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Sustainable Development Goals and forests

A summary of UN Open Working Group debates and country reflections

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About the project

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Executive summary

The UN's draft sustainable development goals (SDGs) were agreed in July 2014. Goal 15 ('Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss') included two targets specifically related to forests. Target 15.2 is the main one:

> 15.2   by 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests, and increase afforestation and reforestation by x% globally

together with one 'means of implementation' of Goal 15:

> 15.b   mobilise significantly resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management, and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance sustainable forest management, including for conservation and reforestation

This report summarises the positions put forward by countries during the debates on forests in the meetings of the Open Working Group (OWG) established to draw up the SDGs, together with reflections from a number of countries on the OWG process after its conclusion.

Discussions in the OWGs

Developing countries' views included very broad support for the concept of sustainable forest management (SFM); very broad support for the need for assistance for its implementation, in the form of finance, capacity-building and technology transfer; repeated references to the role and importance of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) and its Non-Legally-Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests; some references to the role and rights of local communities; and some references to illegal deforestation and the importance of forest governance (though the G77 made it clear that they regarded this as a matter for national governments; international guidelines were only voluntary).

On the treatment of forests in the SDGs, several countries supported a separate SDG on forests; there was some support for the integration of forests issues more widely throughout the SDGs; and some support for including forests in an ecosystem management SDG.

Developed countries' views included very broad support for the concept of SFM; some support for an approach based on natural capital and ecosystem services; a focus on the need to address the drivers of deforestation, including agriculture and illegal logging; and some references to the needs of forest communities, forest governance, tenure rights and community ownership.

On the treatment of forests in the SDGs, several countries supported the inclusion of specific targets on reducing deforestation and degradation, increasing reforestation and protected areas; and there was some support for the integration of forests into a natural resources rather than a biodiversity SDG.

After the themed discussions of the first nine OWG meetings, the final four OWG meetings, from March to July 2014, featured debates over the specific goals and targets to be included. OWG 10 (March/April) saw a wide range of ideas expressed. OWG 11 (May) saw debate around the inclusion of two targets on forests within a broader 'focus area' of ecosystems and biodiversity: 'by 2030, ensure sustainable management of all forests' and 'halting deforestation and increasing reforestation by x per cent'.

OWG 12 (June) saw the first draft of a full set of potential SDGs, including two targets of proposed Goal 15, on terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity:

> 15.4   by 2030, ensure the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests and of mountain ecosystems

> 15.5   by 2030 reverse the loss of and enhance forest cover worldwide, increase reforestation by x%, including by providing adequate incentives for developing countries

By OWG 13 (July), these had been merged into one target:

> 15.2   by 2030, ensure the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, and increase reforestation by x% globally

together with a specific 'means of implementation':

> 15.b   Mobilise significantly resources from all sources and at all levels to finance SFM, and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance SFM, including for conservation and reforestation

The final proposed SDG 15.2 (see above) represents a slight modification of this draft including, most significantly, the bringing forward of the target date from 2030 to 2020; 15.b remains unaltered.

Country reflections

Attempts were made to contact all the countries listed as contributing to the SDG discussions in the OWGs, in order to interview them on their views on the outcome of the SDG process as it reflected forests. Ten countries (three developing and seven developed) responded, though only seven in detail.

Countries were asked whether they had developed a detailed vision for what they hoped to see emerge from the SDG process in regard to forests. Five had not, one considered that their vision was similar to that reflected in the draft SDG 15.2, and another referred to their statement in the OWG discussions. Another had conducted consultations with government authorities and other stakeholders; it emphasised the importance of SFM and its associated means of implementation, and the continued relevance of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument and the four Global Objectives on Forests agreed by the UNFF in 2006.

In June 2014, the EU and Switzerland both published documents outlining their aims for the SDGs. Both are largely in line with the proposed SDG 15.2 but additionally include: suggested targets for safeguarding ecosystems providing essential services; the prevention of species extinction and the reduction of illegal trade (EU); coherence with the Aichi biodiversity goals; and the importance of having a stand-alone goal on forests, as well as integrating it into other goals (Switzerland).

Countries were asked their views on the extent to which the draft SDG 15.2 reflected their views, and to what extent they wished to see further changes. By and large, countries were reasonably content with the draft. One country felt that forests were under-represented, and two that the 2020 target date may be too ambitious. There was some support for the elaboration of further sub-goals or targets. One country stressed the importance of national legislation and the need for more coherence with the Biodiversity Convention and the UNFF's global objectives.

Developing countries were asked what role they thought the UNFF could play in relation to the SDGs. All supported the UNFF as the key coordinating body for forests in UN system, and called for a stronger structure (but without making the Non-Legally-Binding Instrument legally binding) and capacity. One felt that next year's UNFF meeting should set specific targets for forests.

