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Progress with integrating forests in the SDGs

Reflections on the outcome document of the UN Open Working Group on SDGs

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About the project

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Introduction

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, Member States agreed to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs), which would build upon the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the post-2015 development agenda.

Around November 2014, the UN Secretary General (SG) will prepare and issue his report synthesising the results of a range of processes – including the Outcome Document[1] of the Open Working Group (OWG) – as an input to the intergovernmental negotiations to be launched at the beginning of the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly. The SG also held a Climate Summit[2] in New York during September as a contribution towards an agreement at the Paris Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC in 2015. Adoption of the new framework is expected at a high level summit in September 2015.

IIED with partners is working to gather evidence and enable dialogue with key constituencies on how best to frame the inclusion of forests in the post-2015 framework.[3]

Formulating SDGs

Until now, there has been limited achievement towards Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7 on environmental sustainability.[4] Formulation of SDGs from a forest perspective needs to take into account lessons from the formulation and implementation of the MDGs. For example, the SDGs need to better capture value and integrate externalities, to tackle drivers of deforestation and other systemic issues, and to ensure more focus on issues of social balance. It is now apparent[5] that the SDGs have progressed beyond the MDGs in terms of addressing both poverty eradication and broader global development challenges, attempting to tackle systemic barriers to progress, and balancing social, economic and environmental dimensions.

SDGs also need to meet three core concepts of sustainable development consistent with the Rio+20 Outcome Document[6] and related work of the OWG, and as encapsulated within reviews by the Independent Research Forum[7] and Stakeholder Forum:[8]

- Transformative in nature: addressing systemic drivers/barriers to sustainable development, ensuring equity, building resilience, and recognising ecosystem services for human wellbeing.
- Universal in scope: leaving no one behind, ensuring policy coherence, collective action and involvement of all countries and actors.
- Integrated approach to poverty eradication and sustainable development: covering social, economic and environmental dimensions, and enabling inter-linkages.

In terms of process, the OWG Outcome Document appears to have been member state-driven and broadly participatory with extensive consultation. With respect to forests, many experts and policymakers have voiced some of the generic challenges with engaging on SDGs to include the diversity and complexity of issues, the lack of clarity on the next steps in the SDG development process (for example, formulation of indicators), and insufficient in-country coordination, including between negotiators involved with different international processes.

Integrated approach to forests within SDGs

Three components for the ideal framing of forests in the SDGs

- High profile of forests and, specifically, the sustainable management of forests within a land or ecosystem related goal and associated targets.
- Inclusion of outcome targets that reflect the contribution of forests and their ecosystem services to diverse development goals.
- Inclusion of enabling targets that address systemic barriers to progress.

These three key components are outlined below.

1. **Sustainable forest management as an integral part of a broader land-related goal**

   This has now been captured well in the OWG Outcome Document, with recognition of sustainable forest management in Goal 15, and further supported by targets 15.1, 15.2 and 15b:

   "Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forest, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

   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

   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

   15.b mobilize 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."

   The above progress notwithstanding, there is a need to improve the clarity of targets 15.1 and 1.2.

2. **Inclusion of forest-related targets for the achievement of other development goals**

   Earlier work by UNECE/FAO[9] helped identify numerous sustainable development outcomes that forests help deliver. Forests and their ecosystem services contribute towards targets across many goals in the OWG Outcome Document, whose inclusion highlights the cross-sectoral nature of forests. Some examples of the direct contributions of forests to other targets include:

   "2.1 by 2030 end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

   6.1 by 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all

   7.1 by 2030 ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services

   13.1 strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

   15.5 take urgent and significant action to reduce degradation of natural habitat, halt the loss of biodiversity, and by 2020 protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species."

3. **Targets that create the necessary enabling conditions for forests to deliver SD outcomes**

   It is essential for the SDGs to address critical barriers to progress – the underlying causes of persistent poverty and global development challenges such as inequality, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, and weak governance systems. Creating the right enabling conditions to remove barriers is a high priority from the perspective of marginalised and poor communities.

