Sustainable Forest Management
Champions for Africa



Investing in Africa's Forest Future

An African-led, investment proposition for forests, enterprises and livelihoods

With support from Sida

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Cover photograph

Tree nursery worker tending seedlings in Meru, Kenya. Photo: AFF.

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A waterfall in Ngare Ndare Forest, Meru County, Kenya, highlighting the vital role of forests in sustaining water resources. Photo: AFF.



Zanzibar red colobus monkeys in their forest habitat. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Why Africa's forests matter

Strategic natural assets. Shared value.

THE STRATEGIC CASE

Africa's forests are more than ecosystems to protect. They are strategic natural assets that sustain livelihoods and economic activity, regulate water and climate, harbour globally important biodiversity and underpin a growing forest-based bioeconomy.

Across the continent, forests provide food, energy, income and cultural value while feeding industries and value chains. Their contribution spans production and processing, renewable energy, nature-based tourism and emerging bio-based industries. They are also important sources of employment and enterprise, particularly in rural areas.

Their significance extends beyond individual sectors and national boundaries. Healthy forests protect soils and water systems, store carbon and strengthen resilience to drought, floods and other climate pressures. Maintaining these assets is essential to long-term productivity, resilience and development.

Taken together, these functions make forests an asset base of continental significance and a strong foundation for investment that can advance economic development while safeguarding Africa's natural capital.

THE INVESTMENT IMPERATIVE

Africa has the natural capital

What is needed now is investment that turns this natural wealth into lasting economic and social value—without compromising the forests and landscapes that sustain it.

The scale and value of the opportunity

Africa's forest wealth offers an economic opportunity of continental scale. Realising it will require strategic capital, African expertise, credible delivery systems and investable enterprises.

637m ha
of forest across Africa
(FAO FRA 2020)

446m ha
of other wooded land
FAO FRA 2020

400m+
people depend on forest
(World Bank, 2025)

~4m ha
lost every year
(FAO FRA 2020)

US$1tn
bioeconomy potential by 2050
(FAO/Dalberg 2024)

100m
potential green jobs
(FAO/Dalberg 2024)

AN UNDERFINANCED OPPORTUNITY

Africa's forest wealth is substantial, yet much of its economic value remains unrealised

Finance is fragmented, value chains are underdeveloped, pipelines of investable enterprises are limited, and access to technology and markets remains uneven. Consequently, too much value is lost through low-value production, limited processing and weak connections between sustainable forest management and markets.

Continued forest loss widens this economic gap—eroding productive assets, future revenues, livelihoods and resilience.

The opportunity is not simply to produce more. It is to invest more strategically capturing more value in Africa, building competitive enterprises and keeping forests healthy, productive and standing.

THE INVESTMENT SHIFT

From fragmented, project-based finance to African-led investable growth

Development assistance and international climate finance have played an important catalytic role in advancing sustainable forest management, restoration and conservation across Africa. However, the scale of the opportunity requires a broader and more durable financing base—one anchored in African ownership and complemented by international capital and expertise.

US$100–150 billion

Indicative investment required over the next two decades to unlock the potential of Africa's forest-based bioeconomy.

With stronger African ownership, financing can extend beyond individual projects and funding cycles—providing enterprises and landscapes with the long-term capital required to grow, deliver results and attract further investment.



Baobab trees in a dry woodland landscape, illustrating the resilience and ecological importance of Africa's dryland forests. Photo: Wikimedia Commons



H.E. Professor Yemi Osinbajo, SAN, former Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Continental Chair of SFM Champions, speaking at the Afreximbank Annual Meetings in The Bahamas. Photo: Office of the Vice President, Nigeria.

AFF & SFM Champions for Africa

African credibility. Influential leadership. Collective action.

THE LEADERSHIP PROPOSITION

The African Forest Forum (AFF) brings the continental credibility, African expertise, evidence and convening reach needed to position forests at the centre of Africa's development agenda. It connects governments, researchers, practitioners, communities, businesses and development partners around sustainable forest management and forest-based development, grounded in African priorities and knowledge.

The SFM Champions for Africa add senior-level leadership to this platform. Their experience, standing and relationships across government, business, finance and philanthropy can help elevate forest issues, engage influential constituencies and build support for action.