Countries were asked to what extent they felt that important forest-related goals and targets were missing from the SDGs, particularly on integrated land use planning and on conditions supportive of locally controlled forestry, including tenure and land rights. Two countries agreed, feeling that land tenure rights were generally under-represented in the SDGs, while two were less certain, believing the issue was important, but pointing to various mentions in the SDGs. All three developing countries disagreed, believing the issue was adequately reflected and was in any case primarily a matter for national legislation.

Finally, countries were asked to what extent they felt some of the other draft SDGs – for example, those promoting economic growth and infrastructure – potentially made it more difficult to achieve those SDGs relating to the sustainable management of forests. There was no agreement with this argument; countries pointed out that there was always the potential for conflict, and trade-offs were inevitable and would depend on national circumstances. The three pillars of sustainable development were all equally important and had to be implemented and balanced through national policies and strategies.

1. Introduction: MDGs, SDGs and forests

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight international development goals with targets to be reached by 2015, were established following the United Nations' Millennium Summit in 2000. Although generally welcomed at the time, with the experience of implementation, the MDGs have increasingly come to be seen as too limited in outlook, insufficiently integrated with one another and failing to address the right enabling conditions to develop their targets. Accordingly, at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development ('Rio+20') in June 2012, member states agreed to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs), which would build upon the MDGs and converge with the post-2015 development agenda.

The Rio+20 outcome document, 'The Future We Want', resolved to establish an intergovernmental process on SDGs, open to all stakeholders, with the outcome to be agreed by the UN General Assembly. The Open Working Group (OWG) of the General Assembly, established to draw up the SDGs, began work in March 2013, and concluded with the publication of a draft set of goals after its thirteenth session in July 2014.[1] The UN General Assembly in September 2014 discussed the SDGs as part of a wider debate on the post-2015 development framework and decided that the OWG's outcome document would be the main basis for integrating the SDGs into the future development agenda, though other inputs would also be considered during the intergovernmental negotiation process.[2] Final agreement on the post-2015 framework and the SDGs is expected at a high-level summit in September 2015.

Forests are critical to global sustainable development.[3] They cover 31 per cent of the world's land area and provide a very wide range of products and ecosystem services delivering social, environmental and economic benefits. More than 1.6 billion people depend to varying degrees on forests for their livelihoods, including for fuel, medicinal plants and food, and 200 million people, including many indigenous people, directly depend on forests for their survival. Forests are amongst the most important habitats for biodiversity; tropical forests support over 80 per cent of the world's terrestrial species.

Forests provide crucial ecosystem services, including water management and the prevention of soil erosion and landslides. They store more carbon than the atmosphere and have the potential to absorb about a tenth of the global carbon emissions projected for the first half of this century. From the economic perspective, forests provide timber for construction, wood products, pulp and paper and non-timber products, and biomass for renewable energy. They generate jobs and incomes, particularly for poor people in rural areas; world-wide, over 10 million people are employed in the formal forest sector. Forests provide cultural benefits to native and indigenous communities living in or surrounding forest areas, as well as scenic, amenity and cultural heritage benefits to all peoples.

The income generated from forests, and trees outside forests, is significant. In 2009, the formal forest sector's contribution to global GDP was estimated to be about US $468 billion, accounting for nearly one per cent of global GDP. The value of the non-monetary benefits from forests, including environmental and social services to rural economies and households through the provision of energy, shelter and medicine, is estimated to be equivalent to two to three times that amount, yet is generally not included in either public or private statistics.

The MDGs agreed in 2000 reflect only a small portion of these multiple functions and benefits. Forests are referred to explicitly only in MDG7, on environmental sustainability, and are relevant to the following four indicators under Target 7B:

> Target 7B: Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss:

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[1] Outcome Document – Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, available at http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html.

[2] 'General Assembly adopts resolution on SDGs report', UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 17 September 2014.

[3] Information in the following paragraphs taken from *TST Issues Brief: Forests* (UN Open Working Group Technical Support Team), available at http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2291Forest%20Issues%20Brief_FINAL.pdf.

7.1:   Proportion of land area covered by forest.
7.2: CO_2 emissions, total, per capita and per \$1 GDP (PPP).
7.6:   Proportion of terrestrial and marine areas protected.
7.7:   Proportion of species threatened with extinction.

One aim of the SDGs is a better reflection of the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, environmental and social. The proposed SDGs contains seventeen goals to be achieved by 2030, of which forests are mentioned explicitly in two targets of Goal 15 ('Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss'). Target 15.2 is the main one:

15.2   by 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests, and increase afforestation and reforestation by x% globally

together with one 'means of implementation' of Goal 15:

15.b   mobilise significantly resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management, and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance sustainable forest management, including for conservation and reforestation

In addition, target 15.1, on ecosystems, contains a reference:

15.1   by 2020 ensure 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

and this is largely duplicated in one target of Goal 6 (on water and sanitation):

6.6   by 2020 protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

Many other goals and targets are also relevant, and are discussed in more detail in Section 4.

IIED is working to help install forest-related targets and indicators into the post-2015 development framework, including efforts to gather evidence and enable dialogue with key constituencies. A particular focus is placed on enabling the diversity of priorities and perspectives to be better understood, especially those of lesser-heard voices, including Least Development Countries and marginalised groups. This report forms one of four commissioned studies. It aimed to synthesise options, proposals and perspectives with regard to forests and SDGs, in order to help inform the SDG process effectively.

