

Portrait

Hermegast Makoi – A scientist focusing on implementation in the field

Hermegast Makoi started his Sawiris Scholarship in September 2010. His research is aimed at the monitoring of forest carbon stocks in the Miombo woodlands in western Tanzania. He is spending the first half of 2011 at the Institute of Agricultural Sciences of the ETH Zurich.



Hermegast Ambrose Makoi, born 1973 in Tanzania, has received a Sawiris scholarship in 2010. He is currently engaged in doctoral training at the Institute of Agricultural Sciences of the ETH Zurich. His research mainly focuses on the management of projects that motivate communities to participate in the conservation of rural areas while generating community livelihood.

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Hermegast Makoi, you are currently doing your doctoral thesis as part of a North-South Centre programme funded by the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development. What were your previous career steps?

Hermegast Makoi: Since my MSC graduation in Management of Natural Resources at the Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania, I have worked extensively in the field of natural resources and management. Thus, I gained broad knowledge in forest management, land use planning and monitoring of forest resources.

How would you assess the capacity building effect of your Sawiris Scholarship?

Giving people from the South the opportunity to learn from the North and to develop research skills is a long-term

investment in developing countries. Personally, I will use the acquired knowledge to further foster conservation and development of rural areas through continuous working with rural communities.

The goal of the programme is to promote the development of methods which are directly relevant for improving the livelihoods of poor people in developing countries. Referring to this, why do you think that your specific project proposal was chosen by the grants committee?

One part of my research includes the development of methods and tools for assessing and monitoring forest carbon stocks. The other part focuses on the participation of local communities. The two approaches together will result in synergistic effects between the people and their nature – a novel idea. The tools to be developed will be of direct use to local forest managers in their efforts to earn money while protecting nature.

The United Nations declared 2011 to be the International Year of Forests. How does your project contribute to its intended goals?

This study explores the possibilities to connect people to their forests by introducing a new way of benefitting from forest resources while serving the existing forests. If we want to save forests, we need a more comprehensive approach than tree planting. The community should get the opportunity to deliberate on sustainable management, conservation and development of forests.

In what way could your research results add to the mitigation of climate change in practice?

The concept of the REDD mechanism (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation

and Forest Degradation) includes paying forest owners in order to leave the trees in their plots. Researchers anticipate that the participating communities will generate interest in conserving more forests in Tanzania, thus creating the possibility to sequester more carbon.

There always seems to be a conflict between the conservation and the development paradigm. Do you see a possibility of conserving the ecosystem benefits while meeting the needs of local people? We must realise that people are largely connected with their forests through their daily life. Therefore, all measures taken to protect existing forests should address the people's needs as well. We must shift our policy and practice towards conservation and development approaches that meet the inherent trade-offs between the two. The intention of this study is to demonstrate how rural communities can earn money while maintaining intact forests. In the end, the communities themselves will be the beneficiaries.

What would be the most important steps to take in order to achieve a sustainable forest management for the benefit of current and future generations?

There is no simple solution or single answer to the problems which our forests are facing today. It is important to note that any efforts in saving forests need to be linked to the many-sided facets of human life that they affect. We need to embark on a people-centred approach in order to foster forest management. In addition, the forest sector should not act independently. We need policies that regulate other sectors as well, particularly the energy and agricultural sectors.