NewsLetter

East and southern Africa forest observatory

A FOREST OBSERVATORY WILL ENHANCE DATA SHARING AMONG STAKEHOLDERS IN EASTERN AFRICA

Forests are major carbon sinks, contributing significantly to the socioeconomic development of East Africa. To mitigate climate change, most countries in the sub region have signed onto programmes (e.g., REDD+ under the UNFCCC, AFR100, etc.) and made pledges (e.g. on restoration and reforestation) with various degrees of implementation.

However, forest monitoring systems in East Africa can undermine these efforts. These systems are characterized by data scarcity and lack of reliable and updated data/information on forest cover trends. These gaps undermine establishment of baselines for monitoring and reporting on REDD+ and other climate-related targets/ obligations. This means that policymakers, funders, practitioners and citizens will not have access to comprehensive data and/ or information about the latest trends and threats to forests to support better environmental and socioeconomic decision making.

Since 2020, the Forest Observatory of East and Southern Africa (OFESA), an ongoing project led by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), has been working on an up-to-date and reliable system to help countries monitor and report on their climate obligations. To that end, CIFOR is developing a sustainable data-sharing governance framework and building capacity in the management and use of environmental information.

OFESA Tanzania country workshop. George Wakesho/CIFOR.

CURRENT SITUATION

As a first step, the programme began mapping key stakeholders in the forest sector in each country (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Mozambique). In this way, they planned to identify available forest information and the status of data sharing in each identified organization. Although 59% of key forest organizations in each country have data-sharing agreements, these are mostly with project partners. Few had agreements to share data with specific platforms or networks, which limited information flow to these organizations.

Stakeholders identified several key hurdles to sharing data among organizations in the forest sector. These comprise lack of motivation to share information, limited capacity to manage and analyse forest data into sharable/usable formats, lack of institutional coordination and lack of a governance framework.

Engagements with participating countries were vital to understand their data-sharing challenges, including type of available data, the gaps in sharing and perceptions of the governance framework structure.

Countries raised a variety of concerns about the data-governance framework:

- Tanzania requires more than one authorizing institution to access some of the data, which makes accessing forest data difficult. Furthermore, the process is time consuming and laborious due to lack of a national data-sharing platform.
- Ethiopia needs guidelines to develop forest management plans and coordination toward a standardized forest definition and the promotion of communication at higher levels. When experts do not communicate with one another, they create gaps.
- Kenya needs policies and legal frameworks at the subnational and landscape levels. It also needs institutional and coordination frameworks to improve collaboration and partnerships and encourage private sector participation.
- Uganda has a gap in data management frameworks, making mechanisms for sharing available data difficult. Although institutions have access to some data, clear policies for sharing are lacking in some cases. Few institutions have data-sharing policies or frameworks. However, national forestry institutions are developing data-sharing protocols.
- Mozambique needs trustworthy governance within government.

Other cross-cutting challenges include the need for capacity building in forest assessment, organizations with data protocols but that still struggle to share data, a lack of centralized data-sharing platform and a lack of data-sharing policies at the government level.

HIGHLIGHTS

Inception meeting

Due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, the inception meeting was held virtually. It was attended by 30 people from forest authorities and partners of participating countries, EU delegation officials, the Joint Research Centre, CIFOR and the Regional Centre for Mapping Resources for Development (RCMRD). The meeting sought to inform relevant stakeholders in the forest and environment sector about the OFESA project. It highlighted what the project expects to deliver in the five participating countries.

To enhance data sharing, OFESA has engaged key stakeholders in the forest sectors of the five participating countries. This process aims to build on existing collaborations relating to data collection, processing, storage, dissemination and forest data commonality. Such engagements are helping identify the most efficient ways of collaboration and develop efficient data-sharing governance structures.

For instance, stakeholders have identified forest area, forest cover, timber extraction and firewood extraction data as the most collected themes across all the mapped organizations. Government institutions collect a wider variety of information compared to community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international NGOs. This information will help the programme review its priorities to focus on the most common data.

Opening session on the use of GIS and remote sensing technology for forest monitoring. Ngugi Kimani/RCMRD

Stakeholder mapping

The project mapped out stakeholders to understand the main barriers for strengthening monitoring and data-sharing systems/approaches, and their root causes.

We used the contact list from the OFESA prototype to identify 29 respondents from 26 key stakeholders in the five countries. Key informant interviews were held virtually. We then analysed the data to identify collaborations relating to the observatory functions of data collection, data sharing and capacity needs.

