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| Project : Technical assessment programme to strengthen national forest monitoring in Kenya  |                  |
| Report on the forest monitoring technical workshop held in Nairobi, Kenya, 13-17 April 2026 | Issue: 1.0       |
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## Forest monitoring technical workshop

13-17 April 2026, Nairobi, Kenya

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## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings and recommendations from a five-day technical workshop held from 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> April 2026 in Nairobi, Kenya, bringing together key stakeholders involved in the country's forest monitoring efforts and their alignment with the World Bank's Sustainability-Linked Financing (SLF) framework. The workshop convened representatives from the Kenya Forest Service (KFS), the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), the Survey of Kenya (SOK), The State Departments for Lands and for Forests, the Directorate of Resource Surveys and Remote Sensing (DRSRS), the Kenya Space Agency (KSA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and GlobEO. The workshop focused on reviewing the current state of Kenya's National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS), evaluating the methodologies used for estimating forest cover change and carbon emissions, identifying weaknesses in the monitoring pipeline, and charting a way forward. Key discussions covered the eSBAE (enhanced Sample-Based Area Estimation) methodology, biomass estimation challenges, and the need to integrate new technologies such as LiDAR and deep learning classification.

## 2 ATTENDEE LIST

| Institution  | Attendee  |
|--|---|
| KFS - Kenya Forest Service                                 | Evans Kegode<br>Peter Sirayo<br>Peter Kamau<br>Eunice Maina<br>Jira Chimanyi<br>Alice Katunge<br>Robinson Gallo<br>Kioko Nzioka<br>Jonah Rutto<br>Caroline Wangeci Muriithi |
| KEFRI - Kenya Forestry Research Institute                  | Stephen Kiama   |
| SOK - Survey of Kenya / State Department for Lands         | Sophia Muhuri   |
| State Department for Forests                               | Alex Bryan Mwangi Mureithi  |
| DRSRS - Directorate of Resource Surveys and Remote Sensing | Leah Kamene Josiah<br>Edward Juma   |
| KSA - Kenya Space Agency                                   | Alex Wanjala  |
| UNDP - United Nations Development Programme                | Wahida Shah<br>Madeline Craig<br>Fredrika Stopforth   |
| WB - World Bank  | Veerle De Smit<br>Dominick Revell de Waal<br>Hisham Osman<br>Erica Cristine Honeck<br>Isfandyar Zaman Khan  |
| GlobEO - Global Earth Observation                          | Stéphane Mermoz<br>Juan Doblas  |

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### 3 THE SUSTAINABILITY-LINKED FINANCING FRAMEWORK

The World Bank’s SLF framework provides a financial mechanism where loan conditions are tied to measurable environmental Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). For Kenya, one of the primary KPI under consideration relates to deforestation reduction, with the potential possibility of adding reforestation and afforestation targets in the future. The framework requires a credible baseline and a robust monitoring system to track progress from 2025 to 2030.

The Feasibility and Ambitiousness (FAB) framework, presented by the World Bank during the workshop on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April, establishes the need for a careful trade-off between targets that are achievable yet sufficiently ambitious. Based on available data from the NFMS and Global Forest Watch (GFW), the World Bank considered future deforestation levels between approximately 38,000 ha (interest step-down scenario) and 44,000 ha (interest step-up scenario). A critical point raised during the workshop is that the GFW-derived baseline should only serve to define agreed targets of the present SLF framework, but not to compute future forest loss. The actual monitoring from 2025 to 2030 will rely on government-produced data through the NFMS, ensuring continuity, consistency, and alignment with Kenya’s own forest definitions. This separation between target-setting and monitoring data sources is fundamental to the framework’s credibility.

Other countries have already adopted similar approach. Côte d’Ivoire, for example, selected reforestation as one of its KPI because it already had functional monitoring tools in place and the indicator aligned with its national agroforestry plans.

