

Ankara, Turkey, June 18 (Infosplusgabon) - The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has honoured the Ministry of Agriculture of Ethiopia with the first prize for the Land for Life award which recognises excellence and innovation in efforts towards land in balance.

Ethiopia's Ministry of Agriculture won the Land for Life award for its project on Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transition (MERET) jointly presented by the UNCCD head, Ibrahim Thiaw and Somalia's deputy Prime Minister Mahdi Mohamed Guled.

The announcement was made in Ankara, Turkey at the global observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification celebrated on 17 June. International delegates are in Ankara for a three-day forum to commemorate the World Day to Combat Desertification and celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Convention.

"It was difficult for me to believe it at the first instance. It is not because MERET Project does not deserve this honour, but because fairness and justice rarely prevailed in this world. But now I know that truth and justice still exist in this world. Certainly, I was excited and thrilled by the news. It inspires me for further dedication and commitment for the betterment of our environment and society," Betru Nedessa, Coordinator/National Project Coordinator stated after receiving the award.

For more than three decades, they estimate having restored more than 2.5 million hectares of degraded watersheds in more than 72 districts in Ethiopia, reducing food shortages by 50 percent.

MERET's origins lie in the emergency operation that responded to food crises in the 1970s, the remarkable large-scale project is fully owned and operated by the government of Ethiopia. World Food Programme (WFP), the World Bank, and donor nations support the government, and communities.

Under the theme “Decades of Impact,” the 2019 the Land for Life award puts spotlight on individuals/organizations that made outstanding contribution to land degradation neutrality on a large-scale, with long-term changes and dedicated actions for 25 years or longer and remarkable positive impacts on land, people, communities, and society.

Yun managed to bring investment from large-sized forestry-related ecological enterprises headquartered outside of Tibet, such as Elion Group Co., Ltd. and Inner Mongolia M-grass Ecology & Environment (Group) Co., Ltd., to support ecological forestry development projects in Tibet.

Thanks to Yun efforts, a host of tree breeding bases were set up and operated by the newly incorporated Tibet Land Afforestation Group Co., Ltd., thus removing a long-standing barrier to rapid expansion of afforestation in Tibet.

Yun also proposed a new afforestation strategy that promoted large-scale afforestation projects, prioritised the creation of mixed forests, and encouraged the use of elite native tree species.

UNCCD disclosed that he is one of the first local officials in China that acknowledged the role of ecological compensation in poverty alleviation.

Believing that a beautiful Tibet with a well-preserved, sustainable environment would offer a reinforced shield for China’s ecological security and help Tibetan people to live a better life, Yun Dan, incumbent head of the Department of Finance of Tibet Autonomous Region put forward a new approach to Tibetan forestry modernization in the new era during his tenure as the leader of the Tibet Forestry Administration.

China got the third prize and was recognised for protecting the ecosystem of the Qinghai.

MARP is the French acronym for Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). This network was supported by International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). According to UNCCD, Ouedraogo has systematically and successfully promoted the use of both techniques. In 1992, he created the Réseau MARP, which was the first organisation in Burkina promoting participatory research techniques.

In combination with the improved planting pits (zaï), the contour stone bunds have produced a significant impact on crop yields, food security, tree growth and groundwater recharge.

Ouedraogo and his project developed and promoted contour stone bunds, a simple water harvesting technique, which has spread widely on the northern part of Burkina's Central Plateau.

He began working in the early 1980s for the OXFAM-funded Agroforestry Project in Burkina Faso's Yatenga region. In 1983 he became its director. The second prize was awarded to Burkina Faso's Mathieu Ouedraogo, President of Réseau MARP, for showing a lifelong commitment in the Sahel to restoring degraded land to productivity.

So far, 1.5 million households have benefited this project and since the best practices are being replicated and scaled up, this number is expected to rise in the following years.

Farmers successfully escaped poverty and the beneficiary communities were and still are empowered for decision making in all development stages, guaranteeing sense of ownership and sustainability of the intervention.

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