
[What is a forest, and when is it a forest? A critical reflection on the concepts used in international forest policy processes](#)

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Since 2012, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has promoted 21 March as the International Day of Forests. This year's theme is "Forests and Innovation: New Solutions for a Better World."

In a [one-minute video](#), the FAO suggests that materials like plastics, made of chemicals sourced from fossil fuels, can be replaced with "sustainable materials from trees," which are also capable of "locking in carbon."

Once again, the FAO suggests that promoting industrial plantations of eucalyptus, pine and other fast-growing tree species—plantations which it defines as forests—can be a "new solution for a better world." In this statement, the FAO once again ignores the well-documented negative impacts of industrial monoculture tree plantations, the failure of carbon tree plantations in solving climate chaos, and the fact that such plantations help fuel excessive and extremely imbalanced paper consumption—which, of course, is promoted by pulp and paper companies that profit from it.

On this International Day of Forests, while the FAO is once again promoting old "solutions" that actually make the world worse, WRM is releasing a briefing entitled **"What is a forest, and when is it a forest? A critical reflection on the concepts used in international forest policy processes."**

While many groups understand that the FAO's definition of forests has long been an obstacle to halting forest loss, the fact these organizations and social movements—and also WRM—make use of the concept forest in their materials usually go unchallenged. One example of this is how many groups have used the campaign slogan "Plantations are not *forests*".

There has still been little reflection on the fact that a number of Indigenous Peoples who are rooted in *forest* territories have decided not to translate the word, forest. Many have decided to adopt their own definition, since the FAO definition is irreconcilable with their particular and diverse visions and conceptions of their living spaces. They don't see a *forest* as a fixed entity defined by its *tree cover* or its capacity for *carbon sequestration*, but rather as a part of a transformational cycle of a territory. Yet international forest policy processes have censored all indigenous and other grassroots definitions of *forests*. In their conference halls and documents, these international entities will not allow for any definition or other conceptions that lies outside of the supposedly universal categories of *forests*, *climate*, *biodiversity*, *ecosystems*, etc.

It's important to critically reflect on these concepts, as they pave the way for the alleged "solutions" to deforestation that emerge from these international processes. One such "solution," once again touted by the FAO this March 21, is the promotion of industrial tree monoculture plantations.

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WRM International Secretariat