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Policy pointers

The 'forest module' approach addresses outcomes and enablers, moving beyond a limited focus on sustainable forest management and deforestation to a transformative, universal and integrated post-2015 agenda for forests.

Enabling transformative change requires the inclusion of watershed ecosystem restoration, integrated land-use planning, respect for individual and collective forest rights, emphasis on strengthening forest and farm producer organisations and redistributive justice in forest land allocation.

To ensure policy coherence, there must be resolution of trade-offs for forests and people arising from elements of goals on food security and agriculture (2) and economic growth and industrialisation (8, 9 and 10).

Existing forest, biodiversity and climate change governance frameworks need to be used in the development of indicators and financing modalities to support the SDGs.

Sustainable Development Goals: a forest module for a transformative agenda

Forests (and landscapes with trees) are such an important part of a number of different Sustainable Development Goals that we recommend working towards a transformative 'forest module'. The module improves on the more limited current focus on sustainable forest management, deforestation and reforestation targets. It makes explicit the diversity of targets needing inclusion and resolution in order to create an enabling environment that would yield much greater sustainable development outcomes for forests, landscapes and livelihoods. With the negotiation phase nearing, our assessment of the UN Open Working Group's zero draft finds a strong set of goals and targets, yet with several potentially serious trade-offs and missing issues. Application of our modular approach can help negotiators seek coherent outcomes across the goal framework and enable integrated implementation at the national level.

A modular approach for negotiation and implementation

Development of the post-2015 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is entering an important phase. The UN's Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs has been preparing a proposed set of goals and targets since September 2013. The intergovernmental negotiations will shortly start in earnest, aiming for the UN General Assembly to adopt the new framework by September 2015.

With so many issues under consideration,¹ the upcoming negotiation phase will need to generate effective prioritisation. This paper assesses the OWG zero draft and proposes introducing an approach which, if adopted, could ensure that the goals gain the right contribution from forests while optimally fostering their sustainability.

Identifying enablers

Although forests are only explicitly mentioned in Target 15.2, the importance of forests beyond sustainable forest management, forest cover and reforestation is evident from their contributions towards at least 13 other outcome targets under diverse goal areas (see Figure 1).^{2,3}

Experience with the Millennium Development Goals⁴ suggests that the limited outlook provided by these goals and targets is insufficient. Critically, they did not sufficiently address the right enabling environment — through rights, systems, capabilities and metrics — for forests to deliver sustainable development.

Existing frameworks — such as globally applicable criteria for sustainable forest management,⁵ pillars for forest/landscape

