

Mangroves being destroyed faster, warns UNEP report

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Mangroves are being destroyed at a rate 3-5 times greater than the average rates of forest loss, costing billions in economic damages and denying millions of people the ecosystem services they need to survive, observed a new report launched by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

'The Importance of Mangroves: A Call to Action' describes how emissions resulting from mangrove losses make up nearly one-fifth of global emissions from deforestation, resulting in economic damages of some US \$6-42 billion annually. Mangroves are also threatened by climate change, which could result in the loss of a further 10-15 per cent of mangroves by 2100.

Found in 123 countries and covering 152,000 square kilometres, over 100 million people around the world live within 10 kilometres of large mangrove forests, benefiting from a variety of goods and services such as fisheries and forest products, clean water and protection against erosion and extreme weather events.

The report argues that in spite of the mounting evidence in support of the multitude of benefits derived from mangroves, they remain one of the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. It describes financial mechanisms and incentives to stimulate mangrove conservation, such as REDD+, private sector investments, and the creation of Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions for developing countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while increasing national capacity.

It observed that mangrove degradation and loss is predicted to continue into the future if a business-as-usual scenario prevails. The report offers readers and especially policymakers many management and protection measures and tools that are available for use at national, regional and global scales to help ensure a sustainable future for mangroves. "Policymakers should consider several of these, including integrating mangrove-specific goals and targets into the post-2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals agenda, as well as better co-ordination of global action on mangroves through the development of a Global Mangrove Commission, and the streamlining and co-ordination of multilateral environmental agreements," it added.

Among the report's key findings include the role of mangroves as significant carbon storage systems, sequestering vast amounts of carbon (about 1,000 tonnes per hectare) over thousands of years, making them some of the most carbon-rich ecosystems on the planet. Protecting these long-term reservoirs of carbon, and preventing their emissions from being released back into the atmosphere is, the report says, a sensible and cost-effective measure that can be taken to help mitigate climate change.

According to it, mangrove forests play an important role in livelihoods of local inhabitant. A large number of commercially important fish species utilise mangroves during all or part of their lives, with the mangrove providing critical food, shelter and refuge functions. It has been estimated that 30 percent of the fish caught in South-East Asia are supported in some way by mangrove forests; a figure approaching 100 per cent for highly mangrove-dependent species including some species of prawn. It was estimated that the annual average landing of mangrove-associated fish and bluecrab in the Gulf is 10,500 tonnes, with an estimated total value of US \$19 million to local fisheries.

"The complex network of mangrove roots can help reduce wave energy, limit erosion and shield coastal communities from the destructive forces of tropical storms, cyclones and tsunamis," it added.

To overcome the destruction of mangroves, the report made a number of recommendations. Policymaker guidelines for the improvement, management and protection of mangroves include the development of protocols to Regional Seas Conventions that promote protection and sustainable use of mangroves, and the implementation and enforcement of national laws and policies relevant to mangrove protection and management.

Moreover, create a global mangrove fund to support 'climate resilience' actions that conserve and restore mangroves, and protect the carbon stored within them. Also, encourage mangrove conservation and restoration through carbon credit markets, such as REDD+, the 'Bio-Rights' mechanism and corporate and private sector investments.

The report further recommended promotion of economic incentives, such as payments for ecosystem services, as a source of local income from mangrove protection, sustainable use and restoration activities and ensure beneficiaries of mangrove services can find opportunities to invest in mangrove management and restoration planning. It also suggested exploring opportunities for investment into net positive impact biodiversity offsets by the corporate and business sectors as a way to finance the protection and sustainable use of mangroves and ensure that mangroves are addressed in wider marine spatial planning and policy frameworks.

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