

Bright Future for Agroforestry in Rwanda

BY ABDALLAH KASSIM



Photo: Peter Odiaf

Raising a new generation of agroforesters in Rwanda: school children tending to their tree nurseries

Agroforestry is winning many hearts in Rwanda including that of President Paul Kagame. *“The president is just passionate about trees and agroforestry, and in fact he is practicing a tree based integrated system in his own farm,”* said Dr. Dennis Garrity.

Dr Garrity visited Rwanda in late July with Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the United Nations Millennium Project. They met with senior political leaders in the country including the President, who was briefed on the role of agroforestry in meeting the challenges of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

The President applauded the Centre’s work, pledging his government’s commitment to agroforestry for Rwanda’s Green Revolution Plan, aimed at increasing food productivity and availability to the ever-growing population in his landlocked country.

Dr Garrity said he was particularly struck by the opportunities to collaborate with Rwandese institutions in building capacity to promote Rwanda agroforestry products and stimulate new value added enterprise

development.

“Rwanda could be a focal country for collaboration in the development of a node of the Tree Produce Resource Centre and a major target for its work in the coming years,” he said.

During the meeting with senior government officials, Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, emphasized the fundamental importance of stimulating agriculture and food production as the key to economic growth and stability in Rwanda.

He noted that 85% of the population are farmers but crop yields were currently less than one ton per hectare. He expressed confidence that a significant breakthrough could be achieved in national food production.

The visit provided an opportunity for the Centre to highlight its activities and programmes to the donor community who were meeting with government officials concerning the United Nations’ Millennium Development Agenda for Rwanda.

Mr. David Kagoro, ICRAF’s Liaison officer in Rwanda, leads projects on progressive terracing, fodder shrubs,

and introducing improved mango and bamboo planting material with head office support from by Dr. Steven Franzel.

The Centre’s team also met with Hon. Drocella Mugorewera, Minister of Lands, Environment, Forestry, Water and Mines to discuss the potential for high value agricultural enterprises which would be most suitable for Rwanda, including lavender, moringa, mangoes, eucalyptus oil, sweet bananas, and geraniums.

“The Minister is currently working on a plan to avail every Rwandan family with an avocado seedling. This can be expanded to include an entire tree portfolio, geared towards particular agro-ecosystems throughout the country,” noted Dr. Garrity.

“The future is in improving farm families’ access to the best tree varieties and those of highest value. The country is interested in change and the donors are willing to assist so Rwandese needs to take advantage of it,” he said.

Also under discussion was the Landcare approach to community action that might be a good basis to build upon the promising environment for farmer associations in Rwanda. This could link and network farmer associations in a model that links the villages with the supply of tree seedlings.

The Centre’s team had a chance to talk to donors and received positive feedback on ICRAF proposals on shade coffee research and development.

The visit was a major boost to the future work of ICRAF in Rwanda. It also affirmed the excellence of the Centre’s past efforts there and the credibility that agroforestry has gained at the highest levels of government as a result. ■