

## From the Guest Editors Desk

# Why we Devote this Issue to Forest Values

This issue of *Innovation* is devoted to the value of East Africa's forests. The reason for this is that, time and time again, forests get passed over when decisions are made about the best use of land, resources, budgets and investment funds, and the best ways of implementing developments. A big factor driving the marginalization of forests in economic decision-making—at private, public and household levels—is that they are often thought to have very little value. As a consequence, there seems to be very little gain from forest conservation and there appear to be very few costs when forests are degraded or lost. Quite simply, East Africa's forests are undervalued, and economic decisions are skewed as a result.

This issue of *Innovation* attempts to set the record straight—or at least to even the playing field a bit in favour of forests. In fact, East Africa's forest resources have a vast value, if only people would look a bit closer at them. Putting these economic values on the table is essential for economically efficient and equitable decision-making, it is also crucial to conservation in the future. As more and more quality work and lessons learned about the economic values of forests are starting to be generated within the region, it is time to sit up and take note of the huge economic potential that the forest sector represents, and the massive economic opportunities that will be foregone if East Africa's forests are lost.

The issue begins by making a strong case as to why forests are so important to East Africa in economic terms, and why we cannot

afford to ignore these values (Lucy Emerton). We then look at the linkages between the forest sector and the national economy—a topic that should be put firmly and urgently onto the agenda of central government planners and economists in Kenya (Samuel Gichere) and Uganda (Yakobo Moyini). Fanuel Shechambo shows how economic policies that are made at the central level have a number of important effects on how people manage forests at the local level, relating these issues to the case of Mount Meru in Tanzania. Hezron Mogaka then describes the ways in which it is possible to calculate the value of forest resources to rural communities in Tharaka, Kenya, and George Sikoyo describes some of the methods that have been used in East Africa to try and make forest conservation more economically attractive and profitable at the local level. The high dependence on commercial industry, energy and business on forest goods and services is described for the case of the Udzungwa National Park in Tanzania by George Jambiya and Telly Eugene Muramira uses the case of Mabira Forest in Uganda to show how large-scale infrastructure and developments can give rise to devastating economic costs because they impact on forests. Finally, Francis Karanja charts a path for the future and presents an overview of a new project that is attempting to address many of these concerns and issues, through increasing the regional capacity, knowledge, information and application of economic valuation tools to forest conservation in East Africa.

Lucy Emerton & Francis Karanja