

Forests: at the heart of a green recovery from COVID-19

Webinar organized by the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat, UN DESA

28 September 2020, 9:00 am – 11:30 am EST

Concept Note

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront some of the most pressing global challenges that humanity has faced in recent history. The devastating impacts of the pandemic are being felt by all – from urban residents of densely populated megacities to indigenous peoples living deep in the heart of forests. The pandemic has highlighted the linkages between human health, animal health and environmental health. Zoonotic diseases generally occur in areas that have been deforested. Climate change affected zones are also more prone to the proliferation of zoonoses.

Forests and trees provide income, livelihoods and well-being for countless forest-dependent peoples and local communities. Forests provide essential habitat for over 80% of all terrestrial biodiversity. They mitigate climate change by removing about a third of the global greenhouse gas emissions each year (IPCC, 2013). Furthermore, the forestry sector produces essential products and services which underpin public health.

Yet, forests are also at risk from illegal or unsustainable logging, unmanaged fires, pollution, storms, disease, pests, invasive alien species, habitat fragmentation and the impacts of climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges and risks, including increased illegal forest activities and weakened law enforcement. The pandemic has also led to disruptions in markets and supply chains, causing job losses, deepening inequalities and vulnerabilities of forest-dependent populations and threatening the health of the earth ecosystems.

Given the importance of forests in our lives, how do we ensure that these vital ecosystems are protected and sustainably managed, without raising the risk of deforestation and forest degradation? In light of the global economic downturn caused by the pandemic, how do we ensure that the funding of sustainable forest management is not affected by the increased emergency and other development needs?

To discuss some of the key ways, in which forests can contribute to the post-pandemic recovery, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) released, on 15 June 2020, a policy brief titled “Forests: at the heart of a green COVID-19 recovery”. The brief outlines how sustainably managed forests are a nature-based solution to lay the foundation for resilient economies and societies capable of withstanding future pandemics, climate change and other global challenges.

In 2017, the UN General Assembly adopted the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 (UNSPF) to provide a global framework for action at all levels to sustainably manage all types of forests and trees outside forests, and to halt deforestation and forest degradation by 2030. The Strategic Plan was created to promote the contributions of forests to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has at its heart six Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and 26 associated targets to be achieved by 2030. These goals and targets build on the foundation of the four Global Objectives on Forests of the UN Forest Instrument.

The UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 can also serve as the reference framework for a green recovery from COVID-19. The Plan recognizes that the individual and collective actions and commitments of Member States are decisive for its successful implementation, and highlights the vital role of the UN system, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, intergovernmental partners, regional and sub-regional organizations and processes and Major Groups and other stakeholders. It serves as a call to action by all actors, to work individually and collectively to accelerate progress towards the Global Forest Goals, to create a greener, more sustainable post-pandemic world.

Objectives

This webinar is being held in the context of events during the General Assembly high level segment in September 2020, which will set out the vision for global sustainable development in the post-COVID-19 era, including the SDG Moment, celebration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, SDG Business Forum and the Biodiversity Summit. In this regard, the webinar will provide a timely opportunity to showcase the interlinkages between achieving the Global Forest Goals and delivering the SDGs during the Decade of Action, as well as the significance of forests to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and climate change agenda.

Discussions will address the importance of a holistic and balanced approach to sustainable management of natural resources. If the aspiration for a green COVID-19 recovery is to materialize, sustainable and healthy forest ecosystems and resilient forest-dependent communities have to be its major pillar.

Participants

The programme of the webinar includes presentations by distinguished panelists, from different backgrounds and affiliations, who will share their views on how the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 can help to build a greener and fairer post-pandemic future.

The webinar will be open to all relevant stakeholders, including members of the United Nations Forum on Forests, international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the business sector, as well as the general public.

Outcome

A brief summary of the event and a copy of the recording of the webinar will be made available on the UN Forum on Forests website www.un.org/esa/forests.

Programme

OPENING SEGMENT (9:00 to 9:45)

Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, UNDESA

Munir Akram, President of the UN Economic and Social Council and Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations

Kitty Sweeb, Chair of the UNFF16/17 and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations

Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme

Hiroto Mitsugi, Assistant Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN and Chair of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)

Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, CEO and Chairperson of the Global Environment Facility

Moderator: Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge, UN Forum on Forests Secretariat, UNDESA

PANEL DISCUSSIONS SEGMENT (9:45 to 11:25)

Panel 1: Impacts of COVID 19 on Sustainable Forest Management

Moderator: Alexander Buck, Executive Director, IUFRO

Ivonne Higuero, Secretary-General, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES)

Harsen Nyambe, Head of the Division on Environment, Climate Change, Water and Land Management, African Union Commission

David Ganz, Executive Director, RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests

Panel 2: Forests at the heart of a green recovery to COVID-19

Moderator: Alexander Shestakov, Director, Science, Society and Sustainable Futures Division, CBD Secretariat

Carina Hakansson, Director-General, Swedish Forest Industries Association and Chair, Steering Committee, Advisory Committee on Sustainable Forest-based Industries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Paola Deda, Director, Forest, Land and Housing Division, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

Milagre Nuvunga, Co-Leader, The Forests Dialogue and Director, Micaia Foundation

CLOSING REMARKS (11:25 to 11:30)

Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge, UN Forum on Forests Secretariat, UNDESA