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THE GLASGOW LEADERS' DECLARATION ON FORESTS

DÉJA VU OR SOLID RESTART?



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A highlight of the 2021 COP26 Summit was the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, a set of commitments by 141 countries on the sustainable management of forests. This declaration was the culmination of decades of incremental gains in global efforts to address rampant deforestation, and was greeted enthusiastically by the international media as the Summit's first "major deal".

Indeed, the declaration represents important progress, moving forests into a more central position in global efforts to combat climate change. And it demonstrates a clear recognition that forests are essential in meeting a range of other existential challenges, including biodiversity loss. However, as this policy brief details, the declaration continues a decades-long trend of treating forestry protection with voluntary, unenforceable commitments, looking mainly towards economic incentives rather than implementable political actions at the Member State level. The result is a gradual improvement in networked approaches to governing forests, along with incremental progress in linking forestry protection to efforts to curb greenhouse gases, protect biodiversity, and sustainably use natural resources, but little change on the ground. But as the spread and increase of deforestation over recent years demonstrates, efforts to check deforestation itself have come far short of what is needed.

By tracing the history of forestry protection in global governance over the past forty years, this policy brief contextualizes the importance of the Glasgow Declaration. While still lacking in the kind of teeth needed, the declaration demonstrates important recognition of the centrality of forests to a range of other climate goals, and could be used for more concerted action in the near future. But to do so, it must address three related challenges in today's governance of forests: (1) lack of enforcement, leading to an absence of monitoring or meaningful benchmarks globally; (2) a lack of urgency, given the rapidity of deforestation and rate of climate change seen today; and (3) the omission of crucial drivers of deforestation, namely beef, soy, timber, and other export commodities. As such, today's global governance around forests is too slow, too weak, and too fragmented.

On this basis, the brief recognizes the importance of Glasgow, but argues that it must urgently be built upon with the following steps:

1. The general objective of collectively ending forest loss and land degradation by 2030 should be divided into more specific targets that are cumulative rather than linear, and an action plan should be developed accordingly. This will require identifying, prioritizing and implementing "exponential policies" that curb deforestation the most in those areas undergoing the highest rates of forest destruction and degradation, such as the major rainforest areas.
2. In order to monitor the progress of the declaration and assess its effectiveness, civil society and private sector actors should come together in a cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder mechanism to track and assess implementation of the agreement, with regular reporting of findings and issuing of recommendations at the annual COPs, as well as dedicated meetings.

3. Curbing deforestation within eight years is necessary but should not be achieved at the expense of the well-being of local populations that depend on forest production and who currently find few alternatives for income generation. Sustainable approaches, which respect the principle of free, prior and informed consent and have the meaningful participation of local communities, including indigenous peoples at their core, should be promoted in ways that offer such alternatives, enhancing rather than diminishing from the resilience and well-being of those communities.
4. In light of the ongoing uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on developing countries, including those with extensive forest areas, donor countries and international organizations, including the UN, should ensure that predictable financing is available not only for sustainable forest management and conservation, but also for adaptation more broadly. This is particularly urgent for indigenous and traditional communities in forest areas, who have been hit hard by the spread of COVID-19 as well as by the ecological crisis.
5. The UN should help bridge the gap between the State commitments and the pledges made by private sector actors while ensuring clearer links with major normative frameworks, for instance the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. The *Our Common Agenda* report also offers a basis for such guidance, especially with respect to the goal of "Protecting Our Planet". UN bodies, such as the UN Environment Programme, can assist in this task by identifying best practices in exponential policies for sustainable forest management, while the World Trade Organization can better incorporate considerations of forest supply chains into its key discussions and initiatives.

Ultimately, forests are a clear global public good, a crucial aspect of our efforts to halt global warming and provide sufficient biodiversity for human life on this planet. While the Glasgow Declaration showed a recognition of the importance of forestry protection, it ultimately fell well short of the kind of enforceable commitment necessary to meet the urgent challenge facing us today. As we turn to COP27, the goal should be a quantum leap from the incrementalist approaches of the past – climate change is accelerating, international efforts must accelerate as well.

