The role of forests in a green economy transformation in Africa

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Acknowledgements

This publication was produced in partnership with the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Programme), which harnesses the technical capacities of FAO, UNDP and UNEP to support the REDD+ readiness and implementation capacities of developing countries. More information available at www.un-redd.org.

This publication was produced in partnership with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) which promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. IIED supports some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making. More information available at www.iied.org.

Published by UNEP, August 2015

Maryanne Grieg-Gran, Steve Bass, Francesca Booker and Mike Day.

www.unep.org/publications

ISBN: 978-92-807-3533-8

Printed on recycled paper with vegetable-based inks.

Front cover photo: NAMPULA, MOZAMBIQUE, May 2010: Green Resources have been allocated a concession of 100,000 hectares to grow eucalyptus for paper pulp, for construction and for charcoal.

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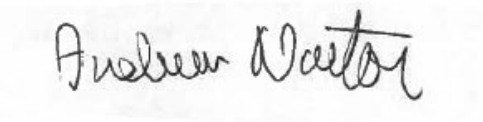
Foreword

African economies are often rooted in abundant natural resources drawn from the myriad ecosystems that blanket the continent. Forests are an integral part of this fabric. Covering some 35 per cent of Africa's land area, they can claim to be pillars of many African economies. For their contribution to remain reliable and strong, forest products and services will need to be wisely developed and intelligently used as African countries transition towards the green economy.

This report - the fruit of an enjoyable collaboration between UNEP and IIED - provides an analysis of the role of Africa's forests in the continent's future green economies. The report points to stark, problematic realities for people of Africa, markets and ecosystems from continuing deforestation and forest degradation. However, it also offers a glimpse of the positive potential of forests as countries shift toward resource-efficient and sustainable green economies.

Drawing on cases studies from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa, this report looks at successes and failures, obstacles and opportunities for forests in Africa. What is clear is that democratic decision-making and local leadership are crucial to enjoy sustainable benefits of this natural capital. Access to financing and green investment will also be imperative.

Policymakers would do well to draw on this report's recommendations for linking REDD+ planning with a green economy and sustainable investments. The transformation to a sustainable green economy in many countries will depend on the forward-looking sustainable management of forests - one of Africa's most bountiful and important ecosystems.



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Executive summary

This report explores the role of forests in a green economy transformation in Africa. Its aim is to present policymakers with a strong rationale for linking forests and REDD+ planning with green economy planning and investments. According to UNEP (2012), a green economy '*results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities'.* Africa is achieving high GDP growth rates but still faces challenges to reduce poverty and create sufficient jobs. As Africa's economies are highly dependent on natural resources, the ability to generate growth in the future and meet wider development priorities will depend on what happens to key resources like forests. For this reason green economy approaches are increasingly relevant to Africa.

We first establish the rationale for linking forests and green economy. Forest resources contribute to a green economy in Africa in diverse ways– providing wood products, generating income and jobs, meeting needs for food, energy and medicinal plants and delivering regulating and supporting ecosystem services. While sector wood and fibre production tend to be the focus of economic policy-making and of official statistics, the formal forest sector is declining relative to other productive sectors and import dependence is increasing. The other forest contributions are less well-documented but in terms of livelihoods are hugely important. In particular, most of the wood extracted in Africa is used for woodfuel, primarily for household cooking and not for wood products (FAO, 2012b).

The report goes on to examine the main threats to the forest resource base starting with the fundamental issue of overlapping rights to forest resources in that informal rights associated with traditional systems of governance are rarely given official recognition undermining local users' incentives to invest in good management. Deforestation, driven as much by agriculture as by forest resource extraction, is proceeding at a high rate while logging is contributing to forest degradation as rotations get progressively shorter. Only a small proportion of Africa's production forests can be considered sustainably managed (Blaser *et al.,* 2011). Over-harvesting of woodfuel and non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs) is also contributing to forest degradation in certain locations close to markets. We find that Africa's forests are closely linked with green economy in the region but that their potential is not being fully realised.