Sections 2–4 of this paper summarise the positions put forward by countries[4] during the debates on forests in the Open Working Group. The main discussions took place in OWG 8 (3–7 February 2014), which featured a wide-ranging debate on 'oceans and seas, forests and biodiversity', but the topic also arose during discussions on draft language for the SDGs and specific targets in the following five OWGs (OWG 9 (3–5 March), OWG 10 (31 March – 4 April), OWG 11 (5–9 May), OWG 12 (16–20 June) and OWG 13 (14–18 July)).[5]

Sections 2 and 3 summarise the views of developing countries (Section 2) and developed countries (Section 3) on the role of forests in sustainable development (country classifications are taken from the UN system[6]). Section 4 summarises countries' views on specific goals and targets. Section 5 presents reflections from a number of countries on the OWG process after its conclusion.

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[4] For the purposes of the working group, countries were grouped into troikas, with one of the three speaking on behalf of the troika at each meeting; occasionally individual countries also made interventions.

[5] For statements, presentations and documents for each OWG, see http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html. For *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* reports of the discussions, see http://www.iisd.ca/vol32/.

[6] Accordingly, although Chile, Mexico and Republic of Korea are all OECD members they are considered here to be developing countries. Cyprus, an EU member state, is also included in the developing country category as it was grouped in a troika with two

2. The OWG debates: developing countries' views

Except where noted, the points listed below were made at the OWG 8 discussions on 'oceans and seas, forests and biodiversity' in February 2014. Countries putting forward these arguments are identified in *italics*.[7]

2.1. Multiple roles of forests and sustainable forest management

Unsurprisingly, there was very broad support for the concept of sustainable forest management (SFM) (*G77, Gabon, Indonesia/China/Kazakhstan*) and the multiple roles of forests, expressed variously as balancing conservation and economic growth (*Peru*) and maintaining ecosystems while pursuing socioeconomic development (*Nepal*).

The argument was also made that the value of forests was understated, including in the MDGs, and needed to be correctly measured (*Southern African group*).

Specific roles of forests were mentioned, including in preventing coastal erosion and acting as a buffer against extreme events (*Maldives*) and as part of sustainable mountain development (*Nepal*). *Egypt* called for greater efforts at afforestation, *Nepal* for the designation of more conservation and protected areas and *Uganda* for rural electrification in order to reduce the demand for woodfuel. The need to address the drivers behind deforestation was highlighted by the *West African states*.

In contrast to the developed countries' interventions (see Section 3), only one country drew attention to the value of a natural capital/ecosystem services approach (*Republic of Korea*).

2.2. Financial and other support

Equally unsurprisingly, many countries expressed support for the need for assistance for SFM for developing countries, in the form of finance, capacity-building and technology transfer (*Argentina/Ecuador/Bolivia, Indonesia/China/Kazakhstan, Nepal*). *Iran, Egypt* and *Tanzania* made essentially the same point in drawing attention to the importance of the proposed means of implementation of the SDGs.

Supporting arguments were put forward by *India/Pakistan/Sri Lanka* – since the bulk of globally important forests is situated in developing countries, the costs of the services they provide should be equitably shared – and the *Least Developed Countries* – since the private sector provides only limited investment in forests, public financing is needed.

The *G77* and *Iran* called explicitly for a new Global Forest Fund, while *Cuba* wanted to see a 'trustworthy' financial instrument.

The importance of the REDD+ mechanism under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was also highlighted (*Gabon, Southern African group, Uganda*).

Republic of Korea drew attention to the need to improve scientific data.

2.3. Importance of existing institutions

Developing countries repeatedly made reference to the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) and to the need for the SDG process not to undercut its role as the main UN platform for forests (*G77, Brazil/Nicaragua, Gabon, Iran, Southern African group, Uganda*).

Similarly, the Non-Legally-Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests, agreed within the UNFF in 2007, was supported as a statement of the necessary goals (*G77, Gabon, Iran, Southern African group*). The

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developing countries.

7 Sources: statements available at UN OWG 8 website (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg8.html) and OWG 9 website (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg9.html) and Earth Negotiations Bulletin, summaries of the negotiations at the various OWGs.

fact that it had incorporated SFM criteria and indicators from other organisations and processes, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), was also mentioned (*Southern African group*). *Republic of Korea* drew attention to the FAO's Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting project for sustainable forest management.

The importance of compliance with other international agreements, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the UNFCCC (separately from the references to REDD+ – see above) was mentioned by *Nepal*. Several countries referred to the Biodiversity Convention, its Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and Aichi targets, but not often explicitly in the context of forests (OWG 8 featured a broad discussion of several aspects of biodiversity).

