United Nations Environment Programme

Research Report

The Question of:

The sustainable use of forest resources

Introduction

Forests provide both direct and indirect benefits to society on global and local level. The direct benefits are renewable stocks of plants and animals or other resources, while indirect advantages include soil conversation, climate regulation, or watershed protection. Forests also serve as a reservoir of biodiversity and as a source of income for governmental or nongovernmental stakeholders in developing countries, providing the bases for rural and industrial economies.

Forests are often exploited in ways that threaten their potential benefits and contribute to the irreversible acceleration and advancing of deforestation, both in the short and the long term. The challenge is to bring the harvesting of forest resources under sustainable management and to ensure that they benefit a wide range of stakeholders.

The Committee

The UNEP (United Nations Environment Program) is a UNO (United Nations Organization) introduced by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. It is the UN's main authority that sets environmental issues on the global agenda.

Their main focus is to guide institutions, NGOs and governments on the way to a more sustainable world. Furthermore, they assess trends and environmental conditions on a global, regional or national level. The UNEP conducts many operations around the world, which are categorized under: climate change, chemicals and waste, disasters and conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, environment under review and resource efficiency.

This committee follows the standard Rules of Procedure, which means it is not an ad-hoc committee.

Key Terms

Sustainable forest management: using and caring for forests in ways that meet daily needs while protecting the forests for the future.

Biodiversity: the richness of the fauna and flora in an area, which is especially important in tropical rainforests, because of the different species humanity harvests from them.

Economic: used in connection with global or local economics, usually refers to production, industry or agriculture.

Economical: financially beneficial.

Ecological: relating to or concerned with the relation of living organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings.

Deforestation: the cutting of masses of forests without ensuring that it will grow back; ways to avoid it are selective logging, thinning forests and replanting trees.

Erosion: the decline of quality and volume of soil.

Sahel zone: located in Africa, a group of countries that are threatened by the expansion of the Sahara desert.

Exploitation: the act of making use of and benefiting from resources.

International consensus: international general agreement.

Greenhouse gas: a gas that contributes to the greenhouse effect by absorbing infrared radiation. Carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons are examples of greenhouse gases; the greenhouse effect accelerates global climate change (also known as “global warming”).

Stakeholders: a person with an interest or concern in something.

Forest-dependent communities: those communities whose economy depends on forest resources and forest products.

Certification: a procedure by which a third party gives written assurance that a product, process or service is in conformity with established standards.

General Overview

Forest and forest resources fulfil a wide range of ecological, environmental, social and economic functions in both the short and long-term. The issue however lies in the sustainability of the use of the resources, as exploiting the forests could cause disastrous consequences in the future. Sustainable forest management is about maintaining the balance between three main pillars: ecological, economic and socio-cultural, meaning that it has to be beneficial for livelihoods of local people, the protection of biodiversity, and it also has to preserve the ecosystems of the forests and reduce the rural poverty.

In order to understand the sustainable management of forests we have to take into consideration the factors influencing the distribution of the forests, as well as the importance of forest resources, the different types and behaviours of forests and the problems associated with the harvesting of forest resources.

Forests cover one-third of the earth's land mass, performing vital functions and supporting the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people. The factors that affect the distribution of forests are the following: relief, drainage, temperature, rainfall, quality and mass of soil, and human activities. Considering these factors there are 4 main types of forests: tropical rainforest, temperate deciduous forest, temperate coniferous forest and boreal forest. The main threat to them is unsustainable forestry due to exploiting the resources, while natural problems such as acid rain are still in action.

The problem of deforestation is not only caused by the excessive cutting of trees. Other consequences include the erosion of the soil which leads to the complete death of the land, making it impossible for any type of plant to grow there or use as pasture. Meanwhile the forest gets smaller, while the demand for resources by the people stays constant or increases, causing the acceleration of deforestation, and with time the self-destruction will show its effects.

The main cause of the expansion of the Sahel zone is due to deforestation and overgrazing. People have to leave their homes simply because the once green scenery turned into desert. This causes further problems of migration especially in Africa, where other states cannot produce enough supplies for the number of people they have to host in addition to their own people.

Other problems with the exploitation of forests, besides deforestation, include: destruction of water catchment, scarcity of forest resources in the long term, disturbance in the ecosystem and wildlife of the forests, leading to several species becoming endangered or extinct.

