

**Opening Note, Jean-Marc Sinnassamy, GEF  
4<sup>th</sup> SAWAP Conference, Accra, Ghana, May 8-15, 2017**

Excellency,

Prof. Frimpong Boateng, Minister in charge of the Environment,

...

Honorable guests,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here today.

I would like to congratulate the organizers for making this Conference happen and thank our host country, Ghana, for the warm welcome. This is an exciting moment – **a moment** we have all been working towards.

We are at a moment when we will hear about concrete **SOLUTIONS ON THE GROUND** – solutions from women's group, from farmer organizations, from the civil society. At the same time, we can also talk about **RESULTS AT SCALE!**

**Over the coming days, we will hear from partners in twelve countries and learn of results that now impact more than one million ha under Sustainable Land Management, benefiting more than 7.4 million people.**

The Sahel and West Africa Programme were the first responses made by the GEF and the World Bank to the request from twelve countries. This request was made at the highest level – from Head of States to Ministers.

This political buy-in has been an incredible trigger and motivator for all the partners from the regional, the national and the local levels to make this program a reality.

Technically, the focus of the SAWAP was conceived in a simple manner – focusing on land, soil, water, vegetation and the ecosystem services they provide to smallholder farmers.

The objective was defined to expand sustainable land and water management in targeted landscapes and in climate-vulnerable areas in West African and Sahelian countries. Under this program, the idea was to develop very concrete and operational projects adjusted to every national or local context to reduce land erosion, improve soil fertility, increase crop yield, improve fodder availability, diversify income, strengthen resilience to climate change, increase biodiversity, and much more. The BRICKS was completing the Wall, with the support of regional Centers of Excellency as the CILSS, OSS, and IUCN.

By addressing desertification and land degradation, this program is a demonstration of the importance of ecosystem services provided by lands, soils, water, and vegetation. Protecting and restoring these natural services have economic and social consequences. Climate mitigation and adaptation are becoming **REAL**, by promoting low-carbon technologies and enhancing resilience of ecosystems for the benefits of people.

Excellency,

Dear participants,

The truly exciting thing about this moment is that we are witnessing the results of technical ideas with political ambition across the region.

*The spoken text shall prevail*

*Seul le prononcé fait foi*

The SAWAP is a good illustration of the nexus between land productivity, food security, and poverty eradication. Some of the results, for instance in Ghana, have already been scaled up in the GEF6 Integrated Approach Pilot for food security.

And, these results could not be more timely.

The GEF is entering into the replenishment discussions and Naoko Ishii, the Chair and CEO of the GEF, is proposing innovative ways to move forward with a set of **IMPACT PROGRAMS**, including on **FOOD SYSTEMS**, **ON LANDSCAPE RESTORATION**, on **SUSTAINABLE DRYLANDS**, on other subjects well reflecting the interdependence between land degradation, biodiversity, climate change and resilience issues.

The issues we all working on are rising to the top of the agenda.

It is a very good time to discuss and show the results of the SAWAP, not only to the participating countries, but to the whole continent, to the donors, and all our partners.

The next replenishment meeting will take place in Ethiopia in October. Actually, do you know that Ethiopia joined the GEF replenishment process as a donor country to share their views and practices? It is excellent news for the Land Degradation agenda, Africa and the replenishment process.

Again, I am very pleased to be with you for the next days. I will be an attentive listener. I wish you all the very best for this Conference and the different sessions ahead.

Let's seize this moment!

Thank you.