### 4 FOREST MONITORING IN KENYA

#### 4.1 Kenya’s institutional landscape for forest monitoring

Kenya’s forest monitoring ecosystem involves multiple institutions, each with distinct mandates. KFS leads forest management and monitoring, particularly for public forests, but also oversees private forests. KEFRI conducts forestry research. DRSRS, which reports to the Office of the President, is responsible for the National Forest Inventory (NFI). The Survey of Kenya (SOK) provides geospatial data and land survey support. UNDP expressed interest in playing a role in external independent verification.

This multi-institutional structure, while rich in expertise, has led to data fragmentation and inconsistencies. Workshop participants acknowledged that combining datasets from the various institutions should help resolve these issues, though this requires deliberate coordination and harmonization efforts.

#### 4.2 The national forest monitoring service

The NFMS, developed under United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) requirements, serves multiple purposes like supporting national greenhouse gas inventories (GHGI),

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the Forest Reference Level (FRL), Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) reporting, and the Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) that KFS must deliver every five years. The system relies on a combination of remote sensing and field-based measurements.

On the remote sensing side, the NFMS is based on Landsat and Sentinel imagery, complemented by drone surveys, processed through tools such as Collect Earth and SEPAL. These tools allow for land cover classification, change detection, and dashboard visualization. On the ground, the NFI provides field-based measurements including tree height, diameter at breast height (DBH), and species identification.

The NFMS produced land cover maps for the year 2021, which were updated in 2025 for the year 2023. The forest inventory has historically focused on High Conservation Areas (HCA) and commercial plantations, though KFS and KEFRI are working to extend coverage to all land types. Future plans call for an exhaustive inventory across the entire country.

### 4.3 Activity data mapping

Three main methods have been implemented for activity data mapping, as detailed below. Kenya's approach to forest activity data estimation has evolved significantly over the past decade, progressing from pixel-based wall-to-wall mapping to probability-based sample area estimation. As presented by Caroline Wangeci Muriithi (KFS), three successive methods have been developed, each responding to the limitations of its predecessor and to recommendations from the UNFCCC Technical Assessment, which called for improved activity data methods and better uncertainty analysis.

#### 4.3.1 Method 1: SLEEK - Pixel-based

The System for Land-based Emissions Estimation in Kenya (SLEEK), funded by the Government of Australia through the Clinton Foundation, represents the first generation of Kenya's forest monitoring approach. Using Landsat imagery at 30 m resolution, supervised classification was performed with a Random Forest algorithm to produce land cover maps from 1990 to 2018 across 10 thematic classes. The country was divided into 34 Landsat scenes, with spectral stratification zones defined for each scene and classification assigned to individual experts. Change detection was achieved through direct map subtraction: two land cover maps from different years were compared pixel by pixel to produce change matrices. This method was used to report the FRL for the period 2002-2018 and the national GHGI.

However, several limitations were identified, such as the difficulty in attribution of change drivers, sensitivity to seasonality in imagery, incompatibility with certain reporting structures (e.g., ART-TREES), subjectivity in canopy mapping, and the introduction of systematic errors and consistent biases into measurements. These shortcomings motivated the transition toward sample-based area estimation methods.

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#### 4.3.2 Method 2: eSBAE under IMPRESS - Area-based

Kenya adopted the ensemble Sample-Based Area Estimation (eSBAE) approach under the IMPRESS (Improving Measurements for Payments to Reduce Emissions and Strengthen Sinks) programme, supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Unlike SLEEK, this method produces statistical estimates of area change rather than wall-to-wall maps.

The method is based on a 2 km national systematic grid generating 149,460 potential sampling points. Each point is enriched with time-series analysis from multiple change detection algorithms (BFAST, LandTrendR, CUSUM, CCDC, etc.) applied to multi-sensor data (Landsat, Sentinel, Planet NICFI, and VHR imagery). These analyses produce a probability of change for each point. Neyman allocation is then used to select a subset of 7,313 points for visual interpretation in Collect Earth, using three strata of change probability. Activity data covers the period 2013-2021. This method was used to update the GHGI and proposed for reporting REDD+ results-based payments.

