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EDITORIAL

A Year in Small-scale Forestry: Global Outlook, Research Insights, and the Path Forward

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Key Message
The global forestry sector faces a critical period. While deforestation rates have declined, forest loss from human and climate-driven fires is rising, impacting public, community, and small-scale private forests. In the Global South, the concept and role of forests continue to evolve beyond traditional timber and environmental benefits, while in the Global North, small-scale and private woodlands are gaining increasing recognition. Here, I synthesizes the articles published in Small-scale Forestry journal throughout the year. It also outlines strategic directions and priorities for the coming year.

Forestry and Small-scale Forestry at a Crossroad

In 2025, the global forestry sector finds itself at a pivotal juncture, where the intertwining of environmental imperatives, economic pressures, and social dynamics presents both challenges and opportunities (FAO 2025). Global forest loss reached unprecedented levels, largely driven by catastrophic wildfires intensified by climate change (Jones et al. 2024). Notably, the area of tropical forest cover lost in 2024 exceeded that of the previous year, with wildfires accounting for nearly half of the total loss (Goldman et al. 2025). In both years, wildfires surpassed agriculture and commodity-driven deforestation as the leading cause of forest loss, marking a per-

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sistent shift in the primary drivers of global forest degradation and loss (Sims et al. 2025; Curtis et al. 2018).

Small-scale forestry, encompassing community-managed forests and family-owned woodlands, plays a crucial role in global forestry discourse (Harrison et al. 2002). However, recent developments underscore the need for a reevaluation of strategies to ensure sustainability and resilience (Namuene et al. 2025). Beyond economic and environmental considerations, the social fabric of forest-dependent communities is still evolving. In regions such as the Indian Sundarbans, residents' satisfaction with forest resources is shaped by healthcare, water security, and infrastructure rather than income alone (Gope & Mistri 2025). Such findings underscore the importance of holistic approaches that address diverse socio-economic needs to promote community well-being alongside sustainable forest management (Nath et al. 2025).

Research in Small-scale Forestry

This year, Brett Butler, our long-serving Editor-in-Chief, stepped down, and I assumed the role in February. Due to this leadership transition, the March issue was delayed, and a double issue was released in June. Subsequent issues were published in September and December. In total, Volume 24 featured 23 articles across three *Small-scale Forestry* issues, including 3 review articles and 1 brief report. Collectively, these contributions explore a wide array of topics and geographic contexts, spanning both the Global South and North. Key insights from these publications are outlined below.

Private forest owners play a critical role in advancing environmental goals, yet their engagement varies widely across regions. In Finland, adoption of environmentally oriented practices is driven by positive attitudes toward ecological objectives rather than social pressures (Häyrinen et al. 2025), while in France, so-called "inactive" owners remain interested in balancing wood harvesting with biodiversity, highlighting the value of targeted technical support (Brahic et al. 2025). In the U.S., owners face diverse natural and human-induced risks, underscoring the need for holistic policies that reflect varied priorities (Shanafelt et al. 2025). Although state incentive programs for ecosystem services show periodic uptake, overall participation remains flat, pointing to the importance of strengthening long-term support (Frey 2025). Similarly, U.K. farmers are exploring small-scale farm woodlands as supplemental income, with policy support and cooperative approaches offering pathways to unlock both ecological and economic benefits (Franks 2025). Collectively, these studies underscore that nuanced, region-specific strategies, combined with technical and policy support, are essential to foster resilient, sustainable private forestry globally.

Forestry policy and collaborative planning are increasingly critical for sustainable management and climate mitigation. In China's Fujian Province, Hong et al. (2025) show that higher policy uncertainty reduces forestland value and extends rotation periods, highlighting the need to integrate policy variability into resilient management strategies. At the same time, Li et al. (2025) demonstrate that coordinated cross-border carbon sink planning between central and local governments can

lower development costs while optimizing forest carbon allocation, emphasizing the potential of policy-driven incentives and collaboration to achieve both economic and environmental goals. Together, these findings underscore the importance of adaptive, coordinated approaches in shaping forestry's role in sustainable development and climate action.

Climate change is intensifying both ecological risks and social vulnerabilities in forest-dependent communities. In Sweden, Björcman et al. (2025) show that private forest owners experience profound emotional stress during wildfires, yet collective action with neighbors and rescue services helps alleviate feelings of powerlessness, highlighting the importance of proactive collaboration to build local resilience and safety. In Türkiye, rural women in Kastamonu face increased workloads and vulnerability due to drought, wildlife pressures, and unpredictable weather, with impacts amplified by poverty and low education (Cesur & Guloglu 2025); targeted policies are needed to strengthen women's adaptive capacity and safeguard livelihoods. In Africa, *Prunus africana*, a key medicinal tree, is increasingly threatened by pests, diseases, and declining vitality at lower altitudes. Ntoko and Schmidt (2025) emphasize that integrating local adaptive strategies—such as agroforestry, planting on farmland, and nursery establishment—into conservation and development programs can protect this species while supporting sustainable livelihoods in the face of climate change.

