



GOAL ASSESSMENT

PROGRESS ON THE NEW YORK DECLARATION ON FORESTS

Goal 6 assessment

Including forest conservation and restoration in the Sustainable Development Goals

November 2020

The New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF) is a voluntary and non-binding international declaration aimed at halting global deforestation by 2030 with more than 200 endorsers: national and sub-national governments, multi-national companies, groups representing Indigenous and local communities, and non-governmental organizations. Published annually, the NYDF Progress Assessment evaluates the global status of forests as well as overall efforts made toward achieving the NYDF goals.

This update presents progress as of 2020 toward achieving Goal 6:

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

- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 is reported on a global basis annually and countries can submit national reviews on the progress and challenges they face on a voluntary basis. However, countries face several challenges regarding their capacity to report and evaluate SDG targets.
- It is unclear what the future of targets 15.1. and 15.2. is as both targets expire in 2020.

Overview of goal and indicators

Goal 6 aimed to ensure 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 NYDF, by the member states of the United Nations. SDG 15 formulates the goal to “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.”

Goal 6 has been met through the adoption of forest target SDG Goal 15.

We continue to highlight progress on *interpreting and reporting* related to the relevant SDG indicators.

Table 1. Assessment framework for Goal 6	
Criteria	Indicators
1. Effectiveness of forest-related targets in SDGs	1.1. Interpretation of SDG 15
	1.2. Progress reporting on SDG 15

Findings

Indicator 1.1: Interpretation of SDG 15

While Goal 6 has been met, some aspects relating to the interpretation of SDG Goal 15 indicators, as well as how they are reported, remain unclear. The SDG target 15.2 states an ambition to end *gross* deforestation, yet the indicators adopted to track this target only measure *net* deforestation. In this way, the indicators fail to provide information on the extent of deforestation in natural forests. Moreover, SDG target 15.2 does not use quantifiable indicators to measure progress on the restoration, afforestation and reforestation of forests.

This 2020 update builds on our 2019 assessment, providing new information on the interpretation and reporting of forest-related SDG targets 15.1 and 15.2 (Table 2). 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 (WCMC), 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	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	
15.2. By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore	15.2.1. Progress toward sustainable forest management	1. Forest area net change rate. Above-ground biomass stock in forest

degraded forests, and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally		<p>3. Proportion of forest area located within legally established protected areas</p> <p>4. Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan</p> <p>5. Forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme</p>
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A comprehensive review of SDG 15 should be underway

Updating SDG 15 is crucial as its targets 15.1 and 15.2 expire in 2020. However, the revision of the SDG indicators' framework that took place at the 51st session of the Statistical Commission in 2020 did not adopt any revisions on targets 15.1 and 15.2.² This means that the targets will expire by the end of 2020.

Instead, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group has proposed changes related to indicators 15.a and 15.b on access to finance to Goal 15. It was proposed that the scope of these indicators – which are additional to the ones included in Table 1 – are expanded to include development support that goes beyond official development assistance (ODA), such as Other Financial Flows (OFF).³ However, there appears to be disagreement on the methodology to be adopted through this amendment.⁴

Table 3. Current wording of indicators 15.a and 15.b

15.a. Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems	15.a.1. Official development assistance and public expenditure on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems
15.b. Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation	15.b.1. Official development assistance and public expenditure on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems

Indicator 1.2: Progress reporting on SDGs

Reporting of Goal 15 at international and national level faces challenges

The annual SDG reports published by the UN Secretary-General provide an overview of global and regional trends towards the achievement of the SDG Goal 15.⁵ The data presented is mostly provided by the custodian agencies responsible for defining methodologies and for collecting, validating, and reporting on data from relevant national authorities.⁶ Table 4 shows the progress update for Goal 15 reported in 2019. The 2019 report finds that information gaps make the assessment of progress difficult. In particular, it notes that countries do not regularly collect data on more than half of the SDG indicators. Another factor undermining reporting is that many targets do not have quantifiable components, which hampers the assessment of progress. The report concludes that more investment into the development of timely and accurate national data and statistical systems is necessary to improve reporting on SDGs.⁷

Table 4. SDG 15 progress in 2019

SDG 15 | Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goals and Targets	World	Sub-Saharan Africa	Northern Africa and Western Asia	Central and Southern Asia	Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	Latin America and the Caribbean	Australia and New Zealand	Oceania	Europe and Northern America
Ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of forest areas	moderate forest cover	moderate forest cover	low forest cover	low forest cover	moderate forest cover	moderate forest cover	low forest cover	high forest cover	moderate forest cover
Protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species	extinction risk at global average	extinction risk above global average	extinction risk above global average	extinction risk below global average	extinction risk below global average	extinction risk at global average	extinction risk above global average		extinction risk above global average