#### 4.3.3 Method 3: eSBAE PROMS under Aim4Forests - Area-based

The most recent iteration, the Probability Map Subtraction Methodology (PROMS), was developed under the Aim4Forests programme. It builds on the eSBAE framework but is easier to implement, using continuous probability maps of forest cover instead of categorical maps for stratification.

Satellite data from two time periods  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  are classified using a Random Forest algorithm trained on stable forest and non-forest reference data, producing forest probability layers for each epoch. The two probability maps are then subtracted to generate a proxy of change probability. This change surface is clustered using K-means into 6 strata (from 0, least probability of forest, to 5, highest probability), rather than the 3 strata used under IMPRESS. Neyman allocation is then applied to optimally distribute sample points across strata. A total of 7,961 points were interpreted in Collect Earth, combining 1,473 points from a systematic 20 km grid with 6,488 stratified random points. Activity data covers the period 2016-2023, and the purpose is to update the National FRL for REDD+ results-based payments.

For both eSBAE methods (IMPRESS and PROMS), sample plots of 70×70 m (~0.5 ha) are generated from each centroid, with 49 sub-units systematically placed 10 m apart. The plot size adheres to the minimum area threshold in Kenya's national forest definition. A plot is classified as forest if its canopy cover reaches at least 15% of the 49 pixels. Quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC) is performed through multiple independent interpretations. Inter-interpreter agreement is measured using overall kappa statistics. This rigorous process, while demanding (approximately 80 points per person per day, and 50 points reviewed per day in collective sessions), benefits from the stability and experience of the national mapping team.

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## 5 IDENTIFIED WEAKNESSES AND PROPOSED LEVERS

### 5.1 Areas estimates uncertainties

A significant discrepancy in activity data estimations was observed between the methods. The SLEEK pixel-based approach estimated annual carbon losses of approximately 50 MtC, while the PROMS area-based approach yielded roughly ten times less. This order-of-magnitude gap raised concerns among stakeholders, not only because it underscored the sensitivity of results to methodological choices, but also because a substantially lower historical emissions baseline reduces the scope for demonstrating future deforestation reductions, and consequently, the financial returns that Kenya can expect from results-based payment mechanisms under the SLF framework. As a result, KFS expressed the interest in reducing uncertainties associated with area estimates as much as possible. Note that uncertainty assessment practices do not yet meet carbon market standards, which increasingly require Monte Carlo-based approaches rather than simpler analytical methods.

#### Identified levers and proposed solutions:

1) **Intensification of the sampling design in underrepresented ecosystems, particularly dry forests, would improve the representativeness and robustness of area estimates.** Note that the trade-off between the desired accuracy and associated cost has to be assessed. To assess the potential impact of sampling intensification, GlobEO developed through a Python Notebook a simulator based on Monte-Carlo that would allow KFS to simulate these impacts on the final uncertainties. Although the Notebook was developed using simulated data, KFS can easily run it using its own data, without sharing that data.

2) **Change probability map quality probably impacts area estimates uncertainty.** This potential impact is being assessed through another Notebook. If change probability map quality appears to significantly affect area estimates uncertainty, relevant classification methods would have to be used. To do so, GlobEO presented to the Kenyan team the most up-to-date Geospatial Foundation Models (GFM) based on Artificial Intelligence (AI). Classification methods encompassing GFM embeddings were presented as a pathway to build improved land cover maps directly from reference points, bypassing some of the limitations of traditional Random Forest classifiers. Rebuilding the initial classifications at two different times using the full set of reference points collected over the years, rather than relying on the original classification maps, was identified as a key way forward. The Kenyan team agreed this approach is both ambitious and relevant.

### 5.2 From statistics to maps

The eSBAE method provides area estimates but does not produce land use and land cover maps. However, the Kenyan team is willing to obtain land use and land cover maps at the end of the process.