On the economic side it is indisputable why the issue of sustainable use of forest resources is of utmost importance, but there are several arguments on the social and economic side too.

Forests are sources of the valuable timber also known as hardwood that has a role in architecture and the production of furniture, as well as fuel and charcoal, a soft wood that can be used as pulp in papermaking, medical plants or substances, or fruits and nuts. All of the previously mentioned sources are gained from forests and they play an irreplaceable role in the economics of several nations and societies.

The most important advantage of forests, however, is not the economic benefit gained from it. Many developing countries depend on forest resources and obtain their revenues mainly from the forest, and keeping biodiversity is important for conservation, but the most important aspect of forests is that through photosynthesis they produce oxygen and purify the air.

There appears to be growing international consensus on the key elements of sustainable forest management: the extent of forest resources, biological diversity, forest health and vitality, productive functions and forest resources, protective functions of forest resources, socio-economic functions, legal policy and institutional framework.

These seven thematic areas were acknowledged by the international forest community at the fourth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests as well as the 16th session of the Committee on Forestry.

Major Parties Involved

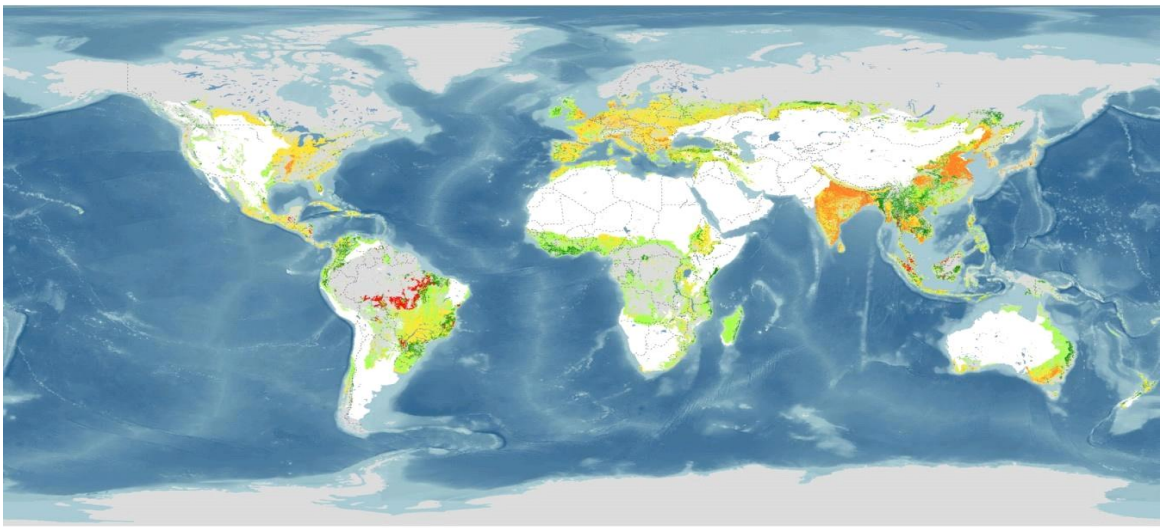
PRODUCT	LEADING COUNTRIES
Timber and wood fuel	Russia, USA, Brazil, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Sweden, Nigeria, France, Finland and German
Timber from hardwoods	Indonesia, Brazil, India, USA, Russia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malaysia and Philippines
Timber from Softwoods	Russia, USA, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Germany and Japan
Wood pulp	USA, Canada, Russia, Japan, Sweden, Finland, France, German, China, Brazil and Norway
Newsprint	Canada, USA, Japan, Russia, Sweden, China, Finland, German and United Kingdom
Rubber and Gum	Brazil, Nigeria
Resin, Pitch, tar turpentine	USA, France, Russia
Cork	USA, Portugal, Spain

The affected countries have to make space for agriculture and utilize their forest resources in order to maintain their economy. That is why it is hard to minimise deforestation in these countries; however, it is crucial for both the affected countries and the international community that they do so in a sustainable way. On global levels the loss of forests has severe economic consequences, while on the local level sustainability would ensure that the economy of developing countries will not collapse in the future.

By 2018 several affected countries have taken steps toward sustainable forest management such as Canada, the USA or most European Countries. The major risk of irreversible deforestation is considered to be in Africa and South America.