INTRODUCTION

Far more than in any other United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP), the 2021 meeting held in Glasgow featured the issue of forests and their connections to climate change. Dozens of commitments were announced by private sector actors, civil society organizations (CSOs) and groups of Member States, while the meeting featured the release of the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use. In this declaration, 137 countries (by December 2021, a total of 141, with the inclusion of the Holy See, Nicaragua, Singapore, and Turkmenistan) made a series of commitments on the sustainable management of forests and more transparent supply chains, among other forest-related issues.

Global events demanded these new announcements. As climate change dovetails with environmental degradation, concern with the state of the world's forests among many stakeholders has reached new heights. Human action has already destroyed approximately 40 per cent of the world's forests.¹ From 2015 to 2020, the annual rate of deforestation was estimated at 10 million hectares² – roughly the size of Portugal each year. This degradation has dire consequences not only for the 1.6 billion people who live in and rely directly on forests for their livelihoods, but also for humanity as a whole. Because forests serve as carbon sinks for several greenhouse gases, helping to regulate the planet's climate, the climate footprint of deforestation is massive. Around 2.6 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide – one-third of all CO₂ released from burning fossil fuels – is absorbed by forests annually.³ These facts have not been lost on major institutions of global governance, including the UN. In 2020, a UN report sounded the alarm about the breakneck speed at which ecosystems, including forests, are declining and species are undergoing extinction. On the 2020 International Day of Forests, UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted that forests are being severely degraded through the unsustainable consumption of natural resources, which is also accelerating climate change.⁴

Given mounting international concern over the world's forests, the Glasgow Declaration and its accompanying declarations by major actors was greeted enthusiastically by international media. The BBC heralded the Glasgow Commitment as "the COP26 climate summit's first major deal."⁵ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) presented the deal as representing "pivotal progress" on sustainable forest management and conservation, arguing that the financial pledges, technical progress and commitments made during COP26 mean that real advances are being made in sustainable forest management and conservation.

From the UN's perspective, the agreement seemed to align not only with established frameworks, including the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda, but also with the variety of loose forest commitments accumulated over the years, as well as with the recently issued Our Common Agenda report. Among a broad gamut of goals for the UN system and the international community, the 2021 document includes a general proposal to "Protect our planet" (Goal 2), including several items directly related to forest management, such as "measures for adaptation and resilience," "post-2020 biodiversity framework," and "transforming food systems."⁶

To what extent does the Glasgow Declaration represent real progress towards key forest-related goals, such as curbing deforestation, promoting sustainable management and conservation of forests, advancing reforestation, and making forest supply chains more transparent? What can be done to develop the commitments into tools for effective results in these areas? This policy brief analyses key documents and processes by UN bodies, Member States, private sector actors and civil society organizations (CSOs) in order to identify the deal's limitations and potential. It argues that the agreement is part of a long tradition of UN Member States falling back on non-binding commitments around forests, but that the recognition of links between forests, climate change, and the socioenvironmental impacts of environmental crimes opens up space for stronger action and cooperation by national governments – if they begin acting now. In addition, the Declaration can serve as an important tool for civil society to monitor and assess progress towards sustainable forest management and conservation.

The first part of the brief offers an overview of the Glasgow announcements, while the second section analyses previous forest-related international commitments. The third part of the brief examines the UN's role in promoting sustainable forest management and conservation, and the final part offers key recommendations on how commitments such as those announced in Glasgow can be built upon, rather than rehashed (yet again) in similar future statements.