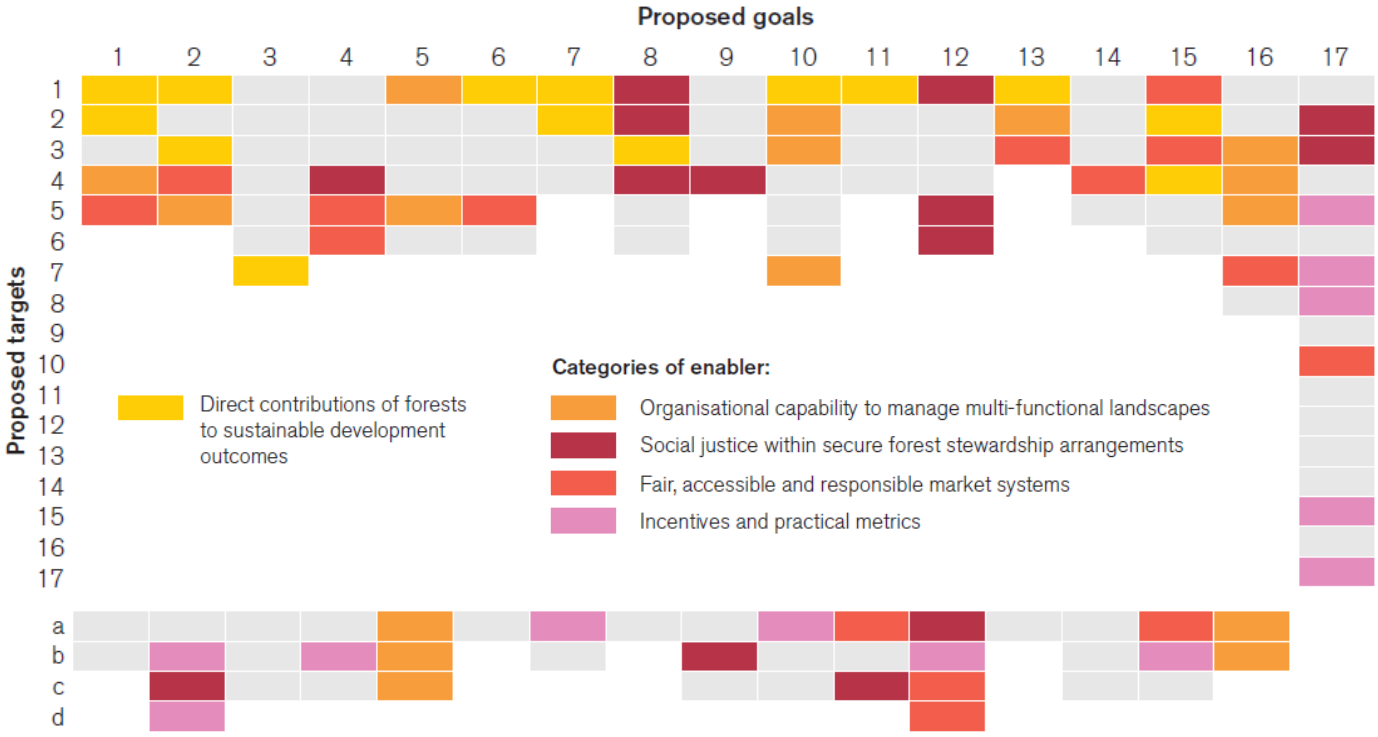
   IIED has applied a structured approach to identifying the necessary enabling conditions for forests to deliver SD outcomes. Initially, a selection of recognised forest related frameworks (sustainable forest management, sustainable landscape management, locally controlled forestry and forests in green economy) were reviewed to identify four broad categories of enabler:[10]

   - Social justice within secure forest stewardship arrangements.
   - Fair, accessible and responsible market systems.
   - Organisational capabilities to manage multi-functional landscapes.
   - Incentives and practical metrics.

   These four broad categories of enabler were then used to assess[11] the goal and targets presented in the 30 June OWG report. The result was a much larger number of relevant targets – see Figure 1 showing the 'SDG forest module',[12] which depicts the set of targets across different goal areas that collectively can result in a more transformative agenda and enable integrated implementation.

Figure 1

'SDG forest module' based on 30 June OWG report



Prioritising targets – stakeholder perspectives

This **integrated approach** for forests within the SDGs improves on a limited focus on sustainable forest management, deforestation and reforestation targets, by making 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. Some prioritisation is necessary, however, to avoid excessive complexity.

