# ABSTRACTS FOR ST. PAUL'S UNIVESITY RESEARCH CONFERENCE ON 23rd & 24th NOVEMBER 2017

## THEME: Strengthening Research and Innovations for Climate Adaptation and Sustainable Development

**Benefit Sharing Mechanisms and Perspectives; Linking Ecosystem Conservation and Community Livelihoods: A Case of Mt. Kenya West Community Forest Associations, Nyeri County**

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**Abstract**

The world has lost about 40 per cent of forest area to deforestation globally and Kenya has one of the highest rates of forest degradation. In the early 1900s the forest cover was at 12 per cent but reduced drastically to 2 per cent in 2000, equivalent to 3.5 million hectares of degraded land. The aim is to manage forests through sustainable exploitation of forest resources to control vulnerability of rural communities to poverty and effects of climate change. The first objective of the study was to analyze the existing benefit sharing, forest governance and policies intervention. The second objective was to examine how access to forest user rights can contribute to equitable, fair and transparent benefit sharing in the forest blocks. The third objective was to establish the linkage between ecosystem conservation efforts and livelihood improvement. The study examined the contributions of Community Forest Associations in forest conservation and management of Mt. Kenya west forest blocks and the extent to which members of these associations and the community as a whole benefit from the forest services. Survey research approach was adopted to collect data from 90 participants sampled across the three Community Forest Associations. The study was conducted in 2016. Data collection methods included desktop reviews, use of questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews. The study noted that that there is a relationship between ecosystem conservation and community livelihoods. The results showed that community participation in forest management has contributed to the increase in benefits compared to fifteen years ago. The study further found that increase in community benefits like raised income from forest user rights has a positive correlation with community conservation and management efforts. Further study is needed to be able to develop a universal model framework for benefits sharing between the forest adjacent community and the Kenya Forest Service. There is need to strengthen policy and forest laws to effectively implement forest benefits sharing guidelines. It's also imperative to improve on forest governance issues and target building the capacity of grass root institutions.

**Key words:** Community Forest Association, livelihoods, benefits sharing mechanisms, forest policies, ecosystems