

(a) What are the most critical barriers preventing the halting and reversing of deforestation and forest degradation?

A critical barrier is the narrow definition of forests, which often excludes coastal and marine ecosystems such as sand dune vegetation (*restingas*), mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrasses. This leads to:

- **Policy and accounting gaps**, where blue carbon ecosystems are not fully included in deforestation targets, climate commitments, or forest-related finance mechanisms.
- **Undervaluation of carbon stocks**, despite these ecosystems being among the most efficient long-term carbon sinks on the planet.
- **Fragmented governance**, with coastal ecosystems falling between terrestrial forest policies and marine management frameworks.
- **Ongoing degradation drivers**, including unplanned coastal development, aquaculture expansion, and poorly designed infrastructure.

Importantly, when these ecosystems are degraded, large amounts of stored carbon are released, turning them from sinks into sources of emissions. Yet, this risk remains insufficiently addressed in current deforestation agendas.

(b) What potential levers exist for accelerating the implementation of the commitment?

Key levers include:

- **Expanding the definition of forests** to explicitly include coastal ecosystems (“blue forests”) within national and global deforestation frameworks.
- **Integrating blue carbon into NDCs and climate finance mechanisms**, ensuring that mangroves and related ecosystems are eligible for funding, conservation incentives, and carbon markets.
- **Leveraging existing initiatives**, such as the Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF), that already recognize mangroves as tropical forests.
- **Scaling restoration of coastal ecosystems**, which delivers high mitigation returns alongside adaptation and biodiversity benefits.
- **Strengthening cross-sectoral governance**, aligning coastal planning, climate policy, and biodiversity strategies.

(c) What experiences, best practices, and lessons learned can be shared?

An important lesson emerging globally is the recognition of mangroves as forests within climate finance and policy frameworks, as seen in initiatives like the TFFF. This demonstrates that:

- **Reframing ecosystems can unlock finance and political prioritization.**
- Conservation and restoration of mangroves generate **multiple co-benefits**, including carbon sequestration, coastal protection, and livelihood support.
- **Nature-based solutions in coastal zones are cost-effective and scalable**, particularly when embedded in broader planning frameworks.

There is also growing experience showing that integrated coastal zone management and marine spatial planning can effectively balance conservation with economic uses, reducing pressures on these ecosystems.

(d) How can forest conservation, sustainable management, and restoration reflect diverse realities?

To be just and effective, forest strategies must:

- Recognize that **many coastal and traditional communities depend directly on mangroves and other blue ecosystems** for food security and livelihoods.
- Ensure that **local and Indigenous knowledge systems** are incorporated into conservation and restoration efforts.
- Support **context-specific pathways**, especially for developing countries where pressures on coastal zones are high and financial resources are limited.
- Promote **equitable access to climate finance**, including for blue carbon projects.

By recognizing coastal ecosystems as forests, countries can **expand the scope of conservation**, align climate and biodiversity goals, and ensure that benefits reach the communities most directly connected to these environments.

Key overarching message

Halting deforestation cannot be achieved if it is understood only as a terrestrial challenge. Mangroves, sand dune vegetation (*restingas*), salt marshes, and seagrasses are forests of the coast—highly efficient carbon sinks and essential buffers against climate impacts. Recognizing and integrating these “blue forests” into deforestation roadmaps is a strategic opportunity to deliver simultaneous gains for climate mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity, and human well-being.

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