

Policy pointers

Take an inclusive and integrated approach to implementing the SDGs. IIED's ten-step approach based on 'SDG modules' offers a practical local, national and global way forward.

Define innovative SDG indicators that can measure transformative change, track progress towards targets and measure interactions across themes and sectors.

Agree a common set of indicators for each area of sustainable development to harmonise policy processes and efforts of all actors (eg for a forest module of the SDGs, REDD+ and revised Global Objectives on Forests).

To achieve these recommendations, ensure the participatory processes used are truly inclusive and democratic, fully involving most affected groups and amplifying marginalised voices.

Integrated approaches to SDG implementation and indicators: focus on forests

Despite their universal and holistic ambition, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets are shaping up to be too compartmentalised to deliver the integrated approach required. In this crunch year of global agreements, we identify two opportunities for giving the SDGs the best chance of success: through integrated implementation and integrated indicators. Focusing on forests — a theme underpinning many of the SDGs — we first outline a practical, ten-step approach to SDG implementation based on 'SDG modules', which cuts across the relevant goals. This inclusive and adaptable approach would remove the barriers blocking the potential of forests to contribute fully to sustainable development. It could guide integrated national SDG implementation and align intergovernmental frameworks. We also propose three categories of indicators for a more innovative and integrated monitoring and review system.

Forests have multiple roles to play in sustainable development: tackling climate change; supporting local economies; protecting biodiversity; providing food, energy and water; and more besides.

Some of these roles are obvious — others less so. Lack of integration was recognised as a key failing of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and integration has been widely demanded¹ throughout the development of the Sustainable Development Goals² (SDGs). But what does integration mean, why does it matter for forests, and how can it be achieved?

Integration means balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development (environmental, social, economic) whilst also systematically addressing 'interlinkages' among the SDGs, and across sectors, policy areas, place and time.³ It also means coherence across the SDGs and other governance frameworks. For forests — as for

many other areas — to maximise their contribution to sustainable development, efforts must extend way beyond the 'forest sector'. Forestry experts and policymakers are appealing for the SDGs to create the enabling conditions for forests to contribute to sustainable development on many fronts (Box 1).⁴ They are calling for an integrated, inclusive, bottom-up approach to forest management, which seeks to ensure local benefits, while resolving conflicts among competing interests and priorities for land use.

This is a crucial year for sustainable development. We have already seen one key intergovernmental agreement — on disaster risk reduction — and those to follow include the post-2015 agenda (including the SDGs), financing for development, and a new climate regime, which covers Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+).

Policymakers must rise to the challenge of cross-sectoral and cross-institutional thinking

For forests — critical to and affected by all of these big decisions — there is another key date in the international governance calendar. In May, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) will agree a Resolution on the Future International Arrangement on Forests, with the possibility of revised Global Objectives on Forests.⁵ Taken together, these offer a unique opportunity to achieve a harmonised,

coherent set of agreements. This opportunity must be seized, but will require thinking beyond institutional barriers and the boundaries of individual frameworks.

However, calls for an integrated SDG framework have not been heeded in the process to date. There is little in the UN Open Working Group's (OWG's) proposed goals and targets⁶ that will promote integration. The SDGs do go much further than the MDGs in balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development but not in addressing the interlinkages described above.

The coming year offers two specific opportunities to increase integration within the SDG framework: (1) implementation preparation; and (2) indicator design. This briefing suggests some effective and practical ways of achieving this, with a focus on forests.

Box 1. Priority target areas for forests to guide identification of an SDG forest module

Experts and government representatives at the 'Enabling forests to score sustainable development goals' workshop (held in Lima, November 2014) identified:²

The most important sustainable development outcomes to which forests contribute:

climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience; income and employment; biodiversity protection; food and energy access; water supply and access.

The critical enablers for forests to contribute to sustainable development outcomes:

A. Social justice and good governance: rule of law, accountability, transparency and access to justice; equitable rights to control, own and access land, property and natural resources; inclusive decision-making processes and equal opportunities; fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilisation of genetic resources.

