

ESTABLISHING FOREST PARTNERSHIPS FOR PEOPLE, BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE

Recommendations for EU International Cooperation and Development

Partnerships are key to leveraging further action to prevent deforestation and forest degradation beyond EU demand for agricultural commodities, whilst achieving crucial co-benefits for people and biodiversity. To be a real game-changer, the EU must propose to its partners a long-term, integrated, ‘win-win’ approach, that meets both EU and partner country interests.

Background

Protecting natural forests around the world is crucial to tackling climate change, biodiversity loss and ensuring sustainable development. Forests are essential for increasing the resilience of societies; absorbing carbon; providing timber, food, energy, medicines and livelihoods to millions of people; stabilizing soil and regulating water flows. Furthermore, expanding human activity along forest frontiers linked to deforestation, is known to increase the risk of animal-to-human infectious disease outbreaks with the potential to turn into pandemics.¹ Human health is closely connected linked to environmental health and the current covid-19 outbreak is a stark demonstration of how the misuse of wildlife can have dramatic social and economic consequences.

The European Commission communication on “Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World’s Forests”² encourages the EU to move towards deforestation-free commodity supply chains which is an extremely important and much needed first step to tackle global deforestation. However, this must be accompanied by actions to support partner countries to become deforestation-free, as laid out amongst the five priorities of the communication: “*work in partnership with producing countries to reduce pressures on forests and to ‘deforest-proof’ EU development cooperation*”. In its December 2019 conclusions, the Council also committed to work with partner countries to “*develop and implement inclusive, ambitious and fair policies to promote action against deforestation and forest degradation*”.

Partnering with developing countries is crucial to ensure the implementation of EU deforestation-free supply chains, as well as supporting partner countries to become deforestation-free. This is critically important to make sure deforestation and forest degradation are tackled in a holistic manner with buy-in from partner governments and civil society in partner countries.

Now is a crucial moment to design partnerships on forests with developing countries, with the future Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) under negotiation, and the European Commission working towards a new comprehensive strategy with Africa³. The European Green

¹ For example, see: Patz et al. (2004) Unhealthy Landscapes: Policy Recommendations on Land Use Change and Infectious Disease Emergence. *Environ Health Perspect.* 112:1092–1098 (2004). doi:10.1289/ehp.6877; and, Loh EH, Zambrana-Torrel C, Olival KJ, Bogich TL, Johnson CK, Mazet JAK, et al. Targeting Transmission Pathways for Emerging Zoonotic Disease Surveillance and Control. *Vector-Borne Zoonotic Dis.* 2015;15: 432–437. doi:10.1089/vbz.2013.1563

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-eu-action-protect-restore-forests_en.pdf

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0004&from=FR>

Deal provides a strong basis for EU action to tackle the inter-related challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and deforestation, including through the mobilisation of development and cooperation instruments to support sustainable development in partner countries. Upcoming key international conferences under the UN conventions for climate change and biodiversity also provide opportunities to leverage international support to tackle deforestation globally.

The EU has substantial expertise in building partnerships with developing countries in relation to forests, through fifteen years of implementation of the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) action plan and related Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs). The FLEGT action plan is instrumental to support timber producing countries to promote transparency, build the capacity of governments, civil society and businesses, and reform relevant policies and lessons can be drawn from its implementation. However, to address the root causes of agricultural expansion on forests and other ecosystems, it will be necessary to go beyond these elements to integrate additional layers, such as land use planning, livelihoods of smallholders and local communities and land tenure rights.

Recommendations

Forest Partnerships should be win-win agreements between partner countries and the EU. They should identify and implement solutions that are inclusive and aim to reconcile different land uses, to reduce deforestation, forest degradation and the conversion of natural ecosystems. This integrated approach should address the root causes of deforestation, including poverty, weak forest governance and land tenure issues, and help achieve a number of linked objectives including biodiversity conservation, climate mitigation and adaptation and socio-economic benefits to Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

DEFINE TAILORED OBJECTIVES

Forest Partnerships should take a comprehensive and integrated approach which encompasses a wide range of sectors, including wood products, agricultural commodities, small-scale agriculture, energy, mining and extractive activities, as well as infrastructure development.

Each Forest Partnership should be tailored to meet the specificities and needs of the partner country. It should support partner countries in implementing their national policies and international commitments, especially under the UNFCCC, the CBD and the SDGs.