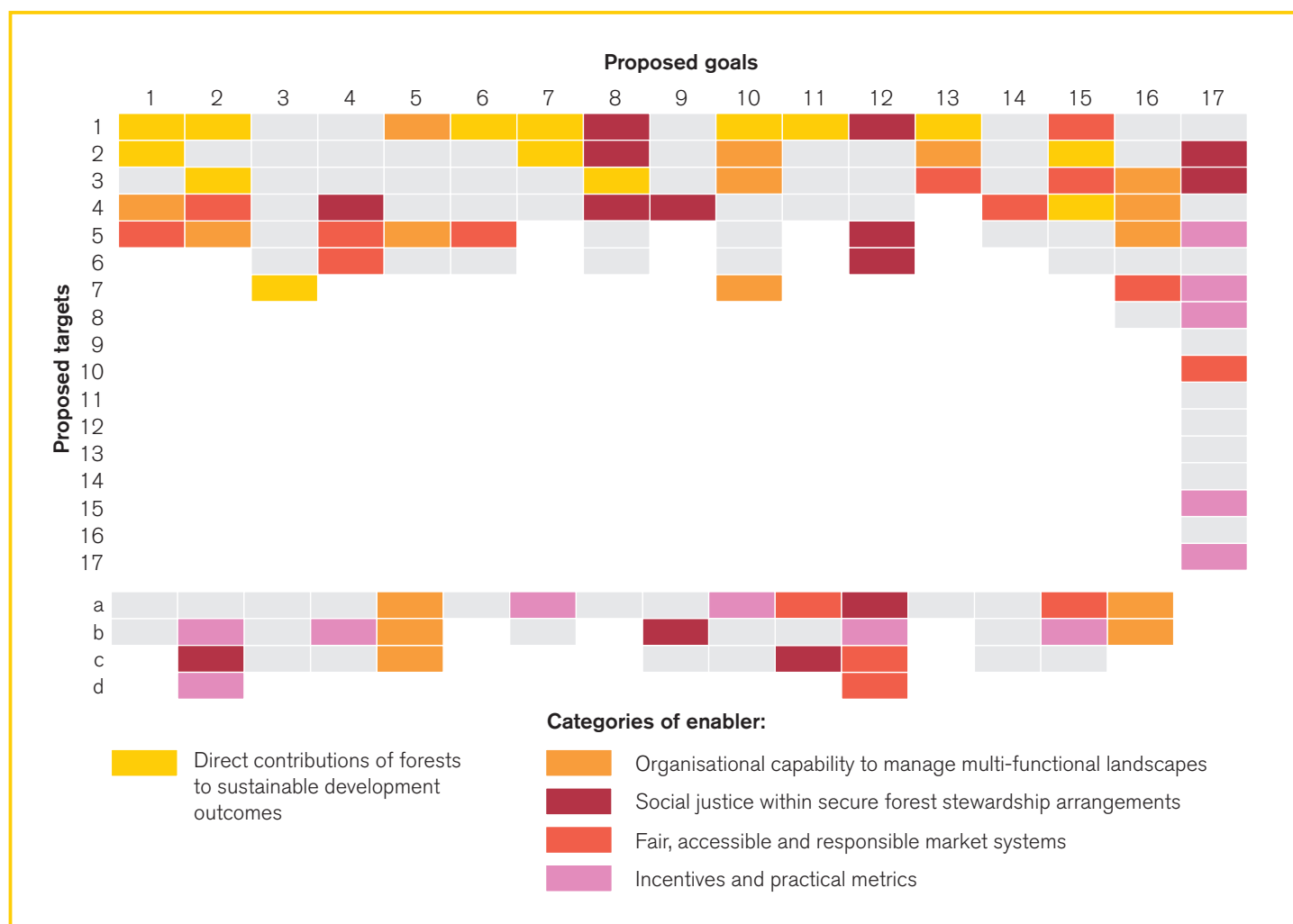


Figure 1. A modular approach to the contribution of forests to diverse development outcomes and required enablers

management,⁶ investments for locally controlled forestry⁷ and key areas for forest contributions to a green economy⁸ — highlight four categories of enabler for forests to deliver sustainable development:⁹

- **Social justice within secure forest stewardship arrangements:** just and secure forest rights through equitable forest governance and negotiated land use planning.
- **Fair, accessible and responsible market systems:** inclusive economic opportunity and resource efficiency for all forest products and services, influenced by sustainable lifestyles and trade.
- **Organisational capabilities to manage multi-functional landscapes:** to enhance the quality and quantity of ecosystem services, sustainable land use practices and resilience of the poor.
- **Incentives and practical metrics:** to build partnerships that effectively resource and monitor progress at national and international levels.

The ‘forest module’

The SDG ‘forest module’ (see Figure 1) considers the combination of targets formulated under diverse goal areas that relate to sustainable development outcomes and are considered essential in delivering these four categories of enabler. Although many of them do not specifically mention forests, they can all be applied for the benefit of forests and forest stakeholders.

The approach can be assessed according to three core concepts that have emerged in dialogue¹⁰ on the SDGs, which we discuss in more detail below:

- contributions towards **transformative change** in support of a rights-based, equitable and inclusive approach to sustainability, in particular by overcoming systemic barriers;
- ensuring **universality** by being global in nature and applicable to all countries while taking into account different national circumstances; and
- addressing **integration** by incorporating all three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced way and promoting inter-linkages across sectors.