#### Identified levers and proposed solutions:

GFM embeddings-based classification algorithms, which we presented to fulfill the need expressed in section 5.1, can also be used for producing maps at the end of the process, using the sampling points

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as training data. The only limitation for this approach is the actual availability of pre-computed embeddings for the preferred GFMs, computed only from 2017 onwards.

### 5.3 Forest aboveground biomass estimation

Forest aboveground biomass (AGB) estimation, directly correlated with forest carbon stocks, remains a major gap in Kenya and in general. AGB maps at 100 m pixel size, for example from the European Space Agency (ESA) Climate Change Initiative (CCI), are available at the global scale but are not accurate. Such maps poorly estimate AGB over dense forests and poorly capture tree cover in farmlands and agroforestry systems.

#### Identified levers and proposed solutions:

We proposed solutions to address the need for AGB estimations. We emphasized the strong sensitivity of SAR (Synthetic Aperture Radar) data to AGB. GlobEO showed useful near-real-time monitoring tools such as SAR Watcher<sup>1</sup>, which was demonstrated over deforestation sites known by the Kenyan team (e.g., Lolgorian). We detailed the various satellite data useful for AGB estimations, available since last year through the ESA BIOMASS mission dedicated to AGB estimation, the NASA/ISRO SAR (NISAR) mission paving the way for the future ESA ROSE-L mission, in addition to Sentinel-1 images. These new SAR data constitute a golden age of SAR data, which are complementary to spaceborne optical images (from Sentinel-2, Landsat, etc.) and spaceborne lidar data from the Global Ecosystem Dynamics Investigation (GEDI) lidar.

We also emphasized the crucial contribution of reference AGB data, from in situ inventory (plots preferably larger than 0.25 ha) associated with airborne/droneborne LiDAR acquisitions and eventually terrestrial LiDAR. Such data are complementary and should be used as training data to AGB estimation methods, in which satellite data allow extrapolation of these estimates and provide maps.

We also reviewed the main AGB estimation methods based on satellite and reference in situ data.

### 5.4 Degradation, reforestation and regrowth monitoring

Degradation monitoring, acknowledged as more prevalent than deforestation in Kenya, is not yet integrated into the monitoring framework. While not an immediate SLF priority, it represents a significant blind spot for comprehensive emissions accounting and future carbon market engagement. The monitoring of reforestation and afforestation is not yet considered as KPIs, and the potential of annual height estimation for monitoring regrowth and biomass accumulation was questioned.

#### Identified levers and proposed solutions:

Canopy height models derived from satellite radar (e.g., ECHOSAT products<sup>2</sup>) offer multi-annual time series that can support height mapping, regrowth monitoring, and AGB estimation. Initial comparisons

<sup>1</sup> <https://juandb.users.earthengine.app/view/sar-watcher>

<sup>2</sup> <https://janpauls.org/projects/echosat/>

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with existing products over Kenyan sites (Narok, Mombasa coast) showed promise and warrant further validation. Note that multi-temporal AGB estimation can support degradation monitoring.

Super-resolution techniques can enhance Sentinel-2 imagery from 10 m to 2.5 m resolution, potentially bridging the gap between freely available Sentinel-2 data and costly VHR imagery. This is particularly relevant for detecting individual trees in farmland and agroforestry systems. To this end, we mentioned some benchmark super-resolution methods<sup>3</sup> based on AI and developed at CESBIO.

## 6 FIELD TRIP

On the fourth day, participants visited three KFS forest stations in the Central Highlands north of Nairobi (figure 1), providing direct exposure to the diverse management challenges and restoration practices that the monitoring system must capture. The field trip highlighted both the complexity of Kenya’s forest landscapes and the ongoing efforts to restore and manage them.