B. Fair and responsible market systems: access to markets and product diversification; support for small enterprises and producer organisations; responsible and sustainable private sector practices; skills for employment, jobs, entrepreneurship.

C. Well managed, multi-functional landscapes: sustainable agriculture and food systems and integrated water resources management; sustainable management of forests and other natural resources; inclusive and integrated land-use planning.

D. Metrics and means of implementation: technology sharing and upgrading; institutional capacity and inter-agency co-ordination; resourcing and incentives; valuing ecosystem services.

Integration in implementation

While sustainable management of forests could underpin, and will depend upon, many of the SDGs, almost all of the explicitly forest-related content is clustered in the 'terrestrial ecosystems' goal (SDG-15). The OWG did make some progress in incorporating issues of relevance to forests in targets under other goals⁷ but the link is only made explicit in one case⁸ (this general point is also true for other policy areas). Without an integrated approach to implementation, we cannot tackle the systemic barriers to sustainable development. For forests, these include the lack of recognition of collective rights to own and access land, the inability to hold the private sector to account, and the under-use of natural capital accounts. This is why IIED and partners have developed an inclusive, integrated approach to implementing the SDGs involving cross-cutting modules.⁹

The approach works by building 'SDG modules' out of targets from across the SDGs that encompass agreed priority outcomes and necessary enabling conditions for the policy areas of each ministry, agency or equivalent institution, as well as for any other major cross-cutting policy areas subject to dedicated governance frameworks. In this way, the linear structure of the columns of targets under the 17 SDGs is twisted into an integrated structure of overlapping modules, which better reflects the interconnected complexity of the real world and allows these institutions and their stakeholders to clearly see where they need to co-operate and with whom in implementation of the SDGs.

A 'forest module' is therefore defined by bringing together those targets from the SDG framework that reflect the priority sustainable development outcomes to which forests can contribute and the necessary enabling conditions (Box 1).¹⁰ Targets should include safeguards to allow limits to be set on any adverse impacts of pursuing forests' sustainable development outcomes. This modular approach could help fulfil the potential of the SDGs by forging cross-sector, multi-stakeholder engagement and enabling the identification of synergies and trade-offs. It could also offer an international-level framework — not only for guiding implementation of the SDGs by forest stakeholders but also for revising the Global Objectives on Forests and defining REDD+ enabling conditions, safeguards and multiple benefits.

How would this approach be implemented in practice? Given that different regions prioritise different target areas,¹¹ SDG targets for a 'local' forest module should be selected through inclusive regional, national and sub-national processes. Box 2 lists ten steps for defining and

implementing an SDG forest module at the national level. These can be adapted to any scale, as well as to the 'nested jurisdictional approach' being adopted for REDD+ by some countries.¹²

Integration through indicators

As with the negotiations for defining the SDGs, the process of developing indicators for measuring progress towards them also shows few signs of joined-up thinking. Distinct UN agencies, each with a specific area of interest, were asked to propose one or two indicators per target. However, the Bureau of the UN Statistical Commission has recognised this deficiency.¹³ It can still make space to consider innovative SDG indicators that will promote integration. But this will require governments and civil society to overcome the vested interests of individual agencies with a loud and united voice.

An innovative and integrated monitoring and review system would include three categories of indicator:

1. Meta-metrics: approximately ten overarching, integrative measures of transformative change, which:

- communicate simply the essence of, and progress towards, the SDGs, drawing together common threads that link different goals;
- are organised under four overarching principles, as suggested by the Independent Research Forum (IRF2015);¹⁴ and
- can be adapted to global, regional, national and sub-national levels, forming the basis for scorecards to help stakeholders hold governments to account for delivery or to track delivery of a collective commitment to action.

Of the meta-metrics suggested by IIED and IRF2015, those most relevant to forests are metrics for well-being within environmental limits; decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation and inequality; and use of participatory, integrated natural resource management and policy processes.