Transformative change

The existing goal framework builds a transformative agenda by helping to promote four systemic drivers for forests to contribute towards sustainable development:

1. Targets 1.4 and 5a aim to improve the security of rights, access and control of land and productive resources, which is central for men and women to control and benefit from forest resources. Complementary targets¹¹ tackle participation and the prior informed consent of indigenous and local communities in decision-making (5.5) and natural resource management (16.4); equal access to justice systems (16.5); benefit sharing from genetic resources (2.5); and the capacity, accountability and transparency of sub-national and local governments (16a), which are essential in contested land use situations.
2. Target 8.4 aims to reduce the inequalities that are prevalent in remote forest areas, while 10.2 and 10.3 promote social and economic inclusion, including employment and decent work. Complementary targets support small and medium enterprises (8.2, 9b and 9.4) and increase resource efficiency of economic activities (8.3 and 12a). Together, these could drive inclusive forest-based income growth that incentivises efficient and sustainable forest use.
3. Several targets centre on life-long education and training (4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 13.3), which can develop organisational capabilities for natural resource management, enterprise development and climate change preparedness. Targets to develop capabilities for integrated landscape management include: sustainable, resilient agricultural practices (2.4), integrated water resource management (6.5), ecosystem management (15.1), land restoration (15.3) and sustainable tourism (12d).
4. In terms of potentially transformational metrics, introducing broader measures of progress beyond GDP into national accounting (17.17) would enhance linkages between ecosystem services, human wellbeing and inclusive growth.

For a truly transformative agenda, the zero draft should complement the targeting of the systemic drivers discussed above by making mention of the following:

- **Individual and collective rights to own land and property.** Target 1.4 must refer to both individual land tenure rights that enable households and individuals to develop viable farm-forest enterprises, and collective rights that allow community-level governance of tenure that is relevant for many indigenous people and local forest-dependent communities.

- **Sustainable and integrated land use planning.** Goal 15 should reflect this fundamental need to ensure landscapes meet local as well as global public goods. Participatory, negotiated land use planning is a prerequisite for balancing competing land demands for food, fuel, fodder and fibre.
- **Restoration of watershed ecosystems, to ensure freshwater supply.** Forests play a central role in protecting water catchment basins. Target 15.1 must include restoration alongside conservation and sustainable use.
- **Processes of redistributive justice to deal with unfair historic forest land allocations.** Participatory, transparent and accountable governance frameworks are pivotal for sustainable forestry. While several targets make reference to vulnerable groups, redistributive justice is important to indigenous peoples and displaced communities.
- **Strengthening forest and farm producer organisations for collective action.** While the current framework offers support for small to medium-sized enterprises, there is insufficient mention of representational structures. Improved organisation and representation can increase enterprises' efficiency and capability, and enable them to engage politically in the shaping of resource rights and economic opportunity.
- **Recognising locally controlled forestry.** In the same way that agriculture interventions (2.3) specify smallholders, reforestation (15.2) needs to target locally controlled forestry.
- **Recognising 'small forest holders'** to support diverse small-scale forest-farm systems that produce more and better food than large-scale monoculture plantations. Given the role of trees in providing food and supporting climate-smart agriculture, target 2.3 should specify small forest holders alongside family farmers and pastoralists to ensure that family and community farm-forest systems receive due levels of support.

A universal scope

The goal framework needs to be applicable to all countries, while taking different national circumstances into account. This cannot be achieved by focusing on forest outcomes alone. A 'forest module' approach, on the other hand, would accommodate the diverse roles forests play in different nations and the many ways negotiators approach the contribution of forests.

