

Curbing Deforestation and Limiting Wildlife Trade, Can We Avert the Next Pandemic?

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EDITORIAL

According to a latest analysis, reducing tropical deforestation and controlling the wildlife trade could be cost-efficient approaches to prevent pandemics before they start. A virus crosses from animals to humans every two years or so, and increases the re-emergence of a pandemic like COVID-19. As humans intrude more into the natural world, these cases are becoming more frequent, and they are accountable for some of the worst outbreaks in recent memory, including SARS, Ebola, HIV, and, most likely, the latest SARS-CoV.

A researcher stated that “COVID has killed hundreds of thousands of people and disrupted the economy, and there are numerous smart, relatively inexpensive steps we can take right now to reduce the chance of another calamity like this.” Although many factors influence whether a spillover becomes a pandemic, including the virus's characteristics and how humans react to it. Some scientists argued that, the first step in pandemic preparations should be to limit the probability of spillover events by combatting deforestation, controlling factory farms, and monitoring the wildlife trade.

As human's clear vast areas of forest for farmland or roads, land edges proliferate, raising the risk of spillover from once-isolated wildlife to humans and livestock. While forest loss is escalating in many areas, some countries such as Brazil have taken initiatives to mitigate the problem, resulting in 70% reduction in deforestation.

The researchers estimate that \$1.5 billion to \$9.5 billion in yearly investments could halve worldwide deforestation rates while maintaining biodiversity and cutting carbon emissions, based on the price of those and similar projects. Humans are also exposed to wild animals and their infections through wildlife marketplaces and the illegal wildlife trade. COVID, for example, is thought to have originated in a Chinese wildlife market. However, just stopping the wild meat trade in China would cost \$19 billion. Also, monitoring programs that screen wild animals for viruses in potential hot spots would cost an additional \$120 million to \$340 million per year. According to the study, such measures would cost between \$20 and \$30 billion every year. Although that cost pales in comparison to COVID-19's estimated worldwide impact, which exceeds \$5 trillion in lost gross domestic product this year alone.

According to a scientist, deforestation and the wildlife trade do cause spillover, but not pandemics; pandemics occur due to a lack of governance, sensible public health initiatives, and surveillance. In reaction to disease outbreaks, efforts to restrict wild meat consumption can affect local people who rely on wild meat for protein and undermine public trust in public health. To justify these expenses, the initiatives would have to cut the risk of a pandemic by 27% in a given year, according to the analysis. It's difficult to say how much these measures lower spillover risk, but even if they make pandemics less likely by a slight bit, it's a cost-effective solution and a wise investment for national and international security.

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