

Second Assessment of the Impact of COVID 19 on Forests and Forest Sector in the Latin America region

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This sixteenth session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF16) in April 2021 requested the Forum secretariat, in collaboration with members of the Forum, CPF member organizations and stakeholders to conduct an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID19 on forests and forest sector, and to present it to the Forum at its seventeenth session

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EMP	Environmental Management Plan
EU	European Union
EUBSP	European Union Budget Support programme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCF	Forest Conservation Fund
FD	Forestry Department
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FEDEMADERA	National Federation of Timber Industries
FGTS	Government Severance Indemnity Fund for Employees (Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço)
FNPD	Forestry and National Parks Division
FOGAPE	Small Enterprises Guarantee Fund (Fondos de Garantía para el Pequeño Empresario)
FOSIS	Solidarity and Social Investment Fund
FU	Forestry Unit
FWPD	Forestry, Wildlife and Parks Department
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GFC	Guyana Forestry Commission
GFFFN	Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network
GIS	Geographic Information System
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HURECC	Urban Renewal, Environment and Climate Change
IBA	Brazilian Tree Industry (Indústria Brasileira de Árvores)
IBAMA	Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources
ICU	Intensive Care Units
IBGE	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística)
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IEDI	Institute of Studies for Industrial Development (Instituto de Estudos para o Desenvolvimento Industrial)
IFE	Emergency Family Income
IFSA	/v š Œ v š]}v o &}Œ •š Œ Ç ^š μ v š • [••}] š }v
ILO	International Labor Organization
INDAP	Institute for Agricultural Development
INDEC	National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of the Argentine Republic (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de Argentina)
INFOR	Forestry Institute (Instituto Forestal)
IOF	Tax on Financial Transactions (Imposto sobre Operações Financeiras)
IPCA	Broad National Consumer Price Index (Índice Nacional de Preços ao Consumidor Amplo)
IRP	Personal Income Tax (Impuesto a la Renta Personal)
KfW	Bank Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau



MAATE	Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition (Ministerio de Ambiente, Agua y Transición Ecológica)
MMA	Ministry of the Environment of Brazil
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Companies
LA	Latin America
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
LACFC	Latin American and the Caribbean Forestry Commission.
LPG	Liquid Petroleum Gas
MoE	Ministry of the Environment.
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NTPI	National Tree Planting Initiative.
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OIT	International Labor Organization (Organización Internacional del Trabajo)
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PCA	Plot for annual cutting (Parcelas de Corta Anual)
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PIS/PASEP	Social Integration Program/ Civil Servant Patrimony Formation Program (Programa de Integração Social/ Programa de Formação do Patrimônio do Servidor Público)
PPE	Personal protective equipment
PPM	Monthly Provisional Payments
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
SB	Stichting voor Bosbeheer en Bostoezicht
SERFOR	National Forest and Wildlife Service
SFB	Brazilian Forest Service (Serviço Florestal Brasileiro)
SFISS	Sustainable Forestry Information System Suriname
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SINAFLOR	Brazilian National System for the Control of the Origin of Forest Products
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SVG	St. Vincent and the Grenadines
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests
UNFFS	United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAT	Value Added Tax
WHO	World Health Organization
WRI	World Resources Institute



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has had several negative effects in terms of industrial production, employment, income and public health in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. The recurrent scenario presents an uneven trend in terms of economic and employment recovery, with a more pronounced impact on women, young people, people with less education and the population in a situation of social vulnerability.

Forests contribute to economic development and human well-being, and their roles in providing income and livelihoods are critical, especially for rural communities, indigenous peoples, small farm owners and other forest-dependent communities. Therefore, it is important to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and forest dependent people.

In this context, the UNFF Secretariat hired Dr. Ivan Tomaselli to conduct the regional assessment of the challenges faced by the LA countries and Ms. Marilyn Headley for the assessment in the Caribbean subregion, including the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector. This report presents the main findings of the referred assessment.

The approach used for this study was based on the collection, compilation and analysis of primary and secondary information. As for primary data and information gathering, a questionnaire was prepared by the Consultant, which was sent to relevant stakeholders identified. Secondary information consisted of a literature review, including published studies and reports, news, policy briefs and other relevant publications available.

