

## **Beyond research and teaching: the role of higher public educational institutions in management of forests in the era of climate change**

Climate change is one of the most important long-term environmental issues of our time and requires both mitigation and adaptation. Interventions in forest establishment and management are some of the proven mechanisms for climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration. Higher public educational institutions have the potential and capacity to actively participate in climate change mitigation through management of forests but it is not clear to what extent such potential has been harnessed. Public higher educational institutions are associated with vast tracts of land some of which are under active forest management. However, there is a glaring knowledge gap regarding management of institutional forests in the context of climate change. It is not clear what proportion of institutional land is devoted to forest establishment and what types of forests exist in various institutions of higher learning. A total of eight higher educational institutions from Kenya's Lake Basin region were purposively sampled for this survey. Various techniques were used to collect primary data including semi-structured questionnaire, interviews, in-depth discussions, observation and photography. Secondary data was collected from existing records and document analysis. The study revealed that higher educational institutions manage both indigenous and established forests but there is room to do better. These institutions have however not taken advantage of the clean development mechanisms. The private institutional forests are not being utilized to promote forest-based ecotourism either and other forms of tourism. This study argues that higher educational institutions can contribute towards realization of sustainable development through planned interventions in institutional forests while working in partnership with other research and development partners.