

"Africa's Forest Ecosystems and COVID 19: How do we build back and forward better?"

By Gertrude Kenyangi,
Support for Women in Agriculture and Environment (SWAGEN),
Uganda



Support for Women
in Agriculture
and Environment

Context

- ▶ Africa's forests are terrestrial ecosystems.
- ▶ Habitats for many a living thing, both fauna and flora.
- ▶ Cover 20.6 percent of the continent's land area and representing 15.6 percent of the world's forest cover
- ▶ Provide nationally, regionally and globally important ecosystem services indispensable for achieving the objectives Africa Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



The good and the bad effects of COVID19 on the forest sector in Africa

-ve effects

- ▶ Africa regional policy dialogues on illegal forest exploitation, focusing largely on Pterocarpus (Rosewood) had to be shelved.
- ▶ The 15th Session of UNFF cancelled
- ▶ The 23rd Session of FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) slated for June 2020 cancelled

+ve effects

- ▶ the rate of illegal timber harvesting has plummeted to zero due to the drop in international demand for logs

-ve effects of COVID19 on forest ecosystems continue

- ▶ At national level;
- ▶ Critical funding for basic forest management activities have been sacrificed by governments and development partners
- ▶ National forest institutions have run out of funds for their forest management activities.
- ▶ The recruitment of additional manpower for the sector will no longer be a priority for many countries.
- ▶ Local forestry staff are not facilitated to patrol the forests



-ve effects of COVID19 on forest ecosystems continue

- ▶ With COVID-19 cases in decline in China, there will be a gradual surge in demand for precious logs from Africa to feed the wood industry.
- ▶ Forests in Africa will be seen as cheap and easy means of recovery from the economic downturns created by COVID-19.



More negative effects of COVID19 on the forest sector

- ▶ Job loss in the sector has adversely affected the livelihoods of local communities
- ▶ local communities have been tempted to extract as much as possible from the forest as part of supplementing their incomes e.g thru charcoal burning
- ▶ Local forest dependent Communities have turned to forests to provide them with the extra food sources and traditional medicines
- ▶ Risk of overexploitation of forests and trees is at an unprecedented high



Recommendations

- ▶ Increased investment in the forestry sector to speed up recovery is required
- ▶ an enhanced level of cooperation, coordination, coherence, and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels
- ▶ actively involve the local communities more in forest management through devolution and decentralization
- ▶ Legal Trade-in timber and other forest products must be part of agreements of the various partnerships between Africa and other regions and countries of the world.



- ▶ Regional and transboundary collaboration are key in supporting national response mechanisms to deal with the trade-in forest products.
- ▶ Continue working with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Forum on Forests (UNFF) as the global institutions with mandates of promoting sustainable forest management across the world.



Trends in Ecology & Evolution

- ▶ Police and Military checkpoints should be empowered to monitor and stop illegal timber movements.
- ▶ Forestry personnel should be allowed to operate during public emergencies and lockdowns to avoid undue exploitation of forests.



- ▶ Strengthen existing global and regional mechanisms for supporting the environment sector
- ▶ Development Partners and donors should ring-fence already earmarked funds for the forestry sector.
- ▶ National budgetary allocations to the sector must be maintained and increased.

Thanks for listening! Please save our habitat!

