CLOSING THE FOREST AMBITION GAP IN NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS

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Back cover photo: Pak Super, a 31-year-old rattan farmer and community activist from Kalimantan, Indonesia. © Matthieu Paley

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, WWF and Climate Focus published Raising the bar: Strengthening forest ambition in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) which assessed the NDCs of 130 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) representing 156 countries (129 individual countries plus the 27 Member States of the European Union) each with at least 100,000 hectares of forest cover and therefore capable of having an oversized impact on the trajectory of global progress on halting and reversing deforestation by 2030[1]. In November 2025, ahead of COP30, an updated report, 'Closing the Forest Ambition Gap: An assessment of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs)' reviewed 39 NDCs 3.0 and 79 BTRs of countries in this group.

As of 28 February 2026, an additional 45 NDCs 3.0 were submitted by countries in this group, bringing total to 84 NDCs 3.0 (83 individual countries plus the 27 Member States of the European Union – total of 110 countries), as published on the UNFCCC NDC Registry. **This report assesses how these 84 Parties incorporated forests into their NDCs 3.0 and examines changes in their level of ambition and action compared to their previous NDCs.** In line with the call to action from the first Global Stocktake (GST1) in 2023 for Parties to enhance their climate ambition and implementation, this analysis provides insights into how countries are responding to that mandate in the forest sector. A full description of methodology is provided in the Annex of the 2025 report here.

There is no credible pathway to achieving the Paris Agreement goals without ambitious forest action. At COP28 in 2023, the first Global Stocktake (GST) formally emphasised the need to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation by 2030, alongside enhanced financial, technological, and capacity-building support[2]. Parties are expected to embed this ambition into their NDCs, updated every five years, setting countries' climate commitments under the Paris Agreement. The recent round of updates (NDCs 3.0) was due to be submitted by the 30th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP30) in Brazil in November 2025.

Given that forests under Indigenous stewardship are among the most well-protected and resilient globally, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are central to forest outcomes worldwide. Forests targeted in NDCs frequently overlap with Indigenous territories, making the recognition of their land rightsv and governance systems as critical enabling conditions for ambitious, effective and equitable forest-based climate action.

COP30, held in Belém at the heart of the Amazon, marked an important inflection point for global action on forests – providing the political foundation for a COP30 Presidency Roadmap for halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation[3] which is expected to be launched at COP31 in Türkiye. Although no standalone forest decision was adopted by the Parties[4], political momentum gathered around the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), which was formally launched at COP30 with more than USD 6.7 billion in announced contributions, and endorsements from countries[5]. While full capitalization remains pending,[6] the TFFF is intended to be a mechanism to provide long-term, predictable financing to countries that protect and sustainably manage their tropical forests. Complementing this, technical partners are working to support tropical forest countries to meet the eligibility requirements and access funds, as well as foster South–South cooperation and exchange.[7]

Beyond the formal negotiations, the COP30 Presidency's Action Agenda positioned forests within a broader framework connecting land use, agriculture, biodiversity, and climate resilience.[8] Led by the Climate High-Level Champions of the COP29 and COP30 Presidencies, the Action Agenda has set a five-year vision and implementation plan that builds on the past decade's achievements and charts a unified, action-oriented path toward climate ambition and delivery through 2030.[9] It lays out a comprehensive approach to mobilize governments, cities, businesses, investors, and civil society to accelerate existing climate commitments in light of the first GST. Structured around six thematic axes—including stewarding forests, oceans and biodiversity —the agenda is implemented through dedicated Activation Groups that build on past COP initiatives to advance 30 priority objectives. Activation Groups follow a four-step implementation cycle—coordination, measurement, showcasing, and scaling—designed to align actors, track progress, elevate proven solutions, and amplify impact through 2028.[10]

Axis 2 of the Action Agenda: Stewarding Forests, Oceans and Biodiversity prioritizes scaling investments to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation, while promoting the conservation, protection, and restoration of ecosystems through integrated solutions that simultaneously address climate change, biodiversity loss, and desertification.[11] Of the 118 concrete Plans to Accelerate Solutions (PAS) under the Action Agenda, 14 are related to Axis 2. Forest-related PAS focus on integrated land-use planning, financial decision-making and investment, synergistic implementation across the Rio Conventions, sustainable food systems, and nature-based climate solutions.[12]

In addition, several other forest-related initiatives were launched at COP30. The Scaling Jurisdictional REDD+ (J-REDD+) Coalition aims to mobilize USD 3–6 billion annually by 2030 to halt tropical deforestation through high-integrity jurisdictional finance.[13] Meanwhile, over 50 countries have backed a Call to Action on Integrated Fire Management to strengthen wildfire resilience through data sharing, Indigenous leadership, and early-warning systems.[14] In parallel, 15 governments endorsed the Intergovernmental Land Tenure Commitment (ILTC), pledging to secure 160 million hectares of land for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, with major commitments in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Colombia, and Brazil[15], supported by the UN-REDD Programme and other technical partners.

Therefore, **the period between now and 2030 represents a decisive window for implementation**, and for alignment between national climate plans and emerging international forest initiatives. The COP30 Action Agenda and its Plans to Accelerate Solutions provide structured pathways for delivering forest-positive investment, integrated land-use planning, and sustainable agriculture and food systems transformation. The Roadmap for halting deforestation is expected to translate political ambition into coordinated milestones, finance mobilization, and technical cooperation. However, **neither the Action Agenda nor the Roadmap for halting deforestation can deliver impact in isolation. Their success ultimately depends on whether countries embed these priorities within their NDCs and their implementation frameworks.**

At the national level, NDCs operationalize international commitments by defining measurable targets, sectoral policies, and budget allocations. At the international level, stronger and more detailed NDCs enhance the credibility and effectiveness of initiatives like the Action Agenda, TFFF, and Jurisdictional REDD+ Coalition by creating predictable pipelines for finance and accountability. They also provide the foundation for collective stocktaking of progress towards the goals of the Paris Agreement. In this way, international solution pathways and initiatives can catalyse finance and coordination, but NDCs remain the mechanism through which forest ambition can be embedded in national climate policy processes leading to concrete action and measurable outcomes.

