


# Albertine Rift Conservation Society

## Strategic Plan 2016-2020

Acting Locally, Engaging Broadly





**ARCOS' Mission is  
"To enhance biodiversity  
conservation and sustainable  
management of natural  
resources through the  
promotion of collaborative  
conservation action for  
nature and people".**

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## Message from the Chairman and Executive Director

ARCOS Network's Strategy 2016-2020 builds on its 20 years' experience in the Albertine Rift region and its recent expansion to the Africa Great Lakes and Mountain Ecosystems, striving to achieve its mission *"to enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources through the promotion of collaborative conservation action for nature and people"*.

Significant achievements have been made by ARCOS through the frequently changing context in the region, thanks to the concerted efforts of our partners, including governments, civil society, local communities and the private sector sharing the same motto of "Collaborative Action for Nature and People".

ARCOS' Strategy - 2016-2020 finds inspiration from learning from and success of the previous strategy - 2011-2015. Winning the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions (MACEI), establishing a regional Portal for Biodiversity Informayion Management System (ARBIMIS), establishing and supporting different Nature Based Community Enterprises (NBCEs), and facilitating conservation and development dialogues on issues affecting the Great Lakes region and African mountains, constitute some of the landmarks for several years to come.

Over 10,000 people per year, including government officials, community members in our key landscapes, people engaged through our online channels and newsletters, and those reached during the trainings and policy dialogue, have been involved in ARCOS activities during the last five years of the Strategic Plan 2011-2015.

This strategy is based upon careful analysis of the challenges and opportunities arising in the political, social, technological and environmental areas and has identified strategic goals and objectives as guided by local, national and regional priorities as well as global challenges, particularly the post-2015 development agenda as articulated in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Climate Change Agreement.

ARCOS Network strives to attain greater results in the field of biodiversity conservation and sustainable benefits from ecosystem services, against the backdrop of climate change in the coming period. We will put community benefits and community participation at the centre of our conservation interventions, and pay special attention to sustainable provision of human basic needs of water, energy and food security, we will do so as to ensure sustainability and demonstrate conservation impact.

We would like to thank all our partners from governments, conservation partners, local communities, national and international organisations, the private sector and our funding partners, for their concerted efforts in pursuing the conservation and development agenda at all levels. We thank Mr Alex Muhwezi who facilitated the consultations for the development of this new Strategic Plan and we particularly thank ARCOS staff and Board Members for bringing out this guiding document.

We invite you all to be a part of ARCOS Network's new phase in conservation and development.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicholas King'.

**Prof Nicholas King**  
Chairman



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Samuel Kanyamibwa'.

**Dr Samuel Kanyamibwa**  
Executive Director

# I. ARCOS' AGENDA

## MISSION

ARCOS' Mission is "To enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources through the promotion of collaborative conservation action for nature and people".

## MOTTO

**Collaborative Action for  
Nature and People**

## VISION

ARCOS' Vision is "All important ecosystems are healthy, viable and rich in biodiversity. They provide sustainable benefits to people, whose livelihoods are much improved as a result of effective policies, respect for nature and strong participation of stakeholders in natural resource management. ARCOS has significantly contributed to this achievement".

## I.1. VALUES AND APPROACHES

ARCOS Network brings together a wide range of stakeholders interested in conservation and sustainable development. Our approaches are based on the following pillars:

1. We facilitate networking with local, national and international players to enhance sustainable development through information and experience sharing,
2. We empower our network through policy dialogue, capacity building and policy engagement when implementing our work. We work with all kinds of organizations – NGOs/CBOs, academic institutions, governments and increasingly business;
3. Our activities on the ground take an integrated landscape approach focusing mainly in protecting biodiversity and enhancing ecosystem services, building Nature Based Community Enterprises (NBCEs) and building shared vision among stakeholders to address threats.

### Core values

Our core values are: Collaborative Action and Partnership, Positive and Passionate about our work, Professionalism, Results Oriented, Accountability and Integrity, Good Communication and Information for Change and Sustainability of Actions.



