



## EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

### COMMENTS BY THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY (EAC) SECRETARIAT ON THE DRAFT OPTIONS AND BUILDING BLOCKS FOR THE 2017-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE INTERNATIONAL ARRANGEMENT ON FORESTS (IAF)

#### Background Information on EAS Forestry Programmes and Initiatives

The East African Community (EAC) is the regional intergovernmental organization of the Republics of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Republic of Uganda, with a combined population of more than 130 million people (2010\*), land area of 1.82 million sq kilometres and a combined Gross Domestic Product of \$74.5 billion (2009\*), and with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. EAC Forests are diverse but share many economic, geographic, ecological, political and socio-cultural characteristics. The region has remarkably wide variety of forests that support a wealth of biological diversity and endemism among plants, birds and mammals. The major forest types include tropical moist evergreen and moist semi deciduous forests, forests plantations, miombo woodlands (wet and dry miombo), savannah, acacia woodlands and mangroves (FAO 2002). The forests which on average cover about 15.8% of the region land surface are vital to people's livelihoods and regional socio economic development activities through provision of goods and services. Apart from being the source of income for individual and families, the forest provide goods and services ranging from fuel wood for energy, timbers and poles for construction, medicine and foods, soil erosion protection, biodiversity and water catchment conservation and recreational opportunities. The performance of the growing tourism industry which contributes 10% of GDP on average depends on the sustainability of forest sector. Furthermore, East African forests stores a great deal of carbon and therefore have potential to contribute to global efforts on climate change mitigation.

Despite of their importance, EAC forests are facing numerous challenges that threaten and undermine their potential contribution to conservation, poverty alleviation and economic development objectives. While climate change threatens to change the types and condition of forests, unsustainable exploitation through logging operations, indiscriminate tree cuttings, forests conversion and infrastructure development degrade and fragment the forests in the region. At present, exploitation efforts far exceed conservation which has led to drastic loss of forest cover. Considering that many forests are transboundary in nature, conflicting forest policies, uncoordinated conservation efforts and lack of regional forest policy to support and complement national efforts are also pose another challenge.

In recognition of challenges facing the forest sector, Partner States have been developing and implementing programs, strategies, policies and legislation with aim of attaining sustainable forests conservation and management. The conservation programs, strategies, policies and legislations have evolved considerably overtime to reflect changing in societal and global demands. The EAC Secretariat further initiated the development of regional forestry policy and strategy to support regional forests conservation and complement national forestry initiatives. The envisaged Regional Forestry Policy seeks to support conservation and sustainable development of forest sector in the region.

Furthermore, EAC Secretariat developed Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade(FLEGT) approach and Regional Forestry Bill in a bid to strengthen forests governance in the region. The objective of the East Africa FLEG process is to promote good forest governance by integrating FLEG processes into existing structures for regional cooperation under the EAC, and thus enhance the contribution of forestry to social and economic development in the region. The EAC Transboundary Ecosystem Bill and Forest Bill have been developed to provide legal mandates to measures geared at attaining sustainable forestry management and conservation in the region.

### **Comments on the Strategic Plan for IAF for the Period 2017-2030**

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) with its universal membership and comprehensive mandate, plays a vital role in addressing challenges and issues relating to forests in holistic and intergration manner and in promoting policy coordination and cooperation to achieve the sustainable management of all types of forests and trees outside the forests. The twelfth session of the UNFF that will be held in 2017 will amongstst other things conclude the development of the strategic plan for the International Arrangement of Forests for the period 2017-2030 through Ad-Hooc Expert Group (2016), UNFF Working Group and UNFF Special Session.

To ensure development of universal and comprehensive strategy, there is a need to ensure there is adequate national stakeholders consultations through forests related forums and processes in order to collect and incorporate stakeholders inputs. Development of the strategy should also take cognisance of the on going discussions under the key international instruments such as UNFCCC, UNCBD and UNCCD to which forest sector contribute.

In developing the strategic plan for the International Arrangement of Forests (IAF) for the period 2017-2030, the following elements should be considered:

- (1) Strengthen the implementation of forest management principals as defined in the non-legally binding instruments on all types of forests taking into account different visions, approaches, models and tools;

- (2) Adoption of cross-sectoral approaches and foster collaboration to address the drivers of deforestation and forests degradation in coherent and coordinated manner and increase the valuation and recognition of full value of forest goods and services contributed to the economy;
- (3) Mobilize new additional resources from all sources for sustainable management of all types of forests and taking steps to enhance the ability of countries to access and effectively employ the forest related funds;
- (4) Affirm our commitments to stronger and more effective post-2015 international arrangement on forests with a view of providing leadership and promoting the vital significance of forests in the global sustainable development agenda, advancing forest policy dialogue and fostering collaboration, cooperation and synergies accross forest related organizations, conventions and other processes; and
- (5) Enhance the contribution of forest sector in global climate change mitigation by promoting measures that discourage forests conversion, increase forests cover and woody biomas and foster local community participation in forests conservation.