



Politics, power and precarity in changing forests: Challenges for research

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Stockholm Resilience Centre
Sustainability Science for Biosphere Stewardship

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KUNGL. VETENSKAPS AKADEMIEN
THE ROYAL SWEDISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

The interlinked challenges

- Climate change & forests
- Biodiversity & ecosystem service
- Increasing inequalities and environmental injustices

→ COVID 19 has exposed the inequities and fragility of our social-ecological systems

Different narratives for forests have emerged ...



- **Maintaining forests can reduce risks of future pandemics** (scientists, conservation orgs) – Who has the responsibility to maintain forests or stop deforestation? What does this mean for local communities in forest frontiers? How can customary rights and local governance practices lead the way?
- **Forests are at the heart of a green recovery** (UN, FAO, OECD, CEFP) – what types of forest jobs or industries are in recovery stimulus plans or to be financed by “green” investments? How can this recovery support more equitable development in forest frontiers?

... along with narratives of forest users ...

- **Women are most vulnerable to COVID-10 and climate change ... women forest users and farmers are the most effective crisis managers** – what are the intersectional effects of vulnerability or resilience? What are the gendered power relations?
- **Return of urban migrants** – how will this affect claims to forests and rural land? How will influx of labor and capital change forest and land use practices? How will inequalities and precarities of job losses affect well-being?



Does a pandemic bring new and unexpected risks ... or reinforce old unsustainable systems?

- COVID 19 as a "new" indirect driver of deforestation ...

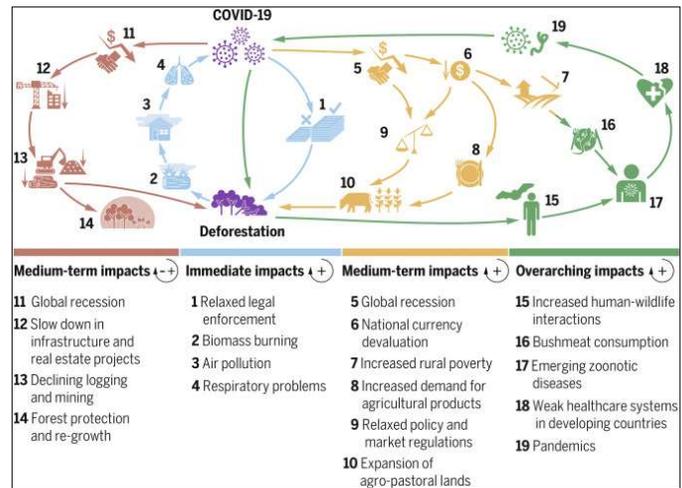


Figure from Brancalion et al. 2020

A call for inter- and trans-disciplinary research

- Clark & Harley (2020):

Already clear, however, is that contemporary development pathways with their growing inequalities have exacerbated both the spread and the impacts of the virus ... [when this pandemic is over] we will **continue to face unsustainable development pathways, held in place by path-dependent regimes and powerful, self-interested actors.**

- Leach et al. (2020):

[the need for new development approaches] ... means both **revealing and challenging the structural conditions, power relations and political economic orders that create risks and vulnerabilities in the first place...** Lasting transformations must address fundamental matters of power and politics, ... at the same time as **fostering hopeful, innovative alternatives.**

Identifying and engaging in transformative pathways that are more equitable and sustainable ...

Will require research that

- Questions the politics, dissecting the discourses – whose interests are served and who benefits
- Examines power relations in policies and practices related to forest access, forest land conversion, trade and finance
- Assesses how these affect (in)equalities and social-ecological resilience (or precarity)
- Engages and gives voice to those not heard in policy processes

Thank you!

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