A PARADE OF COMMITMENTS

Historically, the issue of forests has not featured prominently at COPs. There are two main reasons for this. First, despite the Paris Agreement stressing the importance of focusing equally on mitigation (gas emissions reduction) and adaptation, these conferences traditionally have focused on the former, with far less attention paid to adaptation,⁷ an area in which forests have great relevance. Second, though there is broad understanding in the scientific community of the role of forests in mitigating CO₂ levels, public awareness of how and how much deforestation contributes to climate change, especially through direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions, is still lacking. This is changing. Although an "adaptation turn"⁸ has not yet been reached in the field of international climate negotiations, civil society has become increasingly vocal about the intersections between the climate and sustainability agendas, including with respect to the role of forests. As the UN Environment Programme - Finance Initiative's Climate Lead, Remco Fischer, put it:

"Expectations were incredibly high going into COP26. Civil society – from school children to climate activists – was demanding that decision-makers take urgent action to halt the climate emergency. Emotions were running high amidst heavy criticism of governments and the private sector, including financial institutions, who also came under intense scrutiny."⁹

Demands from civil society help to explain why, more than at any previous COP, nature featured prominently in the 26th edition. As UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson emphasized during the run-up to the conference, new focus should be placed on four key elements: "coal, cars, cash and trees." However, compared to the three C's, trees have tended to remain sidelined, treated as a secondary topic within the broader topic of "nature".

The main headline was the announcement by nearly 140 countries that they would collectively end forest loss and land degradation by 2030. Through the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, these countries, which together account for over 90 per cent of the planet's forested areas (totalling some 3,691,510,640 square kilometers of land), also acknowledged the multifaceted importance of forests. The declaration clearly recognizes the "interdependent role of forests of all types, biodiversity and sustainable land use in enabling the world to meet its sustainable development goals,"¹⁰ thus linking forests to the broader system of global cooperation around climate. In a global governance system in which such linkages have long been resisted, this type of acknowledgement marks a significant change from "territorialist" stances that have led to compartmentalized policymaking, as well as the willful neglect of particular topics.

In another noteworthy discursive shift, the forest declaration addressed not only climate mitigation – "to help achieve a balance between anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and removal by sinks" – but also adaptation, which historically has gotten short shrift at COPs. At times, the text assumes a bold tone, calling for "transformative further action" and reaches into areas that often get dealt with by policymakers as separate issues from forest management and conservation, such as: sustainable production and consumption; infrastructure development; trade; finance and investment; and support for smallholders, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, who depend on forests for their livelihoods and have a key role in their stewardship.

In addition to its broad substantive coverage, the declaration's list of signatories also merits attention. It includes a number of usual suspects, countries that have long championed sustainable forest management and conservation through international cooperation, such as Norway and Costa Rica. There are also dozens of countries that are important to international trade in forest products, both as producers and consumers. But among the signatories are also countries that have resisted robust international commitments for forests, typically by invoking the concept of national sovereignty.

Rather than a stand-alone commitment by States, the Declaration announces a number of related commitments by a variety of stakeholders. For instance, through the Global Forest Finance Pledge, eleven States (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and the European Commission jointly committed to spending USD 12 billion dollars in public climate finance during the period of 2021-2025.¹¹ These Official Development Assistance (ODA) resources are meant to help eligible developing countries – that is, which have increased climate ambition and taken concrete steps towards ending deforestation by the target date of 2030 – to curb illegal deforestation, track wildfires, promote the participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in forest conservation initiatives, and restore degraded land.

The Declaration was also accompanied by commitments focusing on a specific forest area: twelve country and philanthropic donors committed a minimum of USD 1.5 billion towards forest protection in the Congo Basin, the world's second-largest tropical rainforest, for the period of 2021-2025, promising to expand resources in the future by mobilizing finance and investment from a broad gamut of public and private sources while boosting coordination, effectiveness and accessibility.¹² As a recent study found, at current deforestation rates, all primary forest in the Congo Basin will disappear by the end of this century,¹³ this commitment offers a promising platform for concerted action. However, it also contrasts with the lack of similar commitments for the Amazon Basin, the world's largest rainforest, and for the Borneo forested region.