Consultations and surveys were conducted during July and August to gather **stakeholders' priorities** in relation to the OWG Outcome Document (July 2014), including a meeting with LDCs, an open website survey and a public webinar. *Preliminary results* suggest a 'refined forest module' (see Figure 2) containing targets considered essential for retention in SDGs (see also Annex):

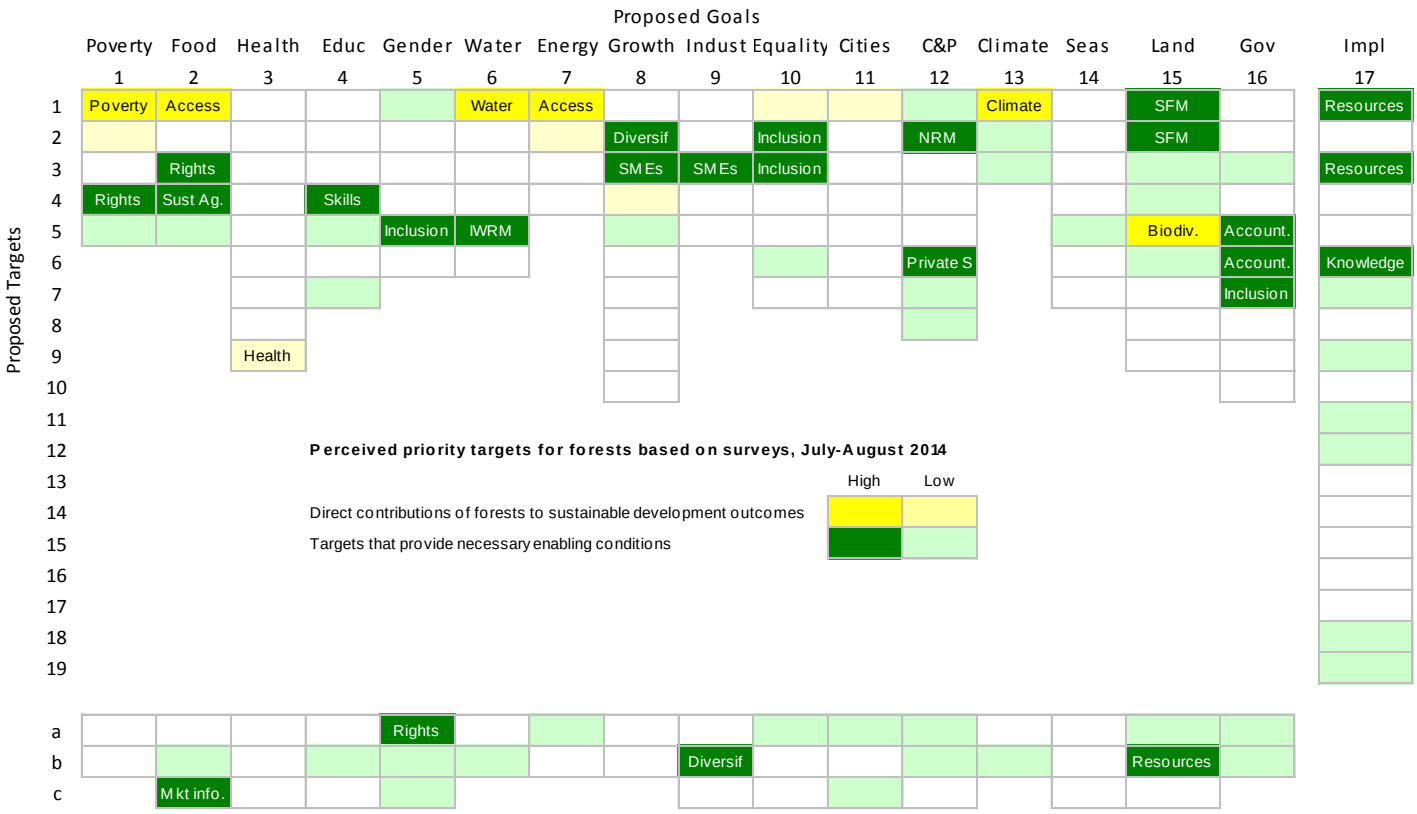
- Contribution of forests to five main goal areas (poverty, food, water, energy and climate)
- Sustainable management of forests and other natural resources
- Other generic categories of enabling conditions:
    - Rights, control, access and inclusion
    - Sustainable food production systems and integrated water management
    - SMEs, capacity and diversification
    - Corporate practices
    - Accountability and transparency
    - Resourcing and knowledge

Importantly, the surveys highlighted two priorities that do not feature in the OWG Outcome Document:

- Forest and farm producer organisation
- Negotiated land use planning

Figure 2

'Refined SDG forest module' based on stakeholder perceptions of 28 July OWG Outcome Document