Capacity building

We identified capacity gaps from the actors in the countries through various approaches, including the mapping exercise, country meetings and leveraging on regional initiatives such as the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management (BIOPAMA) Programme. BIOPAMA shared

knowledge of capacity gaps in the region, including the OFESA countries. This knowledge has informed capacity building programmes under OFESA such as country meetings and workshops. This, in turn, has led to enhanced understanding on best practices for data generation and application.

Case studies

We reviewed case studies in the region to identify success factors of community-based monitoring in developing countries. This informed community forest monitoring in selected hotspots in OFESA countries.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Data sharing among stakeholders

Most stakeholders (58.6%) had organizational data-sharing agreements with 52% already implementing them. However, these agreements were limited to inter-organizational data sharing with no mention of agreements with specific platforms or networks. Moreover, most agreements were between institutions within the same country. Only a few institutions had agreements that covered multiple countries or operated outside their country.

Analysis of the forest data

Sixty percent (60%) of interviewed organizations conducted forest

data analysis, which was mainly quantitative and largely done internally. Although this may point to availability of data analysis expertise, the extent of this expertise is not clear. Analysed data for partners and stakeholders were mostly packaged in various documents, including reports and publications. Under half (45%) of government agencies interviewed share their data with public. Even fewer NGOs (21%) did so.

More than one-third (40%) of stakeholders depended on external experts to analyse their forest data. This group is spread mainly among Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique. With respect to ideal beneficiaries of the analysed data, stakeholders mentioned government (38%) followed by research institutions (33%).
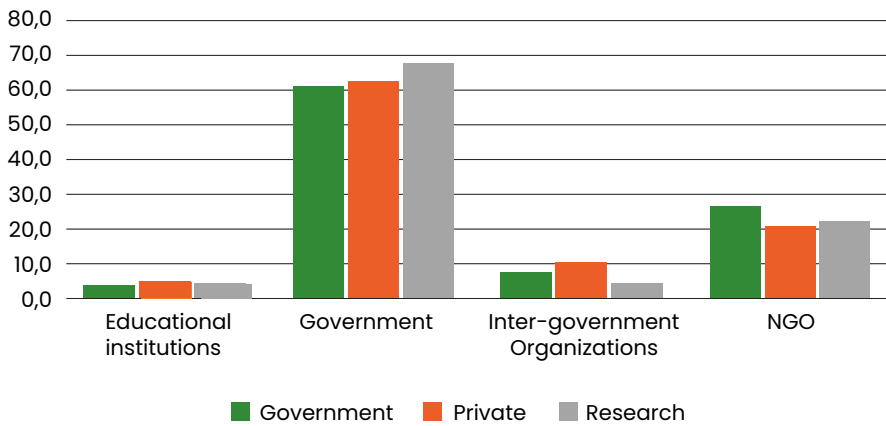

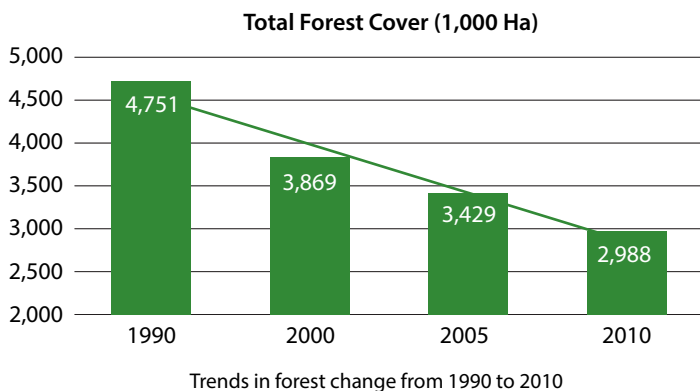Figure 1. Beneficiaries of analysed data by type

Total Forest Cover (1,000 Ha)

Trends in forest change from 1990 to 2010

Figure 2. Total forest cover

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KEY ACTIVITIES

- Following the launch of OFESA in 2017, the project has organized a workshop in each of the five participating countries with policymakers, forestry practitioners, academia and donors. The workshops aimed to help stakeholders identify their needs and challenges on aspects such as forest restoration to bridge the gap between these needs and available data.