AFF provides the institutional and technical foundation; the Champions bring additional leadership and access at the highest levels. Together, they create a stronger platform for advancing Africa's forest agenda and mobilising the support required to turn priorities into results.

THE COLLECTIVE ADVANTAGE

Credibility builds confidence. Influence unlocks investment.

AFF and the SFM Champions combine these strengths to create a stronger basis for engagement, collaboration and resource mobilisation around Africa's forest priorities.

AFF: credibility built across Africa

For nearly two decades, the African Forest Forum has connected science, policy and practice to advance the sustainable management, wise use and conservation of Africa's forests and tree resources. Today, AFF is a recognised continental institution with the reach, expertise and relationships to strengthen policy, build capacity and support coordinated action across the forestry sector.

~4,000
members
(AFF membership records)

51
African countries represented
(AFF membership records)

~200
African experts engaged
(AFF programme records)

273
knowledge resources available
(AFF Knowledge Hub, 2026)

~300,000
unique website visitors annually
(AFF web analytics)

~99,000
PDF downloads annually
(AFF web analytics)

A CONTINENTAL PLATFORM

From its Secretariat in Nairobi, AFF mobilises a distributed network of African experts, institutions and strategic partners to connect knowledge across borders and coordinate responses to shared forestry priorities.

Its formal cooperation and working relationships include the African Union Commission (AUC), FAO, UNEP, UNFF, ITTO, IUFRO, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), AGRA, regional economic communities and leading research institutions across Africa and beyond.

Science-based capacity building and professional development are embedded across AFF's work, equipping forestry stakeholders to apply knowledge and make informed decisions.

Its Technical Support Team to Regional and International Negotiations prepares African delegates to engage effectively in forest-related policy processes and helps translate international commitments into national policy and practice.

This combination of expertise, reach and policy engagement strengthens Africa's voice and provides a credible platform for partnership, coordinated action and investment.

AFF'S CONTINENTAL ADVANTAGE

African-owned
Rooted in African priorities, expertise and institutions.

Continental reach
A network spanning 51 African countries.

Evidence-led
Translating African science and knowledge into policy and practice.

Trusted convening
Backed by established relationships with leading continental and international institutions.

Built for continuity
Sustaining networks, knowledge and institutional relationships beyond individual projects.

Join AFF's continental network
Visit www.afforum.org to learn more and become a member.



Market in the village of Minwoho, Lekié, Center Region, Cameroon. Photo credit: Ollivier Girard/CIFOR-ICRAF

From an African Idea to a Continental Institution

AFF's journey began with a simple but ambitious "forum idea": to galvanise an African voice on forestry issues and mobilise the resources and mechanisms required to address them. Following extensive consultations with forestry stakeholders across the continent—and with foundational support from Sida—that idea took institutional form in 2007, when the African Forest Forum was formally established in Kenya as an independent, not-for-profit pan-African organisation.

THE FOUNDATIONS

2003–2005 SFM I: The Lessons Learnt on Sustainable Forest Management in Africa project examined experience across sub-Saharan Africa and identified gaps in Africa's participation in international forestry processes. A Technical Support Team (TST) was established to strengthen African engagement in international negotiations, laying the foundation for a more coordinated African voice.

2006–2008 SFM II: Sida supported the formal establishment of AFF. Continental consultations defined its initial priorities across forest management, livelihoods, environmental protection and cross-cutting issues.

2008–2014 SFM III: AFF consolidated its institutional base and expanded knowledge generation, capacity development and policy engagement in forest governance, climate change, forest–water relations and forest plantations.

Building for the long term

From 2014, Sida's partnership with AFF continued through three successive programmes that strengthened the institution's governance, visibility, technical capacity, partnerships, resource diversification and role in connecting science, policy and practice.

SIDA-SUPPORTED PROGRAMMES, 2014–2026

SFM IV · 2014–2019	Strengthening Sustainable Forest Management in Africa | SEK 48 million
SFM V · 2019–2023	Strengthening Management and Use of Forest Ecosystems for Sustainable Development in Africa | SEK 42 million
SFM VI · 2024–2026	TAFFECLES: Transforming AFF to enhance its capacity to improve livelihoods and environmental stability through better management of African forest and tree resources | SEK 25.7 million

Across these successive phases, AFF progressed from an idea to an institution and into an established African voice in forestry. Long-term partnerships provided continuity, while African expertise, leadership and networks strengthened AFF's governance, visibility, partnerships and resource base, enabling it to generate knowledge, influence policy and respond to emerging priorities.

