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A GLOBAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

FORESTS AS PILLARS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The Global Forest Expert Panel (GFEP) on Forests for Social and Economic Resilience assembles 14 Panel Members from 10 different countries. They were supported by 8 additional experts, making a total of 22 authors, 11 female and 11 male. The report underwent a thorough peer- and expert-review process by 9 reviewers.

Importance

- Forests cover 31% of the Earth's land and are crucial for biodiversity, climate regulation, and human well-being.
- Around 4.2 billion people (95% of all people outside urban areas) live within 5 km of a forest.
- Forests support 1.6 billion people directly and all global populations indirectly.

Resilience

- Forests mitigate the effects of disturbances on social and economic systems and provide sources of adaptation as humanity copes with a rapidly changing planet.
- Forest ecosystems support cultural practices, enhancing community cohesion and resilience.
- Forest access and secure rights help restore equity imbalances.
- Forest-related small-scale food systems are a major source of local and regional food production, generating income as well as nutritious food security, biodiversity, and cultural vitality.

Craig R. Allen, Nelson Grima, Viola Belohrad, and Brendan Fisher (eds.), 2025. Forests as Pillars of Social and Economic Resilience. A Global Assessment Report. IUFRO World Series Volume 45. Vienna.

CPF Collaborative Partnership on Forests

IUFRO Interconnecting Forests, Science and People

Threats

- Between 1990 and 2015, the total global forest area declined from 4.28 to 3.99 billion ha (31.85% to 30.85%). In the same period, planted forests expanded from 167.5 to 277.9 million ha (from 4.06% to 6.95% of the total forest area).
- Forests face increasing pressures from multiple drivers, including global climate change species invasions, wildfires, logging, fragmentation, over-extraction of forest products, and conversion of forest to non-forest land uses such as housing or agriculture.
- Forest policies emphasising a sustained and maximised supply of timber result, in many cases, in social conflicts, rural poverty, and a declining quality and quantity of forests.

Economic significance

- It is estimated that global forest production value exceeded USD 1,500 billion in 2022.
- Between 3.5 and 5.8 billion people make use of or are dependent on Non-Timber Forest Products. For example, the international trade of pine nuts and forest mushrooms was worth USD 1.8 billion in 2022.
- Globally, about 4 billion m^3 of wood are harvested annually (2.04 billion m^3 of roundwood and 1.97 billion m^3 of fuel wood in 2022).
- An estimated 33 million people (1% of global employment) work directly in the forest sector.
- Around 350 million Indigenous people live within or near forests and depend almost entirely on them for subsistence.
- Ecosystem services and other non-marketed goods from forests and other ecosystems account for between 47% and 89% of the total source of livelihood for rural and forest-dwelling poor households.

Climate and disaster risk mitigation

- Mangroves dissipate wave energy and act as buffers against coastal storms, reducing flood damage and lowering disaster response costs.
- Coastal and mountain forests protect against landslides and extreme weather.
- In the EU, storm protection through forests is expected to reduce climate-related costs by up to 35% by 2050.
- Urban trees mitigate the impacts of heat waves by providing urban cooling, thus reducing the urban heat island effect and saving energy for cooling.

Health and well-being

- Forest therapy reduces stress and improves mental health.
- Forests regulate vector-borne diseases, supporting public health.
- Having access to forest contributes to relational, subjective, and material well-being.

Ways forward

- Transformative changes are necessary that address the drivers of forest decline including dominant approaches to wealth accumulation driving environmental collapse.
- We need an adaptive mix of approaches fitted to and linked across different settings, emphasising collective action, social equity, and environmental sustainability.
- Integrating the ten key resilience-enhancing attributes into policy and management is critical for the future of forest social-ecological systems (see list in the policy brief and report).
- Examples of response options with significant resilience enhancing potential are: integrated-fire management; community-based agroforestry; adaptive collaborative management of forests; and recognising and securing land and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.