

VOICE

— UN DESA —

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Making nature count

Since the beginning of time, we have treated nature as a free and endless provider of services. We hike in forests, swim in oceans and use its resources without a second thought. But even if we don't pay for these goods and services, their value is far from zero.

In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many of us to realize that we have taken nature for granted for far too long.

But why have we acted as if nature is free and endless? Part of it has to do with the measure of progress we use. For the past 75 years, policymakers have been using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of success and wellbeing.

While GDP is a good measure of economic performance, it has its limits. It does not take into account the value of our natural resources or ecosystems. In an extreme example, if we cut down millions of hectares of forests and sell the wood, GDP will go up. But we well know that cutting down millions of hectares of forests is not without grave consequences.

Statistics like GDP are the lens through which we view the world and form our policies. That said, the climate and biodiversity crises are clear warning signs that we need a change in the statistics we use. Luckily, a change is coming and not a moment too soon.

This month, the [United Nations Statistical Commission](#) will adopt a new framework which enables countries to go beyond GDP and finally make nature count. [The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting – Ecosystem Accounting \(SEEA EA\)](#) will enable countries to measure their natural capital and understand the immense contributions of nature to our prosperity and the importance of protecting it.

By complementing GDP with statistics from the SEEA EA, policymakers will be able to make better economic decisions about natural resources and ecosystems, something that is essential for a green COVID-19 recovery.



EXPERT VOICES



What does water mean to you?

A chemical substance? A life-giving force? A human right? A commodity? Water means different things to different people. As we prepare to celebrate World Water Day on 22nd March, we talk about the value of water with Nicolas Franke, Sustainable Development Officer at UN DESA.

In December 2020, a world's first futures market in water was created on Wall Street, meaning that water can now be traded by financiers like gold or oil. Has the world entered a water crisis? How can we stop it?

"Many countries face water crises every year, either through drought, floods and/or contamination. We have all seen them on social media. As a matter of fact, almost one-third of the world's population live in water-stressed countries and we foresee the numbers to increase due to climate change and unsustainable water resources management.

The less predictable a resource becomes, the more valuable it gets, and Wall Street has recognized that. But should the futures market trade with a resource that is a human right? People should better understand the value water has in their life and act to prevent future water-related crises."

The theme of this year's World Water Day is valuing water. Why this theme and what does it mean?

"The idea behind the theme is to generate a global, public conversation on how people value water for all its uses. The aim is to better understand what water means to us and

all the different ways water benefits our lives, so we can value water properly and safeguard it effectively for everyone.

The value of water is about much more than its price – water has an enormous and complex value for our households, culture, health, education, economics and the integrity of our natural environment. If we overlook any of these values, we risk mismanaging this finite, irreplaceable resource.”

We are in the third year of the Water Action Decade and last year saw the launch of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework. What do these initiatives hope to achieve and how?

“The Water Action Decade aims to accelerate efforts towards meeting water-related challenges. During the decade, the international community sets out to advance sustainable management of water resources, energize existing programmes and projects, and inspire action to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

The SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework was launched by UN-Water members, including UN DESA, to improve support to national progress on sustainable water management in five identified crucial areas: optimize financing, improve data and information, build capacity, scale-up innovation and improve governance.”



THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



Four things you need to know about forests and health

Forests are good for our physical and mental wellbeing. Spending time around trees helps boost our immune system, lowers blood pressure and promotes relaxation. From cleaner air to providing natural cooling and the freshwater we drink,

forests support our health in ways that may not be visible.

Forests provide us medicines

Many of the medicines we rely on today come from forests. 25 per cent of medicinal drugs used in developed countries are plant-based, while in developing countries, it can be as much as 80 per cent. Forests also provide essential health products such as hygiene and sanitary items like toilet paper, paper towels, tissues and ethanol for sanitizers.

Even the masks and protective clothing that frontline medical workers depend on are created from forest products like wood pulp and soluble cellulose fiber.

We are losing forests the size of South Korea each year

Every year, our planet loses 10 million hectares of forests, roughly the same area as the entire Republic of Korea. But we can turn the tide on this negative trend through sustainable forest management and ecosystem restoration.

We can bring degraded forests back to life

It is estimated that some two billion hectares of degraded land worldwide have the potential to be revived. That is roughly twice the area of Europe. Revitalizing the health of our forests is in our best interest, as it helps to create new jobs, mitigate climate change, and to safeguard biodiversity.

Forests shield us against future pandemics

At present, 60 per cent of all infectious diseases and 75 per cent of all emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic. These diseases originate from the transfer of pathogens from animals to humans, and they usually occur when natural landscapes, such as forests, are being cleared.