Sustained partnerships

FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO AFF AND PARTNERS, 2011–2027

Alongside Sida's long-term partnership, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation supported AFF's Climate Change Programme from 2010 to 2023, while a growing portfolio of development and technical partners broadened the scope of AFF's work and strengthened its reach across Africa. As shown in Figure 1, financial support provided to AFF and its partners between 2011 and 2027 totals US$30,354,386 across 20 projects supported by seven partners. Sida and SDC account for 91.3% of this financing, complemented by contributions from FAO, UNEP/UN-REDD, SLU, AGRA and the University of Bern.



Figure 1. Financial Support to AFF and Partners, 2011–2027

Sida: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; SDC: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation; FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization; SLU: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences; UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme; and AGRA: Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa.

Over 17 years, this portfolio has advanced sustainable forest management, governance, climate action, REDD+, livelihoods and youth engagement across Africa. It has strengthened national capacity to participate in forest carbon markets, restore degraded landscapes, and integrate current forestry knowledge and best practices into education, training and continuing professional development.



Prof. Labode Popoola, Executive Secretary–CEO of AFF, and Dr. Wahida Shah, UNDP Senior Regional Technical Advisor reaffirm cooperation on shared priorities. Photo: AFF.

Connecting Africa's Forest Ecosystem

The breadth of work supported through these successive programmes has connected AFF across the forest system. Its relationships span policy and institutions, science and knowledge, landscapes and communities, development and implementation, and the businesses, enterprises and financial actors needed to turn forest resources into productive value.

AN ACTIVE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

15+
Communities of Practice
(AFF CoP Analytics reports)

4,054
Members engaged
(AFF CoP Analytics reports)

10,599
Contributions shared
(AFF CoP Analytics reports)

The network is active, not simply institutional. Through Communities of Practice hosted on Howspace and the UN-REDD Academy, AFF creates sustained channels for peer learning, knowledge exchange and collaboration across countries and professional backgrounds. This connectivity matters because forest opportunities rarely sit within one institution or sector. They require evidence, enabling policy, capable actors, markets and capital to come together. AFF provides a platform through which these elements can connect—creating a stronger basis for advancing viable forest opportunities at scale.



Participants at AFF's regional workshop on climate change, forest and tree-based ecosystem services, and socio-ecological resilience in Africa visit Kakuzi PLC's tree nursery in Murang'a County, Kenya, July 2023. Photo © AFF.



A woman cocoa farmer works the land near Atewa Forest, Ghana. Photo: AFF

From potential to investment

Productive landscapes. Competitive enterprises. Thriving communities.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Turning collective leadership into action requires credible pathways that connect Africa's forest priorities with capital. Across the continent, forests can support productive landscapes, competitive enterprises and lasting value for communities.

Promising initiatives are already emerging, creating a strong foundation for new partnerships, enterprise development and sustainable growth.

Patient and catalytic finance can strengthen investment readiness, address early-stage risks and create the conditions for credible initiatives to attract further capital, move into implementation and grow.

The African Forestry Trust Fund (AFTF) is proposed as the African-led mechanism to align forest priorities and credible initiatives with public, philanthropic and private finance—strengthening the investment pipeline and connecting it with the resources, partnerships and expertise needed for delivery.

THE CATALYTIC ADVANTAGE

Readiness attracts capital. Partnerships accelerate impact.

The Fund combines early-stage support, strategic partnerships and catalytic finance to move credible initiatives from preparation to scale—creating investable opportunities and lasting results.

The African Forestry Trust Fund

The proposed Fund would provide a common African-led framework through which institutions with different mandates can contribute to shared forest and landscape outcomes—with clear decision-making, defined responsibilities and accountability for results.

African-led Continental priorities and African institutions at the centre of strategic direction

Partner-based Complementary mandates and capabilities organised through a common platform.

Aligned Support connected to agreed continental, regional and national commitments

Flexible Participation and support adapted to the requirements of each initiative.

Accountable Governance, safeguards and reporting built into decision-making and delivery.

