

THE XVIII INTERNATIONAL GRASSLAND CONGRESS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE OF TROPICAL GRASSLANDS: A DEVELOPING COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE

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GENERAL INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

All too soon we are to draw down the curtains on the XVIII International Grassland Congress and it is my pleasure and honour to contribute to the closing statements of this historic event, the first of its kind in Canada and one to bring us to the end of the present millennium as we set the stage for the next. I do this on behalf of my colleagues in Africa, Asia and South America.

The thirty themes and the nearly 2000 technical presentations underscore the growing complexity of the role of our grasslands in shaping the general well-being of mankind.

The XIX Congress in Brazil in 2001 will no doubt shift the frontiers of knowledge even further in the quest for sustainable use of our grassland resources.

Mr. Chairman, I make my address from a developing country perspective because the bulk of tropical pastures occurs in this region characterized by low per capita income (less than US \$500), a complex agro-ecology from humid to arid grasslands, very fragile grasslands and, especially for Africa, a general food deficit, an increasing pressure on the grasslands and a generally poor awareness of the need to invest in the grasslands as a sustainable commodity for livestock agriculture within the context of a traditional grassland based ruminant livestock production.

THE XIV INTERNATIONAL GRASSLAND CONGRESS HIGHLIGHTS

Realizing that over 50% of the world's grassland resources occur in the tropics, the XVIII Congress more than ever devoted a considerable amount of time to presentations by invited speakers on tropical grasslands with the appropriate emphasis on management systems. It has been clearly established that:

- Tropical pastures, be they in arid or semi-arid lands, are more resilient than previously thought and that the botany of the plant adapts to changing environments to ensure sustainability. The role of browse and crop residues are crucial to the sustenance of ruminants in the harsh environments.
- Under the low external inputs characterizing the cropping systems, legume forages have a crucial role to play in enhancing livestock and food crop production.
- Participatory planning, management and research into grasslands must involve village farmers to ensure sustainability of grassland use.

A clear understanding and respect for indigenous knowledge is a prerequisite for technology development and transfer.

- The breakdown in traditional authority is very relevant to current problems of poorly managed communal grazing lands.
- Deferred grazing is a potent tool for rangeland rehabilitation.

FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS

Despite the tremendous effort of the XVIII International Grassland Congress to address the key issues on tropical pastures the following areas needed additional attention:

- Forages and Grassland Management: Out of 105 poster papers on this critical subject, only 2 representing about 2% came from Africa (Cameroon and S. Africa) with 24 (about 25%) coming from S. Africa with Argentina being by far the greatest contributor.
- Grazing management: Out of 109 poster boards for this session only 1 was presented from Africa and this was by a Nigerian who could not attend for lack of sponsorship.
- Nutrition and environmental implications of neutralizing "toxicity" from browse plants is required. Ethology or animal behavior studies should form a component of studies on antinutritional factors from browse since the animal's ingestive behavior sets the limit for toxicity.
- Livestock - crop integration as this relates to nutrient cycling requires more study.
- Future studies into grasslands and forages should be more holistic involving biological, environmental, economic and social variables.
- Accurate indices for measuring sustainability in different ecosystems is required.
- The role of fire in the sustainable management of tropical grasslands requires more attention.
- Land policy research as this relates to the use of communal grazing land is required.
- Gender issues in planning and management of grasslands received no attention.
- Technology transfer case studies in tropical environments should receive more attention in future.

OTHER CONCERNS

- Participants from developing countries especially Africa were disappointingly few. Grassland management due to the harsh environment and complex socio-economic factors presents special challenges to African grasslands. More research and presentation of results to international fora like the International Grassland Congress should be encouraged. I am aware of possible funding constraints but this is a challenge to the 19th International Grassland Congress in Brazil.

I would suggest to the XVIII International Grassland Congress Board of Directors to make at least 100 copies of proceedings freely available to the libraries of universities and research

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institutions of Africa and other developing countries that were poorly represented in the current Grassland Congress.

- Conference proceedings to ease should be bound and not presented in large ring binders to ease handling.
- All continents except Africa have at one time or the other hosted the International Grassland Congress during its 70 year history. It is my hope that an appropriate African region probably Southern and/or Eastern Africa will bid for IGC 2005. This was also the dream of the late Ray Brougham.

On behalf of the all delegates for Africa and other developing countries, I express my sincerest appreciation to the conference organizers, the Provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and the Canadian Government for a most successful Congress. I am sure they will share their experiences with our Brazilian colleagues.

I thank you for your attention and may God bless all.