

SUMMARY

R20AWS Breakout Session

Forest Responses to Climate Change: Why African Forest Matter

The breakout session was jointly organized by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism (BMNT), the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) as part of the R20 Austrian World Summit.

Background

Forests are the largest terrestrial carbon store. They can sustainably produce woody biomass to replace fossil fuels; and solid wood products can substitute other energy intensive materials. In addition to their crucial role in mitigating the worst impacts of climate change, forests provide a multitude of ecosystem goods and services that are vital to human well-being and to the protection of biodiversity. Climate change, however, also severely threatens forests and trees. Africa is expected to face particularly high impacts from climate change. Moreover, people in Africa are highly dependent on forest goods and services and therefore particularly vulnerable to climate change.

Against this background, renowned experts from Africa discussed with Austrian representatives from government and research about how to capture more fully the mitigation potential of forests and at the same time reduce the vulnerability of forests and people to climate change.

Outcomes

Main challenges & drivers

- Temperatures in all African countries are rising faster than the global rate; this warming is very likely to persist for centuries to millennia and will continue to cause further long-term changes in the climate system, with associated impacts on forests and other terrestrial ecosystems;
- Global warming is adding to a range of other non-climate-related pressures on forest ecosystems in Africa, such as population pressure, overexploitation of forest resources, and the increasing need for agricultural land. Africa is also one of the most rapidly urbanizing continents;
- These drivers put immense pressure on the continent's biodiversity and nature's contributions to people and will increase overall under all plausible future scenarios;

Recommendations for action

- Yet, there are **measures** to increase the sequestration and storage of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and to reduce the vulnerability of forests and people. Such measures include forest landscape restoration and rehabilitation, as agreed under the Bonn Challenge and related regional initiatives, and strategic investments to protect and mobilize sufficient, diverse and high-quality tree seeds and planting materials;
- Such measures must be based on the best available scientific evidence and must be supported by effective **governance frameworks** that are sensitive to community needs and provide for the equitable sharing of benefits and responsibilities;

- For **science** to have the desired impact on policy and practice, however, there is a clear need to increase investment into Research & Development on the African continent, and to build more sustainable scientific and educational institutions, including those aimed at training practitioners;
- **International collaboration** should be guided by the principle to conduct research not on Africa, but together with Africa. The portfolio of existing and planned new programmes and initiatives for cooperation and networking between Austria and African countries, including through IUFRO, support this approach and have potential to accelerate the impact on the fight against climate change.