

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 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

In recent assessments, we tracked 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, but we continue to highlight progress and reporting efforts related to the SDG indicators.

Table 1: Criteria and indicators to track Goal 6

CRITERIA	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

In our assessment, we also consider 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.^[4]

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: 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. (For further discussion of how to define deforestation, see the [Goal 1 update](#).) 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.

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. 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

As of 2018, 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:

- **Untapped Potential: Forest Ecosystem Services for Achieving SDG 15.** An April 2018 Forest Trends publication researched how the various international commitments and agreements made in the past few years were developed in preparation for the 13th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests in May 2018. The report shows the growing interest of countries in collectively achieving SDG 15.
- The **UN Forest Instrument** and the **UN Strategic Plan for Forests**. These internally available United Nations tools for better consistency and targeted action include frameworks for international collaboration, strengthening political action and implementation, and sustainable management practices for all types of forests. They aim for a three percent increase (120 million hectares) of forest area worldwide by 2030. Such policy developments and growing investments are providing important platforms for collaboration and communication.
- **Climate Watch.** Climate Watch is a recently launched 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 different indicators, such as 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 national policies with SDG 15, "Life on Land." 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 implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including all 17 SDGs.
- **UN Statistical Commission to discuss 2030 Agenda.** In March 2018, the United Nations set up a commission to discuss SDG data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda, refining some indicators, strengthening inadequate statistical systems, and replacing indicators that were vague and hard to measure by taking suggestions from countries.

¹¹ United Nations Statistics Division. (2018). [SDG Indicators: Data collection information & focal points](#).