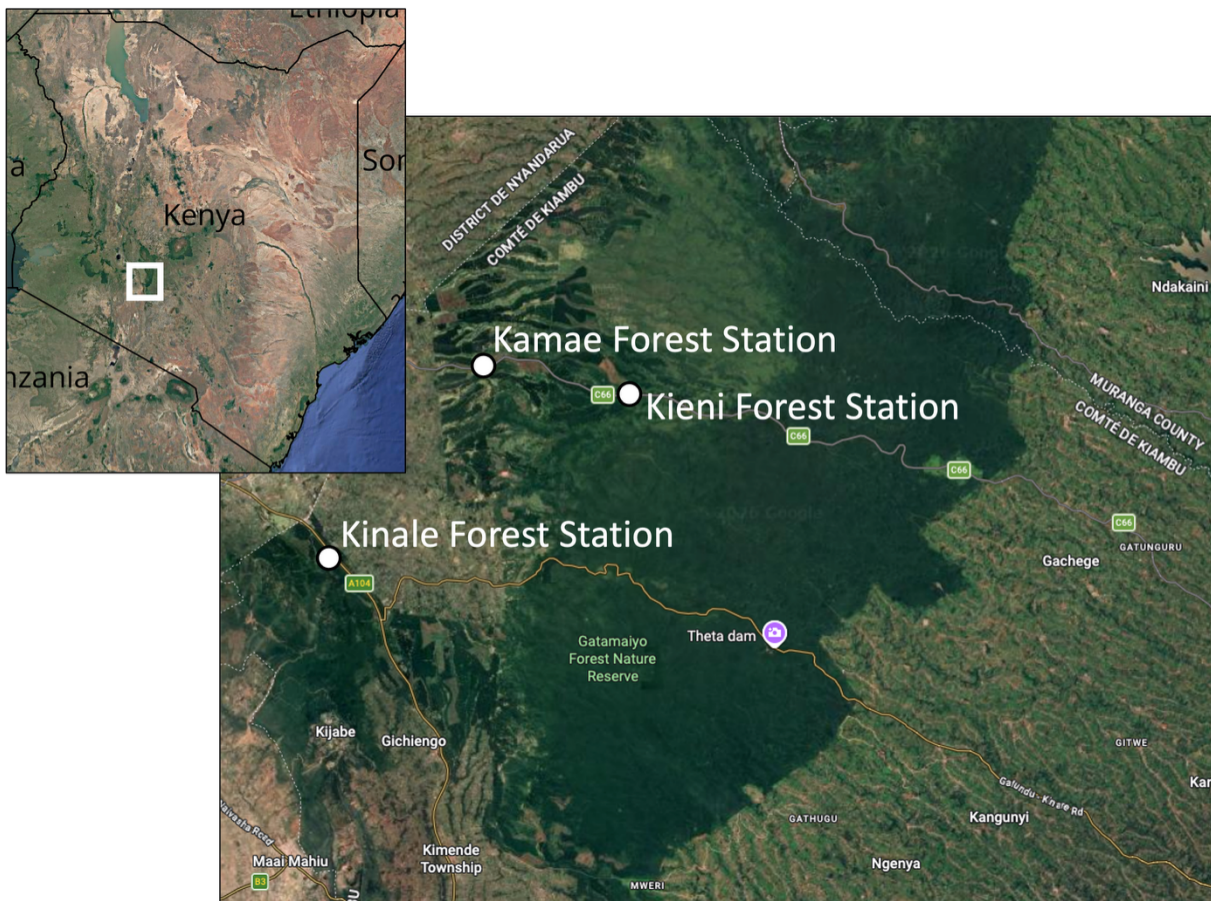


Figure 1. On April 16, 2026, participants of the technical workshop visited three KFS forest stations in the Central Highlands north of Nairobi.

<sup>3</sup> [https://github.com/Evoland-Land-Monitoring-Evolution/sentinel2\\_superresolution](https://github.com/Evoland-Land-Monitoring-Evolution/sentinel2_superresolution)

## 6.1 Kieni Forest Station

The first stop was Kieni Forest Station (figure 2), home to numerous bamboo species and an active indigenous tree regeneration programme. Areas previously planted with commercial cypress have been harvested and are now being replanted with indigenous species such as Podo and Cedar. Station staff noted that indigenous species like Podo require decades to reach maturity, making long-term monitoring of regrowth particularly important for tracking restoration progress.