### III. OUR GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS OF INTERVENTION

#### III.1. ALBERTINE RIFT AND FOCAL LANDSCAPES

As the name indicates, ARCOS was established for primary focus in the Albertine Rift region, one of the most bio-diverse regions of the African continent. However, the region is also heavily threatened as a result of poverty and human demography leading to deforestation and a growing population seeks new farmland and animal poaching. There is also the challenge of policy and law implementation, especially on oil and mining in the protected areas and unharnessed peat scooping in wetlands.

ARCOS has spearheaded stakeholders engagement in the Albertine Rift since 1999 when the first Albertine Rift Regional Forum was organised. In 2007, ARCOS developed a regional biodiversity monitoring framework to harmonise all biodiversity monitoring efforts in the region that culminated to the Albertine Rift Biodiversity Portal launched in 2014, supported by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between biodiversity data holders in the region to share their data and exchange information. We facilitate a strong network of practitioners in the region involved in different fields (EIA, Water-Energy-Food Security Nexus

(WEF), Information Management, Civil Society, etc.). Our landscape approach in field interventions is a holistic approach integrating ecological, economic and social aspects necessary to meet the needs of people and nature. The Landscape approach focuses on three characteristics of the landscape: 1) Structure (what kind of systems that exist), 2) Function (flows of energy and how the systems interact), and 3) Change -how this affects the systems over time.

Our approach is collaborative: In each landscape, we help stakeholders to come together to understand the importance of biodiversity, and threats affecting them, and to monitor the changes. Our approach aims to protect biodiversity and restore ecosystem services and to enhance sustainable livelihoods through Nature Based Community Enterprises (NBCEs). Our approach is based on science and information to guide decision-making: ARCOS has developed a participatory Integrated Landscape Assessment and Monitoring (ILAM) model, using the State-Pressure-Response Framework.

In each landscape of focus, ARCOS' strives to achieve the following:

1. Promote and support collaborative actions at all levels
2. Strive for the protection of biodiversity and restoration of ecosystems and their services
3. Work with communities to enhance their sustainable livelihoods
4. Empower stakeholders to take informed decisions and address environmental challenges



*Exhibition kiosk built by ARCOS for Batwa community around Kibira*



*Albertine Rift region is one of the most bio-diverse regions in Africa*

### III.2. EAST AFRICA AND AFRICA GREAT LAKES REGION



*Photo: Fishermen's boats in Lake Tanganyika*

The Africa Great Lakes region is composed of four basins namely the Lake Victoria basin, Lake Tanganyika basin, Lake Malawi basin, Lake Turkana basin, and the Upper Nile basin. The region straddles eleven countries (Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique) and is known to be one of the population centres of the continent. Given the fact that many families are poor and therefore rely heavily on natural resources to derive their livelihoods, the natural ecosystems in this region including freshwater ecosystems are submitted to an increasing pressure through overuse of resources (e.g. overfishing) which leads to progressive degradation of the ecosystems and habitat loss for the many species they host.

Freshwater habitats and the ecosystem services they provide play a significant role for biodiversity

conservation and human well-being. Despite their value and importance, many lakes, rivers, and wetlands in the Africa Great Lakes region are being severely degraded by human activities and are declining at a much faster rate than terrestrial ecosystems and non-sustainable exploitation of freshwater resources is a primary cause of various issues such as soil erosion and sedimentation, pollution, conflicts and inefficient water allocation and use. Given the large numbers of vulnerable people and the high level of threat to the ecosystems of the Africa Great Lakes region, this region is regarded as a conservation hotspot by many conservation stakeholders and increased effort is being directed towards understanding the drivers of change and ways to address threats affecting freshwater ecosystem in this region.

