

## Reducing forests to carbon sinks poses risk, new report cautions policymakers

- Rising sense of crisis over climate change has caused the 'climatization' of forests that diminishes their value as complex ecosystems and for social welfare.
- There is major untapped potential for policymakers to support long-term, locally driven alternatives to market-based forest governance.
- To achieve an accurate picture of forest governance progress, equity and justice must take center stage rather than relying on deforestation rates alone.



Border between countries with different forest governance approaches. © UNEP Disasters & Conflicts

New York, 6 May 2024 – Launched at the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF19), the first global synthesis report on international forest governance in 14 years reveals the rising trend of the 'climatization' of forests. This reflects a global shift in political attention and financial support towards primarily valuing forests for their capacity as carbon sinks, diminishing their intrinsic role for ecological and social welfare.

Produced by the Science-Policy Programme (SciPol) of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), the report ***International Forest Governance: A critical review of trends, drawbacks, and new approaches***, synthesises the most pivotal developments in international forest governance since 2010. The findings provide actionable insights for land use and climate policymakers to spur the implementation of just and effective forest policies.

The new study reveals that the success of international forest governance to slow down deforestation remains limited and hard to measure. Although there has been some progress in reducing the global rates of tropical deforestation, there is still a rising sense of crisis over climate change, biodiversity loss and increasing social and economic inequalities.

**Dr. Nelson Grima, Deputy Coordinator of IUFRO SciPol states:** *"The current 'playing field' for international forest governance is more crowded and fragmented than ever before, with a plethora of new actors and instruments. The challenge now is to strengthen and coordinate forest policy to address power asymmetries between the different actors."*

The increasing urgency of the climate crisis has influenced the commodification of forests for their carbon sequestration potential. This has led to the rise of new markets for carbon and biodiversity that often focus on short-term economic gains over long-term sustainability and justice. Finance that includes philanthropic and community-led mechanisms offer a just alternative, but so far, have played a limited role.

**Prof. Constance McDermott, University of Oxford, lead author of the report states:** *"Market-based approaches to forest governance such as forest carbon trading and zero deforestation supply*

*chains are becoming an increasingly popular pathway for forest governance and finance, but unfortunately, as the report shows, they risk perpetuating inequalities and producing perverse effects on sustainable forest management. Non-market-based mechanisms such as state regulation and community-led initiatives offer important alternative pathways for just forest governance.”*

**Prof. Franklin Obeng-Odoom, University of Helsinki, lead author of the report**

**adds:** *“Regardless of the finance sources, the underlying common ground must be to pursue social inclusion, redress social-environmental injustice, protect the land rights of resource-dependent communities, and support the transition towards a more just ecological future.”*

As pressures mount on governments and corporate actors to demonstrate urgent action to solve the climate crisis has spurred a “Target Olympics” of far-reaching targets such as zero deforestation or net biodiversity gain. Yet, measuring forest governance success using deforestation rates alone offers a restricted picture, excluding the interconnectedness between humanity and nature.

**Prof. Daniela Kleinschmit, Freiburg University, main lead author of the report, states:**

*“Ambitious and reductionist pledges must be a thing of the past. We are too late on in the game to use win-win narratives and not include the social dependencies and impacts to best understand our forests. Measuring governance has mainly been related to the deforestation rate as the main indicator. However, forests provide many goods and services essential for people, which is why the effectiveness of international forest governance should also be measured against these needs.”*

In response to the challenges of international forest governance, the report calls on policymakers to value forests as more than carbon sinks, prioritise long-term market-based investments and ensure a just and sustainable future for the communities that depend on them.

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to Editors:**

The report analysis is specifically since 2010 when the first global assessment on international forest governance was first published in the framework of the IUFRO-led Global Forest Expert Panel (GFEP). Taking the 2010 report as a baseline, the new study reviews important trends, analyses the forest finance landscape, examines criticism, and suggests alternatives.

The report is due to launch at the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF19) in New York on 10 May 2024 at 1:15-2:30 pm EDT (UTC -4), Conference Room 4.

**Link to the side event webcast:** <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1v/k1vh60svu2>

**Link to the report and the policy brief:**

[IUFRO: International Forest Governance 2024 / Follow-up studies / Science-Policy Programme](#)

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#### **About the Science-Policy Programme (SciPol) of IUFRO**

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. ‘Follow-up studies’ are one of the workstreams of the Programme which build on previously published global assessments and complement them with new available data and developments. Visit: [IUFRO: Science-Policy Programme / Science in IUFRO](#)

#### **About IUFRO**

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations ([IUFRO](#)) is a non-profit and non-governmental worldwide network of 15,000 forest scientists across 120 countries, who work together to enhance the understanding of the ecological, economic and social aspects of forests and trees. Founded in 1892 IUFRO is headquartered in Vienna, Austria. The [26<sup>th</sup> IUFRO World Congress](#) will take place in Stockholm, Sweden, in June this year.