¾ Main challenges faced by countries

Among the main challenges that the pandemic brought to the countries of the LAC region, stands out that to contain the spread of COVID-19, the main measure adopted was to suspend some economic activities, which led to a global economic crisis, with a devastating effect on a region that already suffers from poverty and social inequality.

x Impact of COVID-19 in LAC Region

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the region in a devastating manner, it is estimated that approximately 47.2 million were infected and 1.6 million of lives were lost to the COVID up to December 2021 in LAC region.

x Overview of main Macroeconomic Impacts

In 2020, the economic decline generated an estimated drop of 7.1% of GDP in the LAC region. The contraction of economic activity also generated a significant increase in the unemployment rate, estimated at around 10.5%, a deep drop in participation in the labor market and a considerable increase in poverty and inequality. Industrial production presented a strong retraction, mainly in the second quarter of 2020. The economic crises also had an impact on prices increase and inflation in some countries, mainly in Brazil. The Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in 2020 was 34.7% less than in 2019 in LAC region.

x Impacts on forest sector

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the forest sector were less evident compared to other sectors of the economy and happened in a similar way in most countries. The impact on the forest sector varied among countries, depending on the activities in the forest sector. With the reduction in inspection activities, there was also an increase in compliance with legislation, an



increase in deforestation and forest degradation caused by forest fires. Regarding sustainable forest management, the distancing measures and definition of essential activities were decisive on the impact of the pandemic in the forest sector. Government of some countries such as Argentina and Brazil considered forest production chain as an essential activity, on the other hand, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Trinidad Tobago had restrictions on forest production activities. One of the main impacts of the COVID pandemic on the industrial sector of forest products and by products was the increase in external demand and exports in some countries, mainly led by the currency depreciation



application of vaccines in the population. Among the economic measures, emergency credit lines stand out



1 tINTRODUCTION

1.1 tBACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a global crisis, which caused a change in the levels of production and consumption of several products, a

1.3 t





2.1.1.2 t An Overview of Macroeconomic Impacts

The main macroeconomic impacts in Latin America during the pandemic period were examined. Latin America and the Caribbean will grow in 2021, although the pandemic remains present and the crisis has aggravated longstanding structural problems in the region: low investment and productivity, informality, unemployment, inequality and poverty. Therefore, recovering investment and employment, especially in environmentally sustainable sectors, is a key transformative and inclusive strategy.

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Table3 t Consumer Price Index of selected countrie

Country	Consumer Price Index (%)	
	2019	2020
Argentina	53.8	36.1
Brazil		4.52
Chile		