- Support for upscaling low-cost monitoring began in Arabuko Sokoke forest, Kenya. On 11-15 April 2022, a team from the Forest Survey and Information Systems Department at Kenya Forest Service (KFS) trained 37 forest rangers and community scouts on the Forest Alert system and other forest patrols. Participants included 24 forest rangers from Gede, Jilore and Sokoke forest stations, 1 Kenya Wildlife Service ranger, 8 scouts from community forest associations, 3 forest station managers and the County Conservator for Kilifi. Similar training is planned for Kakamega forest in Kenya. In addition, OFESA is partnering with national forestry authorities in other project countries to identify opportunities to support pilot or upscale low-cost community forest monitoring.

- A one-week regional training workshop on the use of GIS and remote sensing technology for forest monitoring and management was held 9-13 May 2022 at RCMRD in Nairobi, drawing 25 people from all participating countries. It addressed the absence of regionally comparable datasets, providing key indicators that can be streamlined in the region. It also identified priority themes such as forest restoration and forest governance to feed into the State of the Forests report under preparation. In addition, the workshop enabled linkage and collaboration with other interventions in the region such as BIOPAMA and GMES Africa. Indeed, the closing ceremony and award of certificates to participants was graced by the GMES Africa Programme Coordinator, Dr Tidiane Quattara, a space expert with the African Union Commission.

- Learning and exchange on innovations on forest monitoring: Participants from the National Forestry Authority (NFA) Uganda and Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) expressed interest to learn about the Forest Alert monitoring system, a tool KFS is usingto monitor forests by involving community scouts and forest rangers. OFESA will work with KFS to support upscaling the Forest Alert System in other forest hotspots in Kenya.

Opening session and training on GIS and remote sensing technology for forest monitoring and management. Ngugi Kimani/RCMRD

Kenya Forest Service training on low-cost forest monitoring. George Wakesho/CIFOR

FROM THE FIELD

66 We need to explore ways of increasing data utilization. Data is available amongst institutions, but there are no clear policies on how it can be shared. **99**

Dr. Daniel Waiswa –
Makerere University, participant at the Tanzania country workshop.

66 To facilitate restoration, there is need for clear laws and incentives. Restoration will not work well if people have to seek permission to cut trees on their land. **99**

Moreen Uwimbambazi
National Forestry Resources Research Institute, Uganda country workshop participant.

66 One of the main challenges emerging amongst the forestry institutions is lack of updated data. There is a need to update existing data. OFESA intends to address the capacity gaps in data and also support the development of a governance framework for data sharing. **99**

Douglas Bwire
Research Officer, CIFOR

NEXT STEPS

- *State of Forests Report* Potential topics for the synthesis report are being developed following a review of strategy documents from participating countries. The project has begun to engage with country actors and will use feedback to prepare the report.

- Piloting community monitoring in the hotspots will include leveraging on interventions in the countries as is the case in two sites in Kenya. More sites will be selected in Tanzania and Uganda.
- Capacity building of representatives from participating countries based on identified

gaps and benefits of data sharing will follow the concluded regional training and focus on country-specific needs.
- Streamlining available data layers from the various countries will enable comparisons.
- Providing analytical features such as Infographics will inform decisions.

About OFESA

OFESA provides a platform for sharing, exchanging, and accessing data and information related to East and Southern Africa's forests. The objective of the observatory is to produce a comprehensive and harmonized regional dataset on the latest trends and threats to forests, and to make information useful and easily accessible to policymakers, funders, forestry practitioners and citizens. By informing decision making, OFESA supports five countries in the region – Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda – to meet their climate and environment targets. In these five countries, OFESA works closely with focal point institutions from the Kenya Forest Service, the National Directorate of Forests Mozambique, the Ethiopia Forestry Development, the Tanzania Forest Service and the National Forestry Authority Uganda.

❯ http://ofesa.net

About CIFOR-ICRAF

CIFOR is a non-profit, scientific institution that conducts research on the most pressing challenges of forest and landscape management around the world. Using a global, multidisciplinary approach, CIFOR-ICRAF aims to improve human well-being, protect the environment and increase equity. For this, CIFOR– ICRAF conducts innovative research, develops partners' capacity and actively engages in dialogue with all stakeholders to inform policies and practices that affect forests and people.

❯ https://www.cifor.org

About RCMRD

RCMRD is an inter-governmental organization established in 1975 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the former Organization of African Unity (today the African Union). RCMRD is based in Nairobi, Kenya with 20 contracting member states in the Eastern and Southern Africa regions. RCMRD is a Premier Centre of Excellence in the provision of geo-information and allied technologies for sustainable development in member states and other stakeholders. The RCMRD training institute offers training in cartography & GIS, photogrammetry & remote sensing, cartography, land surveying, information technology, accounting courses, etc.

❯ http://www.rcmrd.org

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