FOREST AMBITION AND ACTION IN NDCS 3.0

SUMMARY FINDINGS

The main takeaway

Findings of this analysis are mixed. While some countries show progress toward incorporating forests to fulfil the mitigation and adaptation commitments of the Paris Agreement, there are still shortcomings in forest-specific ambition and implementation. Overlooking these priceless ecosystems comes with immense risks not only for the climate, but also for biodiversity and sustainable development. Addressing these issues in isolation undermines progress. A holistic, systems-based approach remains the most cost-effective and efficient way to drive the necessary changes at the pace required to meet global goals set for 2030.

Challenges and areas for improvement

- Forest ambition remains critically low among NDCs 3.0 and is not aligned with the first GST outcome decision mandate on deforestation. Only two NDCs (Moldova and Mexico) explicitly commit to achieving zero deforestation by 2030, and only 10 NDCs reference paragraph 33 on 'halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030' from the first GST outcome decision. And only 29 NDCs set specific forest-related emission targets.

- Measurable quantitative targets for key actions are also uncommon: only 23 NDCs include targets for deforestation, 28 for degradation and 24 for sustainable forest management. Specific measures for forest governance – addressing corruption, illegal activities, land tenure and land rights – appear in only 27 NDCs, and just 42 NDCs explicitly reference forests in their measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) plans, despite their critical role in tracking progress.

- When it comes to specific forest-related policy measures, sustainable forest management is the only widely integrated policy measure while other key measures are minimally considered. Sustainable forest management is mentioned in 58 NDCs. Fewer NDCs include other policy actions, such as agroforestry (40 NDCs), community forest management (32 NDCs), payment for ecosystem services (19 NDCs) and deforestation- and conversion-free supply chains (11 NDCs).

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Bright spots and positive trends

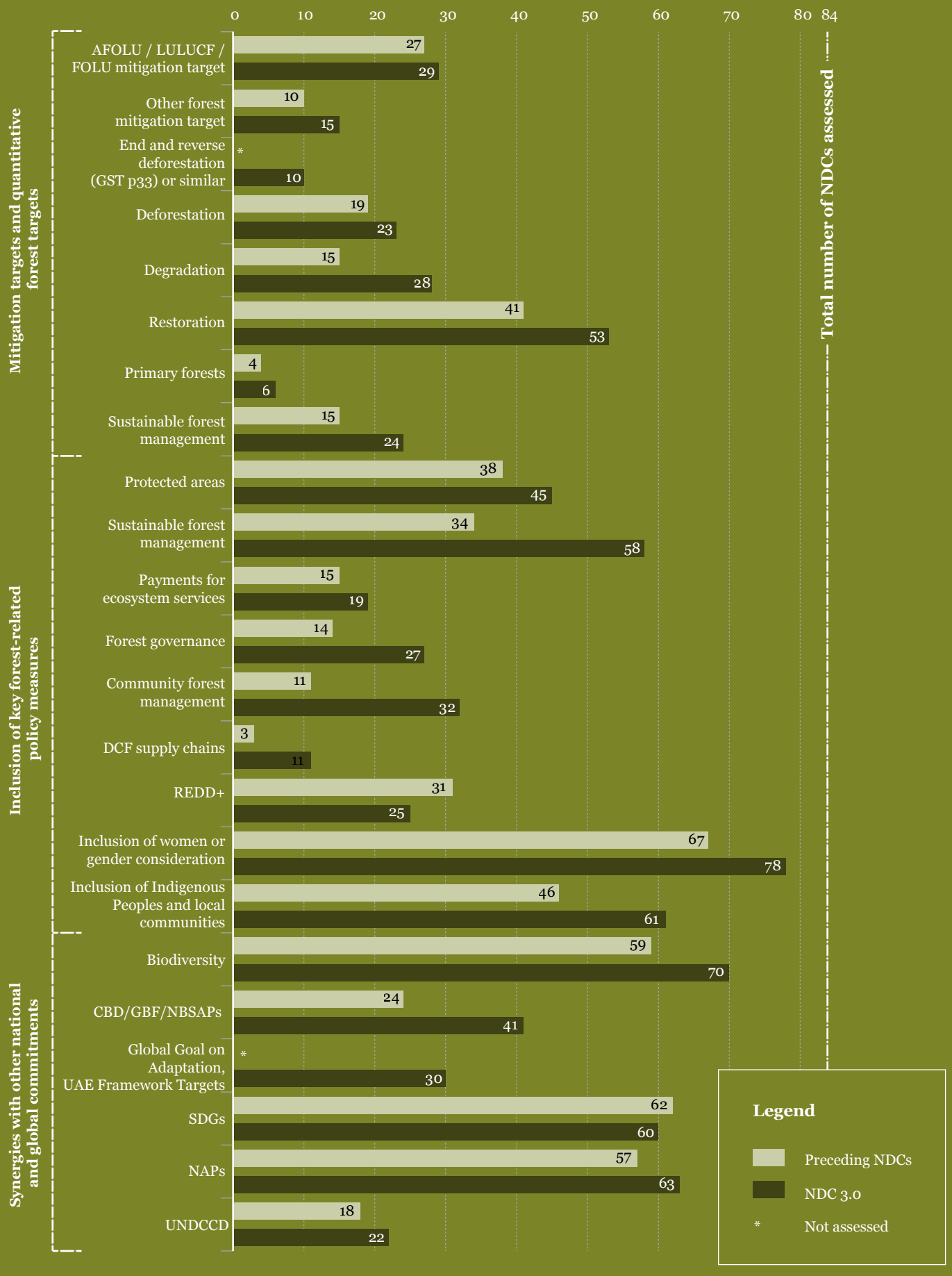
- Restoration targets are the most prevalent, appearing in 53 NDCs with some form of quantitative goal, including 17 with adaptation-related targets. Sustainable forest management and protected areas are the most common policy measures, appearing in 58 and 45 NDCs respectively.