Business-as-usual (BaU) scenarios to 2030 and 2050 are developed, incorporating likely demand trends for wood and woodfuel based on expected growth in population and GDP. These are matched with estimates of the potential supply of industrial roundwood given the outlook for planted forests and deforestation. These scenarios indicate that demand for industrial roundwood could be two to three times current levels by 2050. To meet such demand from the existing natural forest designated for production will require harvesting intensities well above sustained yield, putting severe strain on the forest resource base, already threatened by deforestation. This could be exacerbated also by localised shortages of woodfuel. If the natural forest resource base continues to decline as a result of deforestation and degradation from logging, it will become more and more difficult to meet demand without drastically increasing import dependence. The effect of this high level of demand and the pressures from other

sectors, agriculture particularly, will have a deleterious effect on the ability of forests to deliver key ecosystem services - carbon emissions will increase and biodiversity will be threatened as harvesting intensity exceeds key levels.

A number of interventions that have been tried out in various locations in African countries provide glimpses of the potential of forests to contribute to a green economy transformation. The report draws on examples from six countries, **Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique** and **South Africa**, to illustrate the pitfalls and advantages of different types of intervention and to highlight contextual factors that are important in assessment. Interventions focused on managing, enhancing and restoring **natural capital** have shown that it is possible to meet high environmental standards of sustainable forest management (SFM) in both natural forests and planted forests and that a major challenge is to manage social relationships and ensure lasting benefits for local communities. Another group of interventions have demonstrated that there is considerable scope to increase **resource efficiency** in tree-planting, wood processing, charcoal processing and cooking stoves through new technology, improved handling and storage practices and supply chain organisation. This can reduce pressure on forest resources and in the case of cooking stoves result in significant benefits for low income families, women and girls particularly, from reduced pollution-related health effects and time savings in woodfuel collection and cooking. The challenge is in securing high levels of uptake and overcoming barriers such as financial constraints, lack of capacity and cultural preferences. **Sustainable consumption** interventions are reinforcing the other two types of intervention (natural capital and resource efficiency), driving improvements from the demand side, often as part of international regulatory or supply chain initiatives or certification schemes and to a lesser extent in the form of national l demand initiatives to promote sustainable locally produced goods made from wood or NWFPs.

This is followed by scenario analysis of the implications of some of these interventions with a focus on two major uses of forest resources: timber and woodfuel. Sustainable management of natural forests, at a harvesting intensity compatible with sustained yield, increases the likelihood that the forest resource base will be maintained. But by 2030, and 2050, the demand for industrial roundwood is projected to be so high that the forest resource base may not produce enough to meet demand. However, when SFM in natural forests is combined with a package of other green economy interventions, the shortfall in wood supply is greatly reduced or eliminated altogether depending on the scenario and associated assumptions. This package includes expansion in the area and productivity of planted forests, increase in the efficiency with which wood is processed, and reduction in deforestation primarily by addressing low agricultural productivity. This package of interventions would therefore help to secure the future of the forest sector and its contribution to GDP and employment. Similarly, woodfuel interventions to improve technology can reduce wood demand, relieving pressure on wood resources in areas of localised shortages and reducing carbon emissions.

The key message from the scenario analysis is that a package of natural capital and resource efficiency interventions can in theory ensure the future of the forest resource, while meeting increasing demand. This would be without major compromise to the other contributions of the forest resource to ecosystem

services that underpin a whole range of growth sectors. But in practice there are considerable obstacles to overcome for the interventions reviewed to bring about a green economy transformation. For these interventions to be scaled up, improvements are needed to the enabling environment. These include:

- Improved forest governance through wider stakeholder participation in forest decision-making processes, encompassing informal users of forest resources.
- Work towards local control and new models of engagement with local people/forest communities.
- A more nuanced approach to the informal sector which recognises that some actors within it are working legitimately even if not within the law and encourages good practice.
- Promote access to finance by improving the investment climate and funding enabling investments in capacity-building, and risk management.
- Improve inter-sectoral coordination so that policy measures in sectors that affect or are affected by forests are coherent with those in the forest sector.
- Improve information on forest assets to document the contribution made by forest ecosystem services to different sectors, and deploy in economic development planning and reporting.

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