



## **Collaborative Partnership on Forests**

### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **International institutions call for increased investments for the arid zone forests**

*Dakar, 17 June 2011* – Over twenty-seven international, regional and sub-regional institutions and over 100 participants from around the world gathered in Dakar today for the observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification. Among the participants were members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), a mechanism comprising 14 global institutions and organizations dealing with forestry matters, which called for more, and urgent, investments to stem the growing degradation of natural resources, especially the forests in Africa’s drylands.

Drylands make up 40% of the world’s land area, cover more than 100 countries and are the basis for the livelihoods of 2 billion people. The world’s largest concentration of mammals, and more than 50,000 known plant and 1,500 bird species, as well as the native habitats and wild relatives of the world’s most widely consumed seeds are supported by these forests. But the long-term sustainability of the drylands forests is in jeopardy due to a shortage in the investments needed to scale up the sustainable forest management practices and to support policies to prevent and reverse land degradation in the drylands, the process commonly known as desertification.

#### **Forests central to drylands health**

The World Day to Combat Desertification, marked every 17 June since 1995 by a decision of the United Nations General Assembly, is dedicated to sensitizing the public and policy makers to the increasing global dangers of desertification, land degradation and drought. With 2011 as the International Year of Forests, this year’s observance is under the theme, “Forests keep drylands working,” to highlight the value of the little-known, but hugely important, drylands forests for both the local and global communities.

The First Africa Drylands Week, held on 10-16 June 2011 in observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification, was an opportunity to explore these challenges drawing on Africa's experience, where 44% of the land area is drylands, in addition to its vast deserts. The field visits in Senegal, the testimonies of local populations and discussion with the policy makers, NGOs and the scientific and research community showed that the efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought, almost inevitably, include improving forest and vegetation cover. Forests and trees improve the fertility of and organic matter in the soil, and protect the soil from erosion.

In Africa, the forestry initiatives in the drylands range from the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative and Lake Chad that is already under way in Senegal, to the community tree planting campaigns, and farmer managed natural regeneration in agro-forestry systems led by farmers and lesser known peasants. Campaigns, which in parts of the Sahel, have spread from village-to-village to rehabilitate over 5 million hectares across three states. Clearly, every effort counts.

"Environmental degradation is one of the greatest risks to local communities that depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. The GEF's (Global Environment Facility) engagement therefore is based on two overarching principles: environmental security and food security for peace in fragile regions. Environmental security includes maintaining services provided by ecosystems and their impacts on livelihood conditions. That's why in the heart of Africa, the GEF has established a program to support the Great Green Wall and Lake Chad initiatives," says Monique Barbut, Chief Executive Officer and Chairperson of the **GEF**.

"It's a monumental effort of 11 Sahelian countries who have collectively embraced the Great Green Wall of Sahel and Sahara Initiative as a platform to mobilize partnerships with the international community. Leaders of 11 countries in that region have committed to an environmental and development transformation in the region that will mitigate the risk of desertification while at the same time alleviating poverty. This vision is fully endorsed by the African Union, with an Action Plan for implementation. During several high level events over the last year, Ministers from the 11 countries have reaffirmed their commitment to this vision and repeatedly called for support and engagement by the international donor community, including the GEF, which we are ready to provide over the next four years," she stresses.

### **Increasing support needed for arid zone forests**

Half the world's livestock, a lot of the wildlife and a significant proportion of the drylands people highly depend on the drylands' natural resources. Drylands forests and vegetation are the source habitats of many of the seeds feeding the global population today, and provide valuable ecosystem services, not least, regulating the global climate. A number of CPF members are undertaking projects and programmes dedicated to drylands forests in Africa.

One example is Shinyanga in northern Tanzania. In 1984, then President, Julius Nyerere, described it as the ‘desert of Tanzania’. Today, as a result of a comprehensive soil conservation and agroforestry project, supported by the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), the landscape has been rehabilitated and tens of thousands of smallholders have seen their profits rise by as much as USD 500 per year. They have planted woodlots along with grafted fruit orchards and fodder banks, and made use of nitrogen-fixing trees to increase fertility and crop yields. The ancient *ngitili* system of land management, which Sukuma pastoralists traditionally used to conserve livestock fodder for the dry season has been revived.

A project led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) piloted technologies for water harvesting techniques and initiated building capacity on resin and gum production as well as rehabilitation of degraded lands. By planting a local acacia species, it restored the environmental, social and economic values of the Acacia agro-sylvo-pastoral systems, while contributing to food security across six producing countries of gum and resins in Africa. Thus far, the project has already generated benefits to local communities and restored thousands of hectares across the countries.

