

# DownToEarth

## **Climatisation caused by commercialisation has reduced forest governance to carbon sinks**

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A United Nations report has warned that the “climatisation” of forests, driven by market-oriented approaches to carbon sequestration, has reduced their role to mere carbon sinks.

The report also points out that this shift in focus is undermining the value of forests as complex ecosystems and diminishing their diverse social functions and intrinsic ecological roles in the process.

The report will be released on the last day of the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF19), marking the first global synthesis report on international forest governance in 14 years. UNFF19 is being held from May 6-10, 2024 in New York, United States.

Titled *International Forest Governance: A Critical Review of Trends, Drawbacks, and New Approaches*, the paper was produced by the Science-Policy Programme (SciPol) of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO). It summarises the most significant developments in international forest governance since 2010.

“The findings provide actionable insights for land use and climate policymakers to spur the implementation of just and effective forest policies,” a press statement from the UN said.

The findings indicated that international forest governance has had limited and difficult-to-measure success in reducing deforestation. Although progress has been made to curb global deforestation rates in tropical regions, the report raises serious concerns over the crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and widening social and economic inequalities.

In the press statement, Nelson Grima, deputy coordinator of IUFRO SciPol, remarked that the current platform for international forest governance is more crowded and fragmented than ever due to the proliferation of new actors and instruments. He added the key challenge for successful governance is to strengthen and coordinate forest policies to reduce asymmetries among these actors.

“The increasing urgency of the climate crisis has influenced the commodification of forests for their carbon sequestration potential. This has led to the rise of new markets for carbon and biodiversity that often focus on short-term economic gains over long-term sustainability and justice,” Grima said.

He noted that while community-led and philanthropic financing mechanisms offer a promising alternative, their role has so far been limited.

Constance McDermott, lead author of the report and professor at the University of Oxford, noted that market-based approaches to forest governance, such as forest carbon trading and zero-deforestation supply chains, have gained significant traction. However, the report highlighted the risk of perpetuating inequalities and creating unacceptable impacts on sustainable forest management.

“Other non-commercial alternatives, such as state regulation and community-led initiatives, could offer pathways for more effective forest governance,” she said.

“Regardless of the sources of funding, the underlying principle should be social inclusion, the redress of social-environmental injustices, protection of the land rights of resource-dependent communities, and a shift towards a more just ecological future,” McDermott stated.

He added that governments and corporate sectors have triggered a ‘target Olympics’ to demonstrate urgent actions to mitigate the climate crisis by setting ambitious goals for zero deforestation or net biodiversity gains.

However, measuring forest governance solely by deforestation rates provides a limited perspective, overlooking the complex interlinkages between humanity and nature.

The report called on policymakers to value forests beyond carbon sinks, emphasise long-term market-based investments, and ensure an equitable and sustainable future for communities dependent on forests.

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