

# More inclusive and coherent global action on deforestation urgently needed

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Deforestation and forest degradation, mainly due to agricultural expansion, lead to the loss of roughly 9 million hectares of natural forest per year, say a team of political and environmental researchers, including

members from the University of Oxford.

This has severe social, economic, and environmental consequences, including the dramatic loss of biodiversity, since forests are home to 80% of all terrestrial biodiversity. Also, in the period 2007-2016, some 23% of global carbon dioxide emissions stemmed from deforestation and forest degradation contributing significantly to the pressing climate crisis.

Not least, governments, responsible companies and local farmers are losing billions of dollars each year due to poor governance of international markets. The scientists say that while there has been a lot of innovative development of public, private and mixed forest policy instruments at regional and local levels, these efforts are thwarted by a highly fragmented, incomplete and ineffective forest policy regime at the global level. With a view to the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference, there is an opportunity for climate policymakers to capitalize on some of the key lessons learned from mistakes, and success stories, of international forest policy.

Dr. Metodi Sotirov from the University of Freiburg in Germany said, "Most deforestation takes place in the Global South, and it is driven not only by domestic, but also by international markets and demand for agricultural commodities, bioenergy, and other bioeconomy needs in the Global North. We refer to this as 'imported deforestation.'

"While unsustainable or illegal timber use is still an important driver of deforestation, agricultural expansion for cattle breeding and cultivating soy, palm oil etc. is much bigger. However, international policy and governance are still not addressing the issues at stake: There is still a need for an effective and coordinated global policy response covering all deforestation-related commodities—timber, forest risk agricultural commodities, bioenergy, mining, etc.—and policy, market, societal,

ecological challenges that need to be addressed to reduce the further disappearance of the world's forests."

In the last three decades, large numbers and varieties of global forest policy initiatives and institutions have evolved; each of them addresses different aspects of forests and their management while there are also overlaps. As a result, global forest governance is greatly fragmented and strongly influenced by certain key policies, such as international climate policies, including the Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation REDD+, and global efforts to combat illegally sourced timber trade, including Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade referred to as "FLEGT."

### **What we already know about deforestation and forest governance**

Deforestation has many socio-ecological and economic consequences with major long-term impacts, such as the loss of traditional lifestyles, breakdown of social institutions, or encroachment into indigenous communities resulting in violent confrontations. Economically, deforestation not only represents a loss in forest capital (valued at \$45 billion in 2007), but also loss of potential future revenues and future employment that could be derived from sustainable management for timber and non-timber products. One of the most serious consequences of deforestation is the loss of biodiversity, with an estimated annual extinction of 50,000 species. Deforestation is also an important contributor to global warming with a contribution of about 23 percent when considering total GHG (CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>O) emissions; it disrupts weather patterns creating hotter and drier weather, affects water quality and flow, and contributes to soil degradation and desertification.

Scientific research has identified three major challenges and shortcomings in global forest governance: A complexity problem, a regulatory gap, and an implementation gap. The complexity is due to too

many public and private regulatory processes across global, transnational and national levels; the "regulatory gap" is due to public and private regulations addressing only a small portion of deforestation drivers such as timber, but not the so-called "forest risk" agricultural commodities; the implementation gap is due to these regulations being neither efficiently implemented nor effectively coordinated.

This bewildering variety of regulatory and market-based instruments creates, rather than mitigates, policy and market trade-offs, conflicts, leakage effects and loopholes.

Dr. Connie McDermott, Jackson Senior Fellow and Associate Professor Land Use and Environmental Change at the University of Oxford, UK, added, "We are measuring forest change with ever greater accuracy, but are still failing to change it, or assess the human and environmental cost of our efforts so far. Many 'new' global governance initiatives borrow heavily on existing strategies that reinforce power inequalities. Rather than transform the status quo, they promise to do more of the same, only faster and harder.

"What if we shifted more attention and resources away from global metrics, models and target-setting, to seriously assess how global governance is impacting local people and biodiversity, and to support—or at least not stand in the way of—locally driven efforts to foster change? Social science can help us here, by studying power dynamics across scales, how governance works in local context, what are the perspectives of local people, and how can we learn from them. We can help 'scale out' initiatives by supporting networks and learning between different group efforts, rather than expecting them to 'scale up' and become one globally homogenous strategy."

According to Dr. Sotirov, effective international and EU climate-related action against deforestation and forest degradation will require a

combination of supply-side policy measures aimed at producer countries and economic operators (in tropical regions such as Brazil, Central Africa, and Southeast Asia) with demand-side policy measures aimed at countries and companies importing to EU markets (and consuming/trading regions like U.S., China, India, Vietnam etc.). Amongst the most important solutions advanced by Dr. Sotirov are the strong need to make international forest-related policy action and cooperation more coherent, and to integrate actions outside the forest sector (e.g., in agriculture, bioenergy, and mining) with those of forest [governance](#), and vice versa; furthermore, underlying trade-offs and synergies between forest-related environmental protection, social equity, and economic development in the quest for global sustainability need to be addressed and managed more explicitly, and honestly.

Dr. McDermott provides a critical view on the role of the different stakeholders: "The international community is not the 'hero' that will save the rainforests. We will not save the day by swooping in as experts armed with global statistics to stop bad guys from cutting trees, based on astoundingly little knowledge of either the particular forests we are trying to save or the people we are trying to stop. The day will not be saved by political grandstanding about other countries' problems, brand-friendly 'zero [deforestation](#)' commitments, or Big Data. Real and lasting change cannot just be imposed from the outside—it needs to work for people who are directly affected, and who have a long-term knowledge and commitment to particular forests as more than global statistics."

Dr. McDermott has been contributing to the work of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), a worldwide organization devoted to forest research and related sciences.

**More information:** [revolve.media/events/on-imported-deforestation/](https://revolve.media/events/on-imported-deforestation/)

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