Complementary Designed to reinforce existing institutions and financing mechanisms.

THE VEHICLE

The African Forest Forum (AFF), with the support of SFM Champions for Africa, proposes the establishment of the African Forestry Trust Fund (AFTF).

Strategic partner institutions engaged in this initiative include the African Union Commission (AUC), African Development Bank (AfDB) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The coalition would bring together continental leadership and policy alignment, development finance, technical expertise, advocacy and international cooperation. Each institution could contribute according to its mandate and comparative strengths, within a shared framework for strategic direction and oversight.

This approach would allow the Fund to draw on the experience and institutional reach of its partners while maintaining clear responsibilities and sound decision-making. It would also provide the continuity needed to build confidence among contributors and support the Fund's development over time.

THE PURPOSE

The Fund would mobilise voluntary, extra-budgetary resources for the sustainable management of Africa's forests, broadening the range of actors contributing to the continent's forest future.

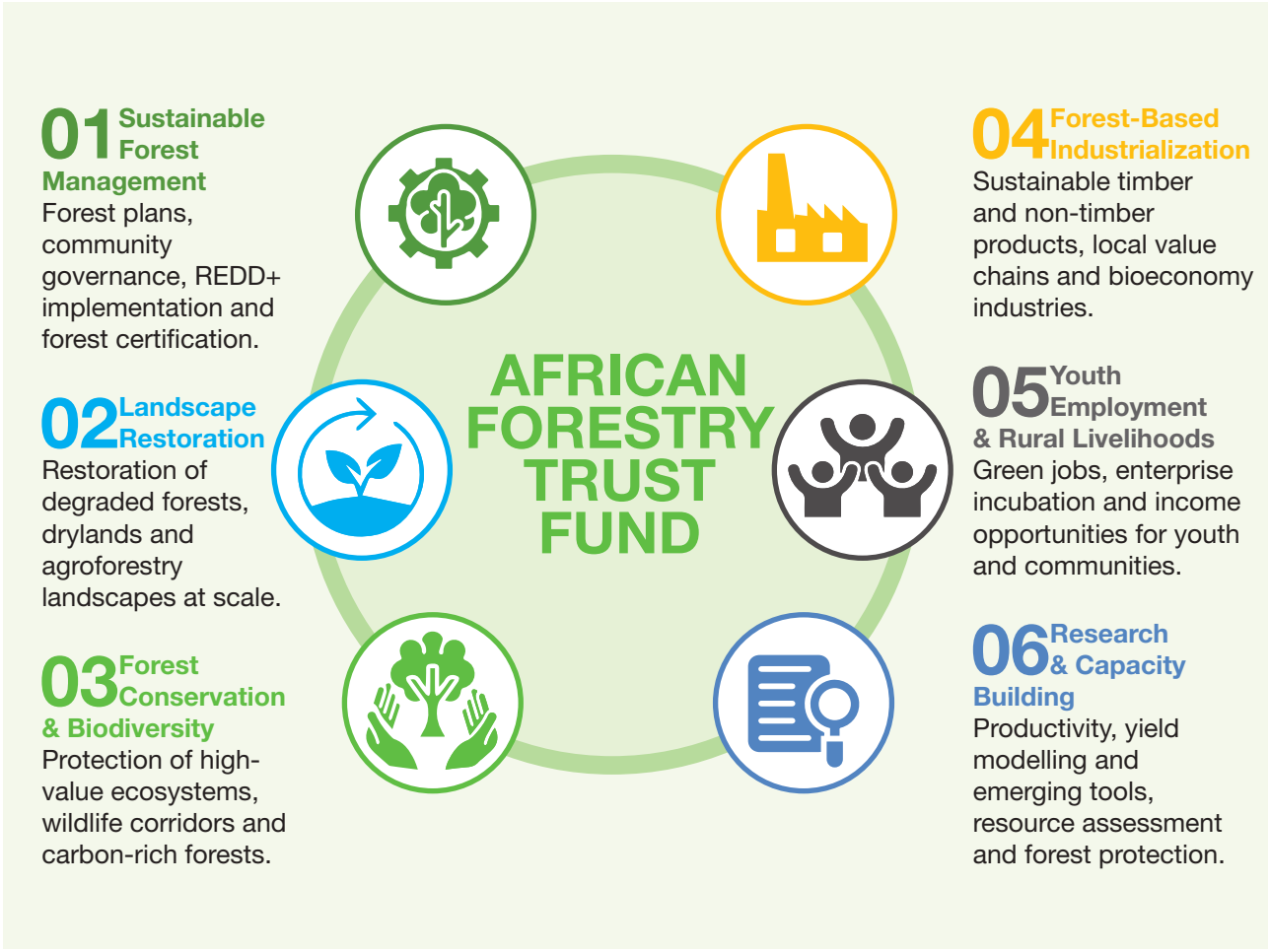
International development cooperation has provided essential support to African forestry over several decades. The Fund would build on this foundation by strengthening resource mobilisation within Africa—drawing on government support, corporate contributions and African philanthropy, while continuing to welcome international partnership.

