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Earth Today | Report makes case for sustainable use of forests

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THE RESTORATION of degraded lands together with the sustainable use of forests and the creation of green value chains have been advanced as two of three pathways to successfully tackling climate change and biodiversity loss while also addressing poverty and food insecurity.

The latest **State of the World's Forests Report** of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) – which cites the third pathway as halting deforestation – maintains that the three forest-based pathways support each other.

“When synergies are maximised, the pathways can provide some of the highest returns in the form of climate and environmental benefits while also enhancing local sustainable development potential, adaptive capacity and resilience,” reads the 2022 report.

In order to successfully navigate the pathways, the FAO report proposes policy changes that redirect financial flows “from actions that harm forests and to incentivise investment in conservation, restoration and sustainable use”.

“Finance for the three forest pathways needs to at least triple – to more than US\$200 billion per year for forest establishment and management alone – by 2030 to meet climate, biodiversity and land degradation neutrality targets,” it said.

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The report notes that there exists a framework for REDD+, that is, reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. This framework, it said, provides a useful foundation from which to pivot, especially since its implementation and the financial flows to support it have grown over time.

“This and other related results-based payment schemes could play a key role in supporting developing countries to move along the forest pathways,” the FAO report said.

~~The framework, to which country parties agreed at the 2012 global climate talks (COP18) in Warsaw,~~

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PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are also critical. Companies in forest-based value chains – from production to consumption and disposal – will be essential partners in the development of circular economies. Many are already expanding the range of forest products as substitutes for materials with higher greenhouse-gas emissions and increasing processing efficiency,” the report noted.

“Local forest growers and processors can obtain more benefit by strengthening links with buyers and developing capacity through producer organisations,” it added.

Another important element is the “empowering and incentivising” key stakeholders, among them women, youth and indigenous peoples “to take leading role in the forest pathways. So, too, is awareness raising and policy dialogue, together with “maximising synergies among the three forest pathways and between agricultural, forestry, environmental and other policies and minimising trade-offs”.

The importance of getting a jump on the pathways is not in question, given the value of forests and the risks with which they are faced.

Among other things, trees and forests are seen as critical to limiting climate change, given their role as carbon sinks. Forests, the report reveals, contain some 662 billion tonnes of carbon, which is more than half the global carbon stock in soils and vegetation. Further, even with high rates of deforestation, the years 2011 to 2020 saw forests trapping more carbon than they released – thanks to “reforestation, improved forest management and other factors”.

Other forest benefits include their service as habitats for a range of plant and animal species; providers of freshwater and as a source of direct employment for some 33 million people worldwide.

Yet, 11 per cent of all carbon emissions is the result of deforestation while between 2015 and 2020, the rate of deforestation has been put at some 10 million hectares annually.

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