In addition, 14 countries and philanthropic donors committed a minimum of USD 1.7 billion for the 2021-2025 period to advancing the tenure rights of indigenous people and local communities in forest areas, and to support their role as guardians of nature. Given the chronically inadequate resources channeled to supporting indigenous communities – a problem that has become more intense given the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on such populations¹⁴ – this commitment signals a step in the right direction, although more details are needed on how this funding will be used.

Multilateral Development Banks, who have come under criticism for failing to systematically track their impacts on forests,¹⁵ also made new announcements. In a joint statement on "Nature, People and Planet," ten major multilateral and regional banks, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank,¹⁶ issued a number of qualitative commitments, including "mainstreaming nature into analysis," integrating a gender perspective, meaningfully engaging with traditional and indigenous communities, and generally supporting "nature positive investment" and "nature-based solutions."¹⁷

In another initiative led by investors, an additional USD 7.2 billion was secured from private sector actors. The effort counts on support from a number of organizations working at the crossroads of finance and conservation,¹⁸ as well as CEOs from over 30 financial institutions, which together hold more than USD 8.7 trillion in assets globally. These actors have pledged to eliminate from their portfolios and their financing activities all investments in agricultural commodities that fuel illegal deforestation by 2025.¹⁹ In another financial sector commitment, the Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance (LEAF) Coalition, whose goal is to stop deforestation by financing large-scale tropical forest protection, announced it had mobilized over USD 1 billion to fund tropical and subtropical countries that successfully reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and degradation. This was billed at COP as the "largest-ever public-private effort to protect tropical forests."²⁰

With respect to trade, 28 countries, accounting for 75 per cent of global trade in key commodities that can threaten forests, announced they had signed up to the new Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade (FACT) Statement. This was conceived as part of a roadmap of actions aimed at delivering sustainable trade and reducing pressure on forests, supporting smallholder farmers and boosting supply chain transparency.²¹ In addition, 12 companies²² with a combined annual revenue of nearly USD 500 billion, that together manage more than half of global trade in key forest-risk commodities such as palm oil, beef and soy, recognized the "important role of agricultural commodities to address climate change as well as achieve the Sustainable Development Goals" and pledged to develop a shared roadmap for enhanced supply chain action that would be consistent with a 1.5 degree Celsius pathway, by COP27.²³

In other words, COP26 produced a patchwork of commitments by different parties, at different levels of decision-making, with different deadlines and of different scopes. With respect to the forests declaration issued by Member States, however, the announcement recalled a series of earlier efforts to strengthen international commitments to curb deforestation and promote reforestation at large scale – all of which failed to produce meaningful practical results and binding commitments, yielding instead a ragtag assortment of mostly market-based mechanisms that governments are free to adopt, adapt or discard as they please. As for other commitments, although they signal a new level of willingness, especially on the part of private actors, to help curb deforestation, the effectiveness of these pledges will depend on what Fischer has called "concrete, consistent and near-term targets for these to translate into determined, impactful actions."²⁴ Making significant strides towards sustainable forest management and conservation will take far more action. As the next section of this brief details, forests have long been the object of commitment-phobia, especially in relation to binding commitments on the part of UN Member States, and the Glasgow Declaration and its accompanying announcements must be understood in light of these precedents.

A PATCHWORK OF PRECEDENTS

How does global governance contribute to sustainable forest management and conservation? There was much precedent leading up to the Glasgow Declaration but it starts with one major failure. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, UN Member States began debating the need for and desirability of a comprehensive forest treaty. Four big ideas for multilateral conventions were discussed, and three yielded multilateral conventions: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and UNFCCC. A fourth proposal pushed by a coalition of wealthier countries, however, aimed at establishing a Global Forest Convention through a centralized, normative authority over the forest sector, did not come to fruition. The majority of developing countries (G77 and China), including Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea, strongly opposed such a legally binding framework.