A BROADER RESOURCE BASE

The Fund would create a structured avenue for governments, businesses, philanthropies and development partners to contribute to Africa's forest priorities.

A more diversified resource base would strengthen African ownership of priorities, increase flexibility in responding to emerging needs and provide a more resilient foundation for sustained action.

The Fund's investment portfolio will be organised around the six strategic pillars presented in the infographic below. Together, they provide a balanced framework for protecting Africa's forest resources, restoring degraded landscapes, strengthening forest-based economies and investing in the people and institutions that underpin delivery.



The first three pillars—sustainable forest management, landscape restoration, and forest conservation and biodiversity—protect and rebuild Africa's natural forest asset base, creating the foundation for economic opportunity, climate resilience and community wellbeing.

The pillars on forest-based industrialisation, youth employment and rural livelihoods build on this foundation by turning forest resources into greater economic value, productive enterprises, jobs and income.

Research and capacity building underpin the entire portfolio, strengthening the knowledge, technical capability and technologies needed to support sound decisions and effective delivery.

The pillars are connected by design. Individual investments can draw on multiple pillars where this creates stronger environmental, economic and social outcomes, allowing the Fund to respond to the full potential of each opportunity.



Sawn timber processing at Kakuzi PLC, Kenya—illustrating how investment in efficient forest value chains can create jobs, strengthen enterprises and retain more value within Africa. Photo: AFF

Management, Monitoring and Accountability

Clear governance arrangements and defined responsibilities will guide the Fund's operations. A Board of Trustees representing participating institutions will provide strategic direction, approve resource allocations and ensure that investments remain aligned with agreed priorities.

A designated Fund Secretariat will manage day-to-day operations, including opportunity assessment, contracting, disbursement, risk management and reporting. Funding decisions will follow agreed investment criteria and procedures for due diligence, procurement and the management of potential conflicts of interest.

The Board will oversee financial performance and review progress across the investment portfolio. Regular monitoring and independent evaluation will show how resources are used, the results achieved and where adjustments are required.

Strong financial controls, environmental and social safeguards, and independent financial audits will protect contributions and support responsible investment. Contributors and relevant stakeholders will receive clear, timely information on financial performance, implementation and results.

The Board will also support the Fund's long-term development by maintaining relationships with existing contributors and engaging prospective partners.

Good governance will protect resources, strengthen confidence and ensure that results can be demonstrated.

Partner with the Fund

Africa's forest future calls for a broader and more durable coalition—combining capital, expertise, influence and market access to advance shared priorities:

Contribute: Support priority initiatives from preparation to implementation.

Co-invest: Invest in credible enterprises, landscapes and programmes.

Enable: Provide expertise, technology, networks and market connections.

Partner support can help prepare enterprises for investment, strengthen forest-product value chains, restore productive landscapes, advance innovation and expand opportunities for communities and young people.

Early partners can also bring experience and insight to the Fund's development, helping shape an investment approach that responds to contributor priorities while remaining firmly anchored in Africa's forest agenda. Regular reporting will show resources committed, initiatives supported and results achieved, providing a clear account of each partner's contribution and impact.

Together, we can turn Africa's forest potential into lasting value —for landscapes, economies and people.



Working together to restore productive forest landscapes. Photo: AFF



Atakora Mountains, North Benin, close to Batia, Pendjari National Park. Photo: Wegmann via Wikimedia Commons.

Sustainable Forest Management Champions for Africa



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