



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MINISTER SENZENI ZOKWANA SPEAKING NOTES

AFRICA DAY CELEBRATION AT THE WORLD FORESTRY CONGRESS

INKOSI ALBERT LUTHULI CONVENTION CENTRE, DURBAN

8 SEPTEMBER 2015

Programme Director, let me start by thanking everyone present and emphasize that *“Our Journey towards the Africa of 2063 has started....”* We, in Africa are building on a vision of our forefathers of five decades ago. This journey is based on the aspirations of the “Africa We Want”, such as

- A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development
- An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance
- An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law

There is a need as Africans to translate these principles in the forestry sector and natural environment into concrete and actionable programmes in achieving the proposed “Sustainable Development Goals”. The theme for Africa Day 2015 celebrated in May 2015 was **“We are Africa-Opening the doors of learning and culture from Cape to Cairo”**.

There is an obvious need today to better articulate and provide a better picture of the potential roles that natural forests as well as planted forests and trees outside forests can play in addressing many current crucial development issues. It is of particular urgency and relevance to do so in light of the sustainable development goals currently being identified for the global community and to achieve truly green economies. The needs and the opportunities for forests and trees outside forests to contribute to this goal are enormous, especially for the African Continent and its people

It is important to highlight the current major trends and issues influencing the forest sector. In spite of the growing awareness about the importance of forests, deforestation and forest degradation are still rampant in our continent. It is however essential to note that deforestation and forest degradation at times occur for very compelling reasons. By far the most important ones are the needs of farmers to extend production for crops and livestock and the need to harvest timber for fuel wood and other livelihoods.

The only realistic strategy for reducing deforestation and forest degradation is to increase food production outside forest land and develop economically viable and attractive sustainable forest management and conservation practices. This could include ensuring that there is optimal land use that will encompass different land uses for the benefit of the communities.

A more positive trend is the rapid economic development in many African countries. This has resulted in a very significant rise in demand for wood and fibre-based products e.g. charcoal, construction timber, paper products, furniture and innovation. A large part of these increased demands are still imported and more investors both locally and internationally see the potential in the forest and tree crop sectors in Africa.

The competition for land leads us to more controversial trends affecting the future of forestry in Africa namely that of increasing competition of good land between food crops, commercial bio-energy production and forestry. The scramble for such land by both local and foreign investors has exploded in the last 10 to 15 years. Investors from the world are looking for opportunities to grow food for export to their home countries or world markets, energy plants for biofuel use or forest plantation for timber and pulp production. This situation in some instances has led to conflicts and disagreements between investors, governments, and local communities, and such investments are often characterized as land grabbing. However,

there are increasing numbers of very good examples where investors, local communities and local governments have come to satisfactory arrangements with all concerned. A critical component is consultation, and negotiation in good faith of an appropriate set of protocols between all concerned.

Global climate change is a reality and the only way is to look at mitigation and adaptation strategies. International policies are increasingly taking into account forests and their management in relation to climate change. The trend is that no forest related development and economic undertaking can be launched without justifying its impact on climate change mitigation and/or adaptation. The only mitigative impact of climate change is that it takes attention from the enormous important and potential roles of sustainably managed forests as drivers of economic development and poverty alleviation. In the South African context, as the possible implementation of the carbon tax, the Agriculture, Forestry and other Land Uses sector has been given an opportunity to explore mechanisms that will be relevant for this sector. This is an opportunity for forestry to showcase the mitigation and adaptation ability that it has.

As we celebrate this Special event on Africa, it is upon us to ensure that African forestry management needs are discussed and addressed to the best of our ability. Future policies should consider the important role that forests can play to bring economic development, food security and job creation to our people. I therefore invite all of you especially the policy makers and the forestry experts to consider the issues that will be raised today to inform policy making in the future.

Vision 2063 is Africa's Common Vision for the Africa We Want – African Forests are Our Natural Heritage, The Lungs that Sustain All Lives.

Forests Today and Forests Forever through Our Common Action in Sustainable Use of Our Natural Heritage

I thank you