2.4. Forest communities and forest governance

Several developing countries mentioned the role and rights of local communities (*Indonesia/China/Kazakhstan;* OWG 11: *G77*) or 'forest dwellers' (*Peru*). The need for indigenous people to be involved in forest management was explicitly mentioned by *Argentina/Ecuador/Bolivia* and OWG 11: *G77*.

The need for clear and equitable land tenure and user rights was highlighted by the *Southern African group*.

The problem of illegal deforestation was also mentioned (*Brazil/Nicaragua*), together with the importance of forest governance and law enforcement and, specifically, the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) initiative (*Southern African group*).

At OWG 10, however, the *G77* reminded the meeting that the governance of forests (along with other natural resources) was a matter for national governments; international guidelines were only voluntary.

2.5. Treatment in the SDG process

A number of countries (*Brazil/Nicaragua, Cuba, Singapore/Cyprus/UAE*; OWG 10: *Congo Basin countries, Gabon*) argued for a separate SDG on forests.

Others, however, supported a more holistic approach, integrating forest issues into overarching goals related to poverty eradication, an inclusive green economy, overall human well-being and sustainable development (*Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal*).

Slightly more narrowly, other countries argued for integrating forest issues into an ecosystem management SDG, including conservation and sustainable development targets, while recognising and building on linkages with other issues such as poverty eradication (*India/Pakistan/Sri Lanka, Republic of Korea*; OWG 9: *Indonesia*).

In OWG 9, however, *Niger* argued against an ecosystem management goal, as their priorities included desertification and forestry management, which they felt might not prove a good fit.

The *West African states* and *Southern African group* both drew attention to the need to consider land management and conservation together, the latter specifically in the context of REDD+.

At OWG 10, the *African group* proposed a SDG to 'combat desertification, land degradation and drought and promote sustainable management of land and oceanic spaces' – including incentives for developing countries to implement SFM and to enhance forest carbon stocks. During the debate on climate issues, *Maldives* highlighted the need for targets to protect carbon sinks and rejuvenate forests.

3. The OWG debates: developed countries' views

Except where noted, the points listed below were made at the OWG 8 discussions on 'oceans and seas, forests and biodiversity' in February 2014. Countries putting forward these arguments are identified in *italics*.[8]

3.1. Multiple roles of forests and sustainable forest management

As with the developing countries, there was very wide recognition for the multiple roles of forests and for the accompanying need to promote SFM (*Australia/UK/Netherlands, EU, France/Germany/Switzerland, Italy/Turkey/Spain, Japan, Norway/Denmark/Ireland, Slovenia/Montenegro, Sweden*).

Slovenia/Montenegro highlighted in particular some of the social functions of forests (heritage, recreation, health, and so on) which are sometimes overlooked. *Romania/Poland* argued that forests are vital for advancing green economies and green industries, which in turn promotes SFM. *France/Germany/Switzerland* highlighted the need to promote reforestation, restoration and afforestation, preferably with native species.

A number of countries highlighted the value of adopting an approach based on the concepts of natural capital and ecosystem services, ensuring that the economic value of biodiversity and ecosystems are reflected in decisions made by governments and businesses (*Australia/UK/Netherlands, EU, Italy/Turkey/Spain*).

Japan drew attention to the desirability of using the criteria and indicators developed under the various SFM forums and the FAO.

Some countries pointed to the need for detailed forest inventories and improved scientific knowledge, combined with traditional knowledge, as the basic preconditions for SFM and, more widely, integrated natural resource planning and management at the landscape level (*Australia/UK/Netherlands, Slovenia/Montenegro*).

3.2. Drivers of deforestation

Several countries argued for the necessity of addressing the direct and indirect drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, including through the adoption of integrated land-use management and land planning (*Australia/UK/Netherlands, EU, France/Germany/Switzerland, Italy/Turkey/Spain*).

In this context, *Norway/Denmark/Ireland* highlighted particularly unsustainable practices in agriculture and the lack of access to sustainable energy. *Canada/US/Israel* similarly drew attention to deforestation caused by the expansion of agriculture, which reinforced the need to integrate goals and targets – like food security or the need to manage natural resources sustainably – in a mutually reinforcing way.

Australia/UK/Netherlands drew attention to the importance of illegal trade as a driver of deforestation.

3.3. Forest communities and forest governance

Some countries highlighted the need for forest management and systems of forest governance of forests to be strengthened and to be inclusive, considering the needs of the communities that rely on them economically and culturally, especially indigenous people and the rural poor (*Australia/UK/Netherlands*).

The need for clear legal tenure rights was stressed as a necessary condition for improving governance (*France/Germany/Switzerland, Sweden*). Some countries drew attention to the importance of

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[8] Sources: statements available at UN OWG 8 website (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg8.html) and OWG 9 website (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg9.html) and *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, summaries of the negotiations at the various OWGs.

eliminating illegal logging and its associated trade by strengthening forest governance frameworks, tenure rights and law enforcement (*EU, France/Germany/Switzerland*).

Norway/Denmark/Ireland specifically expressed support for community ownership of local forests, as well as support for poor communities to sustainably manage them. *Italy/Turkey/Spain* argued that SFM supported forest-dependent local communities through green jobs in rural areas, and also argued for support for better employment conditions in the formal agroforestry sector, in order to improve the livelihoods of the local population.