- Considerations for underrepresented groups are relatively strong, with 78 NDCs mentioning gender and 61 referencing Indigenous Peoples and local communities, but mainly in the context of climate mitigation. However, references to Indigenous Peoples are predominantly descriptive. Most NDCs do not specify how Indigenous Peoples participated in NDC design or make references to Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) when applicable, land rights, and equitable benefit-sharing.

- Additionally, 60 of the 84 NDCs 3.0 acknowledge synergies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 41 reference the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), or National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), 63 refer to National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and 22 mention the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). This recognition and alignment across policy frameworks is essential for fostering coherence and maximizing the impact of climate action.

- Encouragingly, there is increased recognition of forests' role in climate action since the previous round of NDCs, with significantly more NDCs 3.0 setting targets and policy measures for forests compared to their predecessors (Figure 1). While the absolute level of ambition and action on forests has significant room for improvement, this upward trend signals positive momentum. These trends are largely similar to the findings in the UNFCCC 2025 NDC Synthesis Report that assessed previous and updated NDCs of 64 Parties. The Synthesis report finds that compared with their previous NDCs, more Parties included in their new NDCs forest-related climate action particularly afforestation/reforestation and sustainable forest management.

Figure 1. Integration of forests in NDCs 3.0 among 84 Parties compared to their preceding NDCs



TRENDS IN INTEGRATION OF FOREST IN NDCS 3.0

A commitment to ending and reversing deforestation by 2030

Among the 84 assessed NDCs 3.0, **only 10 Parties reference paragraph 33 of the GST outcome in their NDCs**. **Only two Parties – the Republic of Moldova and Mexico – explicitly commit to achieving zero deforestation by 2030**. For instance, Mexico sets a goal of reaching zero net deforestation by 2030, while the Republic of Moldova aims to achieve net-zero emissions in the energy sector by mid-century and to halt deforestation and forest degradation by 2030. References to Paragraph 34 are minimal, with only two Parties — Brazil and Suriname — explicitly mentioning it.

Paragraph 33 of GST outcome decision emphasizes "*the importance of conserving, protecting, and restoring nature and ecosystems towards achieving the Paris Agreement temperature goal, including through enhanced efforts towards halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030*" while paragraph 34 notes "*the need for enhanced support and investment, including through financial resources, technology transfer and capacity-building, for efforts towards halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030*".

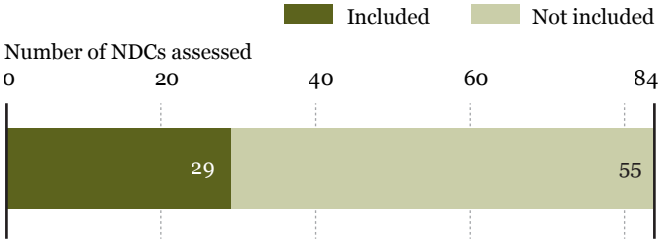
Economy-wide and forest-related emissions mitigation targets in NDCs 3.0

Of the 84 Parties that have submitted NDCs 3.0, 81 include an economy-wide emissions target, but only 29 set separate specific forest-related mitigation targets (e.g., AFOLU, FOLU, LULUCF), which are critical for reducing emissions from deforestation and land-use change.

While 81 of the assessed NDCs have an economy-wide mitigation target, just 29 include a quantitative separate forest-related emissions mitigation target which includes sectoral targets for Forestry and Other Land Use (FOLU), Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use (AFOLU), and Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry (LULUCF). Furthermore, only 15 of assessed NDCs include other sectoral forest-related mitigation targets (e.g., increasing forest area). The current lack of quantitative sectoral targets suggests that Parties have a long way to go in recognizing the importance of forests for meeting their overall emissions mitigation goals (Figure 2).

Parties that have set specific, time-bound mitigation targets related to forests provide informative examples. Belize for example sets a conditional AFOLU sector target to increase its cumulative carbon sequestration potential from 2,555 kt CO_2e (2.555 $MtCO_2e$) in 2030 to 5,110 kt CO_2e (5.11 $MtCO_2e$) in 2035 from 2020 business-as-usual levels. Cambodia sets FOLU mitigation targets of a 30% reduction (unconditional) and 148% reduction (conditional) as compared to a 2035 business-as-usual pathway.

Figure 2. Quantitative emission reduction targets for forests (e.g., AFOLU, FOLU, LULUCF) in NDCs



Changes from the preceding NDCs

Compared to the previous NDCs of these 84 Parties, inclusion of **economy-wide and quantitative forest mitigation targets has improved**.

In their NDCs 3.0, 81 Parties include economy-wide mitigation targets (compared to 74 previously), and 29 Parties feature quantitative forest-related emissions mitigation targets (compared to 27 previously).

Quantitative targets for forests in NDCs 3.0

Most quantitative targets for forests are included in the mitigation sections of NDCs. Fewer outline quantitative adaptation targets for forests.

Restoration targets are the most prevalent within the mitigation section of assessed NDCs, with 47 NDCs including some form of quantitative goal. Nineteen NDCs contain measurable targets for deforestation and 25 for degradation, while sustainable forest management for mitigation benefits appears in only 19 NDCs. Just five NDCs include mitigation measures to conserve primary forests. None of the NDCs include measures to protect Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).

Within the adaptation components of NDCs, only seventeen NDCs include quantitative targets for forest restoration, while just four address forest degradation and four establish explicit deforestation targets. Conservation and protection measures remain limited: none of the reviewed NDCs explicitly reference KBAs, only eight include commitments to sustainable forest management, and merely three mention the protection of primary forests. Their specific inclusion would benefit the effectiveness of both mitigation and adaptation action, given the extensive ecosystem services that old forests especially provide. Primary and largely intact forests and KBAs often have higher resilience and climate mitigation potential than secondary or plantation forests,[16] so retaining and restoring these forests should be prioritized.

