



FSC calls for a forest goal or target and indicator to be included in the Sustainable Development Goals

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The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) calls for the inclusion of a goal or target on forests in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It proposes that this could be formulated as:

By 2020,

- ***halt deforestation and forest degradation globally***
- ***restore 15 percent of currently degraded forest ecosystems***
- ***ensure sustainable forest management.***

This goal or target would build on the forest criterion of the seventh Millennium Development Goal, 'ensure environmental sustainability', and support the three forest-related Aichi Targets agreed by signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2010.

Furthermore, FSC suggests the inclusion of an indicator on certification, which could be formulated as:

Increased use of transparent, effective, balanced multi stakeholder governed forest and chain-of-custody certification systems, particularly in regions where forests are under most pressure.

The Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC) is an independent organization that promotes environmentally sound, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests. Established in 1993 as a response to concerns over global deforestation, FSC is a membership organization with a governance structure based on participation, democracy, equity and transparency.

Our Vision

The world's forests meet the social, ecological, and economic rights and needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations.

Our Mission

FSC promotes environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.



Why a forest goal or target and indicator in the SDGs?

Failing to include forests in the SDGs would give a wrong signal: that either the fate of forests is not essential for the wider sustainable development agenda, or that problems with forests have been resolved. The United Nations' *MDG Report 2012* clearly shows that forest cover continues to decline rapidly in Africa and Latin America, and that despite impressive increases in forest cover in China, India and Vietnam, the decline continues across Asia as a whole. And this focus on the quantity of forest cover does not take into account trends in degradation of forest quality.

While SDGs should focus on drivers of sustainability, it is also important that they clearly highlight both global ecological limitations and the key challenges that must be overcome to make sustainability possible. FSC appreciates current discussions about the structure of the SDGs, and whether a specific SDG on forests is better than a landscape or natural resource management approach. We also refer to the The High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 Development Agenda, which has proposed an SDG entitled 'manage natural resource assets sustainably,' supported by five associated targets, including one on deforestation and reforestation. If this approach is followed, FSC calls for the inclusion of a forest target that is clearly linked to existing international commitments, such as the MDGs and the Aichi Targets, as suggested below.

Aichi Targets relevant to forests

Target 5: By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced.

Target 7: By 2020 areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity.

Target 15: By 2020, ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks has been enhanced, through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15 percent of degraded ecosystems, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification.

FSC is in favor of using indicators that support the SDGs and their associated targets, we also propose including one on forest and chain of custody certification systems. While certification systems are voluntary, and cannot replace necessary government intervention, they have an important role to play in providing incentives for good practice in forest management, mobilizing investments and experience, and creating cross-border confidence and reliable markets for certified forest products. This also makes them an important element in meeting the challenge of achieving sustainable production and consumption patterns.

The wording of FSC's proposed indicator is intended to promote governments' recognition of and support for sustainable forest management certification schemes as contribution to implementation of a forest SDG or target. Transparency and balanced multi-stakeholder governance of the schemes, as well as effective implementation and auditing, are essential elements.



Why are forests important?

Forests have many functions for local people, societies and the planet as a whole. They provide food, building materials, shelter, medicines and fuel. They keep soils in place, and provide water filtration and storage systems that supply an estimated 75 percent of usable water globally. They are the home to the majority of the world's plants and animals, harboring vital genetic diversity, and they play an important role in climate regulation.

International trade and industrialization would not have been possible without timber, for ships, for energy and as the basis of many products. Forests continue to provide essential resources for the paper, construction and furniture industries.

Forests still provide livelihoods for many, particularly in the tropics. A billion people are entirely or partly dependent on forests for food, shelter and economic activities, and another billion depend on them for fuel for cooking and heating.

Our dependence on forests will only increase

Forests are an essential element of our past and future. The World Wide Fund for Nature's (WWF) recent *Living Forests Report* underlines the dimensions of the challenge: by 2030, timber use is expected to more than double, and by 2050 to be between three and four times what it was in 2010. The report presents several scenarios for the future, one of which is linked to an ambitious shift towards the use of renewable and climate-neutral resources, including forest products. Even the 'do-nothing' scenario indicates a rapid increase in the use of such resources.

