



Background Paper

FORESTS AT UNFCCC-COP21: BRIEF

FOREST BASICS

FORESTS ARE GLOBAL

- Forests cover one-third of global land surface and are home to 80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity. Over half of the world's forests exist in just five countries: Canada, United States, Brazil, Russia and China.
- The most biologically diverse and complex forests are tropical rainforests. They produce 40% of Earth's oxygen and store more carbon than any other land-based ecosystem. Yet, they only cover 6% of the earth's land surface.

MORE THAN TREES

- After oceans, forests are the world's largest storehouses of carbon. They are known as carbon sinks because they absorb the greenhouse gasses that produce climate change.
- The amount of carbon absorbed by forests depends on the species of trees and their age. A recent NASA study found that the Amazon rainforest alone absorbs 2.2 billion tons of carbon dioxide annually.¹
- Forests affect our lives daily, from the air we breathe to the food we love. Every single person in the world benefits from the resources forests provide.
- Approximately 1.6 billion people rely directly on forests for their livelihoods. Think about the chair you're sitting on, the tissue you use to blow your nose or the paper for printing—forest products can be found in everyday items, from furniture and food to medicines and cosmetics.

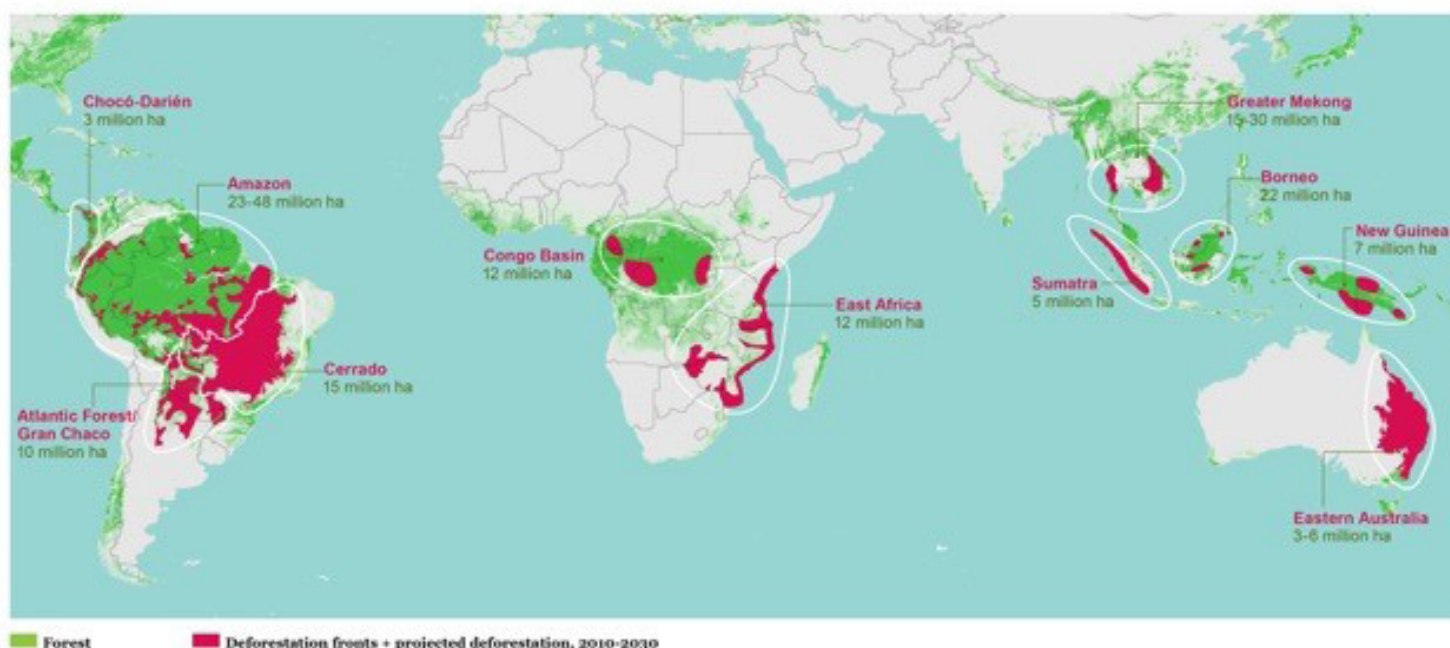
FORESTS UNDER PRESSURE

- As forests are lost or degraded, they can become sources of harmful greenhouse gases instead of carbon sinks. Deforestation and forest degradation are the largest sources of CO₂ emissions after the combined emissions from all cars, trucks, trains, planes and ships in the world.
- Changing agricultural practices, due to an increased population and shifts in diet, is responsible for most of the world's deforestation. Illegal and unsustainable logging, usually resulting from the demand for cheap wood and paper, is responsible for most of the degradation of the world's forests. The threats are so severe that we are losing forests at a rate equivalent to 48 football fields per minute.

¹ <http://www.livescience.com/44235-amazon-rainforest-carbon-cycle-measured.html>

- In the last 25 years alone, the world has lost a forested area the size of South Africa. The biggest forest area loss in the last two decades has been in the tropics, particularly Africa and South America.²
- More than 80% of deforestation between 2010 and 2030 is likely to happen in just 11 places. If business as usual continues, more than a quarter of the Amazon could be treeless by 2030. We could see a global loss of forests equivalent to the size of Germany, France, Spain, and Portugal combined.³
- The amount of wood we take from forests and plantations each year may need to triple by 2050 to meet the world's growing demand, placing additional pressure on forests.⁴

Figure 1 – Global Deforestation Fronts



² <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4793e.pdf>

³ http://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/living_forests_report_chapter_5_1.pdf

⁴ http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/deforestation/forest_publications_news_and_reports/living_forests_report/

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