Goal 6: Include ambitious, quantitative forest conservation and restoration targets for 2030 in the post-2015 global development framework, as part of new international sustainable development goals

Indicator 1.1
Indicator 1.2

Key Messages

- Since the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, attention has been focused on establishing the frameworks for implementing and monitoring them. The indicators and sub-indicators for measuring progress against the targets on forest conservation and restoration were finalized in 2017.
- The final indicators do not directly measure forest conservation (i.e. gross forest loss) or restoration, resulting in the ambitious forest conservation goal receiving little attention in practice.
- Although a number of potential additional indicators were proposed in 2017, no new indicators for measuring forest conservation and restoration were included, confirming that the adopted indicators and sub-indicators are considered final.

OVERVIEW OF GOAL AND INDICATORS

The objective of Goal 6 is the adoption of targets on forest conservation and restoration as part of the SDGs. In addition, it provides three qualifiers: such targets should be (1) quantifiable; (2) ambitious; and (3) relate to the year 2030.

Adopted in September 2015, the SDGs are a set of 17 goals agreed to by the member states of the United Nations, and adopted in September 2015. They replace the Millennium Development Goals and address a broad range of themes covering the three pillars of sustainable development, namely the social, economic, and environmental pillars. Each goal is framed broadly and then broken down into a number of specific targets. In addition, a list of indicators to monitor implementation and report on progress toward meeting the goals and targets at a global level are being developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs).

While Goal 6 of the New York Declaration on Forests targets a specific action – the inclusion of targets within the SDGs – precisely how the forestry goals are interpreted is determined through the development of indicators to measure progress toward meeting them. At the time of last year's assessment, these indicators were still under discussion. The indicator framework for the forestry goals has since been finalized, so this year's assessment considers the extent to which the final indicators impact the ambition of the goal.

In line with the 2016 assessment, we track progress according to two indicators, one focusing on forest conservation targets and the other on restoration targets (Table 1).

Table 1: Indicators to track Goal 6

CRITERIA	INDICATOR
1. Adoption of forest-related targets in SDGs	1.1 Inclusion in the SDGs of an ambitious, quantitative 2030 target for forest conservation 1.2 Inclusion in the SDGs of an ambitious, quantitative 2030 target for forest restoration

FINDINGS

In March 2017, the IAEG-SDGs presented its report on the SDG Indicators, which included a revised list of global SDG indicators, a work plan for examining potential additional indicators, a list of such potential additional indicators, and a proposed plan for future reviews of the indicators. These reviews are slated for 2020 and 2025 (Table 2).[1] It confirms the indicators that had been proposed for the forest targets in SDG 15 (Targets 15.1 and 15.2) and identifies no potential additional indicators for either target.

Table 2: Indicators for SDG Targets 15.1 and 15.2

TARGET	INDICATOR	SUB-INDICATOR
15.1. By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements.	15.1.1. Forest area as a proportion of total land area.	None
	15.1.2 Proportion of important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity that are covered by protected areas, by ecosystem type.	None
15.2. By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally.	15.2.1 Progress towards sustainable forest management.	1. Forest area net change rate 2. Above-ground biomass stock in forest 3. Proportion of forest area located within legally established protect areas 4. Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan 5. Forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme

In parallel with the process of confirming the definition of the indicators themselves, the IAEG-SDGs has been working to define the sub-indicators, methodologies, and data to be used in measuring progress toward their achievement.

The sub-indicators were agreed to in November 2016, with only minor changes from the proposed sub-indicators reported in our 2016 assessment.[2] In April 2017 the IAEG-SDGs confirmed that Indicator 15.2.1 had been upgraded from a Tier III indicator – for which internationally established methodology and standards still need to be developed and agreed upon – to a Tier II indicator, meaning that agreed standards are available.[3] The final agreed indicators and sub-indicator for the

forest-related targets are outlined in Table 6.

The data for measuring progress toward these sub-indicators are reported by countries through the Global Forest Resources Assessment, which the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) produces every five years, most recently in 2015.

Criterion 1: Adoption of forest targets in SDGs

Indicator 1.1: Forest conservation

The conservation target adopted in SDG 15.2 – specifically the aim to "halt deforestation" – is both quantifiable and highly ambitious. Although the target does not specifically refer to stopping the loss of *natural* forests, we interpret the language of the text to refer to stopping *gross deforestation* by 2020. This interpretation is supported by the plain language of the target ("halt deforestation") and the fact that forest enhancement is dealt with separately.

The SDG indicators and sub-indicators proposed last year and since confirmed do not allow for measuring progress toward this ambitious goal. Specifically, FAO observed that Indicator 15.2.1 covers the "net effect of the other parts of Target 15.2: 'halt deforestation' and 'substantially increase afforestation and reforestation.'" The opportunity to propose additional potential indicators to address this gap has not been taken. By focusing on net rather than gross deforestation, these indicators fail to provide information on the extent of deforestation in natural forests, weakening the targets in practice.

Indicator 1.2: Forest restoration

In contrast to the target on forest conservation, the parts of SDG 15.2 dealing with restoration, afforestation, and reforestation are not quantifiable, and indeed proposals for quantifiable targets on reforestation were removed from the final version of the SDGs. But adopting indicators that measure the extent of forest restoration would have allowed for overall progress to be measured.

The adopted SDG indicators and sub-indicators do not allow for any specific measurement of forest restoration, afforestation, and reforestation, though measurements of change in carbon stocks provide a partial picture of the quality of existing forests.

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[1] United Nations Economic and Social Council, Statistical Commission. (2017). Report of the inter-agency and expert group on Sustainable Development Goal indicators (Report No. E/CN.3/2017/2). Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/documents/2017-2-IAEG-SDGs-E.pdf

[2] UN Statistical Commission. (2017). Tier Classification for Global SDG Indicators. 20 April 2017. Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/Tier%20Classification%20of%20SDG%20Indicators_20%20April%202017_web.pdf

[3] United Nations Statistical Commission. (2017). Tier classification for global SDG indicators. Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/Tier%20Classification%20of%20SDG%20Indicators_20%20April%202017_web.pdf