

**Address at the**  
**25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the**  
**World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)**

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, colleagues and friends:

It is a high honour for me, and a pleasure, to participate in this celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Agroforestry Centre. As a pioneer in applied research for development, the Centre has established for itself a record—and a promise—of extraordinary achievement.

It is also true to say that the success of this Centre stands as a continuing source of pride for my own institution, the International Development Research Centre. As most of you know, IDRC people were present at the very creation of ICRAF, and are active still in agroforestry here in Nairobi and around the world.

But the roots of IDRC's affinity with the Centre run deeper than that. We are both bound by an enduring, shared commitment to participatory, community-centred research in developing countries that is directed always to this defining purpose: to empower poor people with the capacity to improve their own lives.

That was the statutory mandate of IDRC from the date of its creation by the Parliament of Canada in 1970—to promote research on the problems of people in developing countries, and to advance the application of knowledge to development itself.

It was this same purpose that inspired the earliest interest at IDRC in the potential of agroforestry to improve especially the lives of the rural poor. It was understood that just as poor and small-scale farmers in Africa had been largely left out of the Green Revolution, agroforestry as a coherent concept had been largely neglected as a subject of development research.

That began to change in the early 1970s. In 1971—a year after IDRC's creation—Joe Hulse of IDRC helped create what was called the Network of Social Forestry. (And by the way, he and his colleagues are credited with coining the English word we all now use—agroforestry.)

In 1975 IDRC commissioned what would prove to be a landmark study on tropical forestry research by John Bené, a founding member of IDRC's Board of Governors with a long and distinguished career in the Canadian forest industry. In a few minutes we will be honouring John Bené, not least for the generosity of his endowment through which IDRC has been granting the John G. Bené Fellowships. It was his original report, along with the energetic leadership of David Hopper (a predecessor of mine at IDRC), that ultimately served to mobilize the creation of ICRAF in 1978.

My colleagues in this session can recall the evolution of ICRAF and the present Centre in much more intimate detail than I can offer. But what is striking about the early history is that the founding principles of both IDRC and ICRAF have grown stronger with time.

I am thinking, for example, of the principle of interdisciplinary research—the interaction of agronomists and botanists, nutritionists and economists, anthropologists and engineers, and all the other professions and callings that populate the agroforestry enterprise. This is a principle that informed ICRAF's work from the start, and it is reflected in research themes today.

For proof of that principle, and the progress we have made, consider the themes arranged for the three-day Science Forum here next week: Land and People, addressing productive landscapes and livelihoods; Trees and Markets, on topics like tree-seed supply systems and enhancing markets for tree products; Environmental Services, looking at pro-poor agroforestry, local conservation and global benefits; and Strengthening Institutions, with a focus on building capacities for research, development and education. I am happy to say that IDRC is contributing \$100,000 to the Science Forum, to support Southern-partner travel and publication of its proceedings.

Admittedly, interdisciplinary research is not always easy to execute. There have been more than a few arguments in the course of breaking down old professional boundaries, and constructing new understandings. But at IDRC, just as in the World Agroforestry Centre, we have achieved important progress over the years.

Still another shared principle is participatory research: research that engages farmers and their families—especially women—not just as subjects but as active participants in the design, conduct and evaluation of research undertakings. This is research that addresses the hardships and aspirations of people in their own communities. Research that makes the most of their wisdom and experience. Research that tests solutions and opportunities in the rough realities of marginalization and poverty.

Here too, we have learned a lot in 25 years—not least, the value of humility. We have learned that the cleverest scientific answer counts for nothing unless it works in practical application on a real development problem.

And we have learned that successful development research is more likely to resemble a conversation than a short question or simple answer. Participatory research is a relationship between researchers and communities, a collaboration with women and men

at their work and in their families. Again, the participation of women is acutely important in agroforestry, because agroforestry is practised as much by women as by men. To cite one example: In central Kenya, out of 3,200 farmers planting fodder shrubs for cows and goats, fully 60 per cent were found to be women.

Similarly, IDRC and this Centre share a commitment to research that makes a real impact on policy—research that improves human well-being by improving policy and the policy process, and by informing decisions at every level of decision-making. At IDRC, we think of this as closing the loop between research, policy, and action.

This is not, as we have learned, a straight-line process. Instead, it requires researchers and policy-makers to engage each other more or less continuously in a framing and reframing of problems and solutions.

It demands of researchers that they try to see problems as policy-makers see them—and that they speak to the policy community in language the policy community understands. At the same time, it obliges policy-makers to attend to practical advice when they hear it—and to invest resources in the research they need, even if future results seem uncertain, or unconventional.

As those early ICRAF innovators also understood, research for development specifically needs to reflect the reality that development decisions are made at every level of a society, from household to village to national government. Testing research, and putting it to good use, will often have more to do with engaging local women or a village chief than some minister of agriculture or finance.

This is simply to echo one of the important points emphasized by Susan Whelan, Canada's Minister for International Cooperation, in her Sir John Crawford Memorial Lecture here in Nairobi this past week. It is urgent, as she said, to deliver research into the hands of those who can use it. That means informing decisions that people make—wherever those decisions are made—with research that is timely, reliable and relevant. (I might add that Sir John was another founding member of IDRC's Board.)

Finally, I would mention the principle of partnership that has guided both IDRC and this Centre from their beginnings. Our institutional creators understood that partnership in development research is not only a practical necessity; it is inherently right.

It is a practical necessity because only through partnerships can all the resources be summoned to a problem that are needed to solve that problem. The World Agroforestry Centre has collaborated with literally hundreds of NGOs over the years, not to speak of governments and intergovernmental organizations, businesses and academic institutions.

Just as significantly, however, the partnership principle reflects the well-founded conviction that people—all people—are entitled to a say in the decisions that affect their lives. And their participation in decision-making will only prove effective if it is informed. This is one of the critical functions of research in good governance and

democratic development—informing people with knowledge of the hard choices that confront them.

All of which explains why IDRC remains an enthusiastic partner in the work of the World Agroforestry Centre. At the moment, in fact, IDRC is supporting eight active or approved projects through the Centre, with a total of more than \$2 million (Canadian). More than half of that funding supports projects in Africa.

In Mali, for instance, researchers are working with farmers on the planting of “living fences” to protect dry-season vegetable gardens from livestock, reduce land degradation, and prevent inter-community conflict. Another project, in the African Highlands, aims at understanding information flows among resource managers and policy-makers, as well as among marginalized people including women, so that resources can be managed more fairly and sustainably.

But it must be said that the connections between IDRC and this Centre are as much personal as financial. And the same is true for IDRC’s relations with CGIAR (the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research). At one point recently, one-quarter of all the 16 CGIAR directors-general came to the Group with experience at IDRC.

None of those centres is closer to IDRC than the World Agroforestry Centre; this Centre receives more IDRC funding than any other in GGIAR. I want to salute in particular Dennis Garrity as a good friend of IDRC—and not only because he bravely survived the ferocious cold of an Ottawa winter this year during a visit to IDRC headquarters.

In conclusion, let me say that the past, if we are smart, is more than prologue. It is an inspiration, and an education.

At IDRC, as it happens, we are right now conducting our own strategic review of operations and making plans for the second half of this decade. In reflecting on our past and on our future programs, we draw instruction and encouragement from our affiliation with the World Agroforestry Centre.

So I commend you for your success, and look forward to an even more productive future.

Thank you.