By planting trees and restoring forests, we can support an integrated one health approach for people, species and the planet. This is why the theme of this year's International Day of Forests on 21 March 2021, is "Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being". Learn more at <http://bit.ly/DayForests>



**BETTER DATA
BETTER LIVES**

**1-3 March and
5 March 2021**
[VIRTUAL]

unstats.un.org
@UNStats #UN52SC

United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

The logo for the 52nd Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission is circular with a green and blue border. It features the UN emblem at the top, the text "52nd Session of the United Nations" and "Statistical Commission" in the center, and a bar chart with colorful bars at the bottom. The words "ECONOMY · ENVIRONMENT · POPULATION · SOCIETY · TRADE" are written around the bottom edge of the circle.



Generation Equality Forum: A space for reflection, dialogue and commitment towards gender equality

By Nadine Gasman Zylbermann, President of Mexico's National Women's Institute (Inmujeres)

The world has changed dramatically since 1995. Yet not one country has reached substantive equality between women and men. We live in a world where there has been important progress, but the Beijing Platform for Action is more current than ever.

We need better implementation, and that requires commitment and financing. Although there have been significant advancements in terms of legislation, we have also witnessed backlash against the rights of women, girls and all gender-marginalized people.

Some rights are increasingly under question and even at risk, especially sexual and reproductive rights. Moreover, the global pandemic has made manifest the economic, social, cultural and political vulnerabilities to which women are subjected. Now, more than ever we must act towards real gender equality.

In this context, The Generation Equality Forum —an event jointly organized by UN Women, the governments of Mexico and France, civil society, and youth—will take place online in Mexico City from 29th to 31st March, and in Paris in June 2021.

The Forum in Mexico will place women and girls' rights agenda at the forefront by centring the voices of grassroots organizations. Conceived as an accelerator for social change and accountability, the Forum offers a new way to join our voices, a horizontal space where diverse feminist movements of all generations come together with governments, international organizations, and the private sector to achieve the equality that women and girls deserve.

The Forum is working to incorporate the voices, views and expectations of grassroots, rural, indigenous, Black, sexually diverse, differently abled, and young women into the conversation.

As co-host of the Generation Equality Forum, Mexico seeks to combine its longstanding commitment to women's rights with its current transformative socio-political agenda. The first UN conference on women took place in Mexico City in 1975. Today, Mexico has

advanced parity legislation in all spheres. Mexico, for the first time, achieved in 2018 parity in Congress, as a result of successive legislative and constitutional reforms supported by the Supreme Court of Justice.

The most recent reform marks a historic moment and an unprecedented achievement to guarantee the political rights of women. This reform will ensure that half of the decision-making positions are for women in the three branches of the State, in the three levels of government, in the autonomous bodies, in the candidacies of political parties for positions of popular election, and in the election of local representatives before city councils.

This milestone in gender equality is in large part due to the struggle led by women's organizations and women politicians and legislators. We must now utilize this political momentum to continue to work towards ensuring that women in all their diversity have the ability to participate and be represented in all aspects of society.

Feminist movements, in all their diversity across Latin America and the Caribbean, have been crucial to advancing the Beijing agenda. Civil society and grassroots organizations have been demanding governments to invest in and legislate on gender equality. Progressive governments are focusing their agendas on substantive equality between women and men that address the intersections between gender and other social factors such as race, class, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc.

In the last few years, we have witnessed how youth-led feminist movements have taken to the streets to demand their rights. Feminist movements are fighting to put an end to patriarchal values and achieve gender equality. The Forum will be a space for dialogue between the future, past and present of feminist movements to accelerate change.

Our horizon is 2030, when the world aims to have achieved the Sustainable Development Goals. Governments, the UN and civil society organizations succeeded in integrating a gender perspective into the 17 SDGs in addition to SDG 5, which specifically addresses gender equality.

The Generation Equality Forum bridges the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda to step up change and define specific actions that bring substantive progress towards full gender equality. Without gender equality, development cannot be sustainable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the scourge of violence against women and girls. Feminist movements have historically engaged with and brought this topic to the forefront of public agendas, and now there are clear ways to prevent, address, sanction and eradicate violence against women in all its forms.

As a result of the pandemic, for the first time in decades, humanity has come face to face with the importance and centrality of women's care work, both in the healthcare sector and at home. Discussing these issues at the Forum is key to economic empowerment and necessary for women to have agency over their own lives.

The pandemic has also shown us how fragile, precarious, and oppressive the status quo has historically been for women. A future post-pandemic world must be a just and feminist world that addresses the structural social, cultural, political and economic causes of gender inequality.

** The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*



SDG 5 IN NUMBERS



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