

Forest's Triple Effect on the Climate

There must be an agreement in Paris to protect and restore forests if we want to see forward movement on saving the climate

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At the **UN Climate Summit in September 2014**, countries, sub-national governments, companies, indigenous people, and civil society came together to sign an inspiring vision for forest protection and restoration, the **New York Declaration on Forests**. The plan called for completely eliminating deforestation and degradation, restoring 350 million hectares of forests, while strengthening forest governance and empowering local communities.

More recently, in July 2015, the United Nations Summit for the adoption of the Post 2015 development agenda – Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, (SDG) agreed to promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally by 2020.

While there is consensus that the scale of action needs to be commensurate with the scale of the problem, it is not clear who needs to do what to **deliver results where it matters the most**: the Indonesian forests and peat lands, the Brazilian Amazon and Cerrado, the Congo basin, and the Russian and Canadian boreal.

Forests are crucial in regulating the world's climate. They contain more carbon than any other land ecosystem and act as carbon sinks by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Forests globally have been estimated to remove almost 9 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide annually¹, equivalent to one fifth of all carbon dioxide emissions globally. Tropical forests alone capture around 4-7 **billion tonnes** of carbon dioxide each year², equivalent to more than **10-15% of all carbon dioxide emissions** globally.

The contribution that forests can make to mitigating climate change is much less than it could be due to massive on-going, often illegal forest destruction. Deforestation, forest fires, logging and other forest degradation globally continue to cause major carbon dioxide emissions contributing to climate change. Tropical forest degradation and deforestation alone have been estimated to account for around 5-8 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, **14-21% of all carbon dioxide emissions globally**³.

Deforestation and degradation therefore have a negative **triple impact on the climate**: they reduce the capacity of the forest land to **capture carbon from the atmosphere**; decomposing trees and forest fires **emit carbon to the atmosphere**; and they make the remaining forest areas more vulnerable to climate change, since forests **mitigate the impact of extreme weather**.

The outcome of the Paris Climate Summit must deliver decisions and clear targets to stop deforestation, drastically reduce forest degradation and facilitate massive forest restoration by 2020, so that in 2050 we have more forests than today. To ensure this occurs, the Paris outcome should direct the Green Climate Fund and other financial mechanisms to prioritise finance to adaptation and mitigation actions which protect natural forests, enhance resilience and restore degraded ecosystems.

1 Pan, Y. et al. 2011. A Large and Persistent Carbon Sink in the World's Forests. Science 333: 988-993

2 Tropical Forests: A Review 2015, International Sustainability Unit

3 Tropical Forests: A Review 2015, International Sustainability Unit

It is essential that, in order to ensure a safe climate and prevent dangerous climate change, fossil-fuel emissions, which is the single biggest source of GHG emissions must be phased out by 2050 and replaced with 100% renewables. However phasing out of fossil fuels alone is not enough. In addition to phasing out fossil fuels, it will be necessary that the new climate agreement ensures the protection of the world's last remaining forests and restoration of forests and other ecosystems.

Mitigation and adaptation through forests and ecosystems must be done with strong **measures to protect against negative impacts on** food security, women and gender, rights of indigenous people and local communities, and biodiversity. The package that is delivered in Paris should ensure that forest protection and restoration is **not used for offsets allowing for continued fossil fuel emissions** through carbon trading. Both these aspects are also key for other crucial land-sector mitigation, such as protecting peat lands and rewetting drained peat lands.

The Paris outcome should ensure that the inadequacies associated with carbon accounting rules in the Kyoto Protocol are not 'imported' into the new climate agreement and should facilitate the delivery of financial resources available for funding both mitigation and adaptation to maximize permanence of emissions reductions and enhanced resilience, including ecosystem resilience. The recognition of synergies between mitigation and adaptation in both the new agreement and previous UNFCCC agreements related to actions in the forest sector will play an important role in this effort.

It is increasingly important that Paris delivers a strong package on finance, in particular for the period pre 2020 due to the urgent need to protect and restore forests and ecosystems. The necessary guidance should be provided to the Green Climate Fund as it now moves into its approvals for projects and programmes and taking into consideration the work of the Standing Committee on Finance related to forests and finance.

For more information, contact:

Cristoph Thies, Forest Expert, christoph.thies@greenpeace.de
Isis Wiedmann, Media Relations, isis.wiedmann@greenpeace.de

For general enquiries, contact:
enquiries@greenpeace.org

Greenpeace International
Ottho Heldringstraat 5
1066 AZ Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 20 7182000

greenpeace.org