ARCOS and its partners are working together through collaborative actions to address major issues affecting freshwater services in the region. Through support to civil society actors, we conduct activities that encourage sustainable water services, land management and farming practices as well as community ecotourism in a bid to achieve integrated water resources management of the freshwater resources in the region. ARCOS Portal has a component on Africa Great Lakes, to allow stakeholders track the progress towards the achievements along various conservation targets that have been set as well as allow policy makers and the public get accurate and well-structured information on the status of habitats, species and ecosystem services in this region.





### III.3. AFRICA SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT



Photo: Mount Sabyinyo in Greater Virunga

Mountains play an important role in economic development, poverty alleviation and environmental protection not only for upland areas but also for the lowlands. Mountains also provide a wide range of critical and indispensable ecological goods and services for a significant number of people in Africa. These include water for agriculture, hydropower, domestic and industrial use, ecotourism, etc.

However they are among the most disadvantaged regions in the world with some of the highest poverty rates. Communities and ecosystems in mountain areas are also among those most vulnerable to climate change, variability and related risks. Climate change, combined with reduced resilience (amongst other things) exacerbates the already existing challenges and increases pressure on mountain people and ecosystems, further enforcing unsustainable land management practices and land abandonment which in turn jeopardises the provision of key mountain services.

Climate change further leads to flooding, droughts and soil erosion, further aggravating the degradation of mountain ecosystems and marginalisation of mountain communities.

With financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), ARCOS is an implementation partner of a global initiative termed “Sustainable Mountain Development for Global Change (SMD4GC)”. The overall goal of this programme is to contribute to Sustainable Mountain Development under uncertain changes in climatic, environmental and socio-economic conditions, focusing on poverty and risk reduction.

Under this programme, an information Portal has been developed to promote exchange and information sharing on the drivers of change in African mountains and facilitate the management and dissemination of the information generated by research and other processes going on onto the continent. You can browse information publications related to African mountains, explore published biodiversity data that are related to African mountains or take advantage of the various interactive mapping features that help users visualize available mountains – related resources available through online database.



## IV. OUR WORK AT A GLANCE: Network, Empower and Act

### IV.1. WE NETWORK

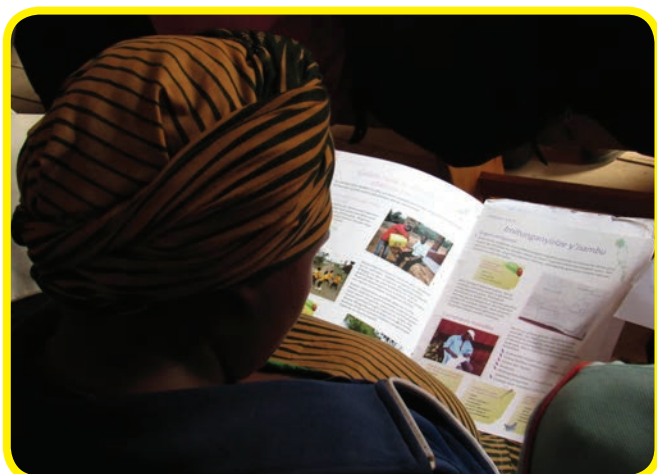


*Photo: Group photo during Africa Regional Mountain Forum, Arusha, Tanzania, October 2014*

Since its establishment, ARCOS has taken networking and stakeholders' engagement at the centre of its operations and today, ARCOS Network is able to influence change at different levels. The last few years have been marked by a growth of ARCOS membership that extends from local to international organisations and individuals from different background. Our Network includes different specialised groups and alliances in different areas of conservation and development.

Among these, ARCOS facilitates mechanisms and engage dialogues with different stakeholders through the Albertine Rift Environmental Assessment Leadership Alliance (AREALA), Africa Great Lakes Conservation Network and the Africa Regional Mountain Forum. During the next five years, this networking and knowledge base will extend to new areas of water, energy and food security nexus and networking for nature based community enterprises.

