



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 s