At a normative level, despite the failure to reach a consensus for the Global Forest Convention, the Earth Summit produced the founding principles of international forest governance. The “Forest Principles” and Chapter 11 of Agenda 21²⁵ established the foundation for international forestry cooperation based on sustainable development of forest resources.

The failure to reach a consensus among Member States on a global convention on forests meant that the international community had to resort to non-legally binding arrangements, relying on voluntary tools. It also struggled to find an institutional home for discussions of global governance and forests. Subsequently, those debates drifted through a sequence of loose governance spaces. In 1995, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which had been set up in 1992 to ensure follow-up on the Summit negotiations, established the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF). This new body focused on the implementation of UNCED decisions on forests, sustainable forest management, trade and environment, and international organizations and legal mechanisms on forests. However, even these mechanisms faced limitations arising out of the UN's State-centric dynamics. The main cleavage in the panel ran along North-South lines: rich countries demanded conservation commitments from developing countries, while the latter called for concessions on finance and technology transfer from the former. While the panel was short-lived (1995-1997) and yielded no legally-binding treaty, it produced the National Forest Programmes (NFPs), which are still under way in over 160 countries.

In order to follow up on discussions held within the IPF, in 1997, the CSD established the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). Despite furthering discussion of forest principles, it was unable to foster a compromise on a global forest convention during its existence (1997-2000). This outcome frustrated supporters of a global deal because, for a time, some political shifts took place that – to optimists, at least – seemed to portend a global agreement. Some countries heavily interested in the forest industry changed their position and began favouring the creation of a global convention on forests. In addition, a number of African francophone countries that had opposed the convention in 1992 aligned with developed countries for a legal framework on forests.

However, key players, such as most South American nations (especially members of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization – ACTO,²⁶ who promote a strong discourse of national sovereignty around the Amazon), Japan, Australia, and the United States, did not support the creation of the convention and frustrated the renewed attempts at establishing such a treaty. Once again, deliberations were moved to a new policy space: in 2000, the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) was created to continue discussing forest-related issues, but the move was seen as a consolation prize.

The repeated impasses over a global forest convention, especially in light of the advances made in the climate, biodiversity and desertification fields, underscored the limitations of centering global forest discussions exclusively around States and of insisting on binding commitments in the face of deeply entrenched resistance to the idea among certain key players. Combined with the growth and internationalization of environmental movements around the world, those deadlocks ended up having two positive effects nonetheless. First, they opened up space for non-governmental actors such as NGOs, think tanks, academic institutions, activist networks, community organizations, and private sector actors, to enter policy discussions around forest governance and cooperation. During the 2000s and 2010s, participation of civil society and private sector actors in global and regional initiatives for forests increased markedly.

The second trend resulting from the failure to reach a global forest convention was a move away from traditional binding commitments anchored in a single agreement towards a "toolkit" approach, featuring a smorgasbord of responses from which countries could pick. From a political perspective, in practice the UN turned towards less ambitious mechanisms and moved increasingly towards market mechanisms. On the other hand, this catch-all approach allowed for the incorporation of new ideas, including – on occasion – some derived from grassroots experiences, such as community-based ways to manage forests sustainably.

What these attempts at strengthening global governance of forests, whether through binding commitments or a loose portfolio of "pick your solution" mechanisms, have yielded is broad array of arrangements that include market-based approaches to traditional policies for forest protection to zero net deforestation commitments along the supply chain.²⁷ As the limitations of global governance in addressing forest issues come into sharper focus, especially due to the repeated political impasses, national actors – not just governments but also subnational governments, civil society and private actors – remain at the forefront of responses.²⁸ An implicit consensus has emerged: international cooperation around forests is a complement to sustainable forest management and conservation, rather than the main force.