OWG outcome document – positive progress

In relation to issues raised during the above-mentioned assessment and dialogue with negotiators, a number of positive changes with respect to forests are evident from the final OWG Outcome Document:

- Specific mention of **forests** within goal 15 and inclusion of restoration and afforestation alongside sustainable management, reforestation and halting deforestation within target 15.2, as well as maintenance of a focus on incentives and financing within target 15b.
- Inclusion of **sustainable management of water** within goal 6, inclusion of restoration including **forests** within target 6.6, and local community participation in target 6b, reflecting the need for integrated water resource management.
- Equal **control** included alongside rights, access and ownership with regards to land, property and natural resources, in targets 1.4 and 5a.
- Explicit recognition of **Indigenous Peoples**, within targets 2.3 and 4.5.
- Inclusion of sustainable **food production systems** alongside resilient agricultural practices within target 2.4.

The draft goal framework also includes a range of target combinations that may improve its transformative nature, by addressing key drivers such as security of rights, access and control, reducing inequalities, promoting life-long education and training, and broader measures of progress beyond GDP in national accounting; and its universal scope, by encouraging international coherence alongside incentives in addressing drivers of deforestation.

Emerging issues

A number of issues have become identified through a combination of dialogue with negotiators and policymakers, public consultations and structured assessments.

- **An integrated approach achieves transformative change**, by incorporating not only sustainable forest management, deforestation and reforestation targets, but a range of other targets that address systemic drivers, create enabling conditions and reflect the cross-sectoral nature of forest ecosystems. The strongest outcome is an integrated approach to SDG implementation that incorporates three components: forest-specific targets within goal 15; outcome targets that reflect the contribution of forests and their ecosystem services to diverse development goals; and enabling targets that address systemic barriers to progress and enabling conditions that better address the priorities of marginalised and poor communities. Priority conditions include the following:
    - Equitable rights to control, own and access land, property and natural resources.
    - Inclusive decision-making processes and equal opportunities.
    - Accountability and transparency.
    - Support for small enterprises and producer organisations, access to markets and product diversification.
    - Responsible and sustainable private sector practices.
    - Sustainable agriculture and food systems, and integrated water management.
    - Negotiated land use planning.
    - Broader measures of progress beyond Gross Domestic Product in national accounting.
    - Resourcing, incentives, knowledge and coordination to underpin the above.
- **Missing issues considered high priority during consultations**, in particular strengthening forest and farm producer organisation (within target 2.3), and negotiated land use planning. Other issues that warrant closer attention include recognising 'small forest holders' alongside family farmers, pastoralists and fishers (within target 2.3), and free, prior and informed consent (within target 16.7). Government policymakers and negotiators need to acknowledge the importance of these issues and seek their incorporation into the goal framework without necessarily opening up the OWG proposal for SDGs to renegotiation.
- **Stronger commitment on agriculture drivers of deforestation**, building on the UN Climate Summit New York Declaration on Forests. Existing targets do incorporate elements of sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices (target 2.4), sustainable corporate practices, public procurement policy and informing lifestyle choices (targets 12.6, 12.7 and 12.8). However, the goal framework should include more ambition to stop agricultural commodities driving deforestation, which again may be achieved without opening up the OWG proposal for SDGs to renegotiation.
- **Linking parallel but related international processes**, for example in relation to the SDGs, UNFCCC, Financing for Development, International Arrangement on Forests and Convention on Biological Diversity. In-country coordination amongst negotiators (and policymakers and advisors) of different international processes needs strengthening to ensure synergies and consistency.
- **Identifying potential policy trade-offs**, for example, in relation to food security, economic growth, industrialisation and ecosystems. Another area of likely trade-off affecting land use, particularly in Africa, revolves around the global projections and international commitments with regards to food production, consumption, forest management and climate mitigation. While the SDG framework itself may not necessarily resolve policy trade-offs or achieve policy synergies, the post-2015 agenda should ensure stakeholders understand and optimally manage the linkages between goal areas and among different targets, for example, using a nexus approach[13] to cross-sectoral integration.
- **Ensuring early consideration of SDG implementation – beyond goals and targets –** builds on existing good practice in terms of integrated approaches to partnerships, financing and incentives;

and building on existing accountability and monitoring mechanisms, including metrics. Reflecting on implementation realities also needs to recognise malpractice, the absence of practice and the reasons behind such shortfalls, since the goal framework must inspire change. This requires greater engagement from in-country stakeholders to determine the optimal implementation possibilities and realities.

