



UN-DESA Division for Sustainable Development Goals

## **Sustainable Development Goal 15: Progress and Prospects**

*An expert group meeting in preparation for HLPF 2018:  
Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies*

### **Background notes for discussion sessions**

#### **Day 1: Monday 14 May**

**9:45-11:00**

#### **Session 1: Progress—where are we?<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Background**

This session provides an overall assessment with regard to SDG 15, using the best available data. It draws on both global and regional evidence to present current status and trends with regard to the various targets of SDG 15.

SDG 15 focuses on conservation and sustainable use of forests, other terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity, including halting desertification and land degradation and combatting illegal trade in endangered species. SDG 15 is one of the more ambitious and wide-ranging SDGs – ambitious because many of the targets, inspired by and aligned with the Aichi Targets, have 2020 as the year of achievement, and wide-ranging because it encompasses all types of land-based ecosystems and biodiversity.

SDG 15 contains 12 targets and 12 indicators meant to track progress towards them. These 12 indicators in turn draw heavily from the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership, which has focused on indicators towards the 2011-2020 Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for the seven biodiversity-related conventions. If one organizes the indicators according to the State-Pressure-Response framework, most of the indicators (seven) measure response, with only four tracking state and only one tracking pressure.

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<sup>1</sup> Based in significant measure on Constanza Martínez, Thomas Brooks, Stuart Butchart, Diego Juffe-Bignoli, Naomi Kingston, Chapter 18: goal 15 Life on land. Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss. Paloma Duran Y Lalaguna *et al.* eds., *International Society and Sustainable Development Goals*, Thomson Reuters Proview Ebooks, First Edition, December 2016.



### *Situation and trends*

Forests and other ecosystems: Forests covered 30.7% of global land area in 2015, down one percentage point from 2000. Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia saw the largest net losses, while Eastern Asia saw net increase in forest cover. Importantly, the total 3.3m ha annual net rate of deforestation in the 2010s represents a drop by more than half from the 7.3m ha per year annual net rate in the 1990s. These figures are subject to considerable uncertainty, however, which new measurement technologies—including high-resolution GIS imagery—are beginning to address. Still, satellites cannot easily distinguish primary forest from plantation forest.

Protected area coverage of Key Biodiversity Areas: The second indicator associated with target SDG 15.1 relates to the coverage by designated protected areas of biodiversity-rich ecosystems of various types (so-called terrestrial and freshwater Key Biodiversity Areas). The percentage of terrestrial Key Biodiversity Areas completely covered by protected areas has increased from 16.5% in 2000 to 19.3% in 2016. The percentage of freshwater Key Biodiversity Areas completely covered by protected areas has increased from 13.8% in 2000 to 16.6% in 2016.

Protected area coverage of terrestrial Key Biodiversity Areas is lowest in Caucasus and Central Asia (4.3% of sites completely covered by protected areas) and Western Asia (4.6%) and highest in Eastern Asia (26.6%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (26.4%). With respect to freshwater Key Biodiversity Areas, protected area coverage is lowest in Western Asia (1.2% of sites completely covered by protected areas) and Caucasus and Central Asia (3.7%) and highest in Northern Africa (25.5%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (24.2%).

Extent of sustainable forest management: While the proposed indicator for target 2 on sustainable forest management is a Tier III composite indicator constructed by FAO, one of the components – viz., area of forest under sustainable management as evidenced by certification – shows a steep upward trend since 2000 – from 53 million has to 407 million has in 2012, a growth rate of almost 20% per year.

Land degradation The indicator on extent of land degradation is still a Tier III indicator. More details on measuring this trend are provided in the Background Note for Session 8 on land and soils.

Mountain ecosystems: There is also a specific indicator on protected area coverage of key biodiversity areas in mountain ecosystems. It tracks trends over time in the complete protected area coverage of Key Biodiversity Areas that overlap  $\geq 50\%$  with mountains as defined by the digital world mountain map. This coverage has increased from 18.1% in 2000 to 20.1% in 2016.



It is lowest in Western Asia (3.5% of sites completely covered by protected areas) and Caucasus and Central Asia (6.4%) and highest in Eastern Asia (42.3%).

FAO has proposed a mountain green cover index, which is currently rated as a Tier II indicator. It is similar in focus to indicator 15.1.1, which measures forest cover, but it is based on a different dataset.

Biodiversity and threatened species: Target 15.5 focuses on halting biodiversity loss, addressing the high rate of species extinction. IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species is used as the basis for one indicator, the Red List Index, which combines measures of probability of survival of multiple species. The RLI shows a declining probability of survival across almost all regions (where regional survival probability is weighted by the percentage of each species' distribution found within the region). South Asia shows both the lowest overall species survival probability and a steep decline in that probability since 2000.

Access and benefit sharing: The indicator for target 15.6 is based on number of agreements reached under two international agreements reached through two mechanisms pertaining to access and benefit sharing: the Nagoya Protocol (to the CBD) on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization, and the Standard Material Transfer Agreement under the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. This is considered a Tier III indicator at present.

Poaching and illegal wildlife trade: The UN Office of Drugs and Crime proposes an indicator measuring seizures of illegal shipments of plants and animals as a proportion of total trade in plants and animals, standardized using import prices in a common market. This indicator combines a measure of pressure with one of response (viz., the intensity of monitoring and enforcement). While it is considered a Tier I indicator, data are not yet available to measure it.

It has been suggested that a disaggregation of the Red List Index could also provide a proxy for measuring the pressure on species survival, including those arising from illegal trade.

Invasive alien species: This is a response indicator based on number of countries with adequate legislation the problem and resources allocated to addressing the problem (the data is collected by IUCN's Species Survival Commission). To date, 55% of countries have enacted overarching national legislation to prevent, control and/or limit the spread and impact of invasive alien species. The global trend in legislative response has been positive for the few last decades and accelerated in the 1990s but then slowed somewhat in the 2000s. The resources dimension has yet to be measured.

Integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national planning: Thus far no indicator exists. It is likely that a future indicator will be based on national self-assessments of progress towards national targets, possibly with a rating system to provide a degree of standardization.



Resource mobilization for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem protection: The only data available is from the OECD DAC’s donor database, which contains “Rio markers” tracking official development assistance (ODA) directed to the Rio conventions, including CBD. By that measure, the trend in biodiversity-related ODA has been positive since 2000, but with considerable variability and a steep drop following the 2008 financial crisis. As of 2014, ODA for biodiversity from DAC donors stood at a little under \$3.5 billion. No data are available on domestic public investment in such measures, nor on private domestic or international investment.

### *Successes and challenges*

Of the 12 indicators established by the 47th meeting of the UN Statistical Commission through the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG indicators, data are already available for five through the SDGs database and two more are available from other authoritative sources. The remaining five do not yet exist. It would be valuable to strengthen the incorporation of pressure indicators for SDG 15, given that only one is proposed at present.

The seven indicators that already exist reveal an important discrepancy. On the one hand, the five indicators of response all show positive trends – efforts towards implementation of SDG 15 are increasing. On the other hand, worryingly, SDG indicators 15.1.1 and 15.5.1, the two indicators available so far on the state of life on land, both show declines. Understanding why the overall state of nature is declining despite increasing efforts towards conservation and sustainable development is an urgent priority if SDG 15 is to be met.

One plausible explanation for these contradictory trends would be that existing responses have had a positive but inadequate impact in slowing the loss of nature, and that these need to be supplemented, including by scaled-up investment, monitoring and enforcement efforts, in order to overcome existing pressures and hence reverse loss.

### *Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress*

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development provides the overarching international reporting framework for progress towards SDG 15 as well as all the other SDGs. It is therefore imperative that the HLPF continue to be supported by UN Member States and that they continue to engage actively, along with other stakeholders, in deliberations on the SDGs and progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Naturally, given the centrality of biodiversity conservation to SDG 15 and also conservation and sustainable use of forests, the respective conventions and fora responsible for these will play a critical role – viz., the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Forum on Forests.



Likewise, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification will be instrumental in addressing land degradation, while CITES will be vital to combatting illegal wildlife trade. All of these and others are referenced in the subsequent sessions. Here, it is worth noting the importance of fostering adequate communication, coordination and cooperation across the different agreements, instruments, and fora to be able to capture wherever relevant possible synergies across the targets of SDG 15, as well as capturing synergies and minimizing trade-offs between SDG 15 and other SDGs. SDG 13 on climate change is particularly pertinent to the future survival of biodiversity and the health of the ecosystems on which it vitally depends.

### **Discussion questions**

1. Where has there been notable progress towards SDG 15 targets, and where have trends been in the opposite direction?
2. Are there particular regions where the situation is especially encouraging (or worrying)?
3. How can we improve the indicator set used to track progress towards SDG 15, given that several are Tier III and others Tier II?
4. What are most important synergies across the targets of SDG 15, and what does this imply for cooperation going forward?
5. What are the most important interdependencies between SDG 15 and other SDGs? Where do these point to synergies to be captured, where to possible trade-offs? How to capture the former, minimize the latter?

### **11:15-12:15 Session 2: Forests**

#### **Background**

##### *Situation and trends*

Forests are among the world's most productive land-based ecosystems and are essential to life on earth and sustainable development. Forests provide essential goods and services, including timber, food, fibre, fuel, fodder and medicine.

Sustainably managed forests and trees conserve soil and water; prevent land degradation and desertification; reduce the risk of floods, landslides and avalanches, droughts, dust and sand storms, and other disasters; and are crucial to climate change mitigation and adaptation and conserving the world's biological diversity, thereby serving as a crucial accelerator for the achievement of SDG15 and across other goals.

##### *Successes and challenges*



While global rates of deforestation have decreased in the recent past from a net annual forest area loss of 7.3 million ha in 2000 to 3.3 million ha in 2015, and they are still alarmingly high. The main driver of deforestation continues to be conversion of forests to agricultural land. In addition, forest degradation is increasing globally, mainly due to unsustainable use, often driven by poverty and/or poor land governance.

Despite ongoing efforts to protect, manage and restore forests and to afforest and reforest under long-term management plans and initiatives, the current rate of progress is not sufficient to achieve the ambitious, time-bound targets of SDG15. Successes need to be upscaled and urgent action needs to be taken to halt deforestation by 2020 and to increase forest area in order to meet the growing demand for forest products and services in the context of sustainable development.

*Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress*

The recent adoption of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 (UNSPF) and its Global Forest Goals (GFGs) by the UNGA provides a vital opportunity for all partners and stakeholders to join forces to accelerate forest-related progress as it serves as a global framework for action at all levels to sustainably manage all types of forests and trees outside forests, and to halt deforestation and forest degradation, including through contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and the UN Forest Instrument among other international forest-related instruments, processes, commitments and goals.

The UNFF and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and its member organizations play an important role in implementing the UNSPF and supporting the achievement of SDG15. Equally important is the commitment of the private sector and the involvement of civil society, particularly youth. Close collaboration on the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network will facilitate access to resources for sustainable forest management.

### **Discussion questions**

1. How can the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 leverage and accelerate the progress in SDG15 and other SDGs?
2. How can efforts to halt and reverse deforestation be accelerated by strengthening positive links between agriculture and forests?
3. What policy changes could help to increase investments in forests and sustainable landscape management?
4. Which are the most critical interlinkages of SDG15 with other goals and targets (GFGs, Aichi Targets, climate goals) in terms of co-benefits or trade-offs? How can they be leveraged towards progress?



**12:15-13:15**  
**Session 3: Biodiversity**

**Background**

Biodiversity – the variety of life on Earth, including species and ecosystems - is essential for sustainable development and human well-being. It underpins food, fibre, and water supply, mitigates and provides resilience to climate change, supports human health, and provides jobs in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and many other sectors. Without effective measures to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will not be achievable.

*Situation and trends*

Given the need for biodiversity and healthy ecosystems to achieve the 2030 Agenda, it is not surprising that many of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) include targets that reflect their important role. Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems are included not only in SDG 14 on oceans and coasts, and SDG 15 on terrestrial ecosystems, but also in many other goals and targets such as the focal SDGs for the 2018 High-level Political Forum, including: SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production. For an analysis of how biodiversity supports the achievement of all SDGs, published jointly by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the United Nations Development Programme, visit: [www.cbd.int/development/doc/biodiversity-2030-agenda-technical-note-en.pdf](http://www.cbd.int/development/doc/biodiversity-2030-agenda-technical-note-en.pdf)

Biodiversity plays an important role in the 2030 Agenda's imperative to 'leave no one behind'. For example, ecosystem services are estimated to make up between 50% and 90% of the livelihoods among poor rural and forest-dwelling households.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the UN Human Rights Council at its 34<sup>th</sup> Session noted that the loss of biodiversity-dependent ecosystem services has a disproportionate effect on people who are vulnerable for other reasons, including gender, age, disability, poverty or minority status and that the loss of biodiversity-dependent ecosystem services is likely to accentuate inequality and marginalization of the most vulnerable sectors of society, by decreasing their access to basic materials for a healthy life and by reducing their freedom of choice and action<sup>3</sup>.

Biodiversity also supports resilient societies in various ways.<sup>4</sup> Urban and rural ecosystem services contribute to climate-change mitigation and adaptation, such as shade provision,

<sup>2</sup> Source: [Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Source: [UN Human Rights Council](#), 34<sup>th</sup> Session

<sup>4</sup> Source: [Cities and Biodiversity Outlook](#), 2012.



rainwater interception and filtration, and pollution reduction. And more green space generally means more vegetation that can act as a carbon sink for partially offsetting urban emissions. Increasing the biodiversity of urban food systems can enhance resilience through food and nutrition security local food systems have historically proved to be critical to a community's survival in the face of food security crises.

Despite such progress and the important linkages between biodiversity and the SDGs, biodiversity continues to be lost at an accelerated rate, largely due to human activities. A review of progress toward achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the current Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, in the 2014 *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, projected that out of 53 target elements, only 5 were on track to be reached by 2020. The recent regional assessment reports issued by the *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (IPBES) found that biodiversity is in decline in all regions of the world.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Successes and challenges*

The United Nations Decade on Biodiversity and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 will come to a close at the end of 2020. Much has been achieved in the two and a half decades since the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) came into force in 1993. But so too have the pressures on biodiversity increased and additional urgent actions are needed, including identifying opportunities for transformational change that can ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The period of time before the end of the decade provides an opportunity to reflect on achievements, take stock of ongoing challenges, and bring new perspectives to advance the implementation of the CBD and a post-2020 biodiversity framework, and the achievement of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

#### *Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress*

Because biodiversity is so important for sustainable development, making progress in implementing the CBD as well as the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its twenty Aichi Biodiversity Targets is critically important to achieving the 2030 Agenda. With 196 Parties, the Convention has near-universal membership and a diverse constituency, with a broad stakeholder base consisting of regional and local authorities, civil society groups, indigenous peoples and local community organisations, and representatives of youth, women, and businesses, along with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

At the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the CBD accelerated its mainstreaming efforts into key economic sectors and will continue so at the fourteenth meeting in Egypt this year, focusing on infrastructure, energy and mining, manufacturing and processing,

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<sup>5</sup> Unedited advance Summary for Policymakers of the four regional assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services, IPBES, 2018. Available at: [www.ipbes.net/outcomes](http://www.ipbes.net/outcomes)





and health sectors. This will be an important contribution to the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs.

### **Discussion questions**

1. What are the changes in policy and implementation that could help reduce incentives that lead to biodiversity loss, and increase biodiversity investments?
2. Which are the most critical interlinkages with other goals and targets in terms of co-benefits or trade-offs? How can they be leveraged towards progress?
3. How can the post-2020 global framework for biodiversity that will be developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity, in follow-up to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, be more effectively linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its national implementation?

**14:30-16:30**

### **Session 4: Holistic and integrated approaches to achieving SDG 15**

#### **Background**

Ecosystem approaches require holistic thinking and cross-sectoral actions to achieve success in the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems. There are both multiple linkages between the targets under the 'Life on Land' Goal, as well as between Goal 15 and other SDGs: in particular with Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and Goal 13 (Climate Action). Integrated approaches can be cost-effective and achieve fast impact, if implemented at scale. Holistic approaches towards water and food security, and the large-scale restoration of degraded forests and landscapes offer opportunities for accelerated progress.

#### *Situation and trends*

Forests, freshwater ecosystems, and biodiversity at large continue to be lost at unacceptable pace. It is estimated that 60 per cent of terrestrial biodiversity loss is related to food production, while ecosystem services to support food production are under pressure. 33 per cent of soils are moderately to highly degraded, and freshwater ecosystems are adversely impacted by water extraction for agriculture and other uses, and by pollution<sup>6</sup>. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services estimates in a recent report that 3.2 billion people globally are adversely affected by land degradation. Integrated approaches to achieve more food production (and less food waste); better conservation of species and critical

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<sup>6</sup> UNEP (2016) *Food Systems and Natural Resources. A Report of the Working Group on Food Systems of the International Resources Panel*



ecosystems; and more climate-friendly agriculture are emerging, but they often lack sufficient scale of implementation.

In this context, a ‘landscape approach’ can achieve win-win scenarios between livelihoods and food security, biodiversity, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Landscape approaches aim to optimize landscape productivity across a range of different objectives, defined by societal choice. In particular, the restoration of degraded landscapes across the world offers the potential of enhancing progress across several SDGs. It is estimated that 2 billion hectares, equivalent to 17 per cent of all biologically productive land, could benefit from restoration; the restoration opportunity in Africa alone is around 700 million hectares.

#### *Successes and challenges*

Encouragingly, momentum for forest and landscape restoration is building. Though forest loss continues, trees are increasing in number and variety across many landscapes, bringing diversity and value to an increasing number of the world’s farms, in and around cities, and across highly varied landscapes that have seen forests and trees disappear in previous decades. And we now have political commitments from nearly 50 countries to bring over 160 million hectares under restoration by 2020 under the ‘Bonn Challenge’, with a view of bringing 350 million hectares of land into restoration by 2030 – an area almost the size of India. Building on this growing political will, and the readiness of both public and private actors to invest, the main challenge now is to accelerate and scale up promising pilot initiatives.

As one example of a recent success that could be scaled up and replicated, the *Tropical Landscapes Finance Facility* (TLFF), a public-private partnership in Indonesia, issued the world’s first Sustainable Landscapes Bond in February 2018. The Bond raised \$95 million of private capital to restore a 400,000 ha landscape on the island of Sumatra. The restoration of a degraded 70,000 ha natural rubber plantation will create a buffer zone around Bukit Tigapuluh forest national park. Natural ecosystem restoration zones are planned to establish wildlife corridors with surrounding landscapes. If the project is successful, it will benefit 18,000 smallholder farmers during its lifespan; sequester significant amounts of carbon; improve supply chain security for the commercial investors; and save endangered biodiversity including iconic species such as orangutans, tigers, and elephants.

#### *Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress*

The three Rio Conventions each recognize the importance of terrestrial ecosystems and sustainable agriculture and forestry for achieving their respective goals. In support of key Convention decisions, numerous mechanisms and partnerships have emerged, including the *Landscapes for People, Food and Nature* partnership, the *UN-REDD Programme*<sup>7</sup> and the

<sup>7</sup> <http://peoplefoodandnature.org/> and [www.un-redd.org](http://www.un-redd.org)



*Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration*<sup>8</sup>. The latter is supporting governments, the private sector, local communities and others in their efforts to achieve the ‘Bonn Challenge’: as of May 2018, 47 countries have pledged to have more than 160 million hectares of degraded forests and landscapes under active restoration by 2020<sup>9</sup>, with a view to scale up to 350 million hectares by 2030. It is estimated that this could generate \$9 trillion of net benefits, including from new jobs, increased food production and improved ecosystem services; and sequester 1 Gigaton of greenhouse gases every year. Regional initiatives, such as the *20x20* initiative in Central America, and the *Africa Restoration 100* initiative are accelerating progress at regional level. Over \$2 billion have been pledge by investors to implement the *20x20* initiative<sup>10</sup>. Similar successful restoration approaches are emerging in many countries around the world, which will contribute significantly to the achievement of SDG 2, 6, 13, and 15, and others.

### **Discussion questions**

1. What are good practices in employing these approaches at scale?
2. How effective are current approaches based on valuation of ecosystem services, natural capital accounting, etc. in capturing the true value of nature, and integrating them into planning and decision-making processes at national and cross-national levels? What challenges must be overcome to make these approaches more effective?
3. How can we achieve a more holistic accounting of the value of nature and its ecosystems, and what role can governments play?
4. What changes are needed in governance institutions and structures at all levels to enable greater efficiency and effectiveness in achieving SDG 15?
5. How can we change the narrative of how we approach SDG15 to capture a more holistic way of thinking?

### **Day 2: Tuesday 15 May**

**9:15-10:30**

### **Session 5: Custodians of terrestrial ecosystems**

### **Background**

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<sup>8</sup> For more information visit <http://www.forestlandscaperestoration.org/>

<sup>9</sup> The pledges have now surpassed the original target, set in 2011, of 150 million hectares under active restoration by 2020

<sup>10</sup> Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (2018) *Restoring forests and landscapes: the key to a sustainable future* (in print)



This session will address the need for more participatory approaches to poverty eradication, sustainable livelihoods and ecosystem conservation. Local and indigenous communities, primary and small-scale producers, pastoralists and fisherfolk are the drivers of solutions to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, prevent poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss. They largely depend on these ecosystems for their livelihoods, and recognizing their rights (e.g. with regard to secure land tenure, access to genetic resources and benefit sharing) can stimulate greater progress on all fronts.

#### *Situation and trends*

A large part of terrestrial ecosystems are either agricultural land or forests. The latter hold around 80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity and some 46% of carbon stored on land. More than 70% of forest land is owned by governments while up to 75% of agricultural land are family farms, a large majority of which are smaller than 2 hectares. Indigenous peoples inhabit nearly 22% of the Earth's surface, containing around 80% of the planet's biodiversity. These millions of people who manage land hold the key to achieving SDG 15 and several other SDGs.

With increasing populations and changing consumption patterns, food production and productivity needs to increase considerably over the next decades placing additional pressure on terrestrial ecosystems. More than 75 percent of Earth's land areas are substantially degraded, 20 percent of drylands are in danger of becoming deserts. Species extinction rates are historically high while the threat of invasive species and pests increases. Climate change further enhances risks of ecosystem degradation and is a leading driver of biodiversity loss in the next decades, along with agriculture and infrastructure development. The damage to livelihoods is huge, undermining the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people and, in many cases, forcing people to fight or abandon their land.

#### *Successes and challenges*

While the overall deforestation rate decreased over the last decades, deforestation continues. Similar trends persist for land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change impacts. Local and indigenous communities, farmers, pastoralists, foresters, fisherfolk and small-scale producers, are custodians for large parts of the affected terrestrial ecosystems. They play a crucial – and increasingly recognized – role in stopping and reversing these trends by changing practices, making better use of agro-ecological knowledge.

Considerable progress was made in recognizing and securing community-based tenure rights and access to benefit sharing mechanisms in the context of biodiversity protection, combatting climate change or land restoration initiatives. However, in many cases tenure rights are unclear,



effectively incentivizing exploitation rather than sustainable management and longer-term investments.

While policies, overall, are being gradually adjusted towards more sustainable development trajectories, they need to be further adjusted to adequately reflect realities of small-scale decision makers while effectively supporting and rewarding the adoption of sustainable practices.

Land restoration and other climate adaptation efforts have started in many places and are being scaled up, often with active involvement of local communities who can benefit in various ways, along with benefits such as climate change mitigation and enhancing biodiversity. Reducing and reversing land degradation and restoring degraded land is thus a priority to protect the biodiversity and ecosystem services and to ensure human well-being. This could provide more than a third of the greenhouse gas mitigation activities needed by 2030 to keep global warming under 2°C.

#### *Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress*

Coordinated actions and new ways of collaboration are needed to create the enabling environments for producers to accelerate change to more sustainable practices, and act as effective stewards of terrestrial ecosystems. Key areas to strengthen mechanisms and partnerships include:

- Securing tenure over forests, pastures and farmlands for local communities and Indigenous Peoples.
- Strengthening producers organizations and Indigenous Peoples groups to ensure their access to information, rights, quality input, new technologies and practices, funding and markets.
- Supporting and scaling up the adoption of sustainable production systems to manage land, trees and forests, crop, livestock and fisheries in a more sustainable and integrated way, taking agro-ecological knowledge into account.
- Foster investments in rural areas that involve small-scale producers and support their transition to more sustainable practices.
- Improving collaboration and coordination across governments and with different partners to provide a consistent enabling environment for producers to also act as custodian of the ecosystems they use for production.

#### **Discussion questions**

1. How can custodians of terrestrial ecosystems be empowered to play a stronger role in achieving SDG15 - including local communities and Indigenous Peoples, primary and small-scale producers, farmers, pastoralists, foresters and fisherfolk, women and youth?



2. How can custodians of terrestrial ecosystems be more effectively supported in balancing the need to address poverty, hunger, secure livelihoods and opportunities for development with the need to save the environment, addressing environmental degradation and a changing climate?
3. What policy and legislative framework changes and investments are needed to further strengthen existing mechanisms and partnerships to provide an enabling environment for custodians of terrestrial ecosystems to effectively up-scale more sustainable practices?

**10:45-11:45**

**Session 6: Wildlife poaching and trafficking**

**Background**

*Situation and trends*

The illegal wildlife trade and the poaching that it fuels are having devastating effects on multiple species of animals and plants globally. This threatens the species' survival, undermines local livelihoods and food security, and has negative impacts on ecosystem function and services from water supplies to climate change mitigation. Trafficking is facilitated by corruption and weak governance throughout the trade networks. The global scale of the trade enables the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases, provides revenue for organized crime syndicates, and is increasingly recognized as a local and national security threat. The current global political climate for addressing these issues is favourable, but efforts to translate this momentum into solid action in many countries are still hampered by weak national capacity and governance, and low political will. Together, these limit the level of national action and transnational cooperation which are needed to deliver successfully on the urgent action called for in SDG15 to end poaching and trafficking.

*Successes and challenges*

Global awareness of the scale and broad implications of the wildlife trafficking crisis has risen greatly in recent years, including at the highest levels of many governments. This has translated into significant additional funding streams from many donors to tackle the issue, as well as policy changes such as bans on domestic ivory trade in certain key countries. On the ground, the spreading use of SMART (<http://smartconservationtools.org/>) and other enforcement tools and technologies have led to greatly increased protection in areas where they have been deployed, although this has not yet occurred at sufficient scale to be effective in protecting trafficked species across large parts of their ranges. The complex and flexible nature of the criminal networks continue to be a major challenge to law enforcement, especially in the context of corruption at multiple points in the trade chain. Knowledge of how to change behaviour to



reduce purchases of trafficked wildlife remains a challenge. Successes need to be replicated broadly and rapidly to ensure that trafficked species can be conserved and, where necessary, recover across their ranges, providing all of their multiple benefits to local communities and economies.

#### *Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress*

The enabling global policy environment for addressing wildlife trafficking has moved forward rapidly in recent years, including with three UNGA Resolutions on Wildlife Trafficking, specific targets in the SDGs, establishment of the ICCWC (International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime), international Wildlife Trafficking Summits and ensuing commitments in London, Kasane and Hanoi, and many relevant resolutions taken by Parties to CITES. To accelerate commitments into effective broad-scale change, actions should be stimulated at national level, and catalyzed multilaterally under the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and UN Convention Against Corruption. This would necessitate every State Party to each Convention adopting legislative and other measures to create and strictly enforce domestic criminal offences ensuring that wildlife trafficking is defined and treated as “serious crime”, and to collaborate with other State Parties as appropriate to do so. Rapid progress is essential not only to deliver on SDG commitments, but also to prevent extinctions of multiple species experiencing rapid rates of decline.

#### **Discussion questions**

1. Are new international mechanisms or organizations needed to respond to the mandates of the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and the UN Convention against Corruption?
2. What new national policies would allow countries to deliver rapidly on SDG Target 15.7?
3. What regulatory frameworks at the national level would allow countries to address the illegal taking, trafficking, and marketing of illegal wildlife products?
4. Which are the most critical interlinkages with other goals and targets in terms of co-benefits or trade-offs? How can they be leveraged towards progress?

**11:45-12:45**  
**Session 7: Mountains**

#### **Background**

##### *Situation and trends*



Covering about 22 percent of the earth's surface mountains have a universal importance as they provide global goods and services to a large portion of the world's population. They are a vital source of water, energy, biodiversity, agricultural products and livelihoods, but both mountain ecosystems and the people are also vulnerable to disturbances. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly recognizes their importance and vulnerability. Of the three mountain-related targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), target 15.4 is fully dedicated to conserving mountain ecosystems.

### *Successes and challenges*

Mountain ecosystems are under threat from climate change, land degradation and natural disasters, with potentially devastating and far-reaching consequences for mountain communities and the rest of the world. Accelerated deforestation of mountain slopes increases the impacts of floods and landslides, with serious implications for the agricultural activities of smallholder farmers, and also contributes to run-off and sedimentation, which impact water flows and water quality in the lowlands. Mountain peoples are highly vulnerable to environmental, economic and social changes. The vast majority of mountain dwellers in developing countries live below the poverty line and one-third face the threat of food insecurity. Income generation and livelihoods opportunities are required to enable mountain people to remain in the mountains and fulfill their role as stewards of the environment.

To promote the social and economic inclusion of mountain people in national development processes and to improve the management of natural resources, over the years an increasing number of countries have established national mountain committees. These multi-stakeholder bodies are instrumental for creating strategic plans, fair policies and laws and implementing sustainable development projects.

### *Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress*

The General Assembly, in its Resolution [A/RES/71/234](#) notes the importance of ensuring the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for human well-being. It also encourages Members States to collect disaggregated scientific data on mountain areas and takes note of the consideration of the Mountain Green Cover Index, developed by the Mountain Partnership Secretariat/FAO in the global indicator framework for the SDGs and targets.

Founded in 2002 at the UNSSD in Johannesburg, the Mountain Partnership is the only United Nations voluntary alliance mandated to promote sustainable mountain development globally. The Mountain Partnership's current membership of 320 includes 59 governments, 14 IGOs, 222 major groups (NGOs, civil society and the private sector) and five subnational authorities, works towards improving the lives of mountain people and protecting mountain environments around





the world. Its Secretariat is hosted by FAO. The global reach and multi stakeholder nature of the Mountain Partnership have contributed considerably to advance the mountain agenda both at global and at national level.

At their fifth global meeting in December 2017, MP members have unanimously endorsed the [Framework for Action](#) committing themselves to integrate, by 2030, in their respective policies and programmes appropriate strategies for sustainable mountain development and mountain ecosystem conservation.

### **Discussion questions**

1. How can the role and value of mountains be included in development strategies and policy development across sectors?
2. How can the data collected for the Mountain Green Cover Index feed into national planning and policies?
3. How can the Framework for Action on mountains contribute to achieving progress in SDG15 and the other SDGs?
4. Which adaptation measures can prevent the loss of biodiversity and the effects of climate change in mountains?

### **14:00-15:00 Session 8: Land and soils**

#### **Background**

Land is an essential building block of civilization yet its contribution to our quality of life is perceived and valued in starkly different and often incompatible ways.. The world has reached a point where we must rethink the way in which we plan, use, and manage the land. Our ability to manage trade-offs at a landscape scale will ultimately decide the future of land resources – soil, water, and biodiversity – and determine success or failure in delivering poverty reduction, food and water security, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Indeed, integrated land and water management is recognized as an accelerator for achieving most of the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### *Situation and trends*

The current pressures on land are huge and expected to continue growing: there is rapidly escalating competition between the demand for land functions that provide food, water, and energy, and those services that support and regulate all life cycles on Earth. A significant proportion of managed and natural ecosystems are degrading: over the last two decades,



approximately 20 per cent of the Earth's vegetated surface shows persistent declining trends in productivity, mainly as a result of land/water use and management practices. Biodiversity loss and climate change further jeopardize the health and productivity of land: higher carbon emissions and temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, soil erosion, species loss and increased water scarcity will likely alter the suitability of vast regions for food production and human habitation. Land degradation decreases resilience to environmental stresses: increased vulnerability, especially of the poor, women and children, can intensify competition for scarce natural resources and result in migration, instability, and conflict. Over 1.3 billion people are trapped on degrading agricultural land: farmers on marginal land, especially in the drylands, have limited options for alternative livelihoods and are often excluded from wider infrastructure and economic development. The scale of rural transformation in recent decades has been unprecedented: millions of people have abandoned their ancestral lands and migrated to urban areas, often impoverishing cultural identity, abandoning traditional knowledge, and permanently altering landscapes

#### *Successes and challenges*

To ensure that no one is left behind, healthy and productive land must be recognized as one of the most important linchpins of our society. It is the central cohesive element for the maintenance of all life. Globally, the fruits of the soil comprise 80% of our diet and millions rely directly on agriculture for their survival, livelihoods and security. A transformative vision for how we manage and protect our land resources must be a high priority if we hope to make a transition to a more sustainable and resilient society. SDG target 15.3 puts forward the ambition of achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), which aims for no net loss through a balance between three processes: degradation, rehabilitation/restoration and sustainable land management. Given that over 40% of the world's poor rely on degraded lands for essential services (e.g., food, fuel, raw material and water purification), restoring their productive capacity will significantly reduce the economic vulnerability of the poorest and promote long-term development for all.

#### *Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress*

In order to "leave no one behind", Life on Land needs to be prioritized. The General Assembly, in its resolutions 71/229 and 72/220, affirmed that achieving LDN will act as an accelerator for achieving multiple SDGs. Upscaling the sustainable management of our land and water resources is a precondition for the achievement of almost all 17 SDG's. Specifically, resolution 71/229 notes that "the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, including Goal 15 and target 15.3, would serve as an accelerator to ending poverty and hunger, tackling inequality, empowering women and stimulating economic growth". It also "reiterates that degraded land, if recovered, would, inter alia, contribute to restoring natural resources, thus



potentially improving food security and nutrition in the affected countries, and in the process could, inter alia, contribute to the absorption of carbon emissions”.

### **Discussion questions**

1. What successes and challenges are unique to this area?
2. How can SDG accelerators and integrators like SDG 15.3 contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda?
3. Which are the most critical interlinkages with other goals and targets in terms of co-benefits or trade-offs? How can they be leveraged towards progress?
4. How can the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund serve as an innovative funding model to achieve the SDGs, especially SDG15.3?

**15:00-16:30**

### **Session 9: Means of implementation**

#### **Background**

Paragraphs 60 to 71 of the 2030 Agenda address means of implementation and global partnerships for the SDGs, including finance, technology, capacity building, trade, and systemic issues. Targets 15a to 15c outline specific measures for implementing SDG15. This session will take stock of the provision of official development assistance (ODA) and public expenditure on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems, highlight evidence-based conservation solutions, including recent scientific and technological advances, effective community management, and innovative partnerships that deliver genuine impact and can be scaled up or replicated for success.

#### *Situation and trends*

Over the last century, humanity has experienced significant gains in terms of social and economic development. These gains however, are unsustainable, and have come at the expense of our world's natural capital. The world has lost 130 million hectares of rainforest since 1990, more than half of the populations of 3,000 species have declined since 1970, more than two thirds of all wetlands have been converted since 1900 and half of all mangrove since 1960. We have eroded the biodiversity and ecosystems that sustain all life, social progress and economic growth. These losses are caused by a series of linked and cross-cutting drivers of loss including: a) market failures, in which the price of goods and services do not reflect the full social and environmental costs of production over time; b) policy failures, in which government and private policies, plans and investments do not adequately safeguard ecosystem services and biodiversity, in which short-term economic gain is prioritized over long-term benefits, trade-offs between



ecosystem services benefits is inequitable among stakeholders, and in which there is an unbalanced distribution of land rights; and c) governance failures, in which rules and laws are unevenly or inadequately applied and weak or no environmental and social safeguards exist.

### *Successes and challenges*

Investing in nature-based solutions can produce multiple social, environmental, and economic benefits and accelerate progress on the Aichi targets and SDGs. A range of finance solutions and linked capacity development approaches are already available, from traditional mechanisms such as taxes, subsidies, payment for ecosystem services, and conservation trust funds, to more innovative instruments such as green bonds and green lending, biodiversity offsets, impact investment, and crowd funding. By combining domestic and international finance in ways that make more efficient and effective use of existing public resources, countries are catalyzing the private investment needed to maintain, protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services. Awakening governments and the private sector to the importance of finance for nature and strengthening capacities for such work is both an ongoing challenge and an exciting opportunity.

### *Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress*

Several mechanisms and partnerships already exist to address these challenges and accelerate progress. These include various global finance and capacity building initiatives designed to support the CBD, UNFCCC and CITES and with support from the GEF and other multilateral and bilateral sources, such as the Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN), the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), the Poverty-Environment Action for Sustainable Development (PEAS), and the Green Commodities Programme, as well as thematic programmes on financing linked to forests, mountains, agriculture and land management, and illegal wildlife trade. These and other initiatives, such as the GEF Small Grants Programme, the NBSAP Forum, and BES-Net support a range of partnership mechanisms at the global, regional, national, and community level.

### **Discussion questions**

1. What are good models of putting ODA as well as domestically mobilized public resources to work towards SDG 15?
2. How can they complement each other including through multi-stakeholder partnerships that engage local communities and the private sector?
3. What capacity development is needed to ensure that these initiatives can adapt innovative finance and technical solutions that are institutionally sustainable?