In addition, primary forests, high integrity forests and forested KBAs are harbours of biodiversity, and their conservation is vital to achieving many GBF targets.[17] The dearth of biodiversity-related targets, however, suggests that most NDCs do not adequately align their forest-related targets and measures with NBSAPs under the CBD. Several targets emphasize tree planting or area-based restoration (Botswana's 1.2 million trees; Vanuatu's 25,000 hectares; the UAE's mangrove seedlings), but rarely link them to halting biodiversity loss, improving habitat quality or measurable ecosystem integrity outcomes. Cuba and Zimbabwe emphasize monitoring, sustainable management and livelihood-based forest pressure reduction, aligning with degradation avoidance, however, they lack numerical targets.

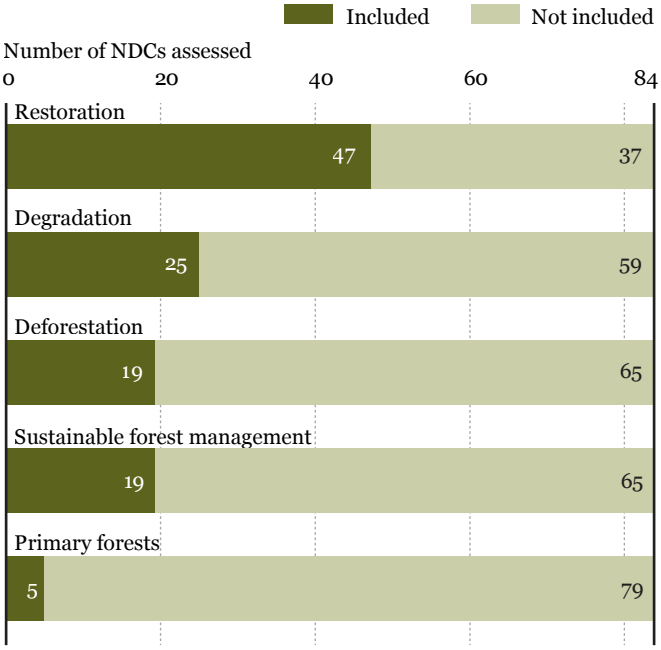
Changes from the preceding NDCs

Compared to the previous NDCs of these 84 Parties, **inclusion of quantitative forest-related targets has improved** in NDC 3.0:

- 53 Parties included restoration targets (compared to 41 previously).
- 23 Parties included deforestation targets (compared to 19 previously).
- 28 Parties included forest degradation (compared to 15 previously).
- 24 Parties included sustainable forest management (compared to 15 previously).
- 6 Parties included primary forests (compared to 4 previously).

For example, Nepal increased its commitment to maintain forest cover from 45% to 46% of the country's total area. Similarly, Uruguay introduced flexibility in its primary forest target by allowing for a potential 5% increase in native forest area, depending on resource availability. Belize established a deforestation target for protected areas, which was absent from its previous NDC.

Figure 3. Quantitative mitigation targets related to key forest intervention areas



Forest-related policy measures in NDCs 3.0

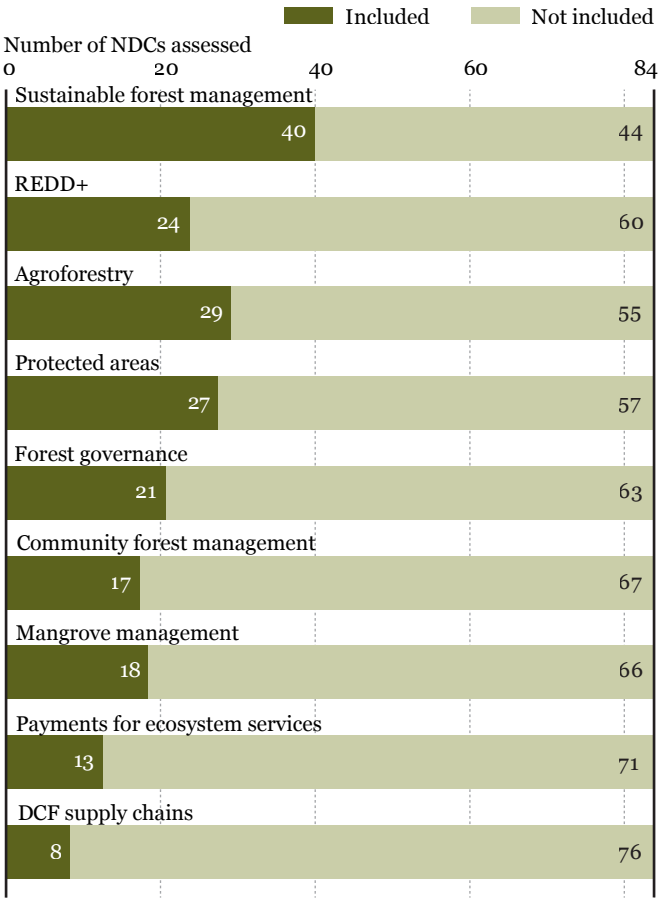
Sustainable forest management and protected areas are the most common forest policy measures in the assessed NDCs. But forest governance and community forest management, critical enabling policy interventions, are not adequately included.

Most of these measures are included in the mitigation component of NDCs. Measures related to sustainable forest management and protected areas appear in mitigation sections of 40 and 27 NDCs, respectively (Figure 4). Agroforestry is cited in 29 NDCs, REDD+ in 24 NDCs and mangrove management is 18 NDCs. Other measures included are community forest management (17 NDCs), payment for ecosystem services in (13 NDCs) and deforestation- and conversion-free (DCF) supply chains (8 NDCs). An NDC may include the same measures in both mitigation and adaptation components.

For example, Botswana references preventing land cover conversion during shifts in land use from forestry to ecotourism for all area under tourism activities. Somalia mentions reducing deforestation rates through conservation, landscape restoration, and enhanced regulation and enforcement. It also mentions the mobilization of carbon credits schemes, payment for ecosystem services and REDD+. Vanuatu commits to maintain and strengthen its forest protected areas, including 1,500 hectares of new forest and improving 1,500 hectares of forests with native plant species.

These trends are largely aligned with the findings in the UNFCCC 2025 NDC Synthesis Report that assessed previous and updated NDCs of 64 Parties.[18] The Synthesis Report finds that compared with their previous NDCs, more Parties included in their new NDCs forest-related climate action particularly afforestation/reforestation (69%) and sustainable forest management (56%), implementing REDD+ (23%), and reducing forest degradation (22%).

