Forests – Lungs of our environment

When we relax on a bed, take medicine, read or write in a book or build a house, we always make a connection with the forest. Because they provide us wood for furniture, fibers for our clothes, herbs or medicines with health benefits, flora, fauna, and plenty of oxygen.

The chorus of birds singing, monkeys howling, frogs calling and insects buzzing welcome a fresh morning. The crystal clear waterfalls are perfect for a refreshing afternoon swim and fireflies illuminating trees at night are wonderful.

Not only this, forests are important to the communities that depend on them. Forests are so much more than a collection of trees. About 750 million people worldwide live in forests and more than 1.6 billion depend directly on them for their livelihoods.

Forests are essential for life on Earth. They provide habitat for a vast array of plants and animals. They supply the oxygen we need to survive. They provide timber for products we use every day. Forests are home to more than three-quarters of the world's life on land. These ecosystems are complex webs of organisms that include plants, animals, fungi, and bacteria.

Forests buffer the impacts of storms and floods. By feeding our rivers, forests supply drinking water for nearly half of the world's largest cities. They also provide shelter, jobs, and security for forest-dependent populations. They are important to people and economies such as habitat for biodiversity, provision of drinking water, water and climate cycle regulation, erosion prevention, crop pollination, soil fertility, and flood control.

Forests have the capacity to remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it, which is called forest mitigation. The process of removing carbon and storing it is called carbon sequestration. They also avoid and reduce the emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, which prevents the planet from warming to more extreme temperatures, which is called climate change mitigation.

Limiting or controlling the global temperature increase will be impossible without the major role of forests. But forests are being destroyed or degraded at a fast rate. Deforestation comes in many forms, including fires, clear-cutting for agriculture, the need for timber, and degradation due to climate change. This impacts people's livelihoods and threatens a wide range of plant and animal species.

Threats to the world's forests are growing. Expanding agriculture, due to increased population is responsible for most of the world's deforestation. Illegal logging resulting from the demand for cheap wood and paper is the largest threat to the world's forests. In degraded forests, small trees, bushes, and plants often are severely damaged or dead and rivers are polluted.

The Amazon, the planet's largest rain forest, lost at least 17% of its forest cover in the last half-century due to human activity – mainly clearing trees to create new or larger farms.

However, each year approximately 12 million hectares of forest are destroyed. This deforestation along with agriculture and other land usage is responsible for roughly 25% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

The practice of planting and maintaining forested areas for the benefit and sustainability of both humans and the environment is called forest conservation. A special report on climate change affirmed that planting forests and protecting existing forests is key to all pathways for limiting global warming. Investment in planting trees and forest conservation is urgently needed as many of the world's remaining forests are under increasing threat due to agriculture expansion, timber extraction, fuelwood collection, and other activities.