These partnerships should pursue overarching objectives, including, but not limited to:

1. **An inclusive approach that achieves poverty alleviation, secures rights and improves governance:**
 - a. **Supporting Indigenous Peoples and local communities:** Recent research shows the role played by Indigenous Peoples in protecting the world's forests has been underestimated and undervalued, especially the most important large tracts of primary, natural forests.⁴ Supporting Indigenous Peoples and local communities to secure and enforce their rights therefore has a significant impact on conserving the world's last remaining forests. Community-led solutions such as community forestry systems, as well as local indigenous knowledge should be promoted and leveraged to support livelihoods and improve conservation management. Forest partnerships should comply with and strengthen human

⁴ Garnett, S.T., Burgess, N.D., Fa, J.E., Fernández-Ilamazares, A., Molnár, Z., Robinson, C.J., Watson, J.E.M., et al. 2018. "A Spatial Overview of the Global Importance of Indigenous Lands for Conservation." *Nature Sustainability* 1 (July): 369–74. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-018-0100-6>

rights, including the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), legal recognition of customary tenure rights, and women's rights and representativeness.

- b. **Supporting small-scale producers:** Small-scale agriculture is a major driver of deforestation in many countries, so supporting smallholder farmers to transition to sustainable agricultural practices is key to ensure country-wide sustainable agriculture. There is also a need to support small-scale producers to make sure they are not left behind or disadvantaged as partner countries adopt more sustainable approaches. Support for small-scale producers should include the generation of decent and sustainable jobs, for example by building up negotiating capacities of smallholder farmers and improving labour and land rights in relevant sectors, building capacity to improve the sustainability of agriculture and forestry practices as well as developing sustainable alternative activities. Examples of incentives can include payment for ecosystem services and agreements with local communities on forest protection and sustainable management, to support community forestry, as well as sustainable agriculture and natural resources management practices.
- c. **Strengthening legal frameworks and establishing multi-stakeholder and participatory processes:** Forest Partnerships should strengthen legal frameworks in partner countries, including through inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches and dialogues on forest policies and governance (including civil society organisations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities and particularly women), and promote transparency, sustainability and accountability in land management. All sectors that are likely to have an impact on forests and other ecosystems should be included in these processes. At the local level, developing multi-stakeholder approaches can be concretised through sustainable landscapes / jurisdictions.

2. Supporting partner countries in achieving global climate and biodiversity goals through nature-based solutions:

- a. **Supporting climate mitigation and adaptation:** The world's last remaining intact forests have a huge impact on climate mitigation. Around 30% of emissions are already removed by intact forests and other ecosystems each year, and additional action on forests and other land use could reduce the remaining net emissions by a further 30% or more.⁵ Recent scientific papers⁶ show that the contribution of degradation of forests and other ecosystems has been dramatically under-estimated and is almost as high as the level of emissions from deforestation. The conservation of forests and other carbon-rich ecosystems is therefore crucial to achieving the objectives of Paris Agreement. As such, Forests Partnerships should support partner countries to implement and enhance their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans, for example, through the inclusion of nature based solutions, such as preventing existing large-scale forest areas from being

⁵ <https://nature4climate.org/about/purpose/>

⁶ For example, Erb, K., Kastner, T., Plutzer, C. *et al.* Unexpectedly large impact of forest management and grazing on global vegetation biomass. *Nature* 553, 73–76 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature25138> and Maxwell et al. (2019) Degradation and forgone removals increase the carbon impact of intact forest loss by 626%, *Science Advances* 5(10), DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.aax2546

deforested or degraded, promoting sustainable agriculture, and implementing large scale restoration, reforestation and management programmes that involve Indigenous Peoples and local communities, respect their rights and enhance livelihoods.

- b. **Conserving biodiversity and enhancing forest ecosystem integrity:** Forests harbour more than 75% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity.⁷ Biodiversity continues to be under threat and greater ambition is needed at the global level to conserve it. Forest partnerships should therefore complement efforts to reach new targets to be agreed under the forthcoming EU Biodiversity Strategy, as well as the global post-2020 biodiversity framework under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This should support partner countries in implementing their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and can cover forest conservation, species-focused conservation programmes, forest and ecosystem restoration as well as watershed management, including by and with the respect of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. A cornerstone of national efforts to conserve species and intact forest ecosystems should be a comprehensive protected areas network that is representative of all elements of biodiversity, effectively and equitably managed, adequately financed and respected in sectoral development plans. The EU should also continue to lead global efforts to reduce defaunation in tropical forests by tackling the unsustainable hunting of wildlife which is a major threat to forest biodiversity.⁸
- c. **Forest and biodiversity-proofing EU development and cooperation funding:** forest partnerships should provide an opportunity to exchange with partners on phasing out funding for projects that drive deforestation, forest degradation, ecosystem conversion and related human rights violations. This could be made concrete through guidelines / methodologies to forest and biodiversity-proof development and cooperation funding, and proactive engagement with relevant partners on this topic – including cooperation with other donors.