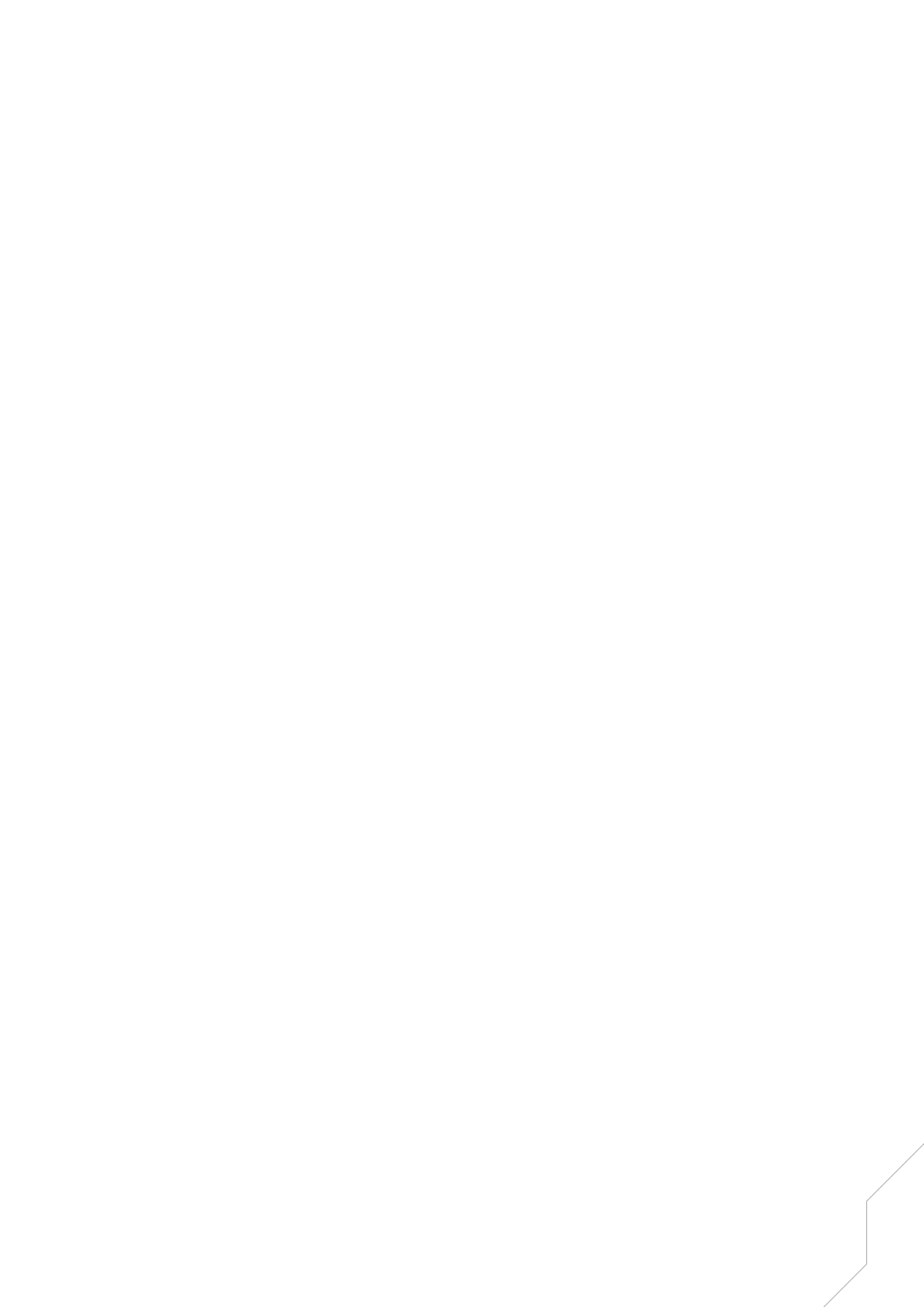


June 2020, and affected the production chain of the tropical timber sectors (PORTAL AMAZONIA, 2020).

Also in Brazil, the production of pulp and paper, since the beginning of the pandemic, was considered an essential activity, which



Table5 -





information based on the survey involving responses from 73 forest-related companies (FEDEMADERAS, 2021) presented below:

- a) Performance and sales decline
45 forest companies (62% of all companies interviewed) report that the COVID-19 pandemic have limited their operations during the first half of 2021. A total of 27 companies did not identify a drop in sales of forest products during 2021, compared to 2020. Out of 35 companies that identified a decrease in sales, 11 companies reported a decrease between 11% to 30%, 13 companies between 31% and 50%. It is concerned that 10% (7 companies) showed a decrease in sales by percentage greater than 50%;
- b) Variation/change in demand



Table 7 - Unemployment Rate of Selected Countries

Country	Unemployment rate (%)	
	2019	2020
Argentina	9.8	11.9
Brazil	11.9	13.5
Chile	7.2	10.0
Colombia	10.5	16.1
Mexico	3.5	4.5
Peru	6.6	13.9

Source: S&P Global Ratings (2021)

The contraction in employment in 2020 was much deeper in sectors such as hotels (19.2%), construction (11.7%), commerce (10.8%) and transport (9.2%), which together concentrate close to 40% of employment in LAC. In turn, industry (8.6%) and other services (5.5%) also registered contractions, while in agriculture the loss of jobs was comparatively lower (2.0%) (CEPAL, 2021b).

Many workers, mainly informal, could not continue with their work and had to exit the market, which prevented them from generating income for their homes and acting in a countercyclical manner as in previous crises. Likewise, the closure of care services and schools implied a heavy workload within homes, which in general is distributed overloading unevenly, especially to women (CEPAL).

e. Forest Financing and Investments

Latin America has possibly been the region of the world most affected economically by the pandemic. The region was already in a phase of slow growth before the pandemic, especially if we consider its status as an emerging middle income region. As expected, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis led to a sharp drop in internationalization processes, with an estimated reduction of 80% in Foreign Direct Investment in 2020 compared to the previous year.

This drop was mainly due to the expansion of COVID-19 programs waiting for the uncertainties to dissipate. In addition, also during the pandemic, there were important investments in the forest sector, with a total of 1 001 507.22 million USD (14 331.5 million USD in 2019) (E7-3(re)1).



Bank (DB) estimate, green bonds reached an amount of US\$12.5 billion in 2020 and US\$18 billion in 2021 in LAC. The region represents only 2% of the global green bond market, with Brazil, Chile and Mexico responsible for 85% of these investments (SWISS INFO, 2021).

In Paraguay, forestry financing and investments are always a challenge for the forest sector, but difficult



Also in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Programa ProBosques in Peru



- a) Closing of restaurants, shops, gyms and other services, except essential services
- b)



The Brazilian government defined, through Decree No. 10.282/2020, a broad list of essential services, including: all services related to health, public and private security, national and civil defense, transport, telecommunications and internet, electricity and others. It is also noteworthy that the states of the federation were free to establish measures regarding the operation of essential services.

It is also noteworthy that forest production aimed mainly at manufacturing pulp and paper was considered essential in most LA countries.

2.1.23 Health Measures

Healthcare systems in most LA countries have significantly lower capacity than the OECD average, with lower health expenditure, fewer hospital beds and health professionals per capita, in addition to weak disease surveillance and tracking systems (OECD, 2020).

