

East and Southern Africa Forest Observatory: Fostering regional data sharing

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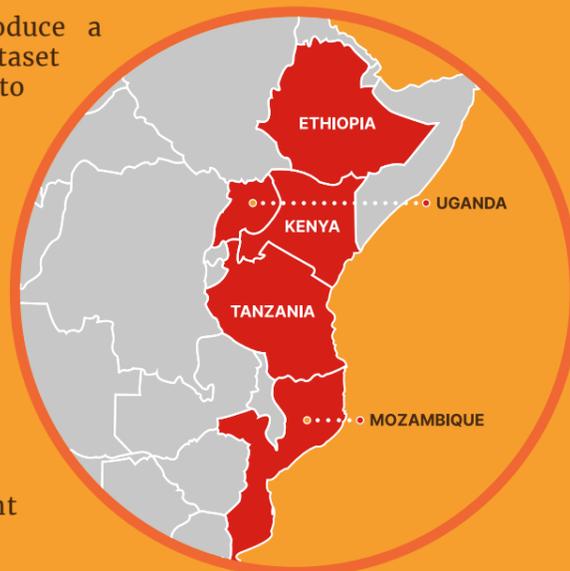


Restoration project in the Mau Forest Complex, Kenya.
Photo: Patrick Shepherd/CIFOR

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. These include regional pledges such as the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100), a country-led effort to bring 100 million hectares of land in Africa into restoration by 2030, as well as global commitments under the Paris Agreement to achieve climate neutrality through forests.



Flagship publication



One of the key expected outputs of OFESA is the State of the Forests report, a publication to be developed in collaboration with partner countries. The State of the Forests will be the first of its kind to present comparable multi-country information on priority themes aimed at providing a regional overview of the current situation of forests.



Rainforest landscape in Uganda.
Photo: Douglas Sheil/CIFOR

OFESA's contributions

Regional outlook

OFESA currently provides streamlined country-level information on forest cover as a percentage of total land area, total forest land, forest types, and distribution of the various forest types.

Forest definitions

Existing forest definitions vary by country and are based on different criteria such as the area covered with trees, percentage of crown cover, or tree height. OFESA explains these definitions to promote a common regional understanding.

Comparable datasets

OFESA aims at addressing the current absence of regionally comparable datasets by providing key indicators that can be streamlined in the region. Ongoing activities include the updating of data on key indicators for various hotspot areas that will be prioritized by countries and piloting data collection.

Trends in forest change

OFESA's database contains trends in forest cover change between 1990 and 2010 for Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique and Tanzania. These trends will be updated in 2021 as data becomes available at the country-level.

Drivers of deforestation

OFESA's database provides information on country-specific drivers of deforestation in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique, and will be updated to include Ethiopia. The information includes how the indicators are monitored, and who is doing the monitoring.



Forest landscape restoration in Ethiopia.
Photo: Mokhamad Edliadi/CIFOR

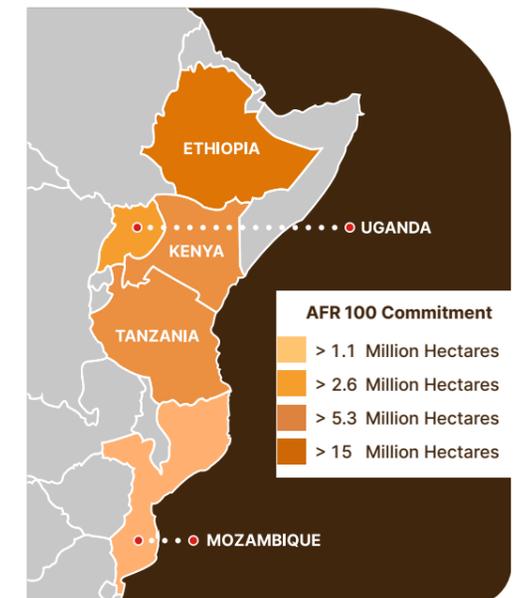
PRIORITY THEMES

The following priority themes have been identified and will be discussed with partners to feed into the State of the Forests report:



FOREST RESTORATION

Under the Bonn Challenge and the AFR100 initiative, countries in East and Southern Africa have made ambitious forest restoration pledges. For example, Ethiopia's National Forest Sector Development Program has set a target on forest landscape restoration of 22 million hectares, while Kenya has committed to restore 5.1 million hectares and has a national strategy to achieve 10% tree cover. The data produced by OFESA can be used to track progress in these pledges.



REDUCING EMISSIONS FROM DEFORESTATION AND FOREST DEGRADATION (REDD+)

Four countries (Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Uganda) have national REDD+ strategies. Kenya, though lacking the strategy, has activities on REDD+. In Ethiopia, REDD+ implementation is one of the pillars of the Climate Resilient and Green Economy Strategy.

Implementation of REDD+ activities requires national forest monitoring systems, which are currently under development or improvement in all countries. OFESA provides an opportunity for countries to establish reference levels on deforestation and forest degradation trends, as well as updating changes in forest degradation maps and other datasets on forests.

OFESA's foreseen forest indicators for REDD+ include carbon stocks in forest biomass and estimated emissions. In addition, inclusion of governance aspects such as forest tenure systems in different forest areas will inform REDD+ initiatives in the region.



