

# Report highlights successful efforts to stem deforestation in 17 countries

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Programs and policies to reduce tropical deforestation, and the global warming emissions resulting from deforestation, are seeing broad success in 17 countries across four continents, according to a new report from the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS).

The report, "Deforestation Success Stories: Tropical Nations Where Forest Protection and Reforestation Policies Have Worked," highlights successes in reducing [deforestation](#) and restoring forests while supporting economic development in 17 cases across Africa, Latin America and South and Southeast Asia. While some countries highlighted in the report, including Brazil, are known for their forest efforts, other countries, including Mexico, El Salvador and the six countries of Central Africa, emerge as surprising innovators.

In the 1990s, deforestation consumed 16 million hectares of forest a year and accounted for about 17 percent of all climate emissions. By the early 2000s, deforestation was down 19 percent to 13 million hectares. Currently, deforestation is responsible for about 10 percent of climate emissions globally.

"Successfully reducing deforestation is essential as forests are home to a wide range of plants and animals, and vital to the livelihoods of indigenous communities. When forests are cleared –for palm oil plantations, agriculture or livestock – we lose vital resources, put animals at risk of extinction, and release massive quantities of carbon dioxide stored in the trees and soils," said report author Doug Boucher, director

of UCS's Tropical Forest and Climate Initiative. "What's surprising about today's report is the number of countries that are effectively protecting their tropical forests and the wide variety of policies and programs that are working. There's no one right way to stop deforestation, but rather a smorgasbord of options."

The successful reductions result from a variety of policy options, including policies and programs directly targeted at deforestation, policies not implemented as planned but that still worked, policy reforms that relieved pressure on forests and changes in larger socioeconomic context.

Brazil is home to the world's largest tropical forest, the Amazon. As early as 2002, the Brazilian government reduced deforestation by establishing forest protected areas, and later companies agreed to moratoriums on buying soy or beef raised on deforested land.

While these deforestation programs and policies proved effective, Brazil took additional action through the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation plus pro-forest activities (REDD+) program in cooperation with Norway. REDD+ offers financial incentives, provided by developed countries, to developing countries for reducing deforestation. Today, 80 percent of original Amazonian forest is still standing due to forest protections, moratoriums and the REDD+ program.

"Brazil is most notably lauded for their deforestation reductions, but the report found numerous example of successfully saving forests in unexpected locations," said Boucher. "And some of these surprising successes, like in Mexico and Central Africa, result from national programs and other economic policies that did not work as initially designed."

Mexico has been working to protect their forests from deforestation since the 1990s, but additional success came from the Payment for Environmental Services program, which aimed to transition payments for environmental services, such as clean water and carbon mitigation, into services paid for by markets. While economists recommended that the limited budget for this program be allocated among to the most efficient service providers, the money ultimately went to rural communities, which are historically prioritized in Mexico.

The program did not work as planned, but still prevented deforestation because participants invested in protecting forests even when not required to do so. Ninety-four percent of the program participants voluntarily spent significant portions of their allotments on [forest management](#), proving that the program was successful overall.

Yet other countries still, like Guyana and Central Africa exemplify how economic development socioeconomic changes are relieving pressure on forests. Guyana's case is unusual in that its deforestation rate is nearly zero and forest policies are focused on preventing deforestation entirely. Like Brazil, Guyana formed a partnership with Norway through the REDD+ program. But Guyana's program focuses on promoting economic growth while still keeping deforestation low.

In Central Africa, forest management plans were adopted in the 1990s, and over time, these plans have grown to cover a large portion of the region's forests. In addition to these policies, the development of oil and mineral resources led to rapid urbanization, which drew people from the rural areas to pursue jobs in larger cities. Increasing imports of agricultural products minimized the competition for rural lands as well as the need for expansion into forest lands.

In addition to the economic development in Guyana and Central Africa, other countries were able to protect forests while supporting economic

development, especially in regards to commodities' expansion. The report found several examples of simultaneous economic growth and emissions reductions.

"Countries can have their cake and eat it too," said Boucher. "The report shows that [economic development](#) is not hindered by reductions in deforestation. For example, the soy and beef industry in Brazil thrived despite moratoria preventing deforestation, Vietnam expanded agricultural production and forest area simultaneously, and Costa Rica's well protected forests attract millions of ecotourists each year."

The report recommends expanding the implementation of REDD+, particularly in less developed nations. Policymakers should also increase funding for payments for ecosystem services and practice strong enforcement. Further, [forest](#) management policies should combine environmental policy with socioeconomic development as well as establish moratoriums to increase effectiveness.

"Ultimately, the report show that every euro, dollar, peso, rupee, dong, and African franc invested in these programs and [policy](#) is money well spent," said Boucher. "The rewards far outweigh the costs."

The report is available in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese.

Provided by Union of Concerned Scientists

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