

VOICE

— UN DESA —

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Better data – for people and planet

With the help of trusted data, our world can track progress on development targets. How is the world faring when it comes to eliminating extreme poverty, combating climate change or achieving gender equality? Reliable and timely statistics hold some of the answers. During the COVID-19 crisis, data have also played a critical role in efforts to save lives.

On 28 February to 2 March and 4 March, statisticians from across the globe will come together virtually at the UN Statistical Commission to advance this work further.

“This important annual gathering comes at a time when we continue to feel the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its devastating impact has created an urgent need to harness the power of data,” UN DESA’s Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin said when he opened the 53rd session on 28 February.

Our Common Agenda, the UN Secretary-General's vision on the future of global cooperation, features prominently a green, sustainable COVID-19 recovery and efforts to address the twin biodiversity and climate change crises. The report asks the global community to identify complimentary measures to GDP and "urges Member States and others to start implementing the System of Environmental Economic Accounting Ecosystem Accounting" (SEEA EA).

At the opening session, Mr. Liu highlighted the Statistical Commission's contribution to go beyond GDP through its work on "updating the System of National Accounts and the development of the System of Environmental Economic Accounting" to obtain "new measurements of progress of sustainability and people's well-being."

During its 53rd session, the Commission is expected to adopt a global framework for climate change statistics and indicators. This framework has been developed to support countries in preparing their own sets of climate change statistics and indicators and will support international climate change reporting to the Paris Agreement as well as the climate-related SDG indicators.

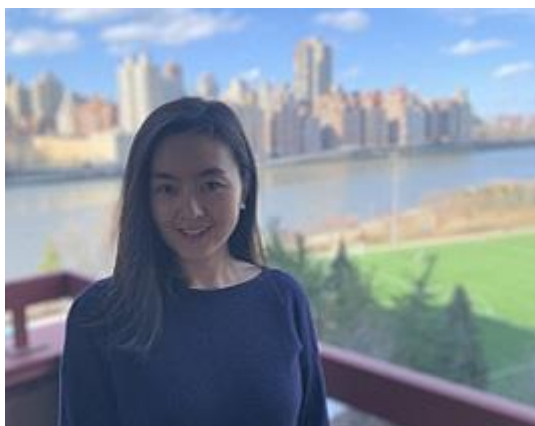
To effectively address the climate crisis, policy makers need to assure that nature is properly accounted for in economic decision-making. This can be accomplished through the realization of the SEEA, which was adopted at last year's session. A global implementation strategy for the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting, aimed at scaling up activities, will be presented to the 53rd session.

As in previous years, the Commission will consider almost 40 substantive reports addressing a wide range of issues including data stewardship, open data, national accounts and censuses.

Learn more about the [UN Statistical Commission](#) and follow the session live via [UN Web TV](#).



EXPERT VOICES



Trees for life – an inspiration to live more sustainably

"Regardless of where we live, the world's forests sustain us all," says Yan Lang, Programme Management Officer, in UN DESA's Forum on Forests Secretariat, as we catch up ahead of the International Day of Forests on 21 March. Ms. Lang describes the current state of our forests

and what actions we can take to protect them.

Forests play a critical role for life on Earth. Can you explain why and give some examples?

"Forests and trees have sustained life on Earth for millennia. They are diverse, complex living ecosystems that are home to rich flora and fauna – from microscopic bacteria and fungi to flowering plants and towering trees; from birds, bees, and butterflies to bears,

deer, and primates. Furthermore, forests are home to people, including indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities. They sustain the livelihoods of people in rural communities, including billions who depend on smallholder agriculture for their subsistence. For many communities, forests are a source of food, fuel, and health – including fruit, nuts, mushrooms, insects, wild animals, wood, and medicinal plants. And regardless of where we live, the world’s forests sustain us all; through the water we drink, the air we breathe, the rain that nourishes our crops, and the social and cultural values that forests and trees embody.”

How would you describe the current health of our forests?