WWF expects in particular a dramatic increase of the non-household use of wood as fuel, but suggests that demand for sawn wood, veneer and pulp is also likely to increase considerably. Indeed, forest products will play an essential role in a global economy that reduces impact on the environment:

- Biomass now provides 9 percent of global primary energy supply, and it will increasingly replace fossil fuels for producing electricity and heat. While some biomass will come from agriculture and waste, those sources are limited and in agriculture biomass production competes for available land with food and fiber production.
- In construction, green building methods will increase the use of timber as this has a smaller ecological footprint than, in particular, cement and bricks, and better energy-isolation characteristics.
- Forest materials will increasingly be used to replace fossil substances in plastics and chemicals.



How are forests doing?

Throughout history, the planet has lost an important part of its forest cover, initially in the northern hemisphere. In recent decades, forest degradation and deforestation have been concentrated in tropical regions. Reasons include forest clearance for cattle grazing, commercial agriculture, plantations, infrastructure, urbanization and weak law-enforcement. This has led to both positive and negative social impacts, but the current trend is clearly negative, sometimes dramatically so.

Non-governmental organizations, governments and businesses have started to act to reverse the trend, but the results have been mixed. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the global loss of natural forests slowed somewhat from 16 million hectares a year in the period 1990–2000 to 13 million hectares a year between 2000 and 2010. Even this lower rate, which still represents a yearly loss of area comparable in size to Nicaragua, is, as FAO points out, alarmingly high. From a total global forest area of four billion hectares, this is a seven percent loss in just 20 years.

Part of the loss of natural forest cover in the last decade has been compensated for by an increase in planted forest of 50 million hectares worldwide. According to FAO, tree plantations today represent nearly seven percent of the world's total forest area.

The resulting trends differ considerably across the planet: the EU and the US are seeing a slow increase in forest cover after centuries of loss; Russia and Canada are stable; Africa and Indonesia are losing forest cover fast (five percent in 10 years), as is Latin America (4.5 percent in 10 years); and Australia has seen recent dramatic losses (three percent between 2005 and 2010).

The most impressive increases are in China (15.7 percent in 10 years) due to a combination of protection of natural forests and rapid growth of plantations. About 30 percent of plantations in the world are in China.

Impacts of deforestation and forest degradation

Not all forests have the same value in terms of biodiversity, environment, and social and economic meaning. Deforestation figures do not show the degradation of forests that is happening in many places. Planted forests are very important for the production of timber (some 65 percent of global industrial wood supply, according to the FAO), but their biodiversity and environmental value is normally much less than natural forests.

Deforestation and forest degradation are contributing considerably to anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases.

They can cause important losses of fertile soil and clean and reliable water reserves, destabilizing weather and wiping out plant and animal species. Social impacts should not be underestimated either: forests are a source of food, fuel, construction materials, jobs and shelter for people.



In many cases, conversion into agricultural land is the cause of deforestation, but often this leads to only temporary economic gains. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *“deforestation and forest degradation may produce attractive short-term returns, but the cost of annual losses of natural forest capital due to deforestation and degradation has been estimated at \$2 trillion to \$4.5 trillion per year.”*¹

How to maintain forests for people and planet

We cannot deny that the spatial impacts of a fast-growing human population and their need for increased production of food and goods have surpassed the capacity of the planet. We need to realize sustainable and fair production and consumption patterns – in the environmental, social and economic senses – or face chaos and disaster.

Halting deforestation and forest degradation is essential to sustainable development. We need to be able to rely on forests in the future. There is not one single policy to achieve this. Instead, we need a combination of:

- promotion of sustainable management of forests that are managed for human needs, including support for the role of effective, balanced multi-stakeholder based forest certification schemes
- protection of valuable natural forest areas
- fighting illegal logging
- integrated landscape management policies that include reforestation and forest restoration programs
- efficient production and consumption to limit the demand for forest resources.

All policy solutions must be environmentally effective, socially acceptable, and make economic sense.

It is important to see forests as part of the global commons. We must halt the decline of forests, and maintain and reinforce their multiple functions, for the sake of the planet itself. And we must cooperate as governments, international institutions, business and civil society organizations, in achieving this.

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¹ Executive Director of United Nations Environmental Programme (2013). ‘Environmental challenges within sustainable development and the contribution of the UNEP to the sustainable development goals and the promotion of sustainable consumption and production’, Background paper for ministerial consultations, 27th session of UNEP Governing Council, UNEP/GC.27/16/Add.1.