

**JICA and Government of Kenya Side Event – TICAD VI**

**A New African Initiative for Combating Desertification to Strengthen Resilience to Climate Change  
in the Sahel and Horn of Africa**

**August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**Nairobi, Kenya**

**Remarks by Naoko Ishii, GEF CEO and Chairperson**

**TRANSCRIPT**

Excellences, friends and colleagues,

Mr. Kato, thank you for the invitation,

Judy, my long-time friend,

Very good afternoon to everyone.

Let me start by congratulating the governments of Kenya and Senegal who have joined forces with JICA and UNCCD to launch this very important initiative. This initiative has just come at the very right moment.

We are at a very critical juncture of humanity. Last year, year 2015, we had two international agreements of historical importance: the SDGs and the Climate Agreement in Paris. Both agreements carry a common message: the health of our global environmental commons – our oceans, our forests, climate, water and our land – is essential to our sustainable development. For so long, we humans have taken those global commons for granted and exploited them as free resources. Now is the time to change courses.

Drylands, one of the critical global commons, is exactly the case in point. In Africa drylands are home to millions of people whose livelihoods are intertwined with the natural environment. They are also considered “bread baskets” because of their importance for the production of major staple foods.

But because of the impact of climate change, droughts in the drylands are becoming more frequent and their effects more profound and severe. Many migrants originate in those areas. Responses to these shocks have consistently placed a huge strain on resources of governments and on the global community. In 2011 four billion US dollars were spent on humanitarian assistance in the Sahel and horn of Africa which is equivalent to almost 10% of ODA to the region.

In fact, many of us in this room are already working for a wide range of opportunities, frameworks, and ideas to address the challenges in drylands. But, we have yet to translate our efforts into tangible and meaningful outcomes to the extent needed to reverse those worrisome trends in drylands. It is increasingly clear that we need to be proactive, we need to address the root cause of the challenge, and we need to come together to coordinate approaches by all stakeholders, and align resources along a coordinated framework. This initiative we are launching here is trying to do exactly that.

A question ahead of us in this room is as follows: what will this coordinated framework look like and what are its guiding principles? What works and what may not work? In the case of the GEF, over the past decade, we have been working with partners (many of them are here in this room) to promote integrated and system-wide approaches to natural resource management in dryland countries. Through Terrafrica we helped countries put in place policies and investment strategies for sustainable land management aligned

with CADEEP. We are also working with countries implementing the Great Green Wall initiative, and we are launching the food security in Africa program in 12 countries to help smallholders acquire best practices for intensification of sustainable agriculture.

Throughout these experiences we have learned which factors are critical to this coordinated framework, and I want to share three of them with you:

1. National governments must support the initiatives and activities initiated by communities consisting of smallholder farmers and herders through policies such as land tenure, and also by providing enabling conditions to create a better market;
2. Government and development partners like us must work together to create business opportunities for communities in the drylands. This can be done through promoting a sustainable value chain for agricultural products, increasing access to financing opportunities, and innovative knowledge resources and practices;
3. We must work at scale and across national boundaries to cover the entire drylands on the continent. It is critical to build a network of institutions which hold valuable knowledge pertinent to each dryland region and let them learn across sectors and across national boundaries.

Excellences, colleagues and friends, I believe we can galvanize our efforts towards a tangible and meaningful outcome by joining our hands in a coordinated framework. I am delighted to express the first commitment of the GEF as a founding partner to this initiative. We look forward to working closely with all the countries and development partners towards a sustainable and resilience future for the Sahel and Horn of Africa.

I thank you all.