



**Permanent Mission of Kyrgyzstan
UN - New York**



**Group of Friends of
Mountainous Countries**

CONCEPT NOTE

**Side-event “Mountain Forests' Restoration: a path to recovered,
resilient and sustainable mountain countries and communities”
16th session of UN Forum on Forests
(April 26, 2021)**

Background

According to the 2020 FAO report on the State of the World's Forests forest ecosystems are a critical component of the world's biodiversity as many forests are more biologically diverse than other ecosystems. As of 2020 forests currently cover 30.8% of the global land area. Worldwide there are 5 major climatic domain of all forest areas: tropical (45%), boreal (27%), temperate (16%) and subtropical (11%). Mountain forests make up to 28% of all natural forest cover worldwide and give place for living to 12% of the world's population.

The importance of forests in the process of sustaining ecological balance and their role as a carbon stock is clearly reflected in the SDG 15.1, Aichi Biodiversity Target 5 and in the Goal 1 of UN Strategic Plan for Forests. Forest ecosystems harbor most of global terrestrial biodiversity, and primary forests in particular are home to species that are unique to these ecosystems. Particularly humid tropical forests contain the most biological diversity. Forests in drylands are the hotspot of biodiversity for such areas and pose significant environmental value.

Objectives

The current international activities aimed at expand natural forests territories and creating new territories covered by trees significantly contribute to repelling negative aspects of climate change.

Mountain ecosystems provide a wide range of direct and indirect contributions to the people who live in the mountain territories and are characterized by a high degree of vulnerability of forest covers. They usually occupy steep terrains at high elevations and provide services, such as stabilizing slopes, regulating hydrological cycles, maintaining rich biodiversity and supporting the livelihoods. Forest also provides most of necessary resources for decent and healthy life of population. By implementing sustainable practices forests could provide economic growth, social and cultural development of Member States.

Forests also play significant role in disaster risk reduction in mountain regions by protecting people, settlements and infrastructure against natural hazards including avalanches, landslides or flood. The potential of forests in reducing natural hazards is highlighted in Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and other relevant international agreements. Particularly, in case of avalanches forests can stabilize a snow cover in so-called release areas and reduce the probability itself. The presence of forests can also onset the threat of rockfalls by playing the role of natural net for rocks and land. In addition forests can prevent landslides by root reinforcement of soil, reduce debris flow intensity and partly reduce the risk of flood by consuming excessive water masses.

Despite the wide acknowledgment of forests' key role in sustaining global climate and contribution to sustainable economic development the total land area covered by trees continues to decrease as these areas are facing new challenges caused by climate change, unsustainable economic practices, changes in production and labor standards, increasing unemployment among mountain communities, rapid urbanization and shifting economic development. Climate change and environmental pressures impact forest vegetation, such as erosion processes and biodiversity loss, and lead to decreasing the potential of mountain ecosystems to provide important ecosystem services. In this regard mountainous Member States are facing additional challenges due to increased vulnerability. Thus the prospects of future recovery from economic and social consequences from COVID-19 pandemic as well as from other negative impact on sustainable development would decrease because of further worsening conditions of forests, particularly mountainous ones.

In developing mountainous countries natural forests provide more than a fifth of rural poor households' livelihoods and the above-mentioned challenges can undermine the efforts of mountainous Member States and local communities in building resilient economies and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The fragility of mountain ecosystems and its natural inability to recover from environmental impacts pose challenges to the development of comprehensive economic activities and infrastructure development, which leads to limitations for local communities to use its natural resources without disrupting ecological balance. The current development of technologies in the sphere of agriculture, mining, timber industry, energy production, transport sector and communications could offer new opportunities for development to mountainous countries and local communities. At the same time it is crucial to address the issues of access to innovations and technology, lack of necessary skills and know-how, investments, as well as inequalities. The principles of multilateralism and leaving no one behind play a key role in search of solutions to address the current challenges to stability of mountainous forest ecosystems, as an integral part of the common UN Agenda on forests' protection. There is solid base for international cooperation built on international and regional agreements which allows Member States, relevant UN institutions and other international and regional organizations, NGOs, academia and private sector to actively participate and contribute in the decision-making process.

This side-event, arranged by the Group of Friends of Mountainous Countries in the margins of the 16th session of the UN Forum on forests, also aims to fruitful discussion between mountainous Member States and other relevant stakeholders on how to contribute to the protection of mountain forests and sustainable use of their resources, to assist mountainous Member States and local communities in building resilient economies and societies for sustainable development in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.