**Preventing future pandemics: A research avenue for corporate sustainability/social responsibility scholars**

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This blog has forged such a focused trail that I would only blur its brightness and weaken its vigor if I added even a short sentence on how businesses are responding to the pandemic. As someone who is native to natural sciences (forestry) and a migrant to social sciences (business), I have viewed the pandemic with what some of us would call a *hybrid* lens. Here is a very short reflection.

How did the COVID-19 outbreak start? Well, we don't yet know for sure but there is evidence to show that it is not laboratory manufactured (despite the rumor that was circulating weeks ago and which I am sure will recirculate in the future). There is convincing evidence to show that it all started from wet markets. Quite likely that is the case. There are already conversations underway about putting an end to those practices. Wet markets are, however, just one, and regionally confined, manifestation of a bigger and systemic problem, which is human-wildlife interaction. As wildlife are forced into closer proximity to humans, people are exposed to diseases never before encountered. There are numerous reasons why human-wildlife interaction is increasing but the main driver is tropical deforestation. Every year, we wipe out from the face of the earth tropical forests roughly equivalent to the size of Austria. As their habitat is destroyed, the wildlife is forced to find refuge and forage closer to human settlements. In some cases (e.g., tigers and leopards) this causes direct conflict. In others (e.g., bats and primates), it can result in transmission of viruses. Halting tropical deforestation is therefore critical to prevention of future pandemics. Why am I sharing all this with scholars of corporate sustainability/social responsibility? Well, because most tropical deforestation is induced by global corporations. As a quick overview, tropical deforestation is the second largest contributor (after the energy sector) to greenhouse gas emissions. To keep it in perspective, emissions from tropical deforestation far exceed the emissions from all the world's cars, airplanes, and ships combined. Also, deforestation focused carbon reduction strategy is one of the most economical alternatives: the Economist magazine once dubbed this approach " a steal."

Why are we not focusing on this approach then? Yes, you guessed it. It's because this approach is not easy to implement. Numerous initiatives are in place to halt tropical deforestation but to little, or frankly, no avail. There are four industry sectors (the so called big four) that fuel tropical deforestation through globally dispersed supply-chains: cattle ranching (beef production), palm oil cultivation (you know the long list of products made from palm oil), soy production (actually, most of it goes to feed chicken that become food for us), and paper products (including the toilet paper, that much sought after product). Many of us have written about the [opacity in global supply-chain](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0007650319898490?casa_token=QL2vfkqexT4AAAAA%3AHEI77K7LQRG5BzrBPRP5py1eFTgsBXttVqxL_ZiyJfnMH1jlTwDQv1ehWeB14OfsxPjP37YzFe8K_M4)s showcasing that many brands don't even know who exactly their suppliers are. Unfortunately, insightful scholarship is stopping at the gate: we have a good deal of understanding what is going on, we have extensively theorized supply-chain problems. Now is the time to take a more meaningful step to help combat those problems. This is where our community, community of corporate sustainability scholars, must step up. Through my over a decade long research in the forest sector, I have come to the following conclusion. Unless social and natural scientists come together, understand each other's language, and methodological approaches, we cannot be effective in finding solutions to ecological crises.

As a sustainability scholar, my biggest takeaway from the COVID-19 outbreak is that we ought to be taking tropical deforestation much more seriously than we have. I sincerely hope that the collective intellect housed within O&E, ARCS, GRONEN, RRBM, NBS, SIM, IABS and other groups could come together to help address this stubborn (and as it is fancy to say, wicked) problem. I can tell that many forestry scholars are keen on collaborating as they too have recognized that without truly understanding corporate behavior, their scientific discoveries will not make a dent.

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