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CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

February 2nd, 2014

Celebrating the World Wetlands Day 2014

ARCOS calls for better harmony between wetlands' functions and services and economic development in the Great Lakes Region

On February 2nd 2014, ARCOS joins the world to celebrate the World Wetlands Day by calling all governments in the Great Lakes Region to respect the principle of harmony between wetlands functions and economic development and reduce the impact of the agriculture on wetlands and water in our region.

Wetlands serve as valuable natural infrastructure for agriculture, providing reliable water and fertile soils, but they are at risk from agriculture's growing demands for land and water. The continued conversion of wetlands to increase agriculture land, the intensification of irrigated agriculture to reduce reliance on rain-fed agriculture under the changing climate, the widespread use of agrochemicals to amend the impoverished soils subject to monoculture systems, and the increasing withdrawal of water from wetlands to supply drinking water to growing populations and cities; all contribute to the fast decrease of quantity and deteriorating quality of water in wetlands in the region and this has a very adverse impact on the ecological functions of these ecosystems making them less capable of providing the life-sustaining services we all depend on.

Despite the growing awareness of concerns over the impact of agriculture on wetlands' functions and services and the improving national policies and regulations, wetland ecosystems continue to suffer from the lack of harmonization of policies and this is seriously affecting the effectiveness of these policies and practices. In fact, the lack of integration in pesticides management, the non-uniform enforcement of restrictive measures such as fishing bans and differential application of technologies in same ecosystem break the balance that makes these agroecosystems multifunctional and keeps them able to provide all these services we are benefiting from.

As the theme of today's WWD puts it "**Wetlands and Agriculture: partners for growth**"; we call for all governments and various stakeholders in Great Lakes transboundary freshwater ecosystems to work for the realization of this principle by adopting uniformly the new technologies that reduce the quantity of water withdrawn for irrigation, conducting together a thorough integrated water resources planning and aiming to minimize the impact on water quality through integrated pesticides management and organic farming whenever possible.

ARCOS and its regional partners are in the second year of implementing a multi-layer initiative on “Stakeholders Engagement for Informed Decision-Making, Threats Mitigation and Sustainable Freshwater Services Management in the Great Lakes Region of East and Central Africa”, supported by The MacArthur Foundation. The overall goal of this initiative is to promote regional collaborative actions that address major issues affecting freshwater services in the region, to catalyze sustainable freshwater management and benefits to communities, knowledge and skill development, and to support informed decisions in mitigating threats facing freshwater ecosystems – including wetlands – today.

Some of the major achievements of this initiative so far include the establishment of the Great Lakes Freshwater Ecosystems Forum, a platform that aims for exchange, networking, as well as information and experience sharing for all practitioners, decision makers, researchers, and grass root communities from all over the region. The initiative has also made progress in building capacity in Wetland management, as demonstrated by the success of the first regional managers’ training workshop held in Kigali in December 2013.

Marking the Day; Dr. Sam Kanyamibwa, the Executive Director of ARCOS said: “*wetlands in the Great Lakes region are facing unprecedented challenges from the increasing population and pressures for development. Without making too much compromise, alternatives are within our reach to reconcile the need to both grow our economies and sustain these ecosystems’ functions. Through exchange and information sharing, the key to success is already in our hands. I call upon everybody to join in the effort to make the wetlands and freshwater ecosystems in the region our partners for development.*”

Notes to the Editors

The World Wetlands Day (WWD), 2 February

The World Wetlands Day celebrated on February 2nd each year marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar. On this day and with support from the Ramsar Secretariat, various awareness-raising activities take place across the world, organized by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and Civil Society Groups to help raise public awareness about the importance and value of wetlands.

About the theme of WWD 2014, “Wetlands and Agriculture: partners for growth”

Given that wetlands are so often intimately linked with agriculture and 2014 is the UN International Year of Family Farming, this theme puts a focus on the need for wetland management and agricultural sectors to work together for the best shared outcomes.

About the Ramsar Convention

The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) is an intergovernmental treaty that embodies the commitments of its member countries to maintain the ecological character of their Wetlands of World Importance and to plan for the wise use of all of the wetlands in their territories (www.ramsar.org).

About ARCOS

ARCOS is an international NGO created in 1995, with the mission to enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources in the Albertine Rift region through the promotion of collaborative conservation action for nature and people. Its focus is on collaborative conservation and sustainable development activities in the Albertine Rift region through biodiversity monitoring, information exchange, networking, capacity building, conservation action, policy work and supporting livelihood activities for the communities. (www.arcosnetwork.org).

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