



Protecting East Africa's Natural Capital: The Cost of Inaction

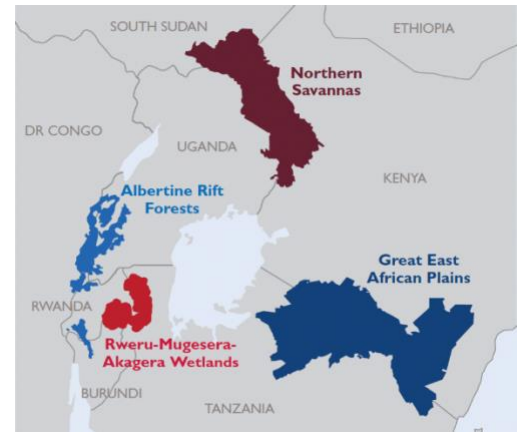
BRIEF FOR POLICY MAKERS

BACKGROUND

The natural capital of East Africa—wildlife, forests, grasslands, wetlands, and waterways—is connected across national borders and drives a multitude of industries, livelihoods, and habitats. When this natural capital is threatened, everything it supports is threatened.

A landmark United States Agency for International Development (USAID) study, [Protecting East Africa's Natural Capital: The Cost of Inaction](#), confirms that environmental threats are accelerating in East Africa and calls on policymakers to take urgent, coordinated action. Without such action, the study warns that governments, businesses, communities, and millions of individuals who depend on these ecosystems will suffer environmental and economic losses in the next three decades.

The study focused on six countries that share four iconic wildlife landscapes. It informs policymakers of the true economic value of this natural capital as well as the top threats to each landscape. Most important, it equips policymakers with an Action Plan for sustainable, innovative policies to help break long-standing bottlenecks.



The four transboundary landscapes spanning Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

KEY FINDINGS: NATURE'S VALUE AND WHAT'S AT STAKE

- **Nature's Value:** The four landscapes provide US\$1.3 billion in direct and indirect value annually and contain some of the region's most important wildlife and habitats.
- **Top Threats:** Natural capital is dwindling at an alarming rate due to unsustainable land use, over-extraction of resources, and the triple threat of climate, COVID-19, and conflict.
- **Likely Losses:** The degradation of ecosystems will spur job losses (predicted at 66,427 in Kenya and 31,430 in Tanzania by 2050 from drops in tourism), and water insecurity for people and industries with up to 35 percent reduction in capacity to regulate water flow, among other losses and costs.
- **Avoided Costs:** The real value of natural capital lies in *avoided* costs. Healthy ecosystems provide services the government does not have to pay for: a steady flow of water, filtering pollutants, preventing soil erosion, and pollinating crops. In 2018, this was valued at an estimated US\$8.18 billion.
- **Carbon is Key:** The landscapes store about 7.5 billion tons of carbon, saving the region US\$1.12 billion annually in avoided costs of climate change and saving the global community another \$600 billion.

A CALL FOR ACTION AND LEADERSHIP

The EAC and partner states must work together across these vital transboundary landscapes, or the entire region will ultimately share the negative outcomes. The Action Plan offers a common strategic approach at regional, national, and community levels: Invest in nature-based solutions that align the interests of people, business, and the environment.

A [new interactive map](#) provides visual and interactive data layers representing the value of ecosystem services to help policymakers and development partners. Experts answer such questions as:

- What are the most important benefits to economic and human well-being from these landscapes?
- Where should we invest funds to improve wildlife and habitat conservation?
- What policy approaches should we use to support livelihoods and the economy without degrading ecosystems?
- How can we work across boundaries to ensure our mutual success?

REGIONAL ACTIONS: Harmonize transboundary management plans to capture interests of partner states and sectors for sustainable use of natural resources. The East African Community (EAC), partner states, private sector, and development and conservation partners should act with the following as priorities:

- Integrate and institutionalize the Transboundary Wildlife Conservation Areas Technical Working Group and strengthen coordination and feedback loops.
- Partner states to harmonize plans and activities across borders and allocate funds for implementation with support from development partners and in coordination with the EAC. The EAC Transboundary Wildlife Conservation Areas Network, when fully constituted, will catalyze such a process.
- The EAC and partner states implement one priority pilot project in each of the landscapes, with support from development partners and the private sector:
 - 1) **Great East African Plains:** Provide pasture restoration on at least 2,000 hectares to improve sustainable livestock value chains and increase space for wildlife.
 - 2) **Northern Savannas:** Support at least four alternative livelihood activities for host communities while strengthening pastureland protection of at least 2,000 hectares.
 - 3) **Albertine Rift Forests:** Provide erosion control and landscape restoration on at least 2,000 hectares through reforestation and terracing.
 - 4) **Rweru-Mugesera-Akagera Wetlands:** Rehabilitate at least 2,000 hectares of habitats.

NATIONAL/SUB-NATIONAL ACTIONS: Identify and enhance public-private partnerships that incentivize bringing biodiversity conservation into development plans.

- National governments, with support from the private sector and international donors, increase the amount of devolved funding to local actors to identify, prioritize, implement, and monitor nature-based solutions, e.g., develop and implement a policy on ecological fiscal transfers that makes conservation indices part of the fiscal allocation formula.
- Build capacity and skills of sub-national actors to enhance understanding and revolutionize nature-based solutions in landscapes' development agenda.

COMMUNITY ACTIONS: Empower communities to manage natural resources through sustainable enterprises and activities supported by innovative private sector financing models. Develop business contexts for target areas with enterprises co-identified by public and private sectors in an inclusive process involving communities, including:

- **Great East African Plains and Northern Savannas:** Work with livestock supply chain actors to improve productivity through practices such as sustainable silvopasture (a combination of trees and livestock); work with intermediate agriculture businesses such as bee keeping, honey and wax production, and dairy to meet certification standards for sustainable production and link it to national buyers; improve markets for handicrafts; tap into international carbon markets that reward communities financially for storing carbon in forests and grasslands; and improve access to savings and loans. For example, conservation and livestock enterprises by

SORALO in an area of 1.5 million hectares of southern Kenya support livelihoods for 240,000 people while providing space for wildlife.

- **Albertine Rift Forests and Mount Elgon:** Work with agriculture and dairy supply chain actors to improve productivity through practices such as sustainable silvoarable (trees grown in combination with agriculture on the same land); non-timber forest products; mushroom harvesting; honey production; improve markets for handicrafts; renewable energy; rainwater harvesting; dairy; tapping into international carbon markets that reward communities financially for storing carbon in forests, e.g., the scalable Livelihood Fund on Mount Elgon.
- **Rweru-Mugesera-Akagera Wetlands:** Work with fishery supply chain actors to improve productivity through practices such as sustainable fisheries; eco-friendly fish processing; improve markets for handicrafts, eco- and cultural tourism; renewable energy; rainwater harvesting; wetland banking; and improve access to savings and loans. For example, the nascent development of commercial fisheries on Lake Ihema in Akagera National Park, Rwanda, by Advance Africa, in partnership with African Parks Biodiversity Management Unit.

Ultimately, government leaders in EAC Partner countries hold the keys that can drive this strategy through policymaking. **The need to act is urgent, and the time to act is now.**

For more information:

Jean Baptiste Havugimana Director
of Productive Sectors East African
Community
P.O Box 1096 Arusha, Tanzania
Email: jhavugimana@eachq.org

Chihenyong Kangara
Regional Climate Change & Resilience
Specialist
USAID Kenya & East Africa
P.O. Box 629 Village Market 00621
Nairobi, Kenya