A World of Opportunity

A Global Map of Forest Landscape Restoration Opportunities



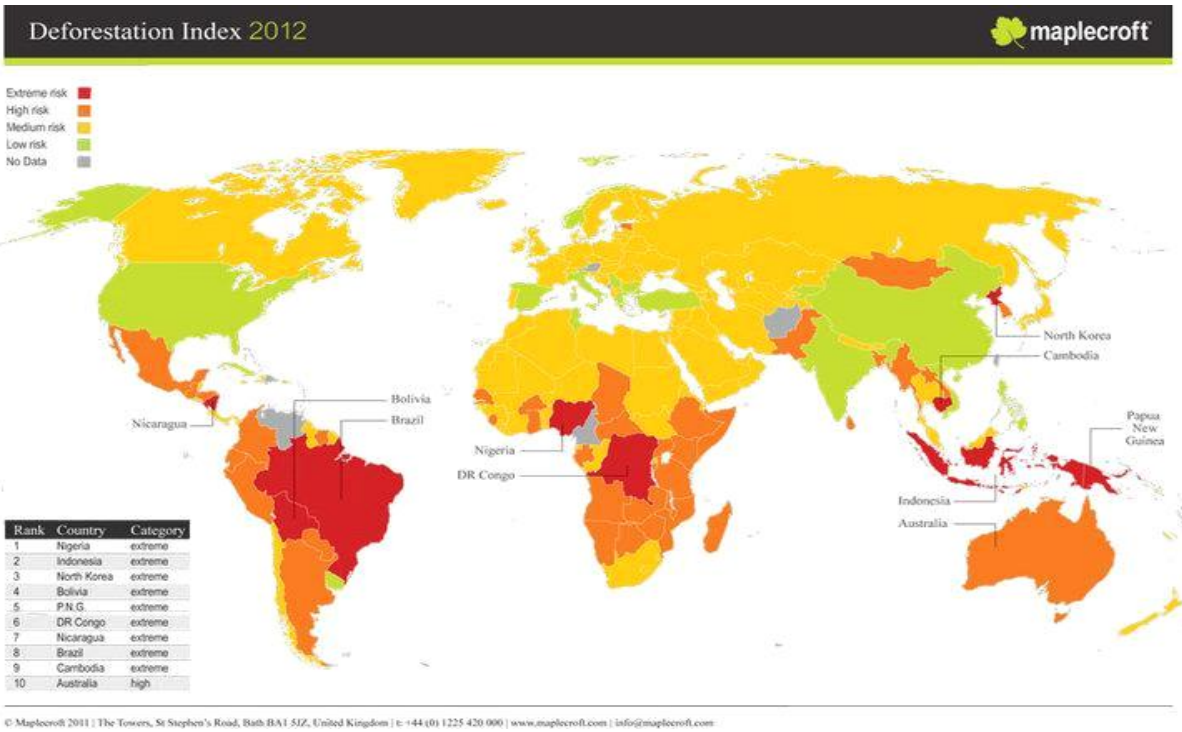
FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION OPPORTUNITY AREAS

- Wide-scale opportunities
- Mosaic-type opportunities
- Protective, within rainfed croplands
- Protective, within irrigated croplands

OTHER AREAS

- Recent tropical deforestation, 2000-05
- Urban areas
- Forest without restoration needs; lands outside the assessment area

www.wri.org/restoring-forests



Rank	Country	Category
1	Nigeria	extreme
2	Indonesia	extreme
3	North Korea	extreme
4	Bolivia	extreme
5	P.N.G.	extreme
6	DR Congo	extreme
7	Nicaragua	extreme
8	Brazil	extreme
9	Cambodia	extreme
10	Australia	high

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Timeline of Events

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests.

Information provided by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Sustainable United Nations team shows that the United Nations (UN) system has offset 17% of its reported greenhouse gas emissions for 2013, a positive step towards meeting Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's ambitious target of the UN system to be climate neutral by 2020.

UN Environment's Climate Neutral Strategy, which also includes participation from a number of Multilateral Environment Agreement and Convention secretariats, is being reviewed in 2013 and the scope expanded to include the management of other environmental concerns such as water, energy and waste.

UN Environment's work to support Climate Neutral UN has resulted in harmonized methodologies within UN, and inspired organizations within as well as outside the UN to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve improved sustainability.