3.4.   Treatment in the SDG process

A number of countries suggested specific targets or indicators for the SDGs. This included ensuring that the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, should at least be halved, reversing the loss of forest cover worldwide and increasing efforts to prevent forest degradation, halting the rate of loss of primary forests and increasing significantly the areas of protected forests (*EU*).

Canada/US/Israel pointed out that including deforestation or replenishment of forest stocks could be one means of integrating climate change into the post-2015 framework.

Several countries did not have a firm view on whether forests should have their own stand-alone goal or be covered in wider SDGs, such as one on the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems – or both (*Belarus/Serbia, Romania/Poland, Sweden*).

Slovenia/Montenegro argued for a visible, strong and cross-cutting integration of sustainable use and management of natural resources in the SDGs. At OWG 9, *Finland* argued for clustering forests with natural resources and ecosystems, not with biodiversity.

The *UNECE workshop* (see below) asked for an acknowledgement of the interconnectivity, the linkages to many sectors, and the multi-functionality of forests when designing the goals and targets. *Canada/US/Israel* highlighted the need for forests and biodiversity to be taken into account in considering other potential goals, including those related to food security.

During the OWG 9 discussions, *Norway/Denmark/Ireland* argued for the importance of non-agricultural food products to be recognised in the 'focus area' on food security and nutrition.

Illustrative targets were also put forward at an Expert Workshop on Forests and SDGs organised in January 2014 by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the FAO:[9]

A. Social and cultural benefits from forests and trees are improved

1. Income and employment from forests and trees in rural areas are increased

2. Rights, tenure and governance of forests are strengthened

3. Food security and the nutritional contribution of forests and trees are enhanced

B. Resilience and ecosystem benefits of forests are enhanced

1. Forest resources sustainably managed and enhanced (quantity and quality)

2. Biodiversity of forests is conserved and improved

3. Water quantity and quality contribution of forests is enhanced

4. Climate resilience and mitigation contribution of forests is strengthened

C. Green economy contribution of forests and trees is increased

1. Energy from forest resources is increased, safe and sustainable

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[9] http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/timber/efsos/general/Annex_I_-_Forests_in_SDGs_-_a_view_from_Europe_-_31_Jan_2014.pdf

2. Efficiency of forest resource use is increased

3. Investment in, and use of, products from sustainably managed forests is increased

4. The OWG debates: specific goals and targets

After the themed discussions of the first nine OWGs, the final four OWG meetings (OWG 10 (31 March – 4 April), OWG 11 (5–9 May), OWG 12 (16–20 June) and OWG 13 (14–18 July)) featured debates over the specific goals and targets to be included.[10]

4.1. OWG 10

OWG 10 saw the first general debate about goals and targets. Several countries put forward suggestions:

- A goal on the sustainable management of natural resources (*Canada/US/Israel* and *Bulgaria/Croatia*).

- Promoting sustainable forest management, reversing the loss of forest cover and improving forest governance (*Canada/US/Israel*).

- A specific goal on the sustainable management of forests, with targets to: halve deforestation by 2015 and degradation by 2030; diversify and improve the uses of wood; crack down on illegal trade in protected species; and ensure protection of the natural and cultural heritage (*Congo Basin countries*).

- Increasing the number of countries adopting SFM by 2030 (*Peru/Mexico*).

- A target for sustainable management of forests, including through the involvement of all relevant stakeholders (*Bangladesh*).

- A target of ending deforestation and land degradation and achieving a land-degradation-neutral world by 2030 (*Cabo Verde*).

- At least halving the rate of loss of forests worldwide, and where feasible bringing it close to zero by 2020 and ending deforestation at the latest by 2030 – both through, inter alia, strengthening of forest governance frameworks, SFM, protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, the expansion of the certified forest area world-wide, and increased efforts to prevent forest degradation (*France/Germany/Switzerland*).

- A target of restoring forest areas (*Guatemala*).

- A target of enhancing the number and size of protected forest areas (*Costa Rica*).

- A strengthening of forest governance frameworks, with a collective aim of halting global forest cover loss by 2030 (*Italy/Turkey/Spain*).

4.2. OWG 11

OWG 11 saw a working paper tabled, including two proposed forest-related targets, within the broader 'focus area' of ecosystems and biodiversity, to:

- By 2030, ensure sustainable management of all forests (supported by *G77, Republic of the Congo/Central African group, France/Germany/Switzerland, US/Canada/Israel, Italy/Spain/Turkey, Montenegro/Slovenia, Peru/Mexico, Croatia/Bulgaria, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Gabon, Nepal*).

- Halting deforestation and increasing reforestation by x per cent (*Republic of the Congo/Central African group, Denmark/Ireland/Norway, France/Germany/Switzerland,*

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[10] Sources: statements available at OWG 10 website (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg10.html) and OWG 11 website (http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg11.html); and *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, summaries of the negotiations at the various OWGs. The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summaries for OWGs 12 and 13 are general summaries of the discussions, and do not indicate which country made which comment.