Faced with these challenges, governments in the region had to implement measures to increase the capacity of their healthcare systems to deal with the crisis, together with facilitating access for all populations. Some of the measures included building emergency hospitals in record time (e.g., Argentina), providing additional ICU beds (e.g., Colombia and Peru) and training health professionals to work in intensive care units (e.g.,



supplies needed to vaccinate the target population and transfers to the provinces through different programs;

- x In Bolivia the public health measure created refers to the obligation to implement biosecurity measures, including the vaccination strategy (Bolivia Questionnaire, 2021).
- x In Brazil the Ministry of Health launched the National Plan for the Operationalization of Vaccination against COVID-19 in February, 2021.
- x In Chile the Vaccine Road began in May 2020, when the Government contacted the main and most promising laboratories that were studying and trying to discover a vaccine. Agreements and contracts have been signed with Pfizer, Novartis, Sinovac, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Covax. Considering the great advances of the vaccination plan, which has already been administered. It is expected that with the gradual opening up and the relaxation of mobility restrictions, the processes linked to investment will accelerate, as well as continue to bolster economic activity (CONA Chile Questionnaire, 2021).
- x Colombia created the national vaccination plan in February, 2021, defining the vaccination schedule and priority groups of the population.
- x The government of Peru established a vaccination plan in October, 2020, including a schedule that prioritizes high-risk individuals.

Vaccination has advanced well in most LA countries. On 14 October, 2021, PAHO reported that 39% of the LAC population has a plan of vaccination against COVID-19. However, this advance of vaccination has been uneven across countries. For example, Uruguay surpassed 80% of vaccination, while Paraguay and Bolivia have less than 40% of the population fully vaccinated.

The updated status of vaccination in Latin America is presented in Table 8, considering fully vaccinated population

Table 8 - Status of COVID-19 vaccination in some countries of Latin America (of November 2021)

Country	Share of fully vaccinated population (%)
Argentina	



2.1.24 Economic Relief/Stimulus Measures

Most LA countries have adopted economic stimulus measures to help companies and individuals, especially those included in economically vulnerable situations, often with a focus on micro and small businesses.

In Argentina the main economic policies adopted by the government stands out (OECD, 2020):

- a) A credit line of USD 1 billion from the Central Bank (Banco Nación) at preferential interest rates for companies in the health and hygiene sector, with a focus on telework; million exclusively for telework;
- b) Flexible fiscal measures, such as minimizing personal and corporate taxes;
- c) Prices of food, personal hygiene medicines and medical frozen products for 30 days;
- d) Public banks will support private companies with working capital up to 180 days;
- e) Monetary policy easing

The Brazilian government also established economic measures to combat the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic (GOVERNO DO BRASIL, 2020). The most relevant were:

- a) Measures to facilitate the renegotiation of up to USD 690 billion in debt for companies and families to stimulate the economy;
- b) Low interest credit line for small and medium-sized companies;
- c) Government waived to collect the Tax on Financial Transactions (IOF) on credit operations during the crisis to stimulate economic activity;
- d) USD 6.1 billion program to subsidize the salaries of people in situations of contract suspension / reduced hours;
- e) Creation of emergency assistance in the amount of R\$ 600 for low-income or unemployed Brazilians;
- f) Provisional Measure that transfers R\$ 5 billion from the Social Integration Program (CIVIL Servant Patrimony Formation Program - PASEP) to Government Severance Indemnity Fund for Employees (FGTS) and releases a withdrawal of R\$1,045 per worker.

In Chile several government economic measures were taken, including

- a) Launch of a USD 12 billion emergency plan for the Emergency Family Income Project, local governments, civil society organizations, increased unemployment protection and health services (OECD, 2020);
- b) The Ministry of Finance and the Internal Revenue Service, has suspended monthly provisional payments (PPM) of the Income Tax of companies for three months (ILO, 2020);
- c) The Central Bank of Chile reduced the monetary policy interest rate by 50 basis points, to 0.50% (ILO, 2020)
- d) Law No. 21.225/2020 established a capitalization of the Bank of Chile for USD 500 million,



The government of Mexico has a package of support measures for SMEs that includes financing of 25,000 pesos per company or person, to be paid in three years, including a 12-month grace period. It also created a solidarity market platform, in which SMEs can find local markets to carry out transactions, outside the platform, with potential consumers of their products and services, promoting the consumption of local products and services. The Mexican government's economic measures also encompass economic intelligence units, which work to provide broader business opportunities for Mexican exporting SMEs, in a remote format. In addition, credit and microcredit are offered to different categories of companies (GOBIERNO DE MÉXICO, 2021).

In addition, the Environmental Compensation Program for Change of Land Use in Forest Lands, which provides economic resources to interested individuals and legal entities that meet the eligibility criteria, requirements and other provisions related to requesting them, indicated in the Guidelines for Operation of the Environmental Compensation Program for Change of Land Use in Forest Lands and that are located in the priority areas defined by CONAFOR based on the high and very high risk levels of incidence of pests and forest fires (CONAFOR Mexico Questionnaire).

