

Supporting our environment: reducing deforestation

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With forests touching the lives of nearly every person on the planet in one way or another, it is vital that measures are taken to protect forests and reduce deforestation. While economic growth resulting from deforestation and the use of forest resources has lifted billions of people out of poverty in various corners of the world, it has also caused debilitating impacts on our environment. Disastrous environmental trends from climate change to air and ocean pollution, from loss of biodiversity to overuse of natural resources, are putting our ecological balance in danger.

It is time to reverse this trend, and everyone can play their part. Human development depends on how we interact with nature, as consumers, citizens, businesses and nations. The private sector is increasingly influencing and promoting progress: powerful companies need to take responsibility and factor environmental issues into their business growth. Consumers have the power to influence policy by changing their spending habits and opting for reusable, eco-friendly items. Governments need to put environmental regulations at the forefront of their agendas.

The state of the world's forests

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), forests harbour most of the world's terrestrial biodiversity, providing a habitat for 80 per cent of amphibian species, 75 per cent of bird species and 68 per cent of mammal species. They provide humanity with essential resources: close to 1.6 billion people depend on forest resources¹ – such as timber, fuel, food and medicine – for all or part of their livelihoods. And forests have the potential to mitigate climate change effects via carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services. They provide resilience to drought and flooding, prevent sedimentation of dams and irrigation systems, resist desertification, bring rainfall and help address food and water insecurity.

¹ FAO. 2015. 'Forests and poverty reduction'
<http://www.fao.org/forestry/livelihoods/en/>

Yet one of the greatest environmental concerns of our time is deforestation. From 2015-20, the deforestation rate per year was equivalent to the size of Iceland, with an area the size of Libya having been deforested since 1990². The majority of net forest loss is taking place in South America and Africa, with more than 6.6 million hectares per year between these two continents alone³.

Driving this deforestation are human agricultural demands that, ironically, only become more at risk as critical species for agriculture are lost due to deforestation. Whether in the form of subsistence farming or commercial cattle ranching, palm oil or soy production, agriculture is estimated by the UN to directly cause 80 per cent of all deforestation, with logging responsible for a further 14 per cent. One result is increased risk of malnutrition among forest-dependent populations, which comprise disproportionately of the world's poorest people, including indigenous peoples.

Deforestation also diminishes the multiple plant species that are found in forests that are of medicinal use, and increases the risk of disease evolution. Animal species threatened by deforestation, such as the golden-headed lion tamarin, require old forests for their survival, and will undoubtedly become extinct if current rates of deforestation continue unchecked.

Carbon emissions generated by deforestation and land degradation processes are a major factor in human greenhouse gas emissions. As the effects of climate change grow more severe, the sustainable management of forests will be critical in helping communities adapt to resource scarcities, for example by providing resilient sources of food and fuel, and by regulating water supplies.

International action to slow deforestation

In 1972 the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm established that long-term human development depends on our relationship with nature. It highlighted the importance of integrating environmental issues into economic and social planning and decision-making. Since then, greater international efforts towards sustainable natural resource management have been made, not least driven by increasing concern over climate change and biodiversity loss. The New York Declaration on Forests, first endorsed in 2014,

² FAO and UNEP. 2020. *The State of the World's Forests 2020. Forests, biodiversity and people*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8642en>

³ *ibid.*



Photo: Shoa Asfaha

set ambitious goals for stopping forest loss, but most of these will not be met, with the global rate of tree cover loss increasing by 43 per cent following the declaration. The 2015 Paris Agreement endorsed the UN's REDD+ framework, which aims to strengthen governance systems for reducing forest-based emissions, using financial incentives from industrialised countries to support low income, resource-rich countries. And the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) programme (which was supported by UK Aid) has seen some success in making voluntary trade agreements with timber producing countries aimed at reducing illegal logging. Despite these advancements, communities around the world still need to do more to address the alarming environmental concerns, in particular deforestation.

Triple Line's work on forests

As part of this agenda, Triple Line's 'Environment, Forests and Climate Change' team works in partnership with governments, the private sector, donors, civil society organisations and communities globally to foster the sustainable management of forests and protect biodiversity. Our work ranges from providing technical assistance to reduce land degradation and deforestation the design of climate resilient infrastructure, and from helping governments define policies and strategies on sustainable management of forests to setting-up monitoring systems to reduce deforestation and greenhouse gases.

In 2019, Triple Line conducted a mid-term review of FAO's National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), established as part of its commitment to REDD+. The review assessed the quality of the NFMS programme's implementation, and evaluated its relevance, sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness in achieving expected results. The research involved consultations and interviews in DRC with a wide variety of stakeholders to investigate the programme and wider REDD+ process, providing an opportunity to study how internationally backed processes such as REDD+ manifest at a local level. In the case of the DRC, such work is critical as the region is home to approximately 3,000 unique plant species, as well as multiple endangered animal species and nearly 150 distinct ethnic groups, all of which have lives that are intimately tied to the forests.

Triple Line has also been supporting the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) as well as other international agencies with monitoring and evaluation, as well as policy briefs and studies on forest governance, climate and reduction of illegal logging of timber and forest risk commodities such as palm oil and soy.

Conclusion

According to the FAO, 'it is evident that most of the goals and targets related to forest biodiversity have not been met and that the related SDGs are not on track to be met by 2030. It is also evident that current negative trends in biodiversity and ecosystems will undermine progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals'⁴. At Triple Line, we recognise the urgent action needed to preserve and promote the health of forests worldwide; and we continue to expand our portfolio of work on environment, forests and climate change to contribute to sustainable environment. It is critical that our ecosystems are protected and that current environmental problems related to deforestation are reversed. We can help by promoting the sustainable management of forests, supporting the conservation of carbon stocks, demanding deforestation-free supply chains for forest products, and tackling illegal deforestation efforts.

⁴ Ibid.