

TALKING POINTS FOR DR. ÉLIANE UBALIJORO CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY RESEARCH AND WORLD AGROFORESTRY (CIFOR-ICRAF) AND DIRECTOR GENERAL OF ICRAF DURING THE DATA & INFORMATION ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP FOR PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS, ON MONDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2024.

Good afternoon everyone!

I would like to give a very warm welcome to our distinguished guests here today,

including Dr. Festus K. Ng'eno, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Environment.

And to the participants from the 24 countries in eastern and southern Africa.

Thank you to the Regional Centre of Excellence for Forests, Biodiversity and Seascape Ecosystems in Eastern and Southern Africa.

And to the EU, the main funder of this initiative.

It is my pleasure to join you today at the Regional Centre of Mapping of Resources campus.

This initiative is so critical.

Data, information, and knowledge products are essential in driving effective decision-making and governance in protected and conserved areas.

And data is central not only to ecosystem management –

but also to fulfil our national and global commitments –

whether they are related to climate targets or the Convention on Biological Diversity.

When we have comprehensive forestry and biodiversity data,

countries can track their progress towards these important goals and report their efforts with transparency and accountability.

Hence the data geoportal for biodiversity, forests and seascape will contribute towards this goal.

And so it's a real pleasure to have you here today for this workshop.

It will provide a platform to explore innovative, data-driven solutions...

to address the many challenges we face in conserving our ecosystems.

Our discussions and findings will be instrumental in shaping more effective conservation strategies for forests, biodiversity, and seascapes.

Now, as critical as data is, data alone isn't enough.

It's the people who analyze and act on this data that make the real difference.

And that's where this Regional Centre of Excellence plays a vital role.

By bringing together experts from across eastern and southern Africa, we are fostering a culture of shared learning, innovation, and collaboration.

Our goal is to equip communities, governments, and organizations with the information and tools they need to manage ecosystems sustainably.

And through this knowledge generation, we will enable action –

ensuring that decisions made are rooted in science and centered around the wellbeing of people and the planet.

This initiative is part of a larger effort, with three interconnected projects spanning across Africa.

The West African project is hosted at the Centre de Suivi Écologique.

The Central African project at OFAC.

And this Eastern and Southern African project is hosted at the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development.

I'd like to acknowledge the essential partnership of this regional centre.

CIFOR-ICRAF has partnered for many years with them,

including on the Observatory of Forests for Eastern and Southern Africa project,

which led to this phase of the Regional Centre of Excellence.

And I'd also like to acknowledge our CIFOR-ICRAF Africa Directorate under Peter Minang for the progress so far. Thank you for all your hard work.

CIFOR-ICRAF's role in the Regional Centre of Excellence initiative is multifaceted.

We are responsible for the overall coordination of all three regional centres.

We contribute to knowledge products such as the State of the Forest reports, policy briefs, research studies,

and case studies on critical topics such as forest reserves, deforestation, and protected areas.

Additionally, we coordinate engagements at the continental and global levels, ensuring that our work aligns with the African Union, UNEP, and CBD processes.

As we move into this workshop, I would like to emphasize the significance of today's gathering.

This is one of the key activities in the first year of the Regional Centre of Excellence's implementation, following its launch earlier this year in March.

The theme of the workshop, Leveraging Data Insights for Impactful and Sustainable Ecosystems, could not be more timely or relevant.

It highlights the importance of collaboration between policymakers, technical officers, and data specialists to advance the management of biodiversity, forestry, and seascapes.

We expect this workshop to lead to several key outcomes, including enhanced capacity in data management and reporting on biodiversity targets.

We also hope to strengthen collaboration among countries in the region as they work together to meet global biodiversity goals.

I encourage all of you to actively participate, share best practices, and engage in meaningful discussions that will contribute to impactful conservation efforts.

As you all know, our natural ecosystems are under tremendous strain— from deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate variability.

We are at a critical juncture, but I firmly believe that Africa has the power to lead the way forward.

Through strong partnerships—like the one we have with the EU—

and through bold, innovative solutions,

we can address these complex challenges and secure a resilient future for the generations to come.

I want to reiterate our unwavering commitment to supporting regional ecosystems and biodiversity conservation.

I am confident that the outcomes of this workshop will lead to actionable steps that will contribute to a more sustainable future for Africa's ecosystems.

Once again, I extend a warm welcome to all of you, and I look forward to the insights and solutions we will uncover together in the coming days.

And I also look forward to welcoming you on our beautiful CIFOR-ICRAF Nairobi campus on Thursday.

Thank you.