3. Supporting efforts to change drivers linked to demand and consumption patterns:

- a. **Promoting sustainable trade in forest and agriculture commodities:** Sustainable trade between partner countries and the EU should go beyond improving the sustainability of the EU value chains to also include support to mechanisms of compliance with potential EU measures to reduce imports causing deforestation. Involving other major trade partners and investors active within partner countries would also be relevant to make sure that other trade and investments are also deforestation-free, beyond only EU supply chains. This objective should be supported by the continuous development of information and monitoring systems – e.g. mapping and remote sensing tools.
- b. **Building capacity to drive behaviour change:** Work to increase the sustainability of supply chains should include enhancing the capacity of relevant stakeholders, such as local communities, smallholders and governments. This could include north-south and south-

⁷ FAO, 2016 State of the World's forests

⁸ <http://www.acp.int/content/sustainable-wildlife-management-programme-launches-inaugural-programme-newsletter>

south exchanges to share best practices, including local indigenous knowledge and access to education and continuing training, particularly for women and girls.

MONITOR AND MEASURE THE IMPACT

The EU and partner countries should determine together concrete and quantified targets and related indicators to monitor the implementation of the Forest Partnerships and measure their social and environmental impacts. Environmental indicators should include the amount of area under conservation measures, the quantity of carbon sequestered, biodiversity status, and ecosystem integrity⁹. Social indicators should include or relate to the jobs created/maintained and related incomes, in particular of smallholders, involvement and land rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Specific targets on participation should be put in place, to make sure Forest Partnerships are inclusive and ensure a representative participation of sectors and stakeholders – particular attention should be given to the participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as women.

LEVERAGE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

1. **Building a “Forest Diplomacy”**

The EU should leverage the impacts of Forest partnerships in international dialogues and processes. Focusing on ‘cleaning-up’ European supply chains will not be sufficient to tackle the issue of deforestation and forest degradation. As stated in the 2019 communication, the EU consumption represents around 10% of the global share of deforestation. If the focus is only on EU supply chains, multi-national companies may simply direct the exports of their sustainably produced products towards the EU market whilst continuing to export products associated with deforestation to other regions.

To maximise the impact of forest partnerships, the EU should invite other major consumer countries to participate and contribute to those, or favour knowledge exchanges to aim at joining forces or replicating such partnerships. The EU must ensure the issue is a priority in bilateral and multilateral dialogues with other major consuming regions and countries to encourage them to take similar measures. This would deliver on the objectives of the Green Deal, the related communication stating that the EU “*will use its diplomatic and financial tools to ensure that green alliances are part of its relations with Africa and other partner countries and regions, particularly in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific*”.¹⁰

⁹ WCS is working with a consortium of scientific partners to develop a new composite index of forest integrity, soon to be published, which will, for the first time will provide a fine scale global index of ecological integrity. Measuring forest integrity is just as important as measuring change in forested area, because reduced ecological integrity affects most of the benefits that forests provide (for biodiversity, climate and Indigenous People and local communities), over huge areas.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf

Furthermore, the EU should work to align key environmental governance mechanisms and institutions (REDD+, FLEGT, Convention on Biological Diversity, UNFCCC) to specifically promote the vital role of community forestry in natural resources management globally, and to embed it as a best practice model and essential safeguard in these mechanisms and institutions, including practical application of such key aspects as land tenure, FPIC and benefit sharing. The EU can also promote a focused effort to expand in-country application of community forestry according to best practice standards, leveraging the influence that REDD+, FLEGT, CBD, UNFCCC provide.

2. Securing adequate financial resources

Sufficient financial resources should be secured to support the development of the Forest Partnerships. Inter alia, we recommend that the future Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) includes a substantial mainstreaming climate and biodiversity target – in line with the European Parliament’s position for a 45% target for climate and environment related spend – and that a specific envelope is earmarked/mobilised for forests. Clear guidelines on forest funding should be defined for the related programming process to make sure this issue is prioritised by EU delegations in priority partner countries.

An EU commitment could also leverage an ambitious global financial commitment for forests at the upcoming CBD and UNFCCC COPs, especially as forests are so pertinent to both the global biodiversity and climate agendas.

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