As main economic measures, the government of Paraguay allowed the fractioning of the IRP (Impuesto a la renta personal) up to 5 interest-free installments with exemption from fines. The Central Bank of Paraguay also determined the reduction of the monetary policy interest rate, from 4% to 3.75%. To stimulate the commercial sector, a reduction in the import tariff on capital goods and e-commerce facilities was established, with an emphasis on the services (ECSA Paraguay Questionnaire).

Peruvian government implemented its Economic Plan to combat COVID-19, with approved measures equivalent to S/143 million soles. These resources are aimed at strengthening health services to control the impact of COVID-19, economic support for the most vulnerable families and measures to support small businesses (MEF PERU, 2020).

In Uruguay an investment stimulus plan was launched with new tax breaks for large investments. Also, credit lines of approximately USD 50 million were issued to companies (OECD, 2020).

2.1.25 Funding Programs

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) created the PAHO COVID-19 Response Fund, in



credit line of USD 36 million, with a term of 8 years, whose resources can be applied to the financing of small and medium-sized companies that are part of the export-related value chains

In Peru, the National Forest and Wildlife Service (SERFOR) of the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Irrigation, in coordination with different regional authorities in Cajamarca, Loreto, Ucayali and San Martín, has been working on a proposal for the preparation of a financing program to facilitate access of small non-timber forest producers under the AGROPERÚ Fund. This program seeks to promote the competitiveness of economic activities based on sustainable use of biodiversity (ADEX Peru questionnaire).

The World Bank has also supported DAC to respond to the impacts caused by COVID-19, through new operations and redirection of resources of existing projects (WORLD BANK, 2021). The World Bank approved a USD 500 million loan for Argentina to strengthen the battle against COVID-19, through the purchase of v



In relation to financing and credit, in some countries specific lines for financing aimed at the forest based sector, as well as small producers and family farmers, have been identified.

In Brazil, the Amazon Plan, an initiative of three private banks (Itaú, Bradesco and Santander) has the objective of leveraging sustainable development in the region. In addition, the Brazilian Forest Service (SFB) decreed the postponement of the payment due date of the installments related to forest production of the first two quarters of 2020 to December in forest concession contracts. Argentina created the Forest Sustainability and Competitiveness Program IDB 2863 / OC4(il)3(it)11(y).



In Brazil the government adopted measures to support people in vulnerable situation, workers and employers(GOVERNO DO BRASIL



- x Creation of temporary jobs through the transfer of S/ 150 million Peruvian Soles; Agroperú Fund with S/ 440 million soles to directly finance small agricultural producers; and Agrobanco with S/ 100 million soles to finance credit at low interest rates;
- x Operation of the Peru Jobs platform, through which citizens can access different job offers in the pandemic period;
- x Allocation of a bonus corresponding to S/ 380 soles for households living in poverty or extreme poverty;
- x Bonus of S/ 60 soles to benefit more than one million households that are part of the rural sector.

In Uruguay the main measures were (GOBIERNO DE URUGUAY, 2021)



the lowest interest rate (1.1 % for loans under the Program) offered to companies in Bolivia, no specific measure related to Sustainable Forest Management or industrial production or market / trade of forest sector was created to mitigate the impact of the pandemic (Bolivia Questionnaire, 2021).

Also in Chile the Economic Reactivation Program for small and medium-sized forest owners, including forest management, afforestation or recovering an area of 24 thousand ha, involving private and public forests, bolstered the local economy. This is promoting economic reactivation and job creation in the rural areas. Among the expected results, it is indicated that this project will improve the direct income condition of more than 2 thousand families and the generation of around 31 thousand direct jobs. This will directly contribute to the restoration of the economic income of this target group and the revitalization of local economies. To date, activities in 15 thousand ha



In Chile the trend is similar wood exports totaled US\$ 581 million in July 2021, a 14% increase over the same month in 2020.



9 Health measures

The health measures adopted by countries of the region were essential to combat COVID-19, save lives and reestablish public health. Despite being a challenge in many countries with very specific local conditions, social isolation is the main sanitary measure to control COVID-19, together with the use of face masks and hand hygiene, which helped to reduce the



2.2 t



¾ Strategies and Recovery Measures

- x The Bahamian government has committed to have 20% of its forests as protected areas for the Caribbean Challenge Initiative. This target of 20% was achieved including the wetlands and the terrestrial mangroves forests in the marine protected areas. The Forestry Unit is now given the responsibility to manage these wetlands and mangrove forests marine protected areas (MPA). However, the resources were not increased as a request was made for additional resources. Recently, the Cabinet approved the hiring of additional persons. Staff will be hired, trained and then redeployed to the satellite offices to cover the new areas.
- x The FAO had set up training programme for the Forestry Unit staff to receive forestry training





social/recreational activities. With the downturn in the number local and foreign tourists the revenue earnings of community persons were reduced significantly.

