



Progress on the New York Declaration on Forests

Technical Annexes

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

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Description of the Goal and the Indicators

Goal 6 and Goal 7 do not target a specific activity, sector, or deforestation driver, but the establishment of an international policy framework to address forest loss and forest emissions. The objective of Goal 6 is the adoption of targets on forest conservation and restoration as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, it provides three qualifiers: such targets should be (1) quantifiable; (2) ambitious; and (3) relate to the year 2030.

The SDGs, adopted on 25 September 2015, are a set of 17 goals agreed by consensus of the Member States of the United Nations.¹ They replace and amend the Millennium Development Goals, which expire in 2015, 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 are under development by an Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG).

It is worth noting that, in contrast to other goals, Goal 6 targets a specific action at one point in time, and so in principle only needs to be assessed once. At the same time, while the SDGs themselves have been adopted in September 2015, the precise contours of how the forestry goals are interpreted will continue to be refined by the IAEG.

To be consistent with the formulation of Goal 6, we track progress according to two indicators, one focusing on forest conservation targets and the other on restoration targets. These are set out below.

INDICATOR 1

Inclusion in the SDGs of an ambitious, quantitative 2030 target for forest conservation

INDICATOR 2

Inclusion in the SDGs of an ambitious, quantitative 2030 target for forest restoration

Main Concepts and Definitions

Ambitious	<p>In the context of targets, 'ambitious' refers to a target that would require significant additional effort to achieve. Any assessment of ambition is necessarily subjective, though some objective factors can be employed, for example, how the target compares with other international goals addressing the same or similar objectives.</p>
Forest conservation	<p>The term 'forest conservation' is subject to a wide variety of interpretations and no agreed international definition exists, whether under the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity or other forum. For the purposes of Goal 6 we consider a target that aims to substantially conserve and ensure the permanence of existing forest as a forest conservation target, including targets to avoid deforestation. Though some definitions of forest conservation may include 'sustainable use', we have not done so here, since the SDGs treat conservation and sustainable use separately.</p>
Forest restoration	<p>'Forest restoration' is defined broadly to include the seven forest landscape restoration activities defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forest land: Planted forests and woodlots (land without trees); natural regeneration (land without trees); silviculture (degraded forest)• Agricultural land: Agroforestry; improved fallow• Protective land and buffers: Mangrove restoration; watershed protection and erosion control
Quantitative target	<p>A 'quantitative' target is one that defines a change that can be measured in terms of quantity, for example the number of hectares of forest land conserved or restored.</p>

Key Findings

INDICATOR 1: ADOPTION OF QUANTIFIED AND AMBITIOUS TARGETS FOR 2030 ON FOREST CONSERVATION

- The SDGs as adopted in September 2015 include a very ambitious target to halt deforestation by 2020, which goes far beyond existing international targets including those expressed in the New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF).
- The review framework for the SDGs remains under development, together with specific indicators for guiding and measuring implementation of specific targets. Current proposed indicators do not include an indicator for measuring deforestation, which may affect progress in translating this goal into action.

INDICATOR 2: INCLUSION IN THE SDGS OF AN AMBITIOUS, QUANTITATIVE 2030 TARGET FOR FOREST RESTORATION

- Only a general and non-quantifiable target was adopted for forest restoration, and a proposed target on reforestation was removed in the very late stages of the negotiations.
- As with deforestation, current proposed indicators do not include those for measuring the restoration and reforestation targets.

Data Gaps and Limitations

To be achievable, the zero deforestation target will require a strong review framework that contains indicators that enable progress to be measured. Indicators for reforestation and restoration targets would also clarify how these goals should be interpreted.

Findings

The Sustainable Development Goals as adopted in September 2015 include a goal dedicated to the protection of terrestrial ecosystems. Goal 15 reads:

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

Nine targets have been formulated that will help to achieve Goal 15. The two main targets are relevant to the present assessment are Target 15.1 and Target 15.2:

Target 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.

Target 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.

Target 15.1 is considered to constitute the 'umbrella framework' for the overall goal, while the subsequent targets address specific ecosystem types (Loewe and Rippin 2015). Though it refers to forest conservation, this target was always expected to be framed broadly and not include specific commitments. For this assessment we therefore focus on Target 15.2.

Target 15.2 can be broken down into four sub-targets:

- Promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests
- Halt deforestation
- Restore degraded forests
- Substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

Indicator 1: Forest Conservation

While none of the sub-targets of 15.2 specifically refer to 'forest conservation', the mandate to "halt deforestation" by 2020 can be considered a forest conservation target. This target is quantifiable since it can be understood as seeking the reduction of global deforestation to 0% by 2020. It can also – by almost any measure – be considered ambitious. Achieving this target would require rapid successes in reducing deforestation.

