



CPF

Collaborative Partnership
on Forests

Towards sustainability: forest solutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Joint statement by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests





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The COVID-19 pandemic has added an extra dimension of urgency to efforts aimed at tackling global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and inequity. Recognizing that the pandemic is the result of a breakdown in the relationship between human systems and natural systems, the focus of responses to it should not be limited to strengthening health systems and economies but should also encompass the protection of ecosystems and the maintenance of their functions. The pandemic should not be used as an excuse to weaken environmental regulations in an attempt to overcome its economic impact and to foster growth.

Forest and trees underpin many nature-based solutions to the challenges we face, and they need to be integrated effectively into recovery strategies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the global, regional and national levels. Recovery strategies must recognize that ecosystem integrity plays a key role in keeping societies healthy and on a path towards sustainability.

The global community cannot allow this pandemic to reverse hard-won progress in protecting forests, reducing and reversing forest loss and degradation and boosting the sustainable production and trade of agricultural and forest products. Forest landscapes and trees should be at the heart of solutions as we look towards a resilient, sustainable future and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, implementing the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 and its Global Forest Goals, and meeting international forest-related commitments and goals.

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)¹ strongly supports integrating the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of all types of forests and trees outside forests into recovery measures in response to the causes and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to achieve sustainability.

We further:

- *confirm* the importance of healthy, resilient forests in the provision of ecosystem services and in decreasing the risk of virus spillover from wildlife to humans;
- *emphasize* the need to integrate actions such as the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of all types of forests into recovery strategies, including resource mobilization, to ensure that forests continue to act as social safety nets. Forests are especially important in rural areas and for the most vulnerable members of society, providing food, medicine, subsistence and income in times of scarcity;
- *recognize* the importance of a OneHealth² approach to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and in preventing future pandemics;
- *assert* that now is the time to shift to more sustainable and environmentally friendly ways of living based on the best available scientific knowledge, expertise and reliable data to create healthy and productive ecosystems that serve nature and people alike;

¹ The CPF is an innovative voluntary interagency partnership established in 2001 to support the UN Forum on Forests and its member countries and to enhance cooperation and coordination on forest issues. The work of the CPF is guided by its Strategic Vision towards 2030, which provides a solid framework for its future work plans and activities. This joint statement is based on the findings of the Partnership for Development Dialogue, which was held on 25 June 2020 on the theme, "COVID-19 responses: How to integrate forestry in recovery support measures: providing jobs, income and building the basis for a more resilient and sustainable future" in the COVID-19 Forestry Webinar Week and an ensuing discussion among CPF members. More information is available at: www.cpfweb.org/73947; www.cpfweb.org/49203-0374ac635d79b48a6991dec124749ee5a.pdf; www.fao.org/about/meetings/cofo/covid-19-forestry-webinar-week. More information on the response of CPF members to the COVID-19 pandemic is available at: www.cpfweb.org/97404

² www.fao.org/asiapacific/perspectives/one-health

- *commit* to fostering and supporting the implementation of globally agreed forest-related goals and targets for halting deforestation, forest degradation and biodiversity loss; and
- *urge* all to turn this historic challenge into an opportunity by shifting to greener, more inclusive economies and societies that will ensure the sustainability of global development.

Forests provide safety nets in times of crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of several crises now taking place, including those associated with biodiversity and habitat loss, climate change, social disparities and inequity. Forests and trees are affected by all these, and their sustainable management can help mitigate them. The loss of ecosystem services provided by forests has been identified as a contributing factor to outbreaks of zoonotic diseases and to other disasters.

Sustainable forest management, which involves the restoration, conservation and sustainable use of forests, provides essential goods and ecosystem services to support human health and livelihoods. Forest products and ecosystem services have been categorized as essential in many countries in the COVID-19 pandemic. Forests provide security for and increase resilience in communities and among indigenous peoples and the vulnerable, for example by increasing food production, providing medicinal plants and creating sources of employment and income. Key forest ecosystem services are ensuring the fertility of soils, filtering and storing of freshwater: access to clean water is crucial for safeguarding public health.

Worldwide, around 1 billion people depend to some extent on forest foods such as wild meat, edible insects, edible plant products, mushrooms and fish as part of their balanced nourishment. Some 2.4 billion people – in both urban and rural settings – use wood-based energy for cooking.

Investing in forests is investing in our future

Human health and well-being and the health of the planet are strongly interlinked; this recognition should guide policies and planning for the recovery phase. Depleted biodiversity, unsustainable wildlife trade, deforestation and forest degradation create health and safety risks, especially for the poor and disadvantaged. Forests can be a safety net, but they will also be degraded if not managed well.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased awareness of the need for and benefits of living in harmony with nature. This historic opportunity must be seized. The private sector is showing more interest than ever in investing in sustainable, nature-based solutions. The finance sector is increasingly aware of the risks posed to their portfolios by climate change and biodiversity loss. There is a strong need to unlock investment opportunities that strengthen livelihoods, are deforestation-free, and mitigate the risks of future zoonotic diseases. Now is the time for new asset classes that incorporate nature-based solutions as an opportunity to build back better.

Investment in education and human capital relevant to sustainable natural resource management is essential, not only for building a net-zero-carbon future but also for building back better. People living at the margins of societies must be at the centre of recovery plans focused on ensuring equity for the most vulnerable and equal rights for all women, men and children.

Having entered the UN Decade of Action, we need to work harder than ever to achieve sustainability, including by promoting traceable and sustainable value and supply chains. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration presents an opportunity to align efforts to restore forest ecosystems to their full functionality, thereby benefiting livelihoods and biodiversity. The CPF urges all to turn the COVID-19 pandemic – a historic challenge – into an opportunity by shifting to greener, more inclusive economies and societies that will ensure a sustainable future for people and the planet.