However, there are global governance arrangements that, despite not being focused on forests, are highly relevant to their sustainable management and conservation. All three conventions that opened for signature at the Earth Summit had components directly relevant to forests, and their interconnectedness is increasingly recognized, as the Glasgow Declaration shows. The CBD, for instance, specified forest management and protection as key implementation tools for biodiversity conservation. Likewise, the UNFCCC, as well as the major agreements that followed it, especially the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2015 Paris Agreement, also call for forest protection as a key mechanism for climate mitigation. Within the Convention to Combat Desertification, forests are viewed as central to restoration and recovery of fragile ecosystems and the well-being of their inhabitants.²⁹

In 2000, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF), with three main goals: to promote the implementation of internationally agreed-upon actions on forests at the national, regional, and global levels; to provide a global framework for policy implementation; and to implement the Forest Principles and outcomes of the IPF/IFF. In part due to the non-binding nature of these arrangements, new regulatory frameworks were launched. Perhaps the most influential of these has been the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), with the addition to a "plus" (to make REDD+) as additional issues, such as conservation, sustainable forest management, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks, were incorporated into the framework. REDD+ seeks to make forest preservation more attractive from an economic standpoint through a financial incentive for carbon storage. That idea is that, in return for this, participating countries receive payments for verified emissions reduction and removals, either through a market-based mechanism or government-based one.

Some analysts have interpreted these trends in terms of fragmentation of forest issues in global governance.³⁰ Indeed, the forest-specific principles, discussions, mechanisms and initiatives, are only a part of how the global governance system addresses issues related to forests. There are also a variety of international regimes, agreements, pacts and coalitions that can also be considered a part of global forest governance.³¹ Some of these relate more directly to climate change, addressing deforestation and forest degradation as a driver of greenhouse gas emissions; others focus more on the development aspect, by promoting more sustainable use of natural resources in forested areas.³²

GLASGOW DECLARATION ON FORESTS AND LAND USE PROSPECTS

Within this vast range of global governance ideas and arrangements, it has been pointed out that a previous announcement by States, dating back to 2014, had essentially failed to slow deforestation at all. Much like the Glasgow Declaration, the New York Declaration on Forests³³ was a voluntary and legally non-binding agreement. It aimed to halve deforestation by 2020, and to halt it altogether by 2030. Some 40 governments eventually signed up, but some key countries, like Brazil and Russia, were not among them. A 2019 report found that deforestation not only continued at an alarming rate but had, in fact, dramatically worsened in the five years from when the agreement was announced, and concluded that the deal had failed.³⁴ While the Glasgow Declaration has more than three times as many signatories and the sense of urgency has heightened among concerned groups regarding the ecological crisis, there have been no major or lasting political shifts among key players in forest governance since the New York Declaration. Indeed, dozens of signatories face deeply entrenched interest groups, for instance in the agricultural, mining, and timber industries, and quite a few have proven very responsive to these market interests rather than shown desire in curbing them. The Brazilian Government signed the Declaration, which opened up the possibility of President Jair Bolsonaro giving a speech at the conference after pressure from COP26 organizers.³⁵ However, it is non-binding and therefore does not necessarily require actual policy changes. And, as happened forty years ago at the Earth Summit, political resistance to major steps forward in fighting deforestation, especially via international cooperation, is still often couched in the language of national sovereignty.³⁶

In addition to the chronic lack of political will by key States, three main challenges remain to loose declarations such as those coming out of COP26. First, because such commitments lack enforcement mechanisms, they are poorly monitored. While a general objective has been set – this time, to collectively end forest loss and land degradation by 2030 – there are no specific benchmarks, indicators and processes to allow non-State actors, including civil society, to assess the progress and outcomes of the declaration. In this sense, it remains more a loose promise than a firm commitment, much like the New York Declaration.

Second, that goal is not ambitious enough. The planet is already experiencing a climate emergency, with intensifying and increasingly unpredictable extreme weather events. At current rates of deforestation, major remaining forests, including tropical biodiversity hotspots of the Amazon and Congo Basins, are expected to reach points of irreversible damage. Evidence is mounting that, as natural cycles are altered, the Amazon rainforest is approaching a "point of no return" – a tipping point with dire consequences for local, regional and even global levels.³⁷ While eight years may seem like a bold statement in traditional policy time horizons, the latest IPCC report has sounded "code red" for human driven global heating, as noted by the Secretary-General.³⁸ At any rate, some Heads of State, including that of Indonesia, have already added the caveat that interpreting the Declaration as referring to zero deforestation would be "inappropriate and unfair".³⁹

The 2030 time frame also holds little credibility in light of the Declaration's absence of a corresponding, detailed action plan and of some of its signatories' continued adoption of predatory extractive practices that lead to forest destruction and degradation. Brazil illustrates some of the challenges in international cooperation for sustainable forest management and conservation, as evidenced by Norway's and Germany's suspension of the Amazon Fund – a REDD+ mechanism created to support forest preservation in the region – due to concerns over the Brazilian Government's policies and practices relating to the Fund and alarm over increasing deforestation in the Amazon.⁴⁰

Finally, the Declaration omits a major driver of deforestation: demand for beef, soy, timber and other export-oriented commodities whose production has been driving deforestation. Without specific mechanisms for collaboration with the private sector, including finance, to clean up supply chains in effective and sustainable ways, declarations of intentions to curb deforestation and promote sustainable forest management will continue to sound empty and produce few results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the analysis above, can the Glasgow Declaration be salvaged? The text is, in essence, a political document, which can serve as the basis for future negotiations. It sets out a new goal and correctly mentions the importance of decoupling commodities from deforestation. Such announcements are a step in the right direction, but the deal is too slow, too weak, and too fragmented. In order to build on this announcement and effectively promote sustainable forest management and conservation, the agreement must be supplemented with the following steps:

- By COP27, to be held in Egypt, the general objective of collectively ending forest loss and land degradation by 2030 should be divided into more specific targets, and an action plan should be developed accordingly. This will require identifying, prioritizing and implementing "exponential policies" that curb deforestation the most in those areas undergoing the highest rates of forest destruction and degradation, such as the major rainforest areas.
- In order to monitor the progress of the declaration and assess its effectiveness, civil society and private sector actors should come together in a cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder mechanism to track and assess implementation of the agreement, with regular reporting of findings and issuing of recommendations at the annual COPs, as well as dedicated meetings.
- Curbing deforestation within eight years is necessary but should not be achieved at the expense of the well-being of local populations that depend on forest production and who currently find no alternatives for income generation. Sustainable approaches, which respect the principle of free, prior and informed consent and have the meaningful participation of local communities, including indigenous peoples at their core, should be promoted in ways that offer such alternatives, enhancing rather than diminishing from the resilience and well-being of those communities.
- In light of the ongoing uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on developing countries, including those with extensive forest areas, donor countries and international organizations, including the UN, should ensure that predictable financing is available not only for sustainable forest management and conservation, but also for adaptation more broadly. This is particularly urgent for indigenous and traditional communities in forest areas, who have been hit hard by the spread of COVID-19 as well as by the ecological crisis.
- The UN should help bridge the gap between the State commitments and the pledges made by private sector actors while ensuring clearer links with major normative frameworks, for instance the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. The Our Common Agenda report also offers a basis for such guidance, especially with respect to the goal of "Protecting Our Planet." UN bodies, such as the UN Environment Programme, can assist in this task by identifying best practices in exponential policies for sustainable forest management, while the World Trade Organization can better incorporate considerations of forest supply chains into its key discussions and initiatives.

Ultimately, forests are a crucial aspect of our efforts to halt global warming and provide sufficient biodiversity for human life on this planet. While the Glasgow Declaration showed a recognition of the importance of forestry protection, it ultimately fell well short of the kind of enforceable commitment necessary to meet the urgent challenge facing us today. As we turn to COP27, the goal should be a quantum leap from the incrementalist approaches of the past – climate change is accelerating, international efforts must accelerate as well.

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