“The health of forests varies across regions and biomes. The good news is that in recent decades net deforestation rates have slowed by more than 50 percent, largely due to sustainable management by countries around the world who have invested in protected areas, restoration, and afforestation. The bad news, however, is that despite these efforts, deforestation and forest degradation are still taking a toll on our forests. While illegal and unsustainable logging poses a threat to forests, the biggest driver of deforestation remains agricultural expansion. This creates a conundrum – large tracts of forests are being converted to farmland and livestock grazing land to meet the immediate needs of food security; at the same time our long-term resilience depends on safeguarding the health of these forests and the rich biodiversity they hold within. To address this, we need to transform agriculture and food practices into more sustainable consumption and production systems.”

What actions can children and youth take to make a difference for our trees and forests?

“Action begins with knowledge, and you can start by learning more about how forests are faring in your neighborhood. Support your local parks and forests by visiting them and joining community events. Talk to your family members and friends about buying sustainably produced forest products. Find ways to reduce waste and conserve the water and energy you use at home and school. Learn how you can support local and environmentally friendly businesses and raise awareness about reducing carbon footprints. Every sustainable choice that you make in your daily life, ultimately benefits our forests and trees. Furthermore, the creativity of the youth can be tapped into to promote ecosystem restoration, not just to plant trees, but also to address the key drivers of deforestation and forest degradation through promotion of agro-value chain, circularity and sustainable consumption and production.”

This year’s International Day of Forests focuses on sustainable production and consumption. Can you tell us more about the theme and the event this year? How can trees inspire us to live more sustainably?

“Every year, we celebrate the International Day of Forests on 21 March, and through the theme of the Day, we raise awareness on the many ways that forests sustain us. This year’s theme focuses on sustainable consumption and production, which is all about restoring balance in how we use natural resources. It is about increasing efficiency while minimizing pollution and environmental degradation. Ultimately, it is about making better choices and creating sustainable lifestyles for ourselves, and our future generations. Given enough care and planning, forests can provide us with a wealth of renewable resources to benefit our daily lives.

This year, we at UN DESA’s UN Forum on Forests Secretariat will organize a special virtual event on 21 March in celebration of the International Day, which will feature senior UN and government officials, technical experts, and stakeholders, each of whom will share their inspiring forest stories. I hope that you will join us at the event via UN Web TV.”

For more information: [International Day of Forests](#)





4 things you need to know about groundwater

The human family and our planet all depend on water for our survival. Yet, 2 billion people lack safe water today. To raise awareness about this critical resource, the world comes together every year on 22 March to celebrate World Water Day. This year is all about groundwater – making the invisible, visible. Here are 4 things you need to know about groundwater and the Day:

1. Core focus is to achieve water and sanitation for all

World Water Day celebrates water and raises awareness of the 2 billion people living without access to safe water. It is about taking action to tackle the global water crisis. A core focus of [World Water Day](#) is to realize Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: water and sanitation for all by 2030. The yearly celebration is coordinated by UN-Water and led by one or more UN-Water [Members](#) and [Partners](#).

2. Latest water trends create momentum for change

In the lead-up to 22 March, people and organizations host World Water Day events and participate in the global public campaign, launched in the preceding months on <http://www.worldwaterday.org/> and on social media. On World Water Day itself, the [UN World Water Development Report](#) is released, focusing on the same topic as the campaign and recommending policy direction to decision makers.

3. A hidden treasure that quenches our thirst

Groundwater is invisible, but its impact is visible everywhere. Out of sight, under our feet, groundwater is a hidden treasure that enriches our lives. In the driest parts of the world, it may be the only water people have. Almost all of the liquid freshwater in the world is groundwater, supporting drinking water supplies, sanitation systems, farming, industry and ecosystems.

4. Groundwater plays critical role to adapt to climate change

In many places, human activities over-use and pollute groundwater. In other places, we simply do not know how much water is down there. Groundwater will play a critical role in adapting to climate change. We need to work together to sustainably manage this precious resource. Groundwater may be out of sight, but it must not be out of mind.





