

Halting deforestation: Striking the right balance between human and planetary needs

According to FAO Deputy Director-General Maria Helena Semedo in her keynote address to an international conference on halting deforestation, changing the way we manage lands, food production and forests is key to guaranteeing food security.



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Rapid population growth accelerates global demand for forest products and services including timber, fibre, fuel, food, fodder and medicine. The demand for wood alone is expected to triple to 10 billion cubic meters by 2050. On the other hand, the population growth also increases demand for agricultural production and converting forests to arable land to meet this demand remains one of the major drivers of deforestation, in particular in tropical and low-income countries.

Innovative approaches to land management

Noting that in the last 25 years, over 20 countries managed to improve food security while maintaining and even increasing forest cover, Semedo said: "This shows that we have the knowledge and tools to stop global deforestation. The right mix of policies on afforestation, reforestation and integrated land-use can lead to real success. But this calls for ambitious, concerted action across all agricultural sectors and beyond, underpinned by political and societal will. Addressing these interlinkages requires innovations in institutions, governance and policies," she added.

"Over the past 25 years, the rate of net global deforestation slowed by more than 50%," said Manoel Sobral Filho, director of the United Nations Forum on Forests, in his keynote address to the conference. "If the current trend of slowing forest loss, combined with forest restoration and plantation efforts continues, a future where we achieve zero net global deforestation can go from being an aspiration to reality."

In his address, Amedi Camara, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Mauritania and president of Council of Ministers of the Pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall, stressed the importance of the Great Green Wall initiative for the African continent for its major contribution to combatting desertification, sustainable management of natural resources and the fight against poverty and climate change.



A garden that stretches across Africa

Ruan Scott 3 Mar 2016



In her keynote address, Christiana Figueres, an internationally recognised leader on global climate change and champion of the Paris Agreement, advocated a human-centred approach based on individual motivation and unleashing the potential of those local communities that would benefit the most from halting deforestation.

Tony Simons, director general of the World Agroforestry Centre, provided convincing arguments in his keynote for addressing underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation in an integrated manner. Solutions must be rooted in economic realities.

The international conference

The *International Conference on Working across Sectors to Halt Deforestation and Increase Forest Area - from Aspiration to Action* is the first major technical conference on forests since the adoption of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the first-ever [United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030](#) (UNSPF).

As most of the drivers of deforestation lie outside the forest sector, the conference brings together officials from ministries from different sectors, including forestry, agriculture, livestock and environment, as well as the private sector, small producer organisations, civil society, and indigenous peoples associations.

The three-day event aims to promote dialogue across sectors and stakeholder groups on how to collectively achieve the globally agreed targets of halting deforestation and increasing forest cover. The outcomes will be brought to the attention of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development of the United Nations that will review progress towards achieving [Sustainable Development Goal 15](#) on "Life on Land" in July of this year.

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