Figure 4. Policy measures for forests in mitigation sections of NDCs



Changes from the preceding NDCs

Compared to the previous NDCs of these 84 Parties, **inclusion of forest-related measures and actions across both mitigation and adaptation has improved** in NDC 3.0:

- 58 Parties included sustainable forest management (compared to 34 previously).
- 45 Parties featured protected areas (compared to 38 previously).
- 32 Parties included community forest management (compared to 11 previously).
- 19 Parties featured payment for ecosystem services (compared to 15 previously).
- 11 Parties mention DCF supply chains (compared to 3 previously).

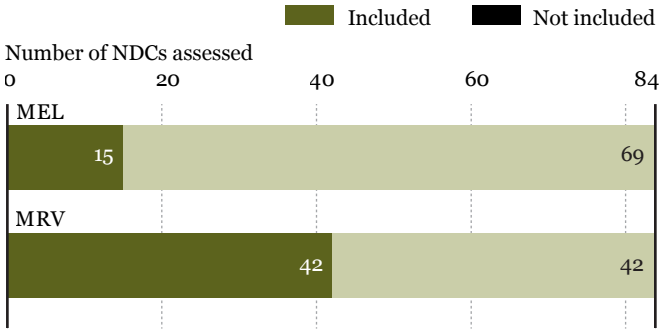
For example, Vanuatu has introduced a clear target for protected areas. Botswana now specifically references sustainable forest management, and Somalia mentions both forest governance and payments for ecosystem services.

Forest commitments within measurement and reporting systems

Only 42 NDCs explicitly reference forests in their Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) plans, despite the critical need to track forest-related emissions and progress toward climate goals. 15 NDCs reference forests in the context of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems for adaptation (Figure 5).

There are good examples of inclusion of forests in measurement and reporting in NDCs. For example, Cambodia aims to "develop and implement protected area-specific M&E frameworks to assess climate impacts on biodiversity, ecosystem services, and the livelihoods of local communities in order to inform adaptive conservation strategies and strengthen climate resilience." Moldova's NDC describes a "monitoring framework that includes process-level results on coordination, integration of climate change adaptation into sectoral policies (especially in the agreed priority sectors of agriculture, forestry, energy, transport, water resources and health), capacity development and knowledge management."

Figure 5. Inclusion of forests in MRV and MEL systems of NDCs

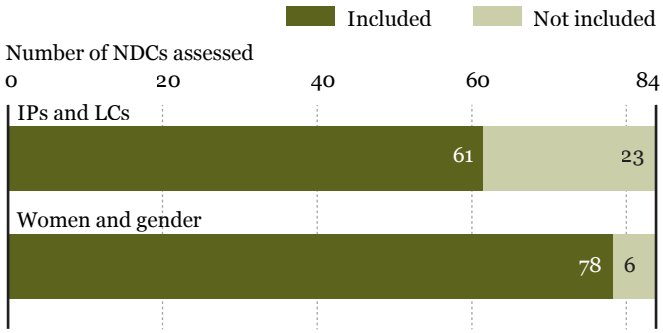


Considerations for forest stewards and marginalized groups in NDCs

Most NDCs mention Indigenous Peoples, local communities and/or gender considerations.

Of the assessed NDCs, 78 mention gender and 61 mention Indigenous Peoples and/or local communities (Figure 6). References to these groups appear throughout NDCs and may be relevant to forest goals even when not included in forest-specific targets or sections. The presence of terms related to gender, women, Indigenous Peoples or local communities does not necessarily imply that these groups were included in NDC development or implementation, that their needs are considered, nor that there is equity in policy development for these groups. Our analysis focuses solely on identifying any mention of these groups within the NDCs, without systematically assessing the ambition or depth of those references. Future assessments would benefit from differentiating gender-specific considerations from those related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and from more systematically assessing social safeguards, benefit-sharing mechanisms and the treatment of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

Figure 6. Considerations of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women and gender in NDC



Future NDC assessments should also clearly examine whether forest-related actions require FPIC of Indigenous Peoples, and whether safeguards and benefit-sharing mechanisms are in place. Without these elements, forest actions risk exacerbating social conflict, tenure insecurity, and inequitable outcomes.

Nepal's NDC sets a target of ensuring 50% women representation and proportional representation of Dalits and Indigenous People in key posts in community-based forest management and commits to ensuring that benefits from sustainable forest management, watershed management, and biodiversity conservation are equitably shared with Local Communities, women, and Indigenous People. Colombia' NDC integrates cross-cutting themes to ensure inclusive and equitable climate action following the principles of a Just Transition. The NDC development process included dedicated consultations that engaged women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities, with specific considerations for gender equality and social inclusion.

Changes from the preceding NDCs

Compared to the previous NDCs of these 84 Parties, **inclusion of mentions of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and gender and women across have improved** in NDC 3.0:

- 78 Parties included gender and women (compared to 67 previously)
- 61 Parties included references to Indigenous Peoples and local communities (compared to 46 previously)

For example, Zambia and Jamaica now include references to Indigenous Peoples and local communities in their updated NDCs, while Mongolia and Botswana have introduced references to women and gender.