Agroforestry and integrated tree-based systems across Africa and Asia are proving vital for food security, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods. In Ethiopia, agroforestry enhances soil fertility, water retention, crop yields, and income diversification, yet limited market access, land tenure issues, and low awareness hinder its broader adoption (Abebe et al. 2025). In India's arid regions, silvipasture systems combine trees, grasses, and livestock to improve soil fertility, fodder quality, and farmers' resilience, while also supporting carbon sequestration and environmental restoration (Shil et al. 2025). In Arunachal Pradesh, traditional agroforestry practices such as agri-silviculture and homegardens boost biomass carbon stocks, maintain species diversity, and strengthen ecological resilience, offering pathways for sustainable land management and climate mitigation (Deuri et al. 2025). Similarly, in Tanzania's Kagera region, tree farming with pine and eucalyptus provides economic and environmental benefits, with adoption influenced by farm size, household demographics, marginal land availability, and access to credit; targeted policies supporting youth and credit access could enhance participation and climate-positive outcomes (Christian et al. 2025).

Forest landscape restoration (FLR) in Central Africa has often followed top-down approaches, relying on exotic species and limited community input. Peroches et al. (2025) emphasize that sustainable restoration requires genuine partnerships with local populations, transparent monitoring, and integration of ecological goals with local livelihoods. Similarly, in Ghana's Offinso Forest District, Yeboah et al. (2025) show that participation in FLR, is influenced by age, education, and livelihood type, with both forest-dependent and non-forest-dependent households engaging actively. FLR enhances natural, social, and financial capital, highlighting its multifaceted benefits and underscoring the need for context-specific, community-centered approaches supported by strong institutional frameworks.

In tropical developing countries, community forestry has improved forest conditions and local livelihoods but in recent years rising non-farm income opportunities and alternative products are reducing dependence on forests, leading to lower participation in management. In Nepal, Bhattrai et al. (2025) emphasize that adapting governance structures and incentive mechanisms to these socio-economic shifts is essential to revitalize engagement and strengthen forest conservation.

Mangrove forests are critical for climate resilience and community livelihoods, yet their conservation depends on active local engagement. In Vietnam, Tien et al. (2025) found that fishermen are more willing to pay for mangrove protection than other residents, with contributions strongly influenced by income, education, and awareness of ecosystem benefits. Effective programs, the authors argue, must tailor strategies to different user groups, ensure transparency, and foster inclusive, well-monitored participation. In the Indian Sundarbans, forest- and river-dependent communities face compounded socio-economic and environmental pressures. Gope and Mistri (2025) report that infrastructure gaps, limited welfare access, and environmental stressors drive widespread dissatisfaction, highlighting the need to strengthen healthcare, education, water security, and livelihood diversification while integrating conservation with community welfare to build resilience.

Eco-labelling is a powerful tool for promoting sustainable forest management and combating illegal logging. In Cameroon, Namuene et al. (2025) report strong consumer support for certified timber, verification systems, and routine checks, noting that education enhances awareness and responsible purchasing. Engaging informed consumers is crucial for enforcing legality, protecting forests, and ensuring transparency throughout timber supply chains.

Sustainable timber production in Iran's northern forests depends on minimizing damage to residual trees during selective logging. Naghdi et al. (2025) show that tree bole wounds—mostly within the first meter of the stem—heal more slowly as wound size, severity, and tree diameter increase, highlighting the importance of careful skid trail design and log extraction to maintain ecological integrity.

Urban community forests in Malaysia provide significant physical, social, and psychological benefits, especially for the elderly. Nath et al. (2025) demonstrate that activities such as exercise, nature observation, and relaxation improve subjective well-being, underscoring the importance of expanding equitable access to urban forests to enhance health, social interaction, and overall quality of life.

In rural Japan, traditional Fukugi windbreaks face pressures from urbanization and demographic change. Chen (2025) emphasizes strong community support for their preservation, driven by ecological, cultural, and climatic benefits, and advocates integrated conservation strategies that combine traditional practices, local engagement, and policy support to sustain these living barriers.

The Path Forward

The ongoing global forest cover loss, driven by wildfires and human activities, underscores the urgent need for coordinated global action to address the escalating forest crisis. Without immediate and sustained intervention, we risk a dangerous cycle of

climate change and environmental degradation. Tackling these challenges requires a multifaceted approach: investing in sustainable practices such as agroforestry and diversified forest product markets, implementing policies that support small-scale forest owners with technical assistance, fair trade opportunities, and access to carbon markets, and fostering community engagement by integrating local knowledge into forest management.

Forestry, including small-scale and community-managed forests, stands at a pivotal crossroads. Thoughtful interventions that promote sustainability, empower local communities, and implement inclusive policies can transform current challenges into opportunities, guiding the sector toward a more resilient, equitable, and environmentally sound future.

As we look ahead, *Small-scale Forestry* journal remains committed to advancing this vision by serving as a vital platform for cutting-edge research and dialogue on small-scale and broader forestry fields. In 2026, the journal proudly celebrates its 25th anniversary, a significant milestone that marks a quarter-century of scholarship and collaboration. With a renewed and more diverse team of associate editors, we aim to further strengthen our contribution to the global forestry community, enhance our impact across the broader field, and continue improving efficiency and responsiveness in our editorial processes.

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