### IV.2. WE EMPOWER



*Our capacity building efforts will focus on community institutions*

From its establishment, ARCOS has put capacity building, information sharing and stakeholders empowerment on the top of its priorities. ARCOS has implemented several capacity building programmes targeting mostly local community organisations and national NGOs,

but also government institutions. Over the years, ARCOS has built its expertise in institutional development, advocacy and fundraising as well as information management, integrated freshwater management and sustainable mountain development. During the next five years, ARCOS will continue to enhance the capacity of different stakeholders and support the mainstreaming of biodiversity and ecosystem services in development policies, strategies, and investments at national, regional and international levels. We will pay special attention to IWRM, renewable energy and integrating ecosystem based adaptation options into national and regional adaptation plans and strategies, for climate change adaptation and community livelihoods. Our capacity building efforts will focus on community institutions in terms of training, market linkage, lessons sharing and competitiveness for sustainable actions.



### IV.3. WE ACT



*During this new strategy, ARCOS will strengthen its effort in its farmer landscapes of interest (Echuya, Kibira-Rusizi, Mukura) and expand to two new landscapes of Bugesera and Kirehe. Photo: ARCOS staff, board and members visit to Akagera wetland.*

As a regional organisation, one of our key strategic decisions is to ensure the right balance between regional/national and international processes and field activities. ARCOS embraces ecosystem-based management applied at landscape level aimed at regulating the use of ecosystems so that we can benefit from them while at the same time modifying the impacts on them so that basic ecosystem functions are preserved. Our landscape approach in field interventions is a holistic approach integrating ecological, economic and social aspects necessary to meet the needs of people and nature. Our field interventions are focused in the Albertine Rift region and working through partners for actions beyond the region.

During the last strategic period 2011-2015, ARCOS worked in four main landscapes: Echuya forest Landscape in Uganda, Mukura Forest and

Rugezi Marsh in Rwanda, and Kibira-Rusizi in Burundi. We have also facilitated community initiatives in three agro-systems of Rwanda for coffee certification. During the next five years, we will strengthen our efforts in these landscapes and expand to two new landscapes of Bugesera and Kirehe as part of FONERWA-funded project. In these landscapes, we will work with different partners, including governments and the private sector, to sustainably manage biodiversity and ecosystem services through PES, landscape restoration and promote actions that build resilience of ecosystems and rural communities to effects of climate change in order to provide sustainable livelihoods.





## V. ARCOS STRATEGIC AREAS

### V.1. SUSTAINING BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES



*Photo: Ruwenzori Turaco, endemic to Albertine Rift. This is the bird species that features in ARCOS' logo*

ARCOS will aim to enhance sustainable management of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems and their services, for community livelihoods and human well-being.

To achieve this, ARCOS will:

#### **Network**

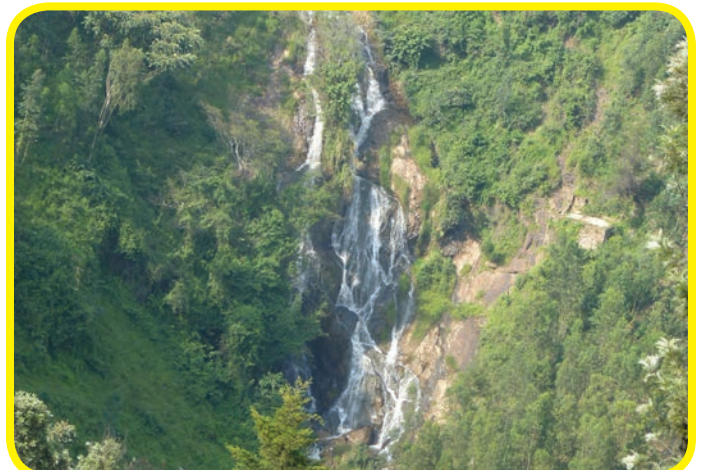
1. Facilitate networking for conservation, monitoring and knowledge management of biodiversity and ecosystem services status, trends and drivers of change.