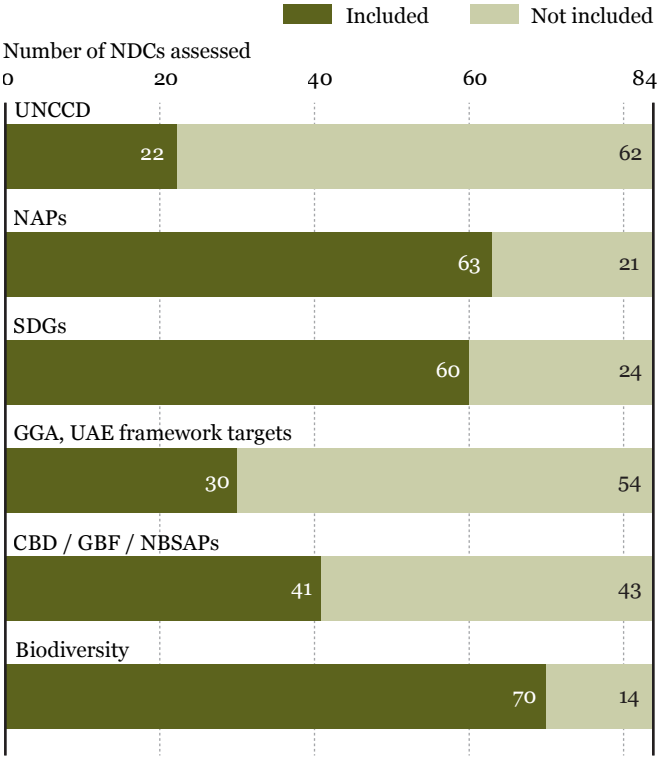
References to other global goals and frameworks

Some Parties cross-reference other national strategies within their NDCs, highlighting opportunities to link climate and biodiversity goals.

Parties reference key international frameworks and national documents related to biodiversity, climate adaptation, desertification and SDGs to varying degrees (Figure 7). SDGs are referenced in 60 of the assessed NDCs and NAPs in 63 NDCs, but just 22 NDCs reference the UNCCD. While 70 of the assessed NDCs mention biodiversity, only 41 explicitly mention the CBD, GBF or NBSAPs, despite the synergies highlighted in the first GST. Similarly, only 30 NDCs reference the Global Goal on Adaptation and UAE Framework Targets, despite their central role in guiding adaptation ambition, aligning national efforts and informing progress assessments under the GST.

Good examples of references to other international commitments include the United Kingdom's NDC 3.0 that "recognises the importance of joining up approaches to tackling the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity, and pollution, including by improving coordination between international conventions (such as the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, the CBD and its GBF, and the UNCCD and through nature-based solutions and joined-up design and delivery of NDCs, NBSAPs, NAPs, and other relevant strategies." Liberia's NDC 3.0 states it is "designed to be consistent with major international agreements. It integrates the objectives of the Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, CBD, UNCCD), aligns with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and directly contributes to achieving multiple SDGs, particularly those related to poverty, hunger, gender equality, clean energy, and climate action."

Figure 7. Consideration of linkages between NDCs and other key forest-related policies

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Changes from the preceding NDCs

Compared to the previous NDCs of these 84 Parties, **references to other global goals and frameworks have improved** in NDC 3.0:

- 63 mentioned NAPs (compared to 57 previously)
- 41 cited the CBD, the GBF or NBSAPs (compared to 24 previously)
- 22 referenced the UNCCD (compared to 18 previously)

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

This assessment of 84 NDCs 3.0 demonstrates that while the integration of forests into national climate planning has increased since the preceding NDC cycle, the overall level of ambition remains far below what is required to meet the global commitment to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation by 2030. Incremental progress like in the inclusion of restoration targets, forest-related policy measures, and references to biodiversity and adaptation frameworks shows growing recognition of the role of forests in addressing the climate crisis. However, recognition has not yet translated into the scale, specificity, or coherence of action needed.

The findings highlight a persistent ambition gap. Only a small number of Parties explicitly commit to ending deforestation by 2030 or reference paragraphs 33 and 34 of the first GST outcome decision. NDCs with quantitative forest-related mitigation and adaptation targets remain small and critical enabling measures like forest governance reform, land tenure security, and deforestation and conversion free supply chains are insufficiently reflected in NDCs. The limited integration of forests into measurement, reporting and verification systems further undermines accountability and the ability to track progress on forests goals and their role contribution to climate targets.

At the same time, the post COP30 landscape presents an important opportunity. Political momentum around the Action Agenda and its Plans to Accelerate Solutions, the expected Roadmap for halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation, and TFFF can help shift ambition toward implementation if they are anchored in more ambitious and comprehensive NDCs. **NDCs remain the primary vehicle through which international forest commitments can be translated into national targets, policies, and budgets**, and subsequently assessed through Biennial Transparency Reports and Global Stocktakes.

Closing the forest ambition gap will therefore require a shift in how forests are integrated within NDCs. **Parties are advice to move beyond generalized pledges towards clear, time bound, and measurable targets that address deforestation, forest degradation, restoration, and the protection of primary and high integrity forests with the rights, knowledge systems, FPIC, and leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities**, whose stewardship is fundamental to successful forest outcomes, embedded in the policy process. Similarly, aligning climate, biodiversity, and land use governance and policy frameworks will be essential to ensure coherence, efficiency, and impact while mitigating risks of policy failure.

The period to 2030 represents a narrowing window for action. Whether the renewed global focus on forests delivers real climate, biodiversity, and sustainable development benefits will depend on the extent to which Parties strengthen forest ambition within their NDCs and embed it within implementation, finance, and reporting systems. Without this shift, commitments risk remaining aspirational. With it, NDCs can become powerful vehicles for translating global forest goals into measurable action on the ground.

Critically, however, addressing the ambition gap in NDC design is necessary but not sufficient. Many of the weaknesses identified in this assessment can be partially remedied during the implementation phase, without waiting for the next NDC revision cycle. It is advisable for countries to treat the implementation of their current NDCs as an active opportunity to strengthen the foundations of their forest-climate commitments: by building monitoring systems that feed into BTRs, embedding biodiversity considerations into restoration programmes, institutionalizing cross-convention coordination mechanisms, and ensuring that sustainable forest management and afforestation targets are delivered through ecologically and socially robust implementation frameworks. The gap between what NDCs say and what they actually deliver can be minimized through the inclusive, strategic, and measurable implementation of the NDC, rather than a specific focus on NDC design and content alone.