This target is, moreover, considerably more ambitious than Goal 1 of the NYDF itself, which aims to (at least) halve the rate of loss of natural forests globally by 2020, and to halt natural forest loss by 2030. The corresponding target under the Aichi Biodiversity Targets adopted under the Convention on Biodiversity similarly targets "at least" halving the loss of natural forests, though it refers to bringing such loss "close to zero" where possible. The level of ambition is also underscored by the fact that previous iterations of the SDGs text had included a date of 2030 for Target 15.2 as a whole, and as late as June

2015 there were proposals to reintroduce that date at least for the deforestation target. Some commentators have even suggested that the target is ambitious to the point of being unachievable (Langelly 2015).

At the same time, it is worth underscoring that in contrast with the Aichi and NYDF targets, the SDG target does not specify halting the loss of 'natural' forests. One possible interpretation of the omission is that the target refers to 'net deforestation', i.e. requiring that any deforestation is offset by forest enhancement (see Goal 1 for more detail). However, both a plain reading of the text and the fact that enhancement is dealt with separately imply that the target should be read as zero gross deforestation, i.e. stopping deforestation entirely.

Indicator 2: Forest Restoration

The sub-target on the restoration of degraded forests within the SDGs cannot be considered a quantifiable target. Even if it could be interpreted as targeting the restoration of all degraded forests, the virtual impossibility of calculating all degraded forests globally would make this practically unquantifiable. The related sub-target that aims for 'substantially' increasing reforestation is also not quantifiable. In this case the absence of a quantifiable target is more notable since a placeholder for such a target ("increase reforestation by [x]%") had been in all iterations of the draft text from the initial proposals made in July 2014 right up to the final stage of the negotiations in July 2015.

The absence of quantifiable targets for forest restoration and reforestation can be considered unambitious when compared to similar global targets. The NYDF, Bonn Challenge (see Goal 5 for more detail on the Bonn Challenge) and Aichi Targets all include quantifiable targets on forest restoration.² At the same time it is worth noting that, in contrast to the reforestation target, there was little discussion of including a quantifiable forest restoration target as part of the SDGs, and the draft text never included such a target.

Beyond the text of the SDGs itself, the impact of action in support of Goal 6 will depend on the implementation framework agreed. UN Member States have given a broad mandate to the High Level Political Forum under the auspices of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council to oversee progress toward implementing the SDGs, but its precise role has yet to be defined. Meanwhile, both national implementation and international review will be guided by the indicators developed by the IAEG. The current proposals for indicators include an indicator on "net permanent forest loss", which would partially measure the deforestation goal but would appear to be somewhat at odds with the text of the goal itself, which focuses on gross deforestation (IAEG 2015). They also include an indicator on area of forest under sustainable management. In addition under Target 15.1 there is a proposed indicator on total forest area, which would be measured based on FAO data. However, this would not specifically identify deforestation, natural forest loss or restoration.

Technical Annex

Indicator 1: Adoption of ambitious forest targets in the context of the SDGs

As Goal 6 is simply formulated and measures a single occurrence that is easily verified, we use two straight-forward indicators that directly reflect the wording of the goal. The key questions each subindicator comprises are: (1) whether a target was adopted; (2) whether it is quantifiable; and (3) whether it is ambitious.

Methodology

The main methodological question is how to assess whether a quantitative target is ambitious. We have focused on the following factors in this determination:

- The level of action that would be required to achieve the target, compared with present action;
- How the target compares with other international goals addressing the same or similar objectives; and
- Whether the target represents an increase or decrease in ambition over the course of negotiations, and in particular since the adoption of the NYDF.

For non-quantitative targets it is not possible to measure ambition, since there is no definable benchmark that can be drawn. By their nature, however, non-quantitative targets are generally unambitious, since they leave the scope of the ambition undefined.

Data Sources

The final agreed text of the SDGs provides the basic source for this goal, while we used previous versions of the negotiating text, including the original proposals, to map how the text evolved over the course of the negotiations. We also relied upon third party analyses of the process to attain additional insights into negotiation dynamics. Finally, we looked at other international instruments containing goals on deforestation and restoration to compare with the SDGs targets.

Bibliography

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Endnotes

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>

² In the case of the Aichi Targets the target refers to "degraded ecosystems" rather than forests specifically, but is framed in the context of carbon stocks and climate change mitigation and adaptation, indicating a strong link to forests.

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