A notable challenge at Kieni is wildlife pressure. The area borders zones with significant elephant populations, and tree damage from elephants is a recurring issue. This necessitates regular patrolling and raises the broader question of how wildlife-forest interactions affect carbon stock estimates.



Figure 2. Visit at the Kieni Forest Station.

## 6.2 Kamae Forest Station

The second site, Kamae Forest Station, showcased the Plantation Establishment for Livelihood Improvement Scheme (PELIS), a programme that integrates forest restoration with community livelihoods. Under PELIS, local communities are allocated plots within forest stations where they can grow crops alongside newly planted tree seedlings. Once the trees reach a sufficient size, the agricultural plots are returned to full forest cover. Bamboo planting is also part of the restoration efforts at this station.

Kamae illustrates the kind of mixed land use, crops intermingled with young trees, that poses particular challenges for remote sensing classification.

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### 6.3 Kinale Forest Station

The third and final site was Kinale Forest Station, covering approximately 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The station features a variety of planted species including cypress, bamboo, and indigenous trees. Notably, certain species such as Eucalyptus do not grow well at this altitude, demonstrating the ecological specificity that national monitoring systems must account for. Efforts have been made to establish ecological corridors through replanting, connecting fragmented forest patches.

Kinale also served as the site for a drone demonstration, illustrating the potential of unmanned aerial vehicles for ground-truthing and detailed forest assessment. Drone surveys can bridge the gap between satellite imagery and field plots, providing very high resolution data for canopy structure, species identification, and restoration monitoring, capabilities that are directly relevant to the SLF monitoring needs.

## 7 WAY FORWARD

### 7.1 Short-term actions for SLF monitoring improvements

- Assess the potential of data intensification and improvement of change probability maps for area estimates uncertainty reduction.
- Produce land use land cover maps at the end of the process using deep learning methods.
- Propose hands-on training for the Kenyan mapping team to address uncertainty analysis, super-resolution, new classification tools, etc.

### 7.2 Medium-term actions to support efforts beyond the SLF (1-3 years)

- Develop a comprehensive AGB map at fine resolution by combining harmonized field inventory data, LiDAR data, and satellite-derived models. This is essential for credible carbon accounting and eventual engagement with voluntary carbon markets.
- Integrate degradation monitoring into the NFMS. While not a current SLF KPI, degradation is acknowledged as more significant than deforestation in Kenya and will be required for comprehensive REDD+ reporting and future SLF iterations.
- Extend the set of SLF KPIs to include reforestation and afforestation indicators. This aligns with KFS's expressed priorities and mirrors successful implementations in other countries (Côte d'Ivoire).
- Establish a formal inter-institutional data-sharing protocol among the various Kenyan institutions to eliminate redundancies, harmonize definitions, and ensure consistent time-series data production.

### 7.3 Long-term vision (3-5 years)

- Support area estimation until 2030.

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- Build a fully integrated national MRV (Measurement, Reporting and Verification) system that serves multiple reporting obligations simultaneously. The monitoring system is the key enabler for all financing mechanisms.

## 8 CONCLUSION

The workshop confirmed that Kenya has a strong institutional foundation and experienced technical teams for forest monitoring. The NFMS, while facing challenges related to data consistency, classification accuracy, and area estimates uncertainty reduction, among others, is on a credible trajectory for improvement. The alignment between the NFMS and the SLF framework is both necessary and achievable, provided that the short-term priorities identified during the workshop, like rebuilding classifications and strengthening uncertainty assessment, are addressed promptly.

The way forward requires a combination of targeted technical investments, institutional coordination, and strategic expansion (adding reforestation KPIs, preparing for carbon markets). With continued support from the World Bank, FAO and development partners, Kenya is well positioned to deliver a monitoring system that meets both national needs and international standards.