SDG BLOG



Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo
Director, UN Forum on Forests Secretariat



Healthy forests offer a path to a better climate and greener future for all

By Ms. Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo, Director, United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat, UN DESA

The world we live in is beset with crises of epic proportions – from the global pandemic that has upended life as we knew it, to the looming threats of irreversible climate change and biodiversity extinction, coupled with rising pollution and unsustainable consumption and production.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed systemic vulnerabilities and inequalities in our development paradigm. From negative trade and economic downturns to rising poverty and food insecurity – the pandemic has left no one unscathed and has put in jeopardy the hard-won progress the world had made towards sustainable development. It has been a stark reminder that our health is deeply interlinked with our environment. Zoonotic diseases typically emerge when natural landscapes are degraded as a result of resource extraction, large-scale deforestation, illegal trade in wildlife and climate change, and other stresses.

The global crises we face today are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. And the one common element in all of this – is us. Our planet is paying the price of our unsustainable choices, and the way we consume natural resources is accelerating biodiversity loss and exacerbating climate change. A recent study found that governments around the world spend at least \$1.8 trillion per year, about 2 percent of global GDP, on subsidizing industries that are harmful to our environment. Imagine the possibilities if these resources could be redirected towards nature-friendly policies?

Albert Einstein once said, “In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity.” And according to a Somali proverb “He who does not seize opportunity today, will be unable to seize tomorrow’s opportunity”. To move away from the dangerous precipice we are on, we must chart a new path, one that puts us back on track for achieving the 2030 Agenda and gives us hope for a better future. As a lifelong forester, I would put forth that healthy, well-managed forests are one such pathway, and can be a solution to many, if not most, of the crises we currently face.

Forests cover 31% of our planet’s land area and provide habitat to 80 percent of all land-based species. Forest ecosystems regulate our global climate, rainfall patterns, and watersheds. They act as carbon sinks, absorbing about 2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide annually. Sustainably managing the forests we have, and restoring the health of forests that are degraded, is critical to closing the emissions gap and regaining balance within our natural ecosystems.

Forests can help address many pandemic-induced challenges, including economic recession, increased poverty and widening inequalities. The forest sector has a proven track record in generating jobs that only require relatively low capital investment. In some countries, forests are already being employed as part of COVID-19 recovery plans through job creation in afforestation, reforestation, and agroforestry activities.

While forests support us and provide a safety net in times of need, they are also under threat. Deforestation, climate change, and forest fires, among others, continue to threaten the future of our forests. When Members of the UN Forum on Forests crafted the Global Forest Goals – the first goal they put forth was to put an end to deforestation and forest degradation, and a pledge to increase forests by 3% by 2030.

As populations continue to grow, it stands to reason that future demand for forest products and other natural resources will also grow, putting pressure on forest ecosystems. It is estimated that if we don’t change current consumption and production patterns, and if our population reaches 9.6 billion by 2050, we would need almost three planets to sustain us. We only have one planet, it is time we rebalanced the equation to be more efficient and thoughtful with resources we take and to make sure that the footprint we leave is as small as possible.

The issues we are grappling with today are not new and have been decades in the making. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the 1972 Stockholm conference, where the links between the environment, development, and poverty alleviation were recognized and placed at the forefront of the international agenda. In the past 50 years, we have had ample time to increase our knowledge, develop policies and reimagine the sustainable future we want. We have set our aim high through the 2030 Agenda, Global Forest Goals, Paris Agreement, and global biodiversity framework.

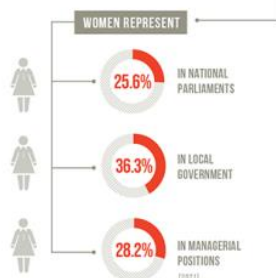
This month, as we celebrate the International Day of Forests on 21 March – let us plant the seeds of hope to reimagine a better future for forests, people, and planet. Let us not forget that it is not too late to take decisive action to reshape our shared future. If we join forces – governments, international organizations, the private sector, local authorities, and individuals alike – then we can create a world with more forests, richer diversity, less poverty, and a cleaner, healthier environment for all.



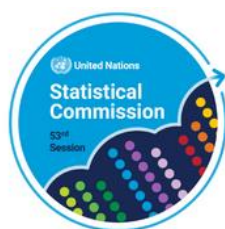
SDG 5 IN NUMBERS



WOMEN'S EQUAL PARTICIPATION
IN DECISION-MAKING IS CRUCIAL FOR
COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY,
BUT GENDER PARITY REMAINS FAR OFF



COMING UP



MORE EVENTS

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