Some positives noted in the forest sector; the reduction in agricultural activities over time is resulting in the increase in forest cover. Also, with the reduction in the number of visitors to the forests an increase in the quality of the forests is expected.

¾ Strategies and Recovery Measures

- x The Ministries of Agriculture and Environment have developed a project to plant one million trees on public and private lands. The implementation of the project which started in 2020 has been affected by the pandemic. They have recrafted the project and there is now greater involvement of the public. Persons are given forest and/or fruit tree seedlings. Each individual is encouraged to care for the seedlings and report on the survival of the plants; the response from the public has been fairly successful. During September the Ministry introduced a competition for persons involved in the project. The person who planted the most seedlings during the week of September 22 won a prize. This encouraged many persons to participate in the tree planting project.
- x The project will be extended beyond the original completion date to ensure that the million trees are planted and maintained.

¾ Challenges in Addressing the Impact of COVID

- x In enforcing the new COVID protocols the Unit has had to expend additional funds to acquire masks, PPE, water boots and gloves for the staff, plus install sanitization stations throughout the offices, and sanitize the vehicles. With the social distancing protocols fewer officers are allowed to travel in one vehicle. These increase costs for the new unbudgeted expenses will adversely affect their b-4(erse)-2(l)13(y)-3(6(th)12(at)-57(the)-45(m)-4



of measures to deal with the increase in cases among the staff. This included rotation of staff, instituting a shift system for the staff, the number of persons in the offices was reduced to facilitate



Main products from the forests are:

x







3/4



government of Haiti introduced quarantine periods at different times in 2020. During these quarantine periods the activities on the MoE were significantly reduced. The activities affected most were the reforestation programs and controlling the forest fires.

The staff from the MoE were unable to travel to the communities during the quarantine periods to meet with the community members. This seriously affected the involvement of the officers with the communities.

Due to the lack of/or reduction in the activities of the MoE there was a loss/or reduction of some short-term jobs in the sector.

¾ Strategies and Recovery Measures

- x Plan to increase reforestation activities/programs in the next few years.
- x Increase the production capacity of the existing nurseries/germplasm centers

¾ Challenges in Addressing the Impact of COVID

- x The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on public funding which also affected the



across Jamaica, one for each Jamaica. In 2020, the implementation of the project was severely affected by lack of funds. The funds which were promised for the implementation of the NTPI were not forthcoming as the government had to adjust the national budget to accommodate the additional costs incurred in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. The NTPI proceeded at a much slower pace than was anticipated at the launch in 2019. The FD utilized their recurrent budget to ensure that seedlings were available to be planted for the NTPI. The production of seedling nurseries during the lockdown period was also affected, as persons were not allowed to go to the nurseries to water the plants. In 2020, the FD approached the private sector to get them more involved in the initiative. The private sector responded positively, currently there are a number of companies which have come on board to assist with seedling production, the distribution of the seedlings, and the planting trees on Forest Estates and in the urban areas.

The implementation of the NTPI also slowed down because the forest officers were not able to engage



reduce the number of





from the reduction in revenue. With the shift back to agriculture the forest cover in the country was under threat. Many persons had resorted to clearing the forest cover to convert the lands to farming. At the same time, the measures instituted by the Government across the island including daily curfew hours, affected the movement of the forest officers. Most persons knowing of the restrictions on the forest officers took the opportunity to gain access to the forest reserves. The FD had to increase its surveillance and monitoring activities to prevent/reduce these illegal activities.

They encountered some challenges as the island was divided into two zones, north and south, there were police check points at the border of these zones. If one did not have a permit, you could not pass the border into another zone. The FD requested permits for the field staff from the National Emergency Management Office, to allow the staff to pass freely from one zone to the other. That system is still in place, and used when there is an emergency curfew. However, since Government vehicles were allowed to go through the check points, the FD used them sometimes, for the field staff which also allowed them to move throughout the zones. The need to have persons kept at safe distances hampered their operations. The number of persons who could travel in the vehicle had to be reduced. They had to utilize a number of vehicles to carry the staff to the forests for their monitoring activities.

St. Lucia has a network of Nature Trails in their forest estates which attracted many local and foreign visitors. During the pandemic the trails had to be closed. This led to a big loss in revenue to the FD, even though the revenue usually goes to the central government coffers. In order for the FD to reopen these nature trails they had to have COVID certification for all the trails. The approval had to be issued from Ministry of Health and Ministry of Tourism to ensure that the trails were in satisfactory condition to accommodate the visitors, both local and foreign. All the stipulated protocols such as sanitization had to be in place.

