthesis

The Group The group felt that to be useful, the synthesis should avoid being a textbook like, but simple, focused and structured in the following three main parts.

Part 1: Main Issues, covering:

- (i) Causes and consequences of land degradation;
- (ii) Extend of land degradation;
- (iii) The international context (relating the issues to existing international conventions and protocols and ongoing debates on tropical forests and lands)
- (iv) Objectives (setting the objectives of the synthesis)

Part 2: Lessons from Case Studies: Factors for Success and Failure

This part will present available case studies on the subject throughout sub-Saharan Africa, analyse reasons for success and failure and make an overall assessment of the situation for researchable constraints identification and policy recommendations in part 3.

Part 3: Researchable Constraints and Recommendations

- (i) Identification of constraints to successful land rehabilitation;
- (ii) Recommendations for policy;
- (iii) Recommendations for Management; and
- (iv) Recommendations for Research and training.

Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now you know about IUFRO's GFIS Africa Project and its Thematic Networking and Synthesis Initiative. I only have to add that the "Background papers" prepared on the 3-part framework presented above, have been submitted to e-discussions last March this year. This workshop is therefore in a sense a follow-up action to the whole process.

With your permission, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of Dr. Michael Kleine, General Manager of the GFIS Africa Project; and Dr. Joseph Cobbinah, Chairman of the Steering Committee of the GFIS Africa Project, I wish to express our sincere thanks to the European Commission (EC) for generously funding the GFIS Africa project.

We wish also to expression sincere appreciation to VITRI and the University of Helsinki for hosting this meeting and making available

to us the marvelous facilities of this Hyytiala campus. Professor Olavi Luukkanen, I wish to thank you personally for all your efforts and interest in the fate of the Africa's lands, especially the dry ones. Do please extend our sincere thanks and appreciations to all at VITRI who have contributed directly or indirectly to the successful organization of this workshop.

Last, but not least, African colleagues and their national research institutions, FAO, CIRAD-forêt and ETFRN, for their tremendous contribution into the implementation of the GFIS Africa Project, including its Thematic Networking and Synthesis Initiative. Your participation into this present workshop is indeed an illustration of that excellent working relationship you and IUFRO have reluctantly nurtured during the last few years.

I THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION