IUCN UNFCCC COP30 TECHNICAL BRIEF: FORESTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Unlocking the Power of Forests for Climate Action

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As COP30 convenes in Belém, in the heart of the Amazon, forests are at the centre of the global climate agenda. They are among the most effective Nature-based Solutions, absorbing nearly one-third of global CO_2 emissions each year (1 Pan et al. 2022, 2 IPCC, 2022), regulating water cycles, conserving biodiversity, and supporting the livelihoods and well-being of hundreds of millions of people. At the same time, continued deforestation and forest degradation are diminishing these vital contributions, with significant implications for global mitigation (3 WRI 2025) and adaptation efforts. Recognizing the multiple roles of forests within the climate system is therefore essential for shaping an ambitious global response under the Paris Agreement.

COP30 offers a chance to spotlight and strengthen the role of forests in global climate policy and action in a concrete way that enhances their multiple benefits for mitigation, adaptation, and sustainable development. Building coherence across forest protection, conservation, sustainable management, and restoration will be crucial to ensuring their long-term contribution to climate and biodiversity goals, and to human well-being. Key ways of achieving this, which also build directly on previously agreed commitments, would include the following:

1. Advancing the 2030 Deforestation Pledge

- Collective action is critical to halt and reverse forest loss and degradation by 2030, in line with the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (Target 10) and the 2023 Global Stocktake (GST) outcome.
- Raise awareness of the crucial importance of primary forests for climate change mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and human health, while recognizing that not all forests are the same.
- Strengthen national forest governance, through enforcement of forest laws, secure tenure systems, and inclusive decision-making that recognizes the rights, knowledge, and central role of Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs).

2. Reflecting Forests in NDCs and Long-Term Strategies

- Including quantified, time-bound restoration, conservation, and sustainable management targets on forests in the new NDCs will directly help to achieve the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C.
- The preparation and updating of NDCs by Parties can benefit from clear technical and policy direction to support the revision LULUCF sector targets within them. Updates could demonstrate progress on national actions to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation by 2030, as well as enhanced efforts to increase forest protection and restoration—including that of primary forests—and reflect how the NDC preparation has been informed by the outcome of the first GST.

3. Scaling Up Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR)

- Achieving global FLR commitments such as the Bonn Challenge and collectively bringing 350 million hectares under restoration by 2030 will require sustained finance and technical support
- FLR contributes to just transition strategies by supporting job creation, local economies, and climate resilience. Project-level and regional analyses find restoration creates substantial local employment — one World Bank analysis summarised restoration projects as generating roughly 2–4 million jobs across sampled initiatives (4 Merry et al. 2023)

4. Financing High-Integrity Forest Action

- Innovative financing mechanisms such as the Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF) provide a potential model for securing the long-term protection of tropical forests and the stability of their carbon stocks by linking sustained finance with verified conservation outcomes.
- Expanding the range of financing instruments—such as forest resilience bonds and green bonds that blend public and private capital for large-scale restoration and conservation; debt-for-nature swaps that channel debt relief into long-term forest protection and community-led programmes; and payment-for-ecosystem-services (PES) mechanisms with robust social safeguards—can strengthen the overall effectiveness and equity of high-integrity forest finance, ensuring that benefits reach IPLCs.
- Improving direct access to forest-related finance through existing UNFCCC mechanisms, notably the Green Climate Fund (GCF), including through results-based payments under REDD+, would enhance the capacity of countries and communities to contribute to and benefit from forest-climate action.

5. Ensuring Nature-Positive Energy Transitions and Enhancing Cooperation and synergies across the Rio Conventions to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation by 2030

- Expansion of renewable energy and other related infrastructure to support the energy transition that is needed to achieve the 1.5°C should avoid contributing to forest loss or degradation or the conversion of other natural ecosystems.
- Apply the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions to guarantee high-integrity forest interventions.
- Align UNFCCC climate action in the land sector with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the UNCCD to promote coherence in policy objectives and implementation.

Forests are not merely a sectoral issue — they underpin global climate stability. COP30 in Belém represents a historic opportunity to turn political momentum into coherent, measurable outcomes that safeguards the future of the Amazon, the world's forests, and the global climate system.

Sources:

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