#### **Empower**

1. Enhance capacity of different stakeholders for biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resources management;
2. Support the mainstreaming of biodiversity and ecosystem services in development policies, strategies, and investments and related Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) at national, regional and international levels.

#### **Act**

1. Partner with communities, governments and the private sector, to sustainably manage biodiversity and ecosystem services through PES, landscape restoration and other actions.





## V.2. BUILDING RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE



ARCOS will strive to support national/regional mechanisms for assessing and understanding the impacts of climate change and promote grass-root actions to build community and ecosystem resilience. To achieve this, ARCOS will:

### **Network**

- Support national/regional mechanisms for assessing and sharing knowledge on vulnerability of ecosystems, livelihoods and socio-economic development to climate change.

### **Empower**

- Strengthen stakeholders capacity in terms of information, training, and best practices for effective climate change action;
- Advocate for the mainstreaming of ecosystem based adaptation options into national and regional adaptation plans and strategies.

### **Act**

- Implement ecosystem based adaptation actions that aim at building resilience of ecosystems and rural communities to effects of climate change.



### V.3. SUPPORTING EFFORTS FOR INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT



ARCOS will facilitate stakeholders' dialogue for integrated water resources management and promote actions that enhance availability and sustainable use of water resources.

To achieve this, ARCOS will:

#### **Network**

- Engage partnerships and dialogue with different stakeholders to promote common understanding of threats to freshwater resources and draw shared vision for sustainable use.

#### **Empower**

- Facilitate mechanisms for capacity building and adoption of IWRM in trans-boundary, national and regional freshwater ecosystems;
- Support the mainstreaming of IWRM in national and international development agenda and strategies.

#### **Act**

- Work with communities to find better options/technologies to address the challenge of water access and sustainably use in selected river basins and landscapes;
- Work with communities and other stakeholders to protect and sustainable manage water catchment areas for maintaining water ecosystem services and human well-being.





## V.4. PROMOTE ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND ACCESS TO CLEAN AND RENEWABLE ENERGY



ARCOS will work with governments, communities and private sector for innovative solutions that promote access to affordable and sustainable energy services.

To achieve this, ARCOS will:

### **Network**

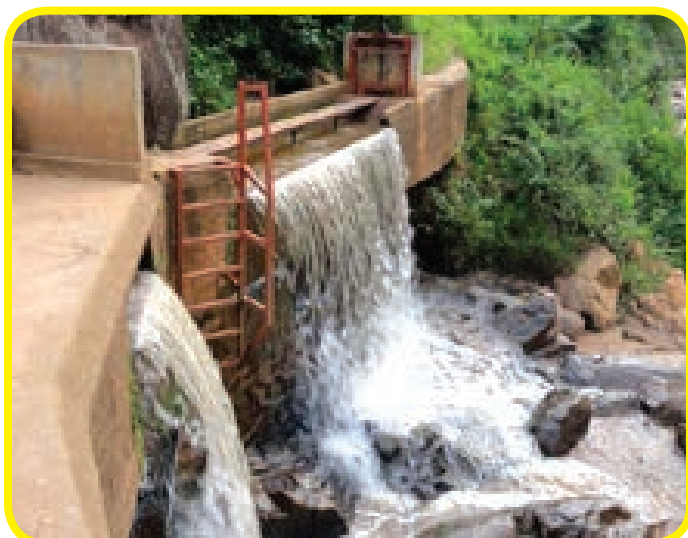
- Enhance networking, knowledge base and best practices on energy efficiency, clean and renewable energy.

### **Empower**

- Build capacity of local stakeholders for enabling the planning, implementation and management of clean and renewable energy solutions;
- Advocate for mainstreaming clean and renewable energy into national and regional economic development and specifically energy policies, strategies and plans.

### **Act**

- Facilitate initiatives that support communities to access affordable and clean energy while reducing the reliance on unsustainable biomass energy.