China/Indonesia/Kazakhstan, Australia/Netherlands/UK, US/Canada/Israel, Italy/Spain/Turkey, Peru/Mexico, Poland/Romania, Colombia/Guatemala, Croatia/Bulgaria, Bangladesh, Barbados).

Several countries spoke in support, and some offered slight variations, including reducing deforestation by x per cent and increasing appropriate reforestation and afforestation (*Australia/UK/Netherlands*), and, reiterating their suggestion from OWG 10, strengthening forest governance frameworks and promoting SFM (*France/Germany/Switzerland*).

Iran proposed adding targets of restoring degraded forest ecosystems and increasing the area of protected forests by 2030. *Nepal* called for including a focus on community-based forest management.

Both *Romania* and *Austria* suggested that the protection of forest and mountain ecosystems should be added to the focus area on water and sanitation.

4.3. OWG 12

The first draft of a full set of potential SDGs was tabled at OWG 12: the 'zero draft', containing 17 goals and 212 targets. Forests were referred to explicitly in two targets of proposed Goal 15, on terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity:

15.4   by 2030, ensure the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests and of mountain ecosystems

15.5   by 2030 reverse the loss of and enhance forest cover worldwide, increase reforestation by x%, including by providing adequate incentives for developing countries

Some support was expressed for including a reference to forests in the title and also for the inclusion of forests in target 15.2, on the conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems, with particular attention to wetlands.

There was general support for keeping the two forests targets, 15.4 and 15.5, separate, though it was also suggested to merge them. There were calls to clarify 'reverse the loss of forest cover' in 15.5, and various proposals to rephrase it. Some countries also wanted to include language on reducing deforestation by y%, sustainable management of forests, fragmentation, afforestation and reinforcing existing instruments to prevent the manufacture and demand for precious wood.

4.4. OWG 13

A revised draft of a set of potential SDGs was tabled at OWG 13: the 'zero draft rev 1', containing 17 goals and 148 targets. The title of proposed Goal 15 had been widened to 'Protect and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, halt desertification, land degradation and biodiversity loss', and the two previous forest-related targets had been merged:

15.2   by 2030, ensure the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, and increase reforestation by x% globally

(The previous reference to mountains had been moved to target 15.1.) In addition, specific 'means of implementation' targets had been added into each goal, including, for forests:

15.b   mobilise significantly resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management, and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance sustainable forest management, including for conservation and reforestation

Several countries expressed support for enlarging the title of SDG 15 further to include forests. In target 15.2, suggestions included adding numerical targets for reducing deforestation and increasing reforestation; restoration as well as conservation; reducing, rather than halting, the rate of deforestation; reversing the loss of forest cover; and afforestation. Some preferred a 2020 timeframe instead of 2030.

4.5. The final proposed SDGs

The final set of proposals for SDGs, published after the conclusion of OWG 13, contains 17 goals and 169 targets. As noted in Section 1, there is one main target relevant to forests, included in SDG 15, whose title now includes forests ('Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial

ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss'):

> 15.2   by 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests, and increase afforestation and reforestation by x% globally

together with one 'means of implementation' of Goal 15:

> 15.b   mobilise significantly resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management, and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance sustainable forest management, including for conservation and reforestation

As can be seen, 15.2 is a slight modification of the previous version:

- 'Ensure' (the implementation of sustainable management) has been changed to 'promote'.

- References have been added to restoring degraded forests and increasing afforestation.

- The target date has been brought forward from 2030 to 2020 – the most significant change.

Means of implementation 15.b remains the same.

Target 15.1, on ecosystems, also contains a reference to forests:

> 15.1   by 2020 ensure 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

And much the same commitment is set out in target 6.6, on water-related ecosystems.

Of course, many of the other goals and targets in the SDGs are potentially relevant to forests, directly or indirectly, including, for example, those covering agriculture, industrialisation, economic growth, cities, sustainable production and consumption, climate change, governance, finance and trade.

5. The draft SDGs and forests: country reflections

As part of this project, attempts were made to contact all the countries listed as contributing to the SDG discussions in the OWGs in order to interview them on their views on the outcome of the SDG process as it reflected forests, as outlined in Section 4.5.

Contacts were attempted through the countries' missions to the UN in New York, the national focal points listed on the UNFF website and a range of other contacts. In general, it was difficult to identify the appropriate person to answer the questions, and even when they could be located, responses were slow and sometimes lacking entirely. Of the 32 countries that contributed to the discussions, 24 responded to an initial enquiry about who was the right contact, but only 12 actually responded to the questions.[11]

One of the 12, however, declined to provide answers on the grounds that negotiations were ongoing, and the only information they could share was the statements made by their negotiators in public. Another declined to provide answers on the grounds that its government had just changed, and the new administration's position was not yet clear.