2. Target-tracking indicators: one or two per target.¹⁵ These could be:

- differentiated to reflect regional, national and sub-national conditions and capacity;
- measured through an inclusive and participatory process; and
- used to monitor progress in forests' contribution to the SDGs through the set of all such indicators for all targets identified in the forest module — not just those that explicitly mention forests.¹⁶

Box 2. A participatory ten-step approach to implementing an SDG forest module

The following steps should all take a participatory approach, involving the perspectives of different stakeholders (including a gender perspective), with priority given to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable stakeholders. Inherently the first critical step — a 'Step 0' — is to establish an inclusive, multi-stakeholder task force to drive forward the process.

1. Conduct an assessment of forest status and trends and their contribution to sustainable development. Use this to inform agreement on priority sustainable development outcomes to which forests should contribute.
2. Analyse the elements that promote and hinder forests' contribution to sustainable development, including power relations and the legal, policy and institutional framework. Use this to inform agreement on categories of enabling conditions required for forests to maximise their contribution to the agreed priority outcomes.
3. Define an SDG forest module, which includes SDG targets for (i) priority outcomes to which forest management can contribute; and (ii) the enabling conditions to achieve these, including limiting any unintended adverse effects.
4. Repeat steps 1–3 to define SDG modules for other policy areas (eg for each ministry, agency or equivalent institution). Overlay these modules to help indicate where ministries and their respective stakeholder groups need to co-operate and identify priority areas for maximising synergies and managing potential trade-offs among policy goals.
5. Identify broader synergies and trade-offs among the SDG forest module and other international frameworks, national development policies and planning processes.
6. Develop a strategy for implementing the SDG forest module as an integral part of the national SDG strategy, from setting ambitious yet realistic national target levels and interim milestones, right through to mobilising resources. The roles, rights and responsibilities of different actors must be clearly specified.
7. Harness broad stakeholder understanding, engagement and support through communication and outreach.
8. Implement the strategy (including its mainstreaming into national macroeconomic and sectoral development policies and planning processes) and ensure co-ordination among ministries and stakeholder groups leading on, or contributing to, the targets identified in the forest module.
9. Monitor and review progress towards the targets in the forest module, including impacts on the status and trends of forests and their contribution to priority sustainable development outcomes.
10. Feed lessons back into changes to the legal, policy and institutional framework and potentially also to goals, targets and indicators.

3. Interlinkage indicators, which:

- measure the interaction between different thematic or sectoral goals and targets (such as rate of deforestation due to agricultural expansion; the link between greenhouse gas emissions from the forest sector and secure, equitable tenure rights); and
- are useful for in-depth national analysis on priority themes and their interactions; and could

also contribute to global analysis such as the Global Sustainable Development Report.¹⁷

Agreeing a set of common indicators for each SDG module that works across other governance frameworks would help harmonise the various policy processes and initiatives related to each area of sustainable development and the efforts of the different actors. In the case of forests, it will be vital to integrate REDD+ and SDG implementation.

A common set of indicators for an SDG forest module and for REDD+ monitoring and review would cover enabling conditions, safeguards and outcomes (or 'multiple benefits', to use the REDD+ terminology) as well as interlinkages. If the UNFF decides to revise the Global Objectives on Forests in line with our modular approach, including by filling the current gap with respect to enabling conditions (especially governance), these common indicators could also be used to track progress against these Objectives.¹⁸ The set of indicators should also be capable of tracking commitments made by the private sector, including the recent collective commitment to eliminate deforestation from commodity supply chains by 2020.¹⁹

Inclusion is key

Achieving integrated implementation of the SDGs means making connections across sectors, stakeholder groups and scales and, critically, making decisions about trade-offs. Throughout this briefing we have used the term 'inclusive', because for these decisions to be made fairly, an inclusive, democratic, participatory process is required in which marginalised voices are amplified.

