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Increasing Africa's climate resilience: Need to strengthen forest research

Around 300 scientists and decision-makers meet in Nairobi, Kenya from 25 to 29 June 2012 to discuss forest and tree management challenges, and research needs in Africa.

(Nairobi/Vienna, 25 June 2012) From dense and undisturbed tropical forests to scattered trees in the dry lands, African forest and tree resources are extremely diverse. At the same time, the continent is one of the regions worldwide most vulnerable to climate change. Increased droughts and forest fire have impacts not only on forests and trees, but also on the life of millions of people. "There is a strong need to gain a deeper understanding of the various impacts climate change already has and will continue to have, and of adequate mitigation and adaptation measures", says Victor Agyeman, Chairman of the Forestry Research Network of Sub-Saharan Africa (FORNESSA) and co-organizer of the First IUFRO-FORNESSA Regional Congress "Forests and Trees: Serving the People of Africa and the World".

Jointly organized with the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) and hosted by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), researchers will meet in Nairobi, Kenya from Monday, 25 June to Friday, 29 June to discuss pressing issues related to the conservation and management of African forests and trees, such as forests and climate change, forest biodiversity conservation, and energy and food security. In conjunction with the congress, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the African Forest Forum (AFF) will hold a "Forest Policy Day" aiming at bringing together forest researchers and policy-makers.

"A large part of the African population depends on forests and trees as a source of fuel; they also obtain wild foods and medicinal plants from forests, and respective resources are essential for people's wellbeing in this region as well as in other regions of the world", says IUFRO President Niels Elers Koch: "The aim of this conference is to bring together researchers from IUFRO's global network with different backgrounds and from different fields to strengthen the scientific knowledge as a profound basis for decision-making and practical solutions on how to manage Africa's forests and improve the livelihoods of local communities and indigenous peoples."



*Firewood collectors in Aponmu Community, Nigeria
(Adejoba Olajide)*

About 675 million hectares or 23 per cent of Africa's land area are covered with forests according to FAO (2011). More than 30 per cent are located in Central Africa, which is home to the world's second largest rainforest in the Congo Basin. Furthermore, African tropical forests have been estimated to harbour 12,000 forest plant species and include biodiversity hotspots such as the Guineo-Congolese forests. However, forest loss still accounts for 4.2 million hectares per year, resulting from pressure exerted by a growing population and inadequate land management practices as well as from climatic shifts associated with increased incidences of droughts and forest fire.

“A number of policy and governance related actions as well as contextual analyses or characterization of the forest environment are required in order to chart effective strategies to reduce deforestation and forest degradation while enhancing resilience to climate variability and change”, adds Cobbinah.

There are also extensive areas of land with scattered tree growth on the African continent, accounting for more than 350 million hectares. Dry forests, woodlands and savannas are the dominant vegetation in 63 per cent of the sub-Saharan African countries, but they have low productivity and are under immense human pressure for various needs. “Statistically only six persons per square kilometre directly depend on the tropical rainforest, while 150 persons per square kilometre depend on the dry forests and farmlands”, says August Temu from ICRAF. As local communities have developed highly adaptive livelihood strategies, “one should learn from their experience and traditional knowledge”.



*Degraded Miombo woodlands in Southern Africa
(R. McCracken)*

Agroforestry, growing trees on farms, is one way of meeting local needs for fuel, food and other ecosystem services and can serve as a buffer during periods of crop failure and droughts. “There is insufficient knowledge on resilience of forests and trees to the impacts of climate change. However, agroforestry systems have a considerable potential for human and domestic animal adaptation to climate change”, says Godwin Kowero, Executive Secretary of the African Forest Forum (AFF). The purpose of the AFF is to provide a platform for information sharing and expertise, 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 economic and social development, and protect the environment.

“Given the social, economic and ecological challenges in African, the IUFRO-FORNESSA Regional Congress provides a unique opportunities for a large number of forest scientists and practitioners from all over Africa to discuss and share information on a wide array of research, management and governance issues related to sustainable land use systems and livelihoods in Africa”, says Michael Kleine, IUFRO Deputy Executive Director and Coordinator of IUFRO’s Special Programme for Developing Countries: “In order to further generate momentum for research cooperation, IUFRO with the generous contribution of its partners is substantially supporting this congress as part of its long-term commitment to the forest science community in the African region.”

First IUFRO-FORNESSA Regional Conference on Forests and Trees

Information on the program: www.fornis.net/congress/en/homepage

Media contact:

Gerda Wolfrum, International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO),
wolfrum@iufro.org

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The **International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO)** is the only worldwide organization devoted to forest research and related sciences. Its members are research institutions, universities, and individual scientists as well as decision-making authorities and other stakeholders with a focus on forests and trees.