

The African Development Bank Group



EMINENT SPEAKERS PROGRAM

**Presentation by Professor Wangari Maathai on
“Natural Resource Management and Poverty Reduction:
Strengthening the Links”**

Opening Remarks by

**Donald KABERUKA
President
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**Our distinguished Guest Speaker, Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai,
Honorable Ministers,
Your Excellencies Ambassadors,
Honorable Executive Directors,
Vice-Presidents,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. It is with great honor that I welcome Professor Wangari Maathai to the Temporary Relocation Agency of the African Development Bank, within the framework of the Eminent Speakers Program. We are grateful to her for accepting to share with us her perspectives on how to strengthen the links between natural resources management and poverty reduction.

2. Most of you are aware of Professor Maathai's international recognition for her persistent struggle for environmental conservation, democracy and human rights. She has addressed many fora on these issues, and spoken on women's cause at special sessions of the United Nations General Assembly.

3. We recall with pride the ever famous Green Belt Movement, a grass roots organization which for three decades succeeded in mobilizing thousands of Kenyan women to plant over 30 million trees. In 1986, the Movement established its pan-African network, under which similar tree-planting initiatives have been promoted in other countries. Professor Maathai's campaign against land degradation and reckless allocation of forest concessions continued to blaze the international trail, and culminated in her recognition in 2004 by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee and in her appointment in 2005 as the Goodwill Ambassador for the Congo Basin Rainforest Ecosystem. Cognizant that education is central to the preservation of the environment, the Green Belt Movement partnered in 2006 with the United Nations

Environment Programme, Prince Albert II of Monaco and the World Agroforestry Centre to launch the Billion Tree Campaign. In March 2009, the three billion mark for new trees planted by government, organizations, communities and students was surpassed. But, she has since set a new goal of seven billion trees by the end of 2009. I am sure that she will succeed.

4. Ladies and Gentlemen, since its inception in 2006, the Eminent Speakers Program has attracted thirteen (13) high level speakers in its seminars who have addressed over 3,000 invited participants. The seminars provide the Bank staff, members of the diplomatic corps, staff of international organizations and institutions of higher learning in Tunisia unique opportunities to exchange views with renowned personalities and experts on development challenges facing the continent.

5. The theme for this morning's seminar has been motivated by the need to deepen current understanding of how *good practice* in natural resource utilization can promote environmental sustainability vis-à-vis poverty alleviation and socio-economic development, particularly in the rural parts of Africa. A critical reflection on this overarching objective of ensuring that Africa's natural resource becomes a positive factor for sustainable socio-economic development is timely and most welcome. Transforming the natural resources from a "*curse to a blessing*" is the challenge for Africa's development.

6. Ladies and gentlemen, According to UN Environment Programme (UNEP), Africa is losing more than 4 million hectares of forest every year – twice the world's average deforestation rate. Furthermore, it is estimated that 319 million hectares of Africa are vulnerable to desertification hazards due to sand movement. Land degradation is moving at an annual rate of 5 km in the semi-arid areas of West Africa. Your Excellency, deforestation and land degradation affect

disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable people. To some extent these are made by man and therefore can be solved by man.

7. As you know, in 2012 the Kyoto Protocol to prevent climate changes and global warming will run out. To keep the process on the line there is an urgent need for a new climate protocol. For that reason, governmental officials from 170 countries are expected to meet in Copenhagen in about a month's time, accompanied by other civil society representatives, NGO and journalists. It will be the last time that all concerned parties will meet before the climate agreement is renewed. Therefore the Climate Conference in Copenhagen is essential for the world climate and all countries are making concerted efforts in ensuring that the meeting is a success and ends with a Protocol to prevent global warming and climate change. African countries have significant contributions to make in ensuring that the interests of their populations are at the core of the debates. In this context, it is reassuring that Africa has a daughter like Professor Wangari Maathai , recognized all around the world to advise her on the appropriate actions.

8. Your Excellency Professor Maathai, in preparation for the Summit, you have so rightly stated that: *“Drought, erratic rainfall and desertification, likely intensified by climate change, are realities for numerous communities that rely directly on land, soil and forests to meet their basic needs..... It is clear that throughout Africa and much of the developing world, environmental issues are not a luxury extraneous to economic survival. Indeed, protecting and restoring forest ecosystems, and arresting global warming are matters of life and death”*.

9. The Bank shares your keen interest in sustainable use of natural resource to meet economic needs while preserving the ecosystem and biodiversity. Our priority areas at present are mainly three: Forestry, Fisheries and Climate Change. Our interventions are guided by policy and strategy documents such as the Agriculture

and Rural Development Policy, the Environmental Policy, the Integrated Water Resources Management Policy and the Climate Risk Management and Adaptation Strategy. The Bank-funded projects focus on conservation and preservation, while improving the income generation activities of the communities and addressing challenges of climate mitigation and adaptation. I am very pleased to state that all projects funded by the Bank are screened for their environmental sustainability to ensure no negative impact on the environment and communities.

10. As we all know, the poorest populations are by far the most affected by climate change and environmental degradation, as they live and survive from natural resources. Whenever drought dries to the extreme lands and pastures, when fishing or hunting resources become exhausted, where forests disappear, and when natural water becomes unsafe for drinking or washing, rural or urban poor suffer most. What can we do about this? Can we provide communities ecological skills and resources to make them able to work collectively on the environment? Can Africa foster the creation of new skill and employment generation in Africa which responds to the share of this global environmental challenge and represents “green growth” opportunity for our populations? These are some of the issues that this morning seminar will address.

11. The scope of the Bank interventions in natural resource management extends to river basins, and the activities cover many aspects including land management, fisheries development and integrated water resources management, with the aim of ensuring sustainable use of the resources taking into account their regeneration capacity. Let me state at this juncture that the Bank is the trustee of the Congo Basin Fund. With other bilateral and multilateral development agencies, we are also promoting multinational programs in the catchment areas of Lakes Chad and Tanganyinka. We will support governments, civil societies and NGOs in designing large scale environmental engineering projects in different crucial areas such as

clean energy, agriculture and forestry irrigation schemes, marine and coastal preservation among all other priorities where green natural resource infrastructure development and poverty reduction are critically interrelated.

12. Ladies and Gentlemen, there is no gainsaying the fact that Professor Maathai's academic and professional profiles are impeccable. Given the limited time, I will share with you the synthesis of only a few of her many remarkable accomplishments. She holds a Masters of Science degree from the University of Pittsburg. She obtained her doctoral degree from the University of Nairobi, where she taught and rose to become the Head of Department of Veterinary Anatomy, the first African woman in the sub-region to achieve such a feat. She has numerous prestigious awards, including The Nobel Peace Prize, The Petra Kelly Prize for Environment and The Hunger Project Africa Prize for Leadership. She serves on the boards of several international bodies. She is listed on UNEP Global 500 Hall of Fame, and has been named one of 100 Heroines and most influential women in the world.

13. Professor Maathai combines scientific knowledge with and social commitment. Her distinction, passion for environmental protection, inestimable knowledge and experience in natural resource issues, particularly as they relate to ecosystem sustenance, poverty alleviation, human rights, gender equity and peace in the developing countries, make her the best placed person to deliver the 14th seminar of the Eminent Speakers Program.

14. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my honour to invite the Nobel Laureate Professor Wangari Maathai, to take the floor.

Thank you.