That left ten countries, three developing and seven developed. The responses from three of the developed countries were fairly cursory, with comments only on the first question asked (see below); one apologised for failing to give detailed answers 'due to the high level of fragmentation in forest management and decision-making related processes' in its country.

Responses are analysed below.

5.1. Detailed visions of forests in the SDGs

Countries were asked whether they had developed a detailed vision for what they hoped to see emerge from the SDG process in regard to forests.

The response from five countries (all developed) was no.

One country simply said that their vision was similar to that reflected in the draft SDG 15.2. Another referred to the intervention it had made in OWG 8; this is reflected above in Section 2, and is a generic statement of support for the principles of sustainable development and SFM, together with a call for clear and specific goals and the need to highlight the role of indigenous and native communities and women.

Another had conducted consultations with government authorities and other stakeholders on the SDGs process. The country emphasised the importance of SFM and its associated means of implementation, and the continued relevance of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests, and the four Global Objectives on Forests agreed by UNFF in 2006:

- Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management (SFM), including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation;

- Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people;

- Increase significantly the area of protected forests and other sustainably managed forests, and increase the proportion of forest products derived from sustainably managed forests; and

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[11] The 32 countries were Argentina, Australia, Benin (for the Least Developed Countries), Bolivia (for the G77), Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Congo (for the Congo Basin countries), Costa Rica, EU, Finland, France, Gabon, Ghana (for the West African states), Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Republic of Korea, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Uganda, UK, US, Zambia (for the Southern African group).

• Reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management and mobilise significantly increased new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of SFM.[12]

The *EU* and *Switzerland* have both published documents outlining their aims for the SDGs. In early June 2014, the *European Commission* published the communication, 'A Decent Life for All: From vision to collective action', outlining the EU's proposals for the SDGs.[13] The section on 'biodiversity and forests' includes:

> The loss of forest cover worldwide must be reversed, the loss of primary forests halted and illegal logging and associated trade eliminated. Potential target topics could be:
>
> • Safeguard and restore ecosystems that provide essential services.
>
> • Prevent the extinction of known threatened species and improve conservation status.
>
> • Reduce the rate of loss, degradation, and fragmentation of all natural habitats.
>
> • Reduce deforestation and forest degradation based on sustainable forest management.
>
> • Reduce levels of illegal trade in wildlife and timber.

The EU position will be further elaborated in a set of Council Conclusions to be agreed towards the end of 2014, and a further communication in 2015. Issues to be covered include financial and non-financial means of implementation, review, monitoring and accountability, measurement and indicators.

The *Swiss* government agreed the *Swiss Position on a Framework for Sustainable Development Post-2015* in late June 2015.[14] As with the EU paper, forests are included under the section on biodiversity:

> […] Biodiversity and forests contribute to poverty reduction and to sustaining human livelihoods and well-being through, for example, underpinning food security and human health, providing clean air and water, storing carbon emissions and supporting economic development. There is evidence of ongoing decline of biodiversity and forest loss – despite having been integrated in MDG 7. It has been recognised that failure to better conserve and sustainably manage biodiversity and in particular ecosystems, such as forests, mountain regions and even soils, may put at risk the achievement of other internationally agreed goals, inter alia, those related to food security and sustainable agriculture, water, climate change, poverty alleviation, energy and human well-being.
>
> Given the importance for sustainable development in all its dimensions, biodiversity and forests should feature prominently in a future set of goals. In doing so it is important to take account of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi biodiversity goals adopted by the international community […] Biodiversity and forests should be formulated as stand-alone goals as well as be integrated in each relevant goal in the form of concrete targets, particularly in possible goals on "Food Security and Nutrition for All through Sustainable Agri-food Systems", "A Water-secure World", "Sustainable Consumption and Production", "Sustainable Cities/Infrastructure", "Universal Access to Sustainable Energy", "Sustainable Growth and the Green Economy, Employment and Decent Work for All".

There are also references to forests in the sections on water and climate change.

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[12] See http://www.un.org/esa/forests/pdf/session_documents/unff6/newsrelease-endofsession.pdf

[13] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *A Decent Life for all: from vision to collective action* (COM(2014) 335 final, 2 June 2014).

[14] Available at http://www.post2015.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/post.Par.0022.File.tmp/Swiss%20Position%20Post-2015_FC_June%202013.pdf

5.2. Views on draft SDG 15.2

Countries were asked their views on the extent to which the draft SDG 15.2, on forests, reflected their views, and to what extent they wished to see further changes during the negotiations.

By and large countries were reasonably content with the draft. One country believed that it struck the appropriate balance, and felt that many countries had not wanted to be more specific given the discussions scheduled at next year's UNFF meeting, designed to feed into the post-2015 agenda.

Another country felt that the outcome of the OWG process was better than expected, and did not want to reopen the discussions for fear of weakening the outcome. They also felt, however, that sub-goals or targets could be further developed, specifically on the implementation of SFM as a contribution to the SDGs and the right balance of social, environmental and economic issues addressed (that is, not just a limited focus on biodiversity or climate change).