Ensuring universal scope also requires consideration of policy coherence and collective action. Achieving success in one country

frequently depends on policies or actions in other countries — for example, addressing the drivers of deforestation while also facilitating economic opportunity, market access and technology sharing. Given the importance of international trade in some agricultural commodities and extractives as primary drivers of deforestation and in changing land property rights, there are targets — for example, those focused on sustainable patterns of consumption and production (12.1 and 12b), business practices and reporting (12.5), public procurement (12.6) and shifting lifestyles (12c) — which provide international coherence alongside incentives to reverse forest loss and enhance forest cover (15.2). Of relevance to timber and biomass energy, a number of relevant targets also improve market access for developing countries (17.2 and 17.3) and technology sharing (7a, 12a and 17.7) in support of decoupling of economic development and resource use (8.3).

While these targets in the existing SDG framework provides a solid basis for universal scope, the following additions would ensure more complete policy coherence:

- **Helping resolve possible policy trade-offs from a forest perspective by:**
 - Reinstating the language in target 2.5 of the first version of the ‘zero draft’ about “develop[ing] food systems that are more productive, sustainable, resilient and efficient, and minimize adverse human and environmental impacts [including deforestation] without compromising food and nutrition security”.
 - Ensuring coherence between Goals 8, 9 and 10. Some of the current targets could favour large-scale industrial actors over locally controlled forestry and small-scale enterprises unless diversified rural economies are put central — for example, targets that promote diversification (8.1), technological upgrading (9.5), regional and global integration (9.2 and 9.4) and industrial sector jobs (9.3) could act against the income growth of the bottom 40 per cent (10.1). There is a need to consistently embed conservation of natural capital and ecosystem services into Goals 8 and 9.

- **A specific target for sustainable biomass energy.** This is the primary cooking fuel in many African, Southeast Asian, Latin American and Caribbean households, and is considered modern if used with improved efficiency cook stoves and smoke removal systems.
- **A target on holding the global average temperature rise.** This would link with UNFCCC on a global imperative.
- **Encouraging regional cooperation to gain financial incentives and trade measures.** With many forests spanning international borders, there is a need for collective action in sustainable management (15.1 and 15.2), restoring degraded ecosystems (15.3) and conserving biodiversity (15.4).

An integrated approach

The forest module incorporates the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Mainstreaming forest and other natural resource perspectives within national development processes facilitates broader systems of national accounting (17.7), the integration of climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies (13.2), urban-rural linkages (11a) and sustainable production and consumption plans (12.1).

It is important to identify suitable indicators to help ensure forests fulfil their role in supporting sustainable development. To help ensure coherence and feasibility, indicator development should therefore look towards existing forest, biodiversity and climate-related frameworks — such as the Global Forest Resources Assessment, Sustainable Forest Management, the Montreal process, Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade Action Plans, the Convention on Biological Diversity (Aichi Biodiversity Targets) and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+).

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Knowledge Products

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Notes

¹ The revised ‘zero draft’ dated 30 June contains 17 goals and 146 targets, reduced from 212 targets in 2 June version. / ² Mayers, J (2014) Forests in the sustainable development goals. *Biores* 8(3):16–19. / ³ Jones, A and Wolosin, M (2014) Branching up and out: options for integrating forests into the post-2015 development framework. *Climate Advisors*. / ⁴ UN (2004) The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014. United Nations, New York / ⁵ Ramesteiner, E and Simula M (2003) Forest certification – an instrument to promote sustainable forest management? *Journal of Environmental Management* 67: 87–98. / ⁶ Sayers, J *et al.* (2012) Ten principles for a landscape approach to reconciling agriculture, conservation, and other competing land uses. *PNAS Special edition*. www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1210595110 / ⁷ Macqueen, DJ *et al.* (2012) TFD Review: Investing in locally controlled forestry. *The Forest Dialogue*, New Haven, USA. / ⁸ Prins, K (2013) Measuring progress of the forest sector towards a green economy: some proposals. Presented at the Joint meeting of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the FAO European Forestry Commission, December 2003, Rovaniemi, Finland. / ⁹ This paper is based on an IIED discussion paper available on the IIED website. / ¹⁰ IRF 2015 (2014) The OWG-11 ‘focus areas’ paper: an IRF2015 review. / ¹¹ Numbers in brackets after text refer to specific target numbers.