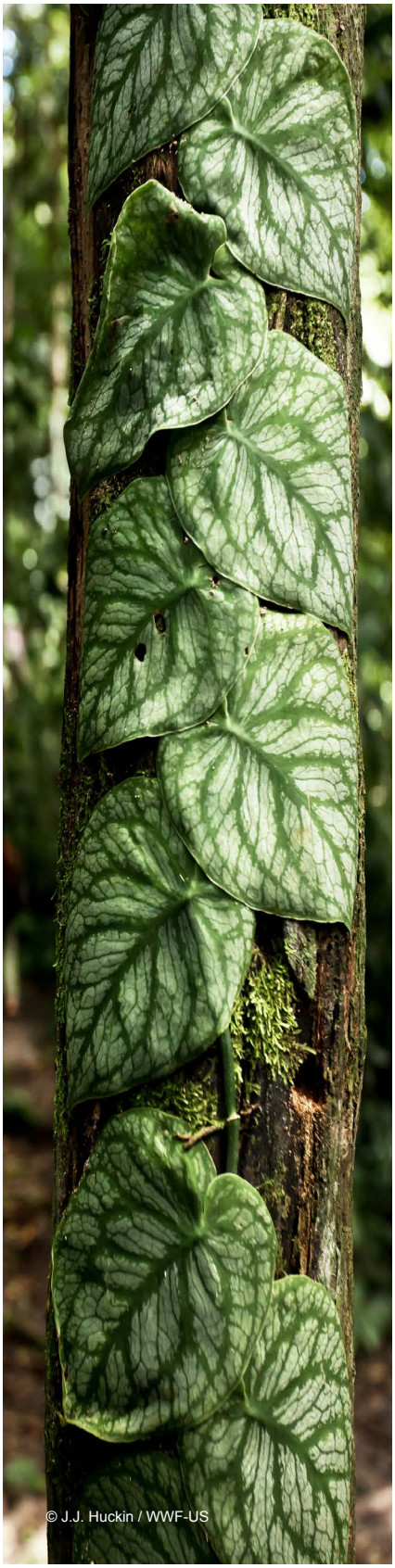
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Mobilize political and financial leadership for forests

Convert COP30 political signals into implementation momentum: COP30 reinforced the urgency of scaling up forest action, yet the gap between ambition and delivery remains significant. Governments must now convert political signals into concrete domestic measures -policies, regulations and legislation- embedding clear forest targets and implementation pathways into NDC 3.0 updates. The outcomes of COP30 should serve as a springboard for accelerated action ahead of COP31 and the next Global Stocktake cycle.

Operationalize and capitalize forest finance mechanisms, including the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF): Following its launch at COP30, the TFFF and other forest finance facilities must now move swiftly into implementation. Supporter countries and partners should raise USD 10 billion by the end of 2026 and start supporting countries and IPs & LCs to meet eligibility criteria. Priority must go to finance that reaches local communities, Indigenous Peoples, and front-line conservation organizations. Donors and investors should align public and private flows with these mechanisms to establish long-term, predictable finance for forests. Forest finance mechanisms should prioritize direct, accessible, and transparent funding for Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, and include safeguard requirements aligned with UNDRIP and REDD+ Cancun Safeguards, including FPIC and equitable benefit-sharing.

Anchor the 2030 Roadmap for halting deforestation and COP30 Action Agenda in NDCs: The Deforestation Roadmap and COP30 Action Agenda should clearly recognize NDCs as the primary vehicle for implementing the 2030 goal to halt and reverse deforestation. COP30 Presidency Roadmap for halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation should provide practical guidance on integrating measurable forest targets, including zero deforestation, reduced forest degradation, restoration, and primary forest protection, into national climate plans and implementation frameworks. In parallel, the Action Agenda's Plans to Accelerate Solutions should be strategically aligned with national NDC priorities so that international initiatives, financial instruments, and private sector engagement directly reinforce and strengthen country led forest commitments.



Translate cross-framework references into operational coordination mechanisms: It is recommended that countries convert NDC cross-references to the CBD/GBF, NAPs, UNCCD, and SDGs from diplomatic acknowledgments into fully operationalized institutional linkages. This requires designated inter-agency coordination structures; joint implementation workplans across relevant ministries; and integrated reporting frameworks that allow a single set of forest monitoring data to feed BTRs, NBSAPs, NAP reviews, and Voluntary National Review processes simultaneously. Countries can also use Voluntary National Reviews to document how forest NDC implementation contributes to SDG 13, SDG 15, SDG 1, and SDG 2 in a coherent cross-framework narrative. The upcoming post-COP30 implementation cycle presents an ideal moment to institutionalize these linkages before the next reporting round.

Mobilize technical support for forests in climate action: The integration of nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches, particularly forest-based solutions, into NDCs would need to be be a core political priority and be supported by sustained technical assistance.

Similar to the "Blue NDC Challenge", a "Forest NDC Challenge" could be launched – a global commitment by coalitions of the willing to halt and reverse deforestation through a scaled-up inclusion of forest-based mitigation and adaptation measures in NDCs and implementation plans. This initiative would create political momentum at national level up to and beyond 2030 and offer technical and financial support to implement strong forest-climate actions.

Build the foundations for forest action in NDCs and NDC implementation

Align NDC ambition with global forest and biodiversity commitments: Parties must enhance NDC ambition by fully aligning with the commitment to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030, as expressed in the outcomes of the first GST and the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use. NDC updates should explicitly reference and build on national priorities set out in NBSAPs to ensure alignment between climate and biodiversity frameworks. General or vague commitments should be replaced by clear, measurable zero-deforestation targets supported by defined timelines to ensure accountability and progress.

Harmonize monitoring systems for climate, biodiversity and forests: Parties must align and integrate existing monitoring systems that enable interoperability and simultaneous reporting on climate, biodiversity and forest goals, minimizing duplication between reporting requirements across the Rio Conventions. They should develop systems that are inclusive and equitable, incorporating traditional knowledge to enhance accuracy and relevance.

Design SMART targets: Parties must conduct regular assessments of direct drivers of deforestation, including the role of agricultural production and supply chains, extractive industries, infrastructure and wildfires, as well as underlying factors like international trade, debt, finance and subsidies — while drawing on biodiversity assessments and priority actions identified in their NBSAPs. Using the 'SMART' approach (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound), revised targets should integrate biodiversity and forest priorities in a coherent framework. Key target areas should include deforestation, forest degradation, ecosystem restoration, primary forest conservation, and the protection of KBAs, aligning with both NDC and NBSAP indicators.