Another country similarly felt that more work would be needed, not least to add a degree of quantification. The *EU* drew attention to the more specific targets listed in their communication, including the need to halt the loss of primary forest and to reduce forest fragmentation, but recognised the desire amongst many countries to keep down the total number of goals and targets.

Another country did not object to the wording of SDG 15.2 but felt that forests were in general under-represented in the SDGs; they would have preferred to see a stand-alone SDG on forests, more focus on interlinkages and more sub-targets.

One country felt that the target date of 2020 for halting deforestation was ambitious. Another country would have preferred to see 2025 as the target date.

One country felt that SDG 15.2 partially met their expectations. They would have preferred to see:

- A reference to 'halt illegal deforestation according to national legislation', instead of simply saying 'halt deforestation'.

- More coherence in relation to Aichi Target 5 of the Biodiversity Convention ('By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced').

- A target specifically related to Objective 2 of the Global Objectives on Forests ('Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest dependent people').

5.3. Views on UNFF

Given the broad support given by developing countries during the OWG discussions for the UNFF and its Non-Legally-Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests, developing countries (only) were asked what role they thought the UNFF could play in relation to the SDGs.

One country pointed to next year's UNFF meeting as the key decision-making forum for specific targets (UNFF 11, in May 2015, will include consideration of a review of the effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forests).[15]

Another country wanted to see the Non-Legally-Binding Instrument strengthened (though without making it legally binding), for the UNFF to become the political platform for forests within the UN and for it to implement the various forest and forest-related targets in the SDGs.

The third country, similarly, felt that as the sole universal forum on forests, the UNFF had the potential to become a catalyst for actions to promote SFM worldwide, and to play the role of a coordinating body for other forest-related conventions, agencies and organisations. In order to achieve this, however, it needed a stronger structure and more capacity.

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[15] See http://www.un.org/esa/forests/iaf-assessment.html

5.4. Views on missing elements

Countries were asked to what extent they felt that important forest-related goals and targets were missing from the SDGs, particularly on integrated land use planning and on conditions supportive of locally controlled forestry, including tenure and land rights.

Only two countries agreed with this position. One felt that land tenure rights were an important element relevant to many SDGs, but currently missing; they hoped that the issue could be raised during the further negotiations on the SDGs. The second agreed that this was one of the most important issues to be addressed; they claimed that they had tried to include it on several occasions but had been opposed, either because of a lack of recognition of the problem or the belief that it was too political.

Two other countries were less certain this was a real problem. Both accepted that these were important issues, not just for forests but also for topics like agriculture, human settlements or land degradation – but they were sometimes mentioned in other SDGs (e.g. 1.4). One felt that, overall, land was reasonably well addressed; the other pointed to the risk of making the perfect the enemy of the good. One country felt that a shortlist of priority measures essential to preserve forests for the benefit of people, climate, and biodiversity would be helpful, either in the form of process-oriented targets (such as ending illegal logging) or as indicators for a deforestation target (for example, reduction in illegal logging, increase in secure tenure).

The three developing countries all disagreed. One felt that these elements were adequately reflected in the draft SDGs. The second argued that the SDGs could not cover every possible issue, and in any case they would be implemented by countries depending on their national circumstances and capabilities. Similarly, the third did not agree that the issues (though important) should have been included in the SDGs, which only touched on most issues in a broader and less specific manner.

5.5. Views on policy coherence

Countries were asked to what extent they felt some of the other draft SDGs, for example, those promoting economic growth and infrastructure, potentially made it more difficult to achieve those SDGs relating to the sustainable management of forests.

Countries did not agree with this argument. There was a widespread recognition of the *potential* for conflict and the inevitability of trade-offs being reached based on national circumstances, but countries felt there was little the SDGs could do to avoid or resolve this.

One country pointed out that the SDGs framework was supposed to be implemented as a whole, rather than countries picking only the parts they wanted. It was not possible to anticipate and engineer trade-offs into the framework in advance; rather, the job of the document was to set the overall tone and direction.

One country recognised the need for policy coherence and an effective balance of the three dimensions of sustainable development. Another argued that any potential conflicts should be managed under the framework of the draft SDGs as they stand now, but believed that a better synergy could be achieved among the three pillars of sustainable development.

One country similarly argued that these conflicts cannot be avoided, just managed in the best way; the economic pillar of sustainable development was just as important as the other two pillars. Another put forward essentially the same position, arguing that the three pillars of sustainable development had to be implemented and balanced through national policies and strategies. Another believed that the principles of sustainable development had to underpin economic growth.

One country pointed out that in fact the world had seen significant progress on forests, including a reduction in the rate of deforestation and active discussion of REDD+ and other strategies likely to increase forest financing in the future. They called for the synchronisation of the SDGs with the future International Arrangement on Forests through the UNFF after 2015.

The UN's Open Working Group (OWG) proposed draft sustainable development goals (SDGs) in July 2014.

This report summarises some of the positions put forward by countries during the debates on forests in the meetings of the OWG, together with reflections from a number of countries on the OWG process after its conclusion.

Project materials

Forests

Keywords:
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