49 UN organizations and three governments have already received or are receiving support from UN Environment, through the provision of tools and methodologies, training, awareness raising, coordination and information sharing.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

As mentioned, in 2007 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests. The instrument was the first of its kind, and reflected the strong international commitment to promote the implementation of sustainable forest management through a new approach that brings all stakeholders together.

In several areas a forest management plan has been carried out taking into consideration the factors mentioned before. However, each of the areas had different certifications, suitable for them. As a result, there is no single accepted forest management standard worldwide, and each system takes a different approach in the determination and definition of standards for sustainable forest management.

There are more than fifty certification standards worldwide, addressing the diversity of forest types and tenures. Globally, the two largest umbrella certification programs are:

- Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)
- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

Certification is intended as a tool to enhance the carrying out of forest management practices on in the international community. Most certified forestry operations are still located in Europe and North America. In affected developing countries the lack of capacity to undergo a certification audit and maintain the operations to a certification standard is a major barrier for forest managers.

National governments sometimes have legal authority over vast forest areas that they cannot control, thus, many protected area projects result in increased biodiversity loss and greater social conflict.

Integrated rural development projects often fail because they are top-down projects that did not take local people's needs and desires into account.

National Forest Funds (NFFs) are dedicated financing mechanisms managed by public institutions, designed to support the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources. As of 2014, there are 70 NFFs operating globally.

The UN Environment has identified three blocks that are essential for a global transformation in the protection and sustainable management of forests: know-how, enabling conditions, and finance.

So far their key initiatives and partnerships to support these building blocks include the following: UN-REDD Programme, Tropical Landscape Finance Facility, Seed Capital Assistance Facility for forest and landscape restoration, Global Forest Watch 2.0, Global Landscapes Forum, Global Peatlands Initiative.

The Future

Possible outcomes regarding the issue may be positive or stagnating if necessary measures are taken, however if not handled appropriately said outcomes could be disastrous. It can lead to the total extinction of species or even whole biological communities. As a consequence forests would disappear and countries depending on forest resources would go bankrupt. It could cause national debt and a global crisis regarding the economy. Another result would include the increase of health issues, due to the deteriorated quality of the air.

On the other hand if certain steps are made, for example generating energy by means that do not require forest resources or just in a limited amount, countries would develop towards a sustainable community, and gain more in the long term. Also they could get support from the REDD+ Programme by the UNEP. Furthermore these countries would contribute to slowing the Global Warming.

These are only a few of the many scenarios the future could bring. Whichever will occur depends on us and the measures we take regarding the issue.

Important Decisions a Resolution Must Take

There are a few ways of addressing the problem facing forests in the world:

- The carrying out of research to determines the growth requirements for different species of trees.
- The enhancement of public awareness about the importance of trees to their environment.
- Encouraging the use of the existed alternatives sources of energy instead of relying on wood fuel and charcoal.
- Encouraging the use of energy-saving stoves which would reduce the amount of woods fuel consumed.
- Making forest management plans in each affected area, suitable for local forest-dependent communities, commercial enterprises, national and regional economies, and the international community.

In simpler terms, the concept of sustainable forest management can be described as the attainment of balance – the balance between societies' increasing demands for forest products and benefits, and the preservation of forest health and diversity. This balance is critical to the survival of forests, and to the prosperity of forest-dependent communities.

While writing your resolution on this issue you should consider the following questions about each solution:

- Who should be the biggest financial contributors to potential solutions? Should they be individual countries who want to contribute willingly or should NGOs provide financial support?
- What timeline to solving the issue do you propose?
- Should resolving the issue be the responsibility of involved member states, or should the UN be responsible?
- What can your country do as a minimal effort but still contribute to the solution?
- What is the greatest effort your country is willing to make?

Any ideas you have and can contribute to the resolution, include them! You can be creative, think outside the box, but stick to your countries policy as much as possible! If your countries policy sets the priorities of matters in a way so that the issue is even negligible to it (e.g.: does not have that huge territory of forests), try to think about the global effects of reaching and maintaining sustainable forest management.

Further Reading

If you have any questions regarding the flow of the debate, the resolutions and policy statements (sample policy statements and sample resolutions included):
https://www.lemun.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Instruction_booklet.pdf
https://www.unenvironment.org/ (You can find accurate and useful information here)

See also: Bibliography

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