

Goal 6 Assessment

Technical Annex to the Five-Year Assessment Report

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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

Key messages

- Goal 6 has been achieved through the inclusion of forests in the targets and indicators of the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by United Nations' member states in 2015.
- SDG 15.2 in particular outlines the ambitious goal of halting deforestation by 2020. However, because the indicators focus on net rather than gross deforestation they fail to provide information on the extent of deforestation in natural forests, weakening the targets in practice.
- A number of organizations, including the United Nations, track progress and report on the SDGs and forest targets. The SDG indicators and subindicators are hard to quantify, making it challenging to assess progress.

Overview of goal and indicators

Goal 6 is the adoption of ambitious, quantitative targets on forest conservation and restoration for the year 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs were adopted in September 2015, less than one year after the endorsement of the New York Declaration on Forests, by the member states of the United Nations.

Assessing progress

For our Goal 6 assessments, we track progress on two indicators, one focusing on forest conservation targets and the other on restoration targets (**Table 1**). Because these targets were adopted in 2015, the goal has been achieved. However, we continue to highlight progress on interpreting and reporting related to the SDG indicators. This 2019 update builds on our 2018 and 2017 updates, providing only limited new information while reiterating previous relevant findings.

Table 1. Indicators to track Goal 6

Criterion	Indicator
1. Adoption of forest-related targets in Sustainable Development Goals (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

Our Goal 6 assessment also considers the indicators used to measure progress on the forest-related SDG targets 15.1 and 15.2 (**Table 2**) because they have important implications for the interpretation of the forest conservation and restoration targets. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is the custodian agency for indicators 15.1.1 and 15.2.1, while the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), along with the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, tracks Indicator 15.1.2. Custodian agencies are responsible for defining methodologies and for collecting, validating, and reporting on data from relevant national authorities.¹

Table 2. Indicators for SDG targets 15.1 and 15.2

Target	Indicator	Subindicator
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 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 toward 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 protected areas 4. Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan 5. Forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme

Findings

Criterion 1: Adoption of forest-related targets in SDGs

Indicator 1.1: Inclusion in the SDGs of an ambitious, quantitative 2030 target for 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.

However, the indicators and subindicators that have been developed to measure progress on SDG 15.1 and 15.2 do not reflect this ambition because they track net forest loss rather than gross forest loss. By focusing on

net deforestation, these indicators fail to provide information on the extent of deforestation in natural forests, weakening the targets in practice.

At the 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, it was noted that the indicators to track SDG 15 lack measures of the quality of conservation and management. Specific exclusions include forest intactness, the effectiveness of protected area management, and integration of biodiversity considerations across the indicators.²

Indicator 1.2: Inclusion in the SDGs of an ambitious, quantitative 2030 target for 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. Proposals for quantifiable targets on reforestation were removed from the final version of the SDGs. The adopted SDG indicators and subindicators do not allow for any specific measurement of forest restoration, afforestation, and reforestation, though measurements of change in carbon stocks provides a partial picture of the quality of existing forests.

Resources for additional information

We consider Goal 6 in the context of the New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF) assessment to have been achieved through SDG 15 because the NYDF assessment indicators have been met and will not be revised. For more information related to progress of Goal 6, see the following resources:

- [SDG-Tracker](#). Launched in 2018, the SDG Tracker is an integrated project of [Our World in Data](#) to track the latest data across all of the 17 SDGs. Through this interactive hub, users can explore and track progress across all of the SDG indicators for which there is data available in a user-friendly interactive format. All of the data is sourced from official, high-quality sources including the UN, World Bank, World Health Organization, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, WHO JMP, UNESCO, UN Food and Agriculture Organization, amongst others. All metrics are intended to be updated from these sources in real-time. The SDG-Tracker is a joint collaborative effort between researchers at the University of Oxford and the Global Change Data Lab.
- [SDG Financing Lab](#). Another SDG tracker was launched in late 2019, this one specifically monitoring finance flows to achieve each of the SDGs. Created by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the SDG Financing Lab finds that SDG 15 receives only 3.5 percent of donor finance for SDGs, tying for the least-funded goal with SDG 14 (life below water).
- [Climate Watch](#). Climate Watch is an online tool from the United Nations that updates progress on the SDGs. It allows policy makers, researchers, and other actors to explore the links between countries' nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and SDGs, and to visualize global trends. Climate Watch presents different instruments and policies by country, and national strategies for harmonizing the many tools available to achieve international climate goals. For example, an interactive map allows users to see which countries have aligned SDG 15 "Life on Land" with national policies. The platform was built in partnership with Climate Analytics, GIZ, NDC Partnership, Stockholm Environment Institute, UNFCCC, World Bank Group, Google, World Resources Institute, and others. The United Nations periodically updates SDG statistics.
- [SDG Knowledge Hub](#). The SDG Knowledge Hub, managed by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, is an online resource center for news and commentary regarding the implantation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including all 17 SDGs.

Endnotes

¹ United Nations Statistics Division. (2018). [SDG Indicators: Data collection information & focal points](#).

² Paul, D. (2018, July 16). HLPF Finds Mixed Progress on SDG 15. October 31, 2019, SDG Knowledge Hub | IISD website: <https://sdg.iisd.org:443/news/hlpf-finds-mixed-progress-on-sdg-15/>.