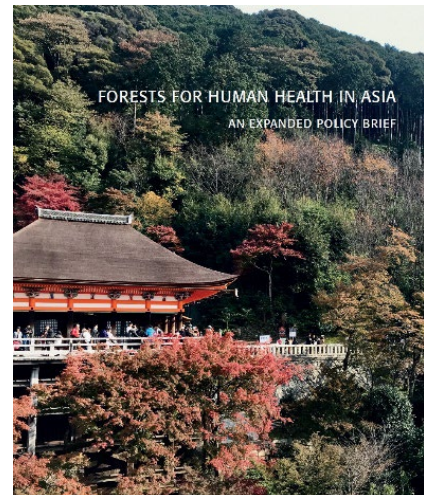


New Asia Policy Brief Calls for Better Integration of Health Benefits of Forests

- *There is a lack of awareness in Asia and elsewhere of the vital relationship between forests and human health.*
- *It is crucial that decision-makers in both forests and health sectors better understand the contexts that deliver health benefits, because there are no simple, one-size-fits-all solutions.*
- *Asia can be considered a cradle of more integrative and close-to-nature healthcare, which is a good foundation for adopting approaches such as the One Health framework.*



(Vienna, 10 October 2023) A new expanded Policy Brief published by the Science-Policy Programme ([SciPol](#)) of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations ([IUFRO](#)) presents consolidated scientific evidence on the relationship between forests and human health in the Asian region. It aims to support policymakers and stakeholders in Asia and beyond, including government officials at all levels as well as global international organizations, in their ambition to ensure sustainable development that takes into consideration the health of humans and nature.

[Download the Policy Brief](#)

The publication titled “Forests for Human Health in Asia. An Expanded Policy Brief” is based on the detailed analysis of information contained in the global assessment report “Forests and Trees for Human Health: Pathways, Impacts, Challenges and Response Options” (IUFRO World Series Volume 41, March 2023), which was developed in the framework of the Global Forest Expert Panels (GFEP) joint initiative of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF). Additional research focusing on Asia was carried out to complement the findings of the global assessment.

[Download the Global Assessment Report](#)

The global assessment confirms that forests, trees, and green spaces have immense potential to contribute to the mental, physical, and social health and wellbeing of humans at all stages of life, from the prenatal stage to the elderly. They provide nutritious food and medicines, support climate change mitigation and adaptation, filter air and water pollutants, and offer areas for recreation. At the same time, poor practices of conservation and management of forests can result in adverse effects on human health with the emergence of zoonotic diseases, forest fires, and allergic outcomes.

“While forests are an important component of climate change and biodiversity policies, there is a lack of awareness in Asia and elsewhere of the complex and vital relationship between forests and human health and wellbeing. Decision-makers need to include forests and human health relationships in relevant policies urgently, as the various global and regional challenges continue to influence both sectors,” says *Dr. Xiaoqi Feng*, Professor, University of New South Wales, Australia.

“Decision-makers in both forest and health sectors should also adopt more integrated approaches such as the One Health framework, which recognizes that the health of humans and the health of animals, plants, and the wider environment are closely linked and interdependent. Asia can be considered a cradle of more integrative and close-to-nature healthcare, which provides a strong foundation for adopting such new frameworks,” says *Dr. Payam Dadvand*, Associate Research Professor, Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal).

Health outcomes of forests and trees differ between urban, rural, and forest-dependent communities. In the context of Asia, although most forests are publicly owned (90% in South and Southeast Asia and 88% in Western and Central Asia, for example), a significant population in the region are forest-dependent communities. Approximately 481-579 million Indigenous People and Local Communities (IPLCs) in Asia depend directly on forests for food, medicine, and livelihoods, all of which affect health and wellbeing.

“Therefore, attention must be paid to ensuring equitable access to resources and improving local livelihoods through tenure rights, as increased access to forest resources can have a significant impact on human health, particularly among forest-dependent communities,” says *Dr. Unnikrishnan Payyappallimana*, Professor, Transdisciplinary University, India.

Asia has also seen large-scale transitions recently, such as a population shift from rural to urban areas. The speed and scale of urbanisation and population growth in cities across Asia over the last 50-70 years have been unprecedented.

This has coincided with a shift in disease burden, where increase in life expectancy and decline in some communicable infectious diseases and infant mortality have been replaced by rising levels of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. In fact, the rise in NCDs in Asia is among the highest in the world and aligns with processes of urbanisation that have fostered car dependency, sedentary and stressful lifestyles, and the adoption of caloric ‘Westernised’ diets.

“There are no simple, *one-size-fits-all* solutions for the design and planning of forests and green spaces for health, as contexts are very different across Asia. It is crucial that decision-makers in Asia in both forests and health sectors understand the contexts that result in positive health and wellbeing impacts to ensure that policies and strategies effectively secure and enhance them,” says *Dr. Shureen Faris Abdul Shukur*, Associate Professor, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Several case studies of natural ecosystem restoration and reconstruction in Asia have already demonstrated the potential to strengthen synergies between health and other benefits from forests while minimising trade-offs. “Successes and lessons learnt from such cases can inform strategies to promote sustainable economic development while maintaining the sustainability of forests and enhancing the provision of essential ecosystem services that contribute to human health and wellbeing, especially among vulnerable population groups,” says *Dr. Cecil Konijnendijk*, Honorary Professor, University of British Columbia, Canada.

[Download regional media release for global forests and human health assessment](#)

About IUFRO

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations ([IUFRO](#)) is a non-profit and non-governmental worldwide network of forest scientists, who work together on a voluntary basis to enhance the understanding of the ecological, economic and social aspects of forests and trees. IUFRO unites more than 15,000 scientists in more than 630 Member Organizations – mainly public research centers and universities – in 115 countries and is a member of the International Science Council. The organization was founded in Germany in 1892 and has been headquartered in Vienna, Austria, since 1973. The [26th IUFRO World Congress](#) will take place in Stockholm, Sweden, in 2024.

About IUFRO's Science-Policy Programme

The [Science-Policy Programme](#) (SciPol) of IUFRO provides a mechanism for effectively mobilizing scientific expertise and information to equip governments and intergovernmental processes with solid knowledge for making decisions that affect forests, trees, and land use regionally and globally.

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*Photo John Parrotta for IUFRO:
Medicinal plants offered on a market in India.*



*Photo Sital Uprety for IUFRO:
People visiting the serene Kiyomizu-dera temple in Kyoto,
Japan*



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Urban development in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia*