

Sustainable Development Goal 15: Progress and Prospects
Expert Group Meeting in Preparation for HLPF 2018

Custodians of terrestrial ecosystems

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Thank you very much Mr. Moderator for this opportunity to bring local voices to global discourse. It must be understood that the Sustainable Development Goals are not occurring in a vacuum. They have been preceded by development models such as the “Economic Growth” model whose sole focus was GDP growth and profit accumulation. It proved;

- Inequitable because it has accumulated the great wealth and sophistication it created such as nuclear, electronic industries and sky scrapper cities in the hands of 1 % of the world population while it has handed the 90% remaining population food insecurity, abject poverty and a perpetual state of dependency on the 1 %.
- Destructive, because it has destroyed the values of the so called least developed regions of the world. It destroyed our traditional beliefs, culture, institutions, local practices and extended family networks that were our safety nets
- Irresponsible, because it has caused massive pollution and a monumental waste of natural resources.

The SDGs are therefore a welcome development. We view them as broad, elaborate and inclusive of many of our development concerns. However, in our opinion, while stating to be grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the SDGs are not anchored on a Human Rights Based Approach. The implementation of the SDGs must recognize local communities and Indigenous Peoples as the Rights holders of terrestrial ecosystems and not just stakeholders. Terrestrial Ecosystems must be regarded as sovereign spaces rather than multi-stakeholder platforms. Therefore implementation of the SDGs must include social, environmental and governance safeguards that promote ways of working and rules of institutions that are acceptable to the rights holders. They for instance must;

- recognize customary tenure rights of indigenous and local communities
- Respect traditional and indigenous knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities to access genetic resources and cultural sites in terrestrial ecosystems gazette as reserve
- Avoiding involuntary resettlement of forest-dependent communities
- Encourage and facilitate the full and effective participation of rightsholders
- Uphold rights of indigenous peoples, to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)

We call upon governments to embrace their role of duty bearers rather than as one of many stakeholders, to ensure that the dignity of the custodians of terrestrial ecosystems is at the center of the implementation and realization of SDGs and that everyone involved in this process has an equal opportunity. The State is duty bound to ensure that custodians of Terrestrial Ecosystems namely Local communities and Indigenous Peoples know their rights in

the process of realization of SDG15. The State must ensure that they are supported to participate in the development of policy, in practice and to claim their rights where necessary.

There must be Responsible Investment in all projects and programs geared at achieving SDG15. Market based mechanisms such as REDD+ must be people centered, aimed at enhancing adaptation to climate change and the resilience of communities more than profits.

Every investment must be a collaboration between the rights holder and stakeholder and carry a Dedicated Grant for Local communities and Indigenous People to engage in the investment and share the benefits that accrue thereof.

A clearly spelt out and effective grievance redress mechanism must be put in place to arbitrate in conflicts that may ensue in the process of implementing the SDGs.

Policies, laws and regulations that existed before the SDGs clearly did not deliver the transformative, multi dimensional development that we desired. It is imperative that they are assessed and reviewed. To realize SDGs and especially SDG 15 we cannot play by the current rules. In other words it cannot be business as usual. All of us together, with unity of purpose, must breakout and form new institutions and organizations which specifically take into account the specific concerns of the local communities, Indigenous Peoples and marginalized groups. The new Policies Laws and Regulations must change the underlying rules systems and incentive structure in such a way that the development process, especially conservation, use, and management of terrestrial ecosystems is participatory, transparent, inclusive and is accompanied by equitable share of benefits accruing from terrestrial ecosystems.

All policies in this regard must be gender responsive and redistributive, intended to transform existing gender relations. Both men and women must have equal access to, control of and decision making powers regarding productive resources. To this end all investments and interventions towards implementation of SDGs must conduct Gender Analyses and build a data bank of gender disaggregated data that is regularly updated with hanging gender relations information, to track progress of realizing SDGs within the equal opportunities framework.

There has to be an accountability mechanism to ensure that policies are not divergent from practice.

The SDGs must guard against co-optation by the State or Multilateral initiatives. They must maintain clarity of vision and not be a political pawn used to gain political mileage.