## V.5. PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND IMPROVED FOOD SECURITY



ARCOS will work with different partners to promote sustainable agricultural practices that increase sustainable farming productivity and ecosystem resilience. To achieve this, ARCOS will:

### **Network**

- Establish and support mechanisms for NBCEs networking and information exchange with more focus on women and indigenous people.

### **Empower**

- Support community farming institutions in terms of training, market linkage, lessons sharing and competitiveness for sustainable actions;
- Catalyse and advocate for sustainable agricultural policies and strategies at national and regional level.

### **Act**

- Increase agricultural productivity and income of selected NBCEs;
- Promote sustainable agricultural systems and practices (incl. agroforestry and Climate Smart Agriculture) that enhance resilience to climate change.





## VI. ARCOS STRATEGIC APPROACH

### VI.1. NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIPS



**ARCOS will continue to engage strategic partnerships with leading players and facilitate regional collaboration and networking with different stakeholders (communities, governments, NGOs and private sector)**

**To achieve this, ARCOS will:**

- 1. Ensure implementation of ARCOS Partnership Strategy and effective management of ARCOS Network through collaborative actions;**
- 2. Increase ARCOS membership and engage ARCOS members in the implementation of conservation and development priorities in the region;**
- 3. Work with Private Sector to promote corporate social and environmental responsibility and develop ambitious, scalable business solutions integrating business and environment.**





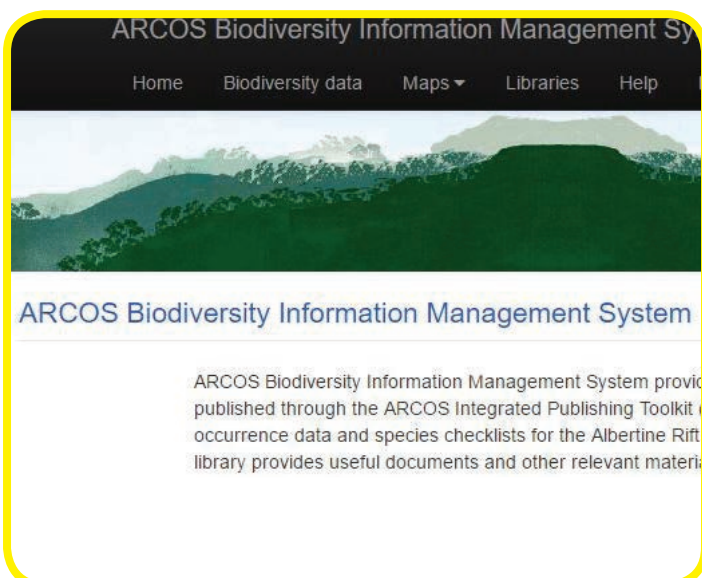
## VI.2. REGIONAL HUB FOR INFORMATION, CAPACITY BUILDING, ADVOCACY AND POLICY DIALOGUE



The work of ARCOS will aim to further strengthen its position as Regional Centre for Knowledge sharing, training, policy influencing and Dialogue on Conservation and Development agenda.

### ARCOS will:

1. Enhance knowledge of environmental status of the Albertine Rift, African Great Lakes region and African Mountains and disseminate information through a regional/national participatory information system.
2. Empowering stakeholders through professional training to more effectively participate in sustainable management of ecosystem services, decision-making and the reduction of environmental threats.
3. Promote mainstreaming of ecosystem approach in development agenda and advocate for pro-poor policies and participatory decision-making for sustainable management of ecosystem services.
4. Facilitate platforms for dialogue, knowledge sharing and policy influencing to promote sustainable development.