FOREST GOVERNANCE

Key governance priorities in the region include strengthening forest management institutions through capacity development, decentralization of forest management and enactment of legislations to enhance community participation, strengthening tenure rights of communities over forest resources, capacity development of community associations involved in forest management, and enhancing coordination across levels and actors in natural resource management. The governance indicators developed by OFESA, such as forest ownership types, can be used to improve forest governance.

Moreover, OFESA contributes to these priorities through enhancing governance in data sharing. It is foreseen to develop and pilot a governance framework for the operation of the observatory that can allow continuity after the project period and create incentives for data sharing.



BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN PROTECTED AREAS

Biodiversity conservation in protected areas is another national priority for countries in the region, as stipulated in national strategies, such as the National Strategy and Action Plan of Biological Diversity of Mozambique, and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan II (2015-2025) for Uganda. In addition, the third target in the National Forest Sector Development Program of Ethiopia aims to increased coverage of forest protected areas to 17%, the CBD Aichi biodiversity target. Most of the biodiversity is found within forests areas classified as protected areas, including national parks, game reserves and forest reserves. For instance, 13.2 million hectares of forests in Mozambique are in conservation areas, whereas in Tanzania, almost 50% of the forests are within conservation areas.

To inform biodiversity conservation, OFESA provides links with other specific initiatives that focus on protected areas. For example, OFESA has already made initial steps in creating synergies with the EU-funded program BIOPAMA. Some of the areas already identified for potential collaboration include sharing datasets, stakeholders and technologies.



Wheat farmers in Tanzania. Agriculture is the main cause of forest degradation in the region. Photo: Nkumi Mtingwa/CIFOR



FOREST MONITORING

Several approaches to forest monitoring have been used in the region, including biomass monitoring and Land Use Land Cover (LULC), forest cover mapping, and harvesting and trade of products. However, challenges remain in integrating multi-stakeholder processes in assessment design and implementation.

OFESA aims to increase the involvement of communities in low cost forest monitoring by developing adequate frameworks, incentives for communities, and determining how communities be involved not only as data collectors but also in making decisions informed by the data that they collect.

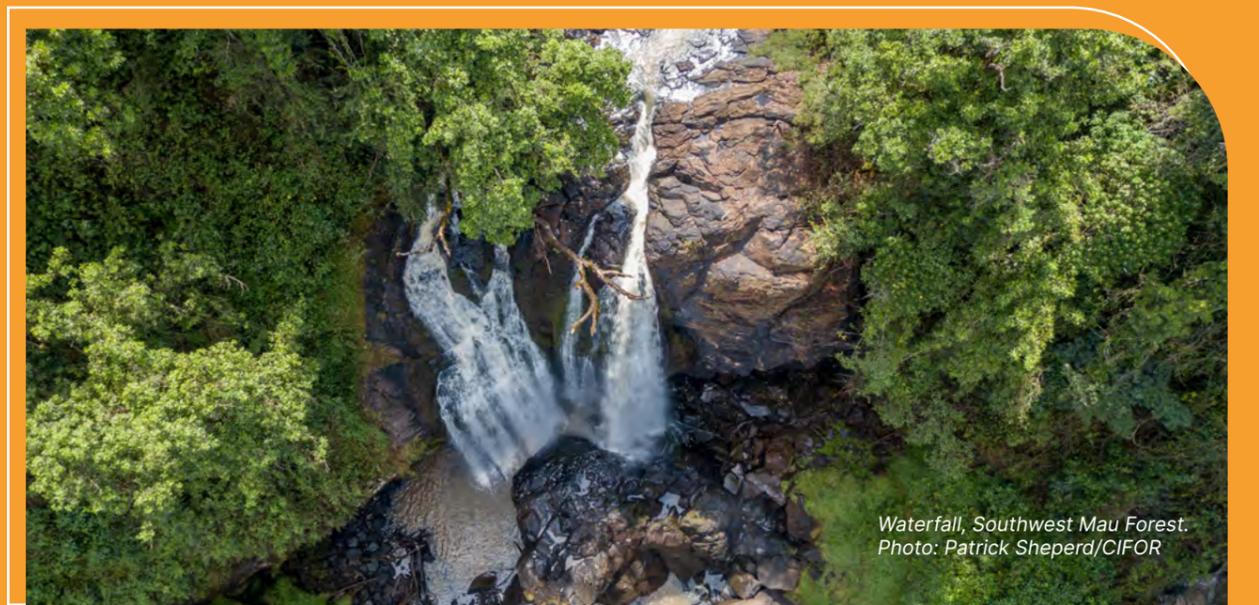
These actions will be enriched by working with participating countries to develop common standards for data collection methodologies to enable cross site comparison, and providing reference datasets.

What's next for OFESA?

OFESA's databases already provide an initial overview of these priority areas, but collaboration with participating countries is needed to ensure that data is updated, and more information is collected.

The next steps for OFESA are:

- Working with participant countries to identify their exact needs and challenges in the selected thematic areas, and choosing hotspot areas that can be used for monitoring.
- Streamlining available data layers from the various countries to enable comparisons.
- Providing analytical features such as Infographics to inform decision-making.
- Provide links to data and information relevant to inform decisions on forest management.



Waterfall, Southwest Mau Forest. Photo: Patrick Sheperd/CIFOR



Transporting hardwood and goats in Mozambique.
Photo: Stevie Mann/ILRI

To learn more about the East and Southern Africa Forest Observatory, please visit:

ofesa.net | rcmr.org/ofesa

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