



# FACTSHEET

## SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF AFRICAN FORESTS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Despite great advances in recent years, sustainable management of Africa's vast and diverse natural forests is still proving to be extremely challenging. This factsheet outlines problems and progress made. It is aimed at those involved in the future of African forests, including those in non-forest sectors.

### Key messages

- ▶ Much work remains to improve sustainable management of African forests. This must be acknowledged by policy makers in the forestry sector.
- ▶ Those in non-forest sectors such as agriculture, water, mining and tourism also need to acknowledge the vital role of forests when designing and implementing sectoral policies.
- ▶ Conserving existing forested areas tends to receive most attention, but maintaining the quality of remaining forests is also crucial.
- ▶ New knowledge on impacts of climate change on forests and alternative demands on resources must be shared and learnt from.

### Promoting and enforcing sustainable forest management

African forests are suffering from deforestation, land degradation and climate change. Much of the early effort made to address these issues was in developing criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, but many studies also highlighted problems in monitoring and enforcing regulations.

Significant recent advances have resulted from voluntary arrangements such as forest management certification by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and similar organisations, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) projects, Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs), and international trade agreements such as the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) initiative. However, none of these are having a significant effect on reducing the large volumes of illegally harvested timber traded within Africa itself.

### Defining sustainable forest management

The definition used by the FAO, EU and other organisations since the 1990s, is "the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfill, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems."

### Forest management and mismanagement: facts and figures

- ▶ Africa's forest and woodland constitute about 20 per cent of the world's total, though the deforestation rate is four times the world's average.
- ▶ The deforestation rate in Africa is also increasing, against the global trend, and about 3.4 million hectares of forests are lost every year.
- ▶ Africa accounts for more than 50 per cent of all global damage to forest areas by wildfires.





Reforestation campaign with primary schools, Kara region, Togo (Courtesy Katie Koralesky)

- ▶ Sustainably managed forest areas are increasing, indicated by growth in FSC certification in Africa. A total of 7.2 million hectares were certified in 2012, mostly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2.5 million), Gabon (1.9 million), South Africa (1.5 million) and Cameroon (0.7 million).

## Key challenges

Africa contains one fifth of the world's tropical moist forests, now threatened by unsustainable practices. Competing land uses also mean that African forests are disappearing faster than those elsewhere. Added to this, climate change is predicted to increase future constraints in meeting these challenges. It is essential that policy makers in other sectors acknowledge the importance of maintaining forest cover for its multiple benefits.

The implementation of sustainable forest management practices in Africa is hampered by the low priority given to the sector by central government; poor enforcement of regulations; lack of incentives, particularly for local communities and the private sector; ill-defined property rights; and the treatment of forests as open access resources. Some of the barriers in dealing with forest adaptation include limited economic resources and infrastructure, low levels of technology, poor access to information and knowledge, inefficient institutions, and limited empowerment and access to resources.

Sustainable forest development requires the integration of livelihood initiatives with climate adaptation and mitigation, involving forestry, agriculture and other land-based activities. However, there is only limited information of questionable quality and quantity with which to guide rational decision making in planning and managing these resources, and in particular on how to use resources to tackle rural poverty and promote environmental protection.

### Source

Chidumayo, E., Okali, D., Kowero, G., Larwanou, M., eds. 2011. *Climate Change and African Forest and Wildlife Resources*. Nairobi: African Forest Forum.

## Priorities for sustainable forest management

- ▶ **Community-based adaptation for 'climate-proofing' African forests.** Community-based adaptation, also called 'autonomous adaption', is being increasingly studied and developed as an alternative or complement to publicly-funded adaptation. Such local coping strategies based on indigenous knowledge should be supported as important grassroots initiatives, and also used as starting points for planning future activities.
- ▶ **More forest-based adaptations in National Adaptation Programmes of Action.** Only a few NAPAs in Africa identify forest-based adaptation as a priority area for intervention. Improving this could involve technical approaches such as increased use of forest products as a buffer against climate-induced crop failure in marginal areas, the promotion of agroforestry, increased tree planting and adaptive livestock management. Policy approaches could also include decentralisation of resource management through Community Based Natural Resource Management, or funding for increased training and education at all levels. Practical steps include reducing risks from forest fires; improved monitoring, prevention and adaptive management; emphasizing the value of soil conservation and well-managed tree plantations; and identification and promotion of (micro-) climatic benefits and environmental services offered by trees and forests.
- ▶ **More efforts made to identify and promote suitable international and cross-border initiatives.** Impacts of African participation at international negotiations must be improved. One mechanism for this is the Comprehensive Framework of African Climate Change Programme, which is developing a shared vision of African priorities for sustainable development and poverty reduction in any future climate change regime, the simplification of procedures and removal of conditionalities in accessing international climate funds.

Design and editing by Green Ink ([www.greenink.co.uk](http://www.greenink.co.uk))

## Contact us

The Executive Secretary, African Forest Forum (AFF), United Nations Avenue, Gigiri, P.O. Box 30677-00100, Nairobi, Kenya  
 Phone: +254 20 722 4203 | Fax: +254 20 722 4001 | Email: [exec.sec@afforum.org](mailto:exec.sec@afforum.org) | Web: [www.afforum.org](http://www.afforum.org)