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Published: Wednesday | December 14, 2022 | 12:44 AM [Christopher Serju/ Senior Gleaner Writer](#) [1]

Jamaica will need to engage in sustainable forest management through the pursuit of environmental, social and economic sustainability in order to unlock the full potential of the country's forests, says CEO and Conservator of Forests Ainsley Henry. Addressing last Wednesday's inaugural National Forestry conference, hosted by the Forestry Department at the Jamaica Conference Centre, downtown Kingston, he pointed to the the benefits of sustainable forest management, which include managing timber, a renewable resource.

"When timber is harvested and used for durable purposes like housing or furniture, not only does the stored carbon remain locked in the wood, it opens up a space for a new tree which will absorb a great deal of carbon dioxide while growing. Embracing the use of sustainably sourced timber as a substitute in construction instead of materials with a heavy CO2 footprint, such as aluminium, concrete or steel, also contributes to its mitigation benefits. Simply put, from a climate perspective, active forest management, where annual harvesting is below the annual regrowth and utilising the wood for durable purposes, is climate-smart," he said.

Henry stressed that the potential for economic empowerment of communities through the forest sector goes much farther than simply job creation.

"Ultimately, we all share an interest in securing Jamaica's sustainably managed forest resources to provide a flow of quality raw materials to contribute to the national economy and job creation, without compromising the social and environmental benefits of forests," he told the audience. He acknowledged the impact of the European Union's ongoing contribution to the sector, including its recent funding of 46 sustainable alternative livelihood projects to the tune of \$240 million, as part of the budget support for the forestry sector.

"These burgeoning enterprises continue to grow and have launched small-scale businesses that are providing jobs and incomes for their stakeholders. It is our hope that several will grow into medium - and who knows - maybe even large-scale enterprises with continued support. They will expand job creation and economic growth at the local level, and cumulatively contribute to our collective development at the national level."

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The conference was held under the theme 'Forestry as a Business: Unlocking the Economic Potential of Jamaica's Forests'.

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