Annex: Perceived priority targets for forests based on surveys and consultations conducted during July and August 2014 (preliminary results)

A. Direct contributions of forests to sustainable development outcomes

1.1 by 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day

2.1 by 2030 end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

6.1 by 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all

7.1 by 2030 ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services

13.1 strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

15.5 take urgent and significant action to reduce degradation of natural habitat, halt the loss of biodiversity, and by 2020 protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species

B. Targets specific to forests under Goal 15

Sustainable management of forests and other natural resources

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

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

12.2 by 2030 achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources

C. Targets that provide necessary enabling conditions

Rights, control, access and inclusion

1.4 by 2030 ensure that all men and women, particularly the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership, and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services including microfinance

2.3 by 2030 double the agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets, and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment

5.5 ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life

5.a undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources in accordance with national laws

10.2 by 2030 empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

10.3 ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including through eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and actions in this regard

16.7 ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Sustainable food production systems and integrated water management

2.4 by 2030 ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters, and that progressively improve land and soil quality

6.5 by 2030 implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate

2.c. adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives, and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility

SMEs, capacity and diversification

4.4 by 2030, increase by x% the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

8.2 achieve higher levels of productivity of economies through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high value added and labour-intensive sectors

8.3 promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises including through access to financial services

9.3 increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, particularly in developing countries, to financial services including affordable credit and their integration into value chains and markets

9.b support domestic technology development, research and innovation in developing countries including by ensuring a conducive policy environment for inter alia industrial diversification and value addition to commodities

Corporate practices

12.6 encourage companies, especially large and trans-national companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle

Accountability and transparency

16.5 substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms

16.6 develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

Resourcing and knowledge

15.b mobilize 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

17.1 strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection

17.3 mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources

17.6 enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation, and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, particularly at UN level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism when agreed

[1] OWG Outcome Document http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html

[2] New York Declaration on Forests http://www.un.org/climatechange/summit/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/09/FORESTS-New-York-Declaration-on-Forests.pdf

[3] Ongoing work includes: studies on country perspectives, regional studies from Africa, Asia and Latin America; UNECE session on SDGs and forests (November); Peru international workshop (November); GLF2 side-event (December); UNFF (February); and ongoing engagement with negotiators. See http://www.iied.org/integrating-forests-post-2015-development-framework

[4] The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014
http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2014%20MDG%20report/MDG%202014%20English%20web.pdf

[5] Assessing the OWG on SDGs Outcome Document: Key Messages
http://www.irf2015.org/sites/default/files/publications/IRF%20OWG%20Brief_final_9-10-14.pdf

[6] The Future We Want https://rio20.un.org/sites/rio20.un.org/files/a-conf.216l-1_english.pdf.pdf

[7] The OWG-11 'focus areas' paper: an IRF2015 review.
http://www.irf2015.org/sites/default/files/publications/IRF2015%20review%20of%20OWG11_0.pdf

[8] Tests of success for the SDGs – a tool for designing and assessing sustainable development goals and targets
http://www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/SDGsTestsOfsuccess.pdf

[9] http://www.unece.org/sdg-workshop.html

[10] Note these are not designed to be a detailed and universally applicable set of enabling conditions for the contribution of forests to sustainable development, but merely selected for purposes of assessing the OWG report.

[11] SD goals from a forest perspective: Transformative, universal and integrated? http://pubs.iied.org/13573IIED.html?c=forest

[12] SDGs: a forest module for a transformative agenda http://pubs.iied.org/17248IIED.html?c=forest

[13] 13 Cross-sectoral integration in the SDGs: a nexus approach http://www.sei-international.org/publications?pid=2474

As the process to develop post-2015 sustainable development goals builds momentum, this paper highlights progress to date with the integration of forests particularly in the work of the UN Open Working Group. Three components for the ideal framing of forests in the SDGs are presented, based upon analytical work and wide-ranging consultations, highlighting the need to include enabling targets that address systemic barriers to progress and opportunities for transformative change.

This paper outlines areas of positive progress during the development of the Open Working Group's Outcome Document, as well as emerging issues needing attention by experts, policy makers and negotiators involved with the post-2015 agenda.

Project materials

Forests

Keywords:
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Post-2015 agenda, Good governance

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