

## Press Release

# Forests under Climate Change – Knowledge Exchange between Austria and Africa

- Importance of forests and trees for climate protection highlighted at R20 Austrian World Summit
- Special focus on Africa, where particularly high impacts of climate change are expected
- New Austrian initiatives for promoting science cooperation and networking with African partners towards greater sustainability

(Vienna, 28 May 2019) Forests are the largest terrestrial carbon store. They can sustainably produce woody biomass to replace fossil fuels; and solid wood products can substitute other energy intensive materials. In addition to their crucial role in mitigating the worst impacts of climate change, forests provide a multitude of ecosystem goods and services that are vital to human well-being and to the protection of biodiversity. Climate change, however, also severely threatens forests and trees. It is adding to a range of other pressures on forest ecosystems, such as population pressure and the increasing need for agricultural land.

A breakout session at the R20 Austrian Climate Summit 2019 focuses specifically on the role of forests in Africa, where many people are highly dependent on forest goods and services and, consequently, most vulnerable to climate change. The event is organized jointly by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism (BMNT), the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), and takes place on 29 May at the University of Vienna. Three renowned experts from Africa will talk with Austrian representatives from government and research about the opportunities and challenges for people and the environment related to forests, trees and forest products in the face of climate change and about collaboration with Austrian partners.

Maria Patek, Director-General for Forestry and Sustainability, Austrian Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism (BMNT), underlines Austria's global responsibility for addressing climate change and the sustainable management of forests, "Fostering cooperation on forest-related matters and building strong networks is essential to our approach. We believe that our strong focus on knowledge sharing, capacity building and facilitating networks for exchange accelerates the impact on the fight against climate change." This is why Austria also hosts the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO). With over 600 member organizations in 126 countries IUFRO is a network that fosters science collaboration worldwide for underpinning sound decisions on global sustainability challenges.

New instruments which Austria has developed in support of research cooperation and networking between Austrian and African academic institutions are pursuing the same goal on a broader scale.

"In addition to bilateral cooperation programs between Austria and African countries such as South Africa, we are now also utilizing the new global program for 'Development Research Cooperation', in which most African countries can participate. Furthermore, in cooperation with the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, and our mobility agency OeAD GmbH, we will start to build up the Austrian-African research network 'Africa-UniNet' later this year with the aim to create a basis for long-term cooperation and dialogue", says Barbara Weitgruber, Director General for Scientific Research and International Relations of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF).

All these initiatives share the common goal of contributing towards overcoming challenges locally and globally and, thus, towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

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Information: <https://www.iufro.org/events/other-major-events/r20-austrian-world-summit-2019/>