Our ten-step approach (Box 2) demonstrates what such a process could look like. Participants have access to all relevant information and play an active part in contributing, analysing and acting on evidence. For the SDGs to be transformative, their implementation must tackle systemic barriers to sustainable development, which often means addressing power imbalances. This can only be

done through inclusive, bottom-up processes in which local communities are given autonomy over their livelihoods and the natural resources upon which these depend. One key approach is locally controlled forestry.²⁰ IIED and others have already documented examples of context-specific practices that can guide SDG implementation.²¹

It is also vital from a forest perspective that the real land users (the key decision-makers in relation to that land) have a genuine opportunity to be part of the process. They must be able to monitor indicator values and act in response. For example, in Kenya, local knowledge of changes in land use is being combined with satellite imagery to boost understanding and action by land users.²²

Seizing the day

To harness the potential offered by an integrated approach to forests (and many other areas) for achieving transformative change, policymakers must rise to the challenge of cross-sectoral and cross-institutional thinking.

The time to act is now: swift action will help us agree a common set of indicators for forests by harmonising the complex and politically sensitive processes of REDD+, the SDG indicators and UNFF. Common indicators could be used by all the international and national financing and certification schemes. This would embed a common sustainable development framework that would avoid the Clean Development Mechanism's failure to support its stated purpose of assisting developing countries in achieving sustainable development with an adequate implementation system.

If the SDGs are to reach their potential, now is the time for the leaders of these processes to seize this opportunity to walk the integration talk.

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Knowledge Products

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Notes

¹ See, for example, the UN Secretary General's 'Synthesis Report': www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/700&Lang=E / ² See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html> / ³ www.irf2015.org/sites/default/files/publications/IRF2015%20review%20of%20OWG11_0.pdf / ⁴ <http://pubs.iied.org/G03918.html> / ⁵ www.un.org/esa/forests/about.html / ⁶ See note 2 / ⁷ <http://pubs.iied.org/G03839.html?c=forest> / ⁸ Target 6.6: by 2020 protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes / ⁹ For details, see <http://pubs.iied.org/17248IIED.html?c=forest> / ¹⁰ See <http://pubs.iied.org/17248IIED.html> and <http://pubs.iied.org/G03918.html> for illustrations of forest modules. / ¹¹ For an Asian perspective see: <http://pubs.iied.org/G03850.html?c=forest>; for Africa see <http://pubs.iied.org/G03874.html?c=forest>; and for Latin America and the Caribbean see <http://pubs.iied.org/G03871.html?c=forest> / ¹² www.cifor.org/publications/pdf_files/infobrief/5201-infobrief.pdf / ¹³ http://unngls.org/images/PDF/Technical_report_of_the_UNSC_Bureau_final.pdf / ¹⁴ Leave no one behind; ensure equity for all; build economies that work for people and planet; and mobilize collective action on a shared global agenda. See www.irf2015.org/assessing-owg-way-forward for full list of proposed meta-metrics. / ¹⁵ Note that many of the OWG's targets include several sub-targets, which would all require separate indicators of this type. / ¹⁶ The modular approach is a more practical equivalent to the identification of common targets across multiple goals and common indicators across multiple targets. / ¹⁷ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsreport> / ¹⁸ Coherence with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity should also be sought (and will be achieved to the extent they are integrated into the SDGs). Coherence at the appropriate level with existing sustainable forest management criteria and indicator frameworks and certification schemes should also be sought. Use of a common set of indicators in financing and regulatory schemes will be critical to this endeavour. / ¹⁹ www.un.org/climatechange/summit/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/07/FORESTS-Action-Statement_revised.pdf / ²⁰ Locally controlled forestry is defined as "The local right for forest owner families and communities to make decisions on commercial forest management and land use, with secure tenure rights, freedom of association and access to markets and technology." / ²¹ See for example, <http://pubs.iied.org/13574IIED.html?c=forest>; <http://pubs.iied.org/13565IIED.html?c=forest>; <http://pubs.iied.org/13572IIED.html?c=forest>, as well as the outcome document of the Lima workshop on "Enabling forests to score sustainable development goals". <http://pubs.iied.org/G03918.html> / ²² www.iied.org/community-maps-reveal-rich-resources-land-policy-makers-think-empty