There are a number of ecotourism sites which are privately owned and managed. Many of the owners were participants in the heritage tourism programme a few years ago, and were encouraged to offer their forests and attractions e.g. waterfalls to the tourists.



The Division has the jurisdiction to enforce the Wildlife Management Act and the Forests, Soils, and Water Conservation Act. This also covers the management of the watersheds which are critical in supplying water for consumption.

The implementation of the 10 year plan scheduled for 2020 to 2021 was not significantly impacted by COVID19. They have been able to continue with their reforestation activities, but were affected by the passage of Hurricane Elsa, even though the damage to the forest was not great, only a small percentage of damage to the forests. Access was impeded as there were some land slippages.

¾ Strategies for mitigating against the impact of COVID

- x Increase access to computers for all.
- x Improve internet service and greater access to the internet across St. Lucia.
- x Request capital funds from the government and external agencies
- x At the 32nd session of the Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission (LACFC) held in September 2021, a number of opportunities were identified during the meeting there were, they also noted that there were a number of financial sources that could be tapped.
- x Protocols developed in the Forestry Division to manage the rotation of staff and to be opened for business to the public were reduced interactions
- x



¾ Challenges in addressing the Impacts of COVID

- x The Forest Division received a reduction in the allocation of funds from the central government that was budgeted for them over the period. The allocation periods were modified from quarterly to monthly.
- x The unavailability of essential materials and supplies has adversely affected COVID-19 recovery forest programme.
- x Also Funds for the implementation of Community forests activities were reduced due to shift in allocations of funds to tackle the COVID pandemic. A number of livelihoods projects, which are critical for the recovery efforts, such as broom making with Lantana palm leaves, and using the shoots of the palm to make wine which is usually exported, and bee keeping and honey production were severely affected.
- x The two GEF funded projects are still operating; viz. the Integrated Ecosystems Management and Restoration of Forests in the South East Coast Project, and the Integrated Water, Land, and Ecosystems Management in the Caribbean Small Island Developing States Project, the work programs were not affected significantly. However, the implementers were unable to hold large community group meetings because of the restrictions which are in place. They resorted to virtual meetings but not everybody has access to the technology and some are unable to attend. This slowed down the implementation of the projects.

¾ Best Practices

- x The 10-year Strategic Plan for the forest sector is still being implemented and will guide the forest programs to assist with the post pandemic recovery

¾ Recommendations

- x Seek capital funds from the government and external agencies to assist with the recovery measures.
- x Need assistance from the UNFF to develop a livelihoods project to manage the feral/wild pigs problem in the forests. The feral pigs originally domesticated by humans for their meat and skin, but they have become a major pest in many forest ecosystems.



volcano, red is closest. With COVID [v š Z Z } u u μ v] š Ç •%o OE [%o Z • š Z]•





- o There were periods during the pandemic when the enforcement activities of the forest guards in the field were at a low level. In these periods the SBB did not have



- x SBB encouraged persons in the sector to make payment of forest fees using internet banking as much as possible, to avoid unnecessary ~~physical~~ contact.

¾ Recommendations

- x





¾ Strategies and recovery measures

- x The FD has identified the need for additional staff:
 - o To carry out activities on the plantations
 - o to increase the production of seedlings in the nurseries;
 - o to increase the patrolling and enforcement activities as Game Wardens;
 - o to carry out maintenance of the sites to facilitate the return of visitors to the National parks
- x The Government to offer additional licenses for harvesting of teak.
- x Local markets for teak and teak products to be identified
- x FD conducted a number of media briefings during the lockdown/ slowdown periods to inform population how they can assist with the protection of the forests reserves, using the traditional and social media channels. Addressing the following topics:
 - o How to protect the forests
 - o Information on Agroforestry practices plant trees that will bear fruits e.g. breadfruit along with timber and conservation trees
 - o Stop hunting in the closed season
 - o Allow the wildlife to return/replenish during this period of lockdown.
- x v } μ œ P ‰ œ • } v • š } Z À Z ^ š Ç š } v • [À] •] š š Z o y } œ • š • X birds and the natural beauty.

¾ Challenges in addressing the impact of COVID

- x Lack of funds to implement some of the strategies outlined above was a big challenge.
- x Government funds had to be reallocated to other sectors, such as health, to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is expected that as the country gets the number of COVID cases under control, funds will be allocated to the forest sector and the projects can resume with funds allocated to them in the new budget year.
- x Over 70% of all projects being implemented by the Forestry Division were put on hold since allocation



¾ Best practices to reduce the impact of COVID

During the period of the COVID pandemic, the FD has been offering virtual tours of forests of Trinidad and Tobago. Persons who were not able to physically visit the forests were given a chance to visit the forests when the country opens up again.

