



## **Forests & Climate: We need to do much, much more**

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**NEW JERSEY, USA, Oct 20 2021 (IPS)** - Governments agree that saving the climate means saving forests – but ambition and action fall short of what’s required.

First the good news: one of the forest goals agreed by governments, businesses and civil society organizations has been met.



In 2014, the [New York Declaration on Forests](#) (NYDF) set out 10 goals for protecting and restoring the world’s forest. Its latest progress assessment focuses on Goal 7 – on making sure that reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation are part of a global climate agreement.

It’s one of the few goals that we can unequivocally say has been achieved. The Paris Agreement in 2015 enshrined the importance of forests in the international climate agenda. It also incorporated a mechanism to provide forest countries with financial incentives for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, supporting sustainable forest management and enhancing forest carbon stocks (REDD+).

So far, so good. But agreements are one thing – what counts is how they’re put into practice. And on that front, the news isn’t so good.

When it comes to forests, emissions trends are heading in the wrong direction, with [deforestation and forest degradation continuing on a massive scale](#). And we’re already seeing the devastating impacts of climate change with ever more extreme forest fires, from the [Amazon](#) to [Siberia](#) to the [Mediterranean](#) – fires which themselves release vast quantities of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.



As the NYDF progress assessment shows, we need to do far more to harness forests' huge potential to help us mitigate and adapt to climate change. Encouragingly, most countries now recognize the potential of forests in their latest official climate action plans, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs). But many don't yet include quantified targets – and when they do, they are rarely ambitious enough.

Many tropical forest countries' targets are conditional on receiving international climate finance – yet this isn't happening on anything like the scale required. Although tropical forest countries have made strides in developing REDD+ programmes, payments for results have yet to materialize. Domestically and internationally, governments have committed about US\$2.4 billion per year towards forest-related climate mitigation, which is around 0.5-5% of what's needed – and is dwarfed by the subsidies that continue to flow into activities that cause deforestation.

A growing number of NDCs recognize the role of Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as forest custodians, which is a sign of progress. But at least half of IPLCs' customary lands worldwide aren't yet legally recognized – and where IPLC rights are legally recognized, they are often not enforced.

In fact, this is true of forest governance more generally. Many countries now have policies that look good on paper, but they aren't implemented or enforced strongly enough. At least 69% of deforestation driven by agriculture in recent years was [illegal](#) – but happened anyway.

So how do we turn things around? The arguments for conserving and restoring forests are well known, with the COVID-19 pandemic only [reinforcing the link](#) between the health of humankind and the health of the planet. We know the solutions too.

We need greater cooperation across landscapes, sectors and supply chains. Businesses need to eliminate [deforestation and habitat conversion from their supply chains](#). Governments need to implement supportive legislation and incentives – both in forest countries, and in countries that consume products that drive deforestation. The finance sector has to redirect financial flows from activities that drive deforestation and into forest-friendly enterprises. The rights of IPLCs must be

recognized and upheld, while smallholders and communities should receive support to build sustainable livelihoods.

The growing climate crisis adds urgency to all these imperatives. Back in 2015, WWF and others campaigned hard to ensure that the role of forests was recognized in the Paris Agreement. Achieving that goal was a big win. But now we need to go further.

The upcoming COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow is the most important since Paris. It will set the agenda for the coming make-or-break decade. Governments at COP26 must commit to more ambitious action on forests. They must increase the level of forest climate finance by an order of magnitude. Most of all, they must turn words into deeds.

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