### VI.3. PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE NATURE BASED COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES



**ARCOS will partner with grass root community groups to develop new business solutions and nature based villages for the consistency between conservation and development**

**ARCOS will:**

- 1. Promote collaborative resource management models (including Conservation Agreements) for community development, natural resource management and financial sustainability**
- 2. Engage partnerships, exchange and dissemination of experiences and lessons learned in nature based community enterprises.**



## VII. EQUIPPING ARCOS FOR THE TASK

### VII.1. FOSTERING ARCOS' EFFECTIVENESS AND INNOVATION (AWARD)

MacArthur  
Foundation  
2012 Award for Creative & Effective Institutions

**ARCOS  
NETWORK**

Building on ARCOS Award for Creative and Effective Institutions, we will design and apply programme development and delivery mechanism that demonstrate ARCOS quality service, value for money and ARCOS credibility. We will strengthen ARCOS' financial base and capacity for resource mobilization within and outside the organization.

### VII.2. BUILDING ARCOS LEADERSHIP IN INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING



We will strengthen institutional capacity to collect, analyse and share biodiversity information. We will enhance effective communication through variety of means (e.g., websites, portals, and knowledge sharing platforms), including upgrading ARBMIS. We will build ARCOS Regional Training and Information Centre.

### VII.3. INVESTING IN OUR GREATEST ASSETS: HUMAN RESOURCES



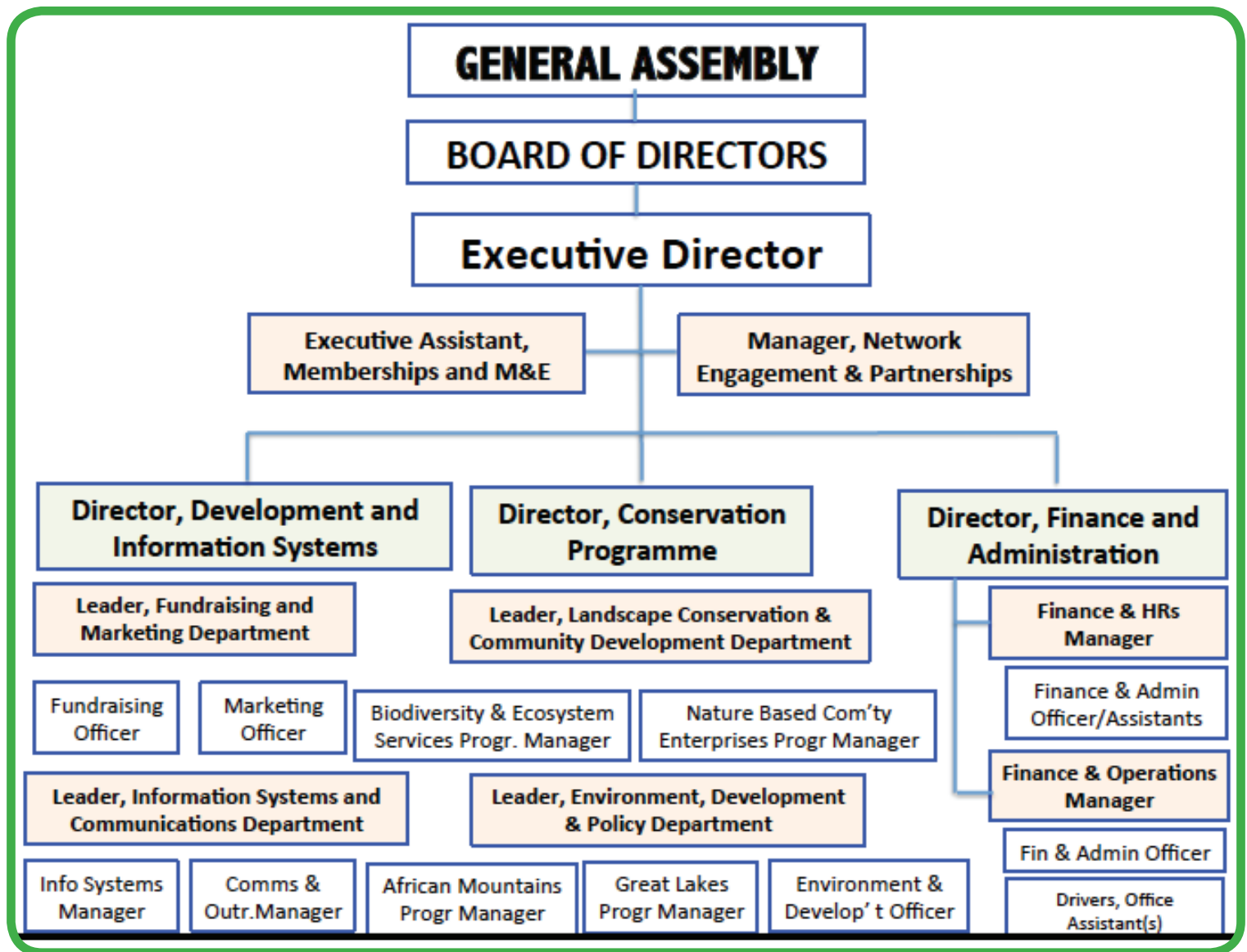
We will continue to build a professional team able to engage locally, regionally and globally with integrated approach, local knowledge and global perspective. We will consolidate our team expertise in programmatic areas with high quality research and analysis, communication, management and resource mobilization skills. We will also harness the potential of diverse and committed Board members, interns and volunteers.