The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is the principle platform for countries to track progress toward the implementation of the SDG goals at national level. At the HLPF, countries exchange – on a voluntary basis – the progress they have achieved implementing the goals, as well as the challenges they have faced. This is mostly done by the submission of Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). These documents published by governments are intended to present a snapshot of where a country stands in the implementation of Agenda 2030, identifying gaps and good practices, as well as providing an overview of processes planned to monitor and evaluate national progress toward the goals. Some of the issues these reviews have typically looked at is the interlinkages and trade-offs between various goal objectives – this refers to the discussion of synergies between goals, as well as trade-offs where policy action that ensures progress towards one goal objective sometimes negatively impacts other goal objectives.⁸

Since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, 168 countries have submitted their reviews.⁹ In 2020, 47 countries presented their VNR at the HLPF from July 10-16, 2020. Most countries who reported on SDG 15 provided examples of actions they have taken to safeguard biodiversity, including increasing protected areas, including forests. And several countries have noted the tension between having the forestry sector contribute to a significant portion of their economic growth, even as their forest area is declining.¹⁰

In previous years, independent reviewers¹¹ of the VNRs have found that these documents often lack plans to put in place monitoring and evaluation processes for the tracking of national progress toward the SDG goals.

Several companies have started to report on their impact on SDGs

A recent 2019 report found that out of more than 1,000 companies (in 31 countries and territories and 7 industries), 72 percent mention the SDGs in their reporting, 25 percent include them in their business strategy, and 14 percent mention specific SDG target.¹² While these figures show a positive attitude by companies toward the SDG goals, more concrete actions and progress and evaluation targets are necessary in their reporting.

To improve the transparency of corporate action, a common disclosure set and practical guidance to report on SDGs was developed by the UN Global Compact and the Global Reporting Initiative. The Business Reporting on the SDGs platform was formed to ensure such measurement and reporting. Based on the platform, several assessments have been

carried out to evaluate the progress of companies' commitment to report and measure progress toward the SDG goals.

Endnotes

- ¹ UN Sustainable Development Goals: SDG Indicators, Data collection information & focal points <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataContacts/>
- ² UN Sustainable Development Goals: SDG Indicators. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>
- ³ UN Economic and Social Council. (2020). *Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators*. United Nations Social and Economic Council. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/2020-2-SDG-IAEG-E.pdf>
- ⁴ UN Economic and Social Council. (2020). *Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators*. United Nations Social and Economic Council. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/2020-2-SDG-IAEG-E.pdf>
- ⁵ United Nations. (2018). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*. United Nations, New York, 2018. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2018/TheSustainableDevelopmentGoalsReport2018-EN.pdf>
- ⁶ UN Sustainable Development Goals: SDG Indicators, Data collection information & focal points <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataContacts/>
- ⁷ United Nations. (2019). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*. United Nations, New York, 2019. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf>
- ⁸ UN Committee for Development Policy. (2018). *Voluntary National Review Reports—what do they report?* Department of Economic & Social Affairs. United Nations Committee for Development Policy, New York, 2018. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20549CDPbp201846.pdf>
- ⁹ High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. (2020). *2020 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report*. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27027VNR_Synthesis_Report_2020.pdf.
- ¹⁰ High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. (2020).
- ¹¹ IIED. (2017). *Evaluation: a missed opportunity in the SDGs' first set of Voluntary National Reviews*. International Institute for Environment and Development (2017) <https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17423IIED.pdf>
- ¹² PWC. (2019). *Creating a strategy for a better world: How the Sustainable Development Goals can provide the framework for business to deliver progress on our global challenges*. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/sustainability/SDG/sdg-2019.pdf>

Acknowledgments

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About the NYDF Progress Assessment:

The NYDF Progress Assessment is a continual and collaborative process achieved collectively by partner organizations and researchers. Since 2015, the NYDF Assessment Partners have annually published updates on progress toward each of the ten goals of the NYDF. Working groups for individual goals form the basis for developing and revising goal-specific assessment frameworks. They also generate key data and analytics on findings, attempting to narrow knowledge gaps. All assessment findings undergo a rigorous peer review process conducted by experts across the globe.

The NYDF Assessment Partners include:

CDP, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Chatham House, Clean Cooking Alliance, Climate Focus, Conservation International (CI), Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Fauna & Flora International, Forest Foundation Philippines, Forest Trends, Global Canopy, Institute for Global Environmental

Strategies (IGES), Instituto de Manejo e Certificação Florestal e Agrícola (Imaflora), The Alliance of Biodiversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Levin Sources, National Wildlife Federation (NWF), Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Rainforest Alliance, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Sustainability Consortium (TSC), Woodwell Climate Research Center, World Resources Institute (WRI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US), Yiaku Laikipiak Trust, and the Zoological Society of London's (ZSL) Sustainability Policy Transparency Toolkit (SPOTT) initiative.

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