Given the importance of forests in arid and semiarid zones for rural development and environmental protection, their development is a pressing challenge for both researchers and decision makers. “Facing global climate changes that are foreseen for the present century, including reductions in the already limited rainfall and variations in its seasonal distribution, this challenge becomes even stronger,” says Santiago Barros Asenjo, who coordinates a working group of the **International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO)** on forest management in arid and semi-arid regions.

Deforestation is the first step towards land degradation. A change in the spatial spread of an arid zone forest also signals the decline or recovery of degraded land. Yet, the significance of the drylands forests is not equally matched by the public discourse or investments on the issue. Few financial investments are allocated to these forests compared to other forest ecosystems. It is an underinvestment that, given the growing local conflicts over these resources, may become a liability to global peace in the long run.

The First Africa Drylands Week observed that local drylands communities contribute to the global wellbeing, but the ecosystem services they provide are inadequately compensated, if not overlooked, by the international community. The long-term sustainability now enjoyed by the temperate and moist tropical forests conservation shows that policy incentives and global cooperation are critical to the sustainable conservation and use of forests. Drylands forests are a blind-spot in the national and global policy frameworks on the sustainable management of forests.

### **Early investments show returns in arid forests, but more resources needed**

“Arid zone forests are a key forest resource that are often overlooked by the international community,” notes Eduardo Rojas-Briales, Assistant Director General of the **FAO Forestry**

**Department.** “FAO, together with its partner organizations, is working to raise awareness of the importance of arid zone forests and their contribution to food security and soil protection, with the hope that an increasing number of governments and local communities will understand the benefits of investing in these forests and the application of sustainable forest management in these areas to prevent land degradation and desertification.”

“Key to the rehabilitation of drylands are technologies such as rainwater harvesting, fodder trees to reduce grazing pressure on fragile lands, rotational woodlots for fuelwood, revegetation of degraded lands and carbon storage above and below ground in the soil,” says Tony Simons, Deputy Director General of the **World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)** in Nairobi. “These agroforestry interventions have been a successful form of dryland management and soil conservation in many parts of the world.”

Two notable positive developments have taken place on the policy front recently. The parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification have agreed that starting in 2012, the progress reports submitted on their national activities to combat desertification, land degradation and drought will show quantitatively, how things are changing on the ground. They will state the proportion of the population that is above the poverty line in the affected areas as well as the changes observed in land cover. And in order for the real economic value of the services rendered by the drylands, including its arid zone forests to be correctly determined, they decided to hold the 2nd UNCCD Scientific Conference in 2012, under the theme, ‘economic assessment of desertification, sustainable land management and resilience of arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas’. But this is only a start.

“If history is to be trusted, then for change to come, we must think outside the box. A box that puts blinkers around our individual mandates. A box that gives attention to the symptoms, not the causes of deforestation. A box that takes soil and water as givens that do not require a deliberate conservation approach nor, indeed, targets. A box with policy tools that pay for some, not all, ecosystem services,” says Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary of the **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**.

Together partners reinforced their commitment by identifying concrete actions, as well as technical and financial inputs, to achieve the vision for a Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel. There are many major successes that have already been achieved providing excellent basis on which to build. They have also recommended the organization of a second Africa Drylands Week to maintain the momentum built by this first very successful gathering.

This First Africa Drylands Week demonstrated renewed solidarity and unity throughout the Circum-Saharan region. Scientific and operational partnership, based on comprehensive consultation and inclusive approaches and methodologies between the development and cooperation partners, countries and civil society will reinforce governance systems, including sustainable land management, land tenure and secure livelihoods. Under this framework, individual countries, or groups of countries will be able to develop their own initiatives that will together contribute to successful land management, combat effects of climate change, prevent

and combat desertification, conserve biodiversity and mitigate the vulnerability of rural and urban societies and ensure food security for the tens of millions of families, across the Sahara and the Sahel. (ends)

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### **Notes to the Editors**

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) is a voluntary arrangement among 14 international organizations and secretariats with substantial programs on forests. The CPF's mission is to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forest and to strengthen long term political commitment to this end. CPF members share their experiences and build on them to produce new benefits for their respective constituencies. Joint initiatives and other collaboration activities are supported by voluntary contributions from participating members. For more information: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/cpf/en/>

CPF members:

- Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)
- Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD Secretariat)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- Global Environment Facility (GEF Secretariat)
- International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO)
- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD Secretariat)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF Secretariat)
- United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC Secretariat)
- World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)
- World Bank (World Bank)