### VII.4. PLANNING, REPORTING AND MONITORING AND EVALUATION MARKERS

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a vital component of this strategic plan. The secretariat will be primarily responsible for providing the necessary information (reports, programme critiques and evaluation outcomes) for monitoring and evaluation purposes, which will then be reviewed by the Board. Outputs of ARCOS staff will be regularly monitored by the Coordination Bureau of ARCOS' Board to ensure efficient work practices (as per their quarterly and annual plans against their achievements). This will be achieved through annual plans and reports, quarterly plans and reports. A comprehensive mid-term strategy review should be undertaken in mid-2018 and a final end of Strategic Plan Review between March and June 2020, to assess the overall implementation of this strategy, and the status of expected outputs within each of the programme areas. This assessment should involve partners and external experts.



## Annex 1: ARCOS Organisational Structure





## Annex 2: Acronyms used

AR	Albertine Rift
ARBMIS	ARCOS Biodiversity Management Information System
ARCOS	Albertine Rift Conservation Society
AREALA	Albertine Rift Environmental Assessment Leadership Alliance
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CRSN	Centre de Recherche en Sciences Naturelles
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FONERWA	Fonds National pour l'Environnement au Rwanda
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management
ICCN	Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature
ILAM	Integrated Landscape Assessment and Monitoring
OBPE	Office Burundais pour la Protection de l'Environnement
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
MACEI	MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions
MAF	MacArthur Foundation
MUIENR	Makerere University Institute of Environment and natural Resources
NFA	National Forest Authority, Uganda
NAFA	National Forest Authority, Rwanda
NBCE	Nature Based Community Enterprise
NBI	Nile Basin Initiative
NELSAP	Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Programme
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority
NGO	Non governmental Organization
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
RDB	Rwanda Development Board
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMD4GC	Sustainable Mountain Development for Global Change
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
TANAPA	Tanzania National Parks
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WEF Nexus	Water Energy Food Security Nexus
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature



ARCOS thanks its supporters whose support has enabled us to achieve so much so far. However, to be transformational, the goals that ARCOS has set are ambitious if we embrace them on our own. This is why we are a Network. Together we will achieve more. We need additional support and joining us will help to increase our capacities and attain these goals. ARCOS welcomes new partnerships and support from different actors to work together in delivering our vital conservation programmes and advance sustainability in the Albertine Rift region, Great Lakes region and in the African Mountain Ecosystems.

**Join us at [www.arcosnetwork.org](http://www.arcosnetwork.org), email: [info@arcosnetwork.org](mailto:info@arcosnetwork.org)  
Facebook page : ARCOS Natework, Twitter: @ARCOSNetwork**



# ARCOS Strategic Areas 2016-2020 at a glance





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