Mainstream forest conservation and sustainable land use across all sectors in national strategies: With the post-COP30 implementation phase underway, countries should institutionalize forest and biodiversity considerations across all sectors including in agriculture and food systems, energy transitions, infrastructure, trade, and finance, to ensure an integrated approach to sustainable land-use management. Forest-related policy actions must feature in updated NDCs, Long-Term Strategies (LTSs), and NAPs, and NBSAPs, ensuring coherence between economic planning and nature-positive development pathways. All governments should report on progress related to paragraph 33 of the GST outcome in their BTRs, regardless of whether specific forest-related targets are included in their NDCs.

Strengthen transparency and accountability in forest and biodiversity reporting: Parties must enhance transparency and accountability in forest reporting. NDCs must clearly define baseline forest conditions consistent with REDD+ requirements for forest reference emission levels (FRELs) and forest reference levels (FRLs), while ensuring complementarity with biodiversity baselines captured in NBSAP monitoring systems. They should include metrics and indicators for forest-positive actions aligned with IPCC guidelines and REDD+ MRV standards, and national biodiversity monitoring frameworks to streamline reporting across the Rio Conventions. Results-based actions should be documented in BTRs with technical annexes for REDD+ results while referencing synergies with NBSAP indicators and frameworks where relevant.

Facilitate inclusive and participatory forest governance: Implementation following COP30 must prioritize the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and forest-dependent populations. Their rights, land tenure security, and knowledge systems must be embedded in forest and biodiversity-related climate strategies, financing mechanisms, and monitoring systems.

Prioritize and transparently finance forest-based solutions for climate and biodiversity: Parties must allocate national resources to forest actions that advance climate mitigation, adaptation and biodiversity conservation. They must redirect public funding away from activities that drive deforestation toward forest protection and restoration, ensuring just and equitable transitions for affected communities. NDCs should clearly specify financial needs for conditional forest-related targets, with detailed budgets to enhance transparency, accountability and access to climate finance.

Build forest MRV systems during the current implementation cycle in preparation for future BTRs: This will be particularly important for most countries during the NDC implementation phase as most NDCs are lacking structured approaches to forest-based MRV. Countries can make use of the current NDC implementation cycle as a period of urgent MRV capacity-building, with the explicit goal of having functional forest monitoring systems feeding into the next round of BTRs. This requires establishing or strengthening national forest inventories and forest monitoring systems, and integrating forest data flows into national BTR reporting systems before the next submission deadline. Countries that have not yet defined forest baselines should prioritize doing so, as this is a prerequisite for accessing results-based finance under REDD+ and for meaningful participation in future Global Stocktakes. Investing in MRV capacity may be seen as a foundational investment and international and domestic finance flows should be channeled toward it during the implementation phase.

Align restoration implementation with national biodiversity targets: Restoration targets in NDCs may be implemented as ecosystem recovery programmes. It is advisable for countries to integrate forest restoration priorities with national biodiversity targets (particularly GBF Target 2 on restoring 30% of degraded ecosystems by 2030) identifying areas where restoration can simultaneously recover habitat for threatened species, reconnect fragmented ecosystems, restore watershed services, and contribute to climate outcomes. Monitoring protocols for restoration should track indicators such as species diversity, habitat connectivity, ecosystem function, and and survival rate. This data can then serve both BTR and NBSAP reporting requirements. Where countries have committed to tree-planting targets as a restoration action, implementation guidance should specify how these will be translated into genuine ecosystem restoration with demonstrable biodiversity co-benefits.

Leverage sustainable forest management as a programmatic entry point for NDC implementation: Countries with sustainable forest management already anchored in their NDCs should capitalise on this. National sustainable forest management regulations and associated forest governance frameworks should be updated to embed ecological and social standards, ensuring that mitigation actions simultaneously deliver adaptation, biodiversity and livelihood co-benefits (contributing directly to NBSAPs and national SDG efforts). Governments should develop national roadmaps with operational actions, clear timelines, responsible agencies, and measurable outcomes across forest types (i.e. production forests, community-managed forests, and conservation areas). Where national forest programmes, REDD+ national strategies, or Forest Reference Emission Levels already exist, these should be formally integrated into NDC implementation plans to maximise the use of existing institutional infrastructure that can potentially unlock access to results-based finance, and build the monitoring, reporting, and verification systems that future BTR submissions will require.

ANNEX. LIST OF ASSESSED NDCS

The 84 NDCs 3.0 reviewed were downloaded from the official UNFCCC NDC registry:

-Brazil
-Canada
-United States of America
-Belize
-Zambia
-Japan
-Cuba
-Ecuador
-Norway
-New Zealand
-Nepal
-Kenya
-United Kingdom
-Solomon Islands
-Uruguay
-Suwitzerland
-Somalia
-Montenegro
-Moldova
-United Arab Emirates
-Zimbabwe
-Serbia
-Botswana
-Angola
-Australia
-Cambodia
-Chile
-Mongolia
-Honduras
-Liberia
-Nicaragua
-Pakistan
-Jamaica
-Eswatini
-Ethiopia
-Vanuatu
-Colombia
-Sri Lanka
-Bolivia
-Lebanon
-Morocco
-Panama
-Kyrgyzstan
-Malaysia
-South Africa
-Indonesia
-Zambia
-Venezuela
-Mauritania
-Brunei
-Darussalam
-Côte d'Ivoire
-China
-Thailand
-Mozambique
-European Union
-Azerbaijan
-Peru
-Uzbekistan
-Guinea
-Fiji
-Paraguay
-Bahamas
-Türkiye
-Rwanda
-Belarus
-Bhutan
-Burundi
-Ukraine
-Iraq
-Costa Rica
-Mexico
-Suriname
-Kazakhstan
-Sierra Leone
-Gabon
-El Salvador
-Republic of Korea
-Burkina Faso
-Armenia
-Saudi Arabia
-Samoa
-Trinidad and Tobago
-Congo
-Eritrea

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