¾ Recommendations

- x Reallocate funds for the FD and the forest sector in the new budget.
- x The Government of Trinidad and Tobago to allocate additional resources for harvesting of Teak.
- x New local markets for Teak and Teak products should be identified to substitute for the drop in demand in the export markets.
- x Sharing information on the strategies used by other countries to encourage their forest sectors
- x What mechanisms are other countries using to keep the forest industry alive during the pandemic



of the projects. Some have had to return monies because they could spend the funds during the pandemic period.

¾ Recommendations

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- x Develop more community projects. They reforest the degraded lands persons will be reimbursed for the planting the following year for the trees that have been established, using agreed rates and prices.



3 t RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

3.1 t



- x Sharing information on the strategies used by other countries to encourage their forests sectors

3.2 t





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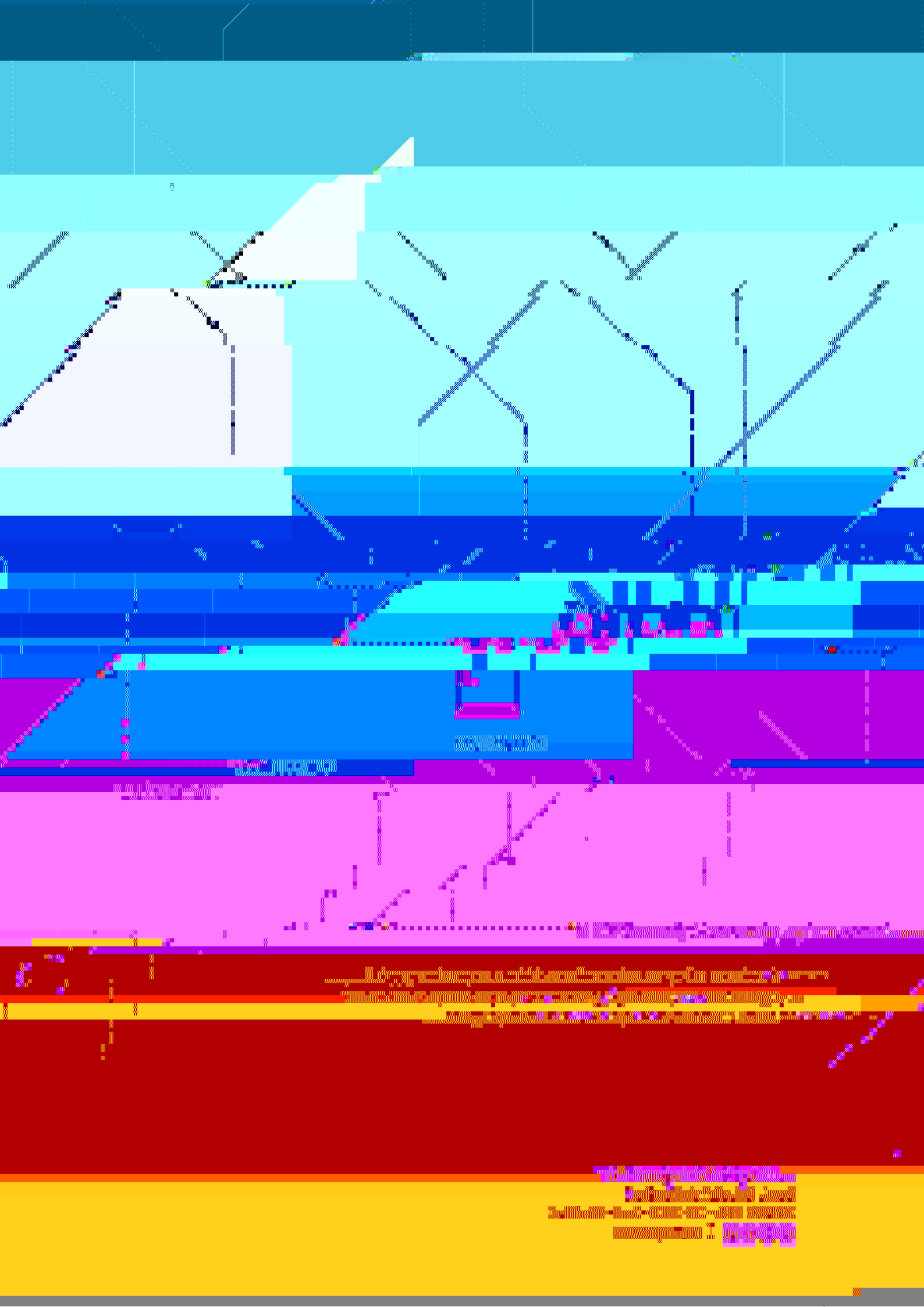
ANNEXt LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS BY COUNTRY

COUNTRY	INSTITUTION	CONTACT
Bahamas	Ministry of the Environment and Housing Forestry Unit	



COUNTRY	INSTITUTION	CONTACT
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Agriculture, Food Production, Fisheries ar



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