



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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SDGs in focus:

SDG 15 and interlinkages with other SDGs –

Life on Land

Monday, 11 July 2022, 9:10 AM- 12:00 PM

Secretariat Background Note

Background

Nature and nature's contributions to people are essential for human existence and good quality of life. This was captured by SDG 15 and related targets. However much greater efforts are needed to meet the global goals for the protection of life on Earth and for halting the degradation of land and oceans.

It is urgent to address negative trends such as:

- The risk of species extinction is increasing unprecedentedly in the history of humanity, with the situation being worst in Asia and several small island developing states (SIDS). Only 37 per cent of countries are on track to achieve their national biodiversity targets, while 58 per cent have made some but insufficient progress.
- Agriculture continues to be the largest driver of forest loss and species extinction. While overharvesting of species, agricultural activities, logging and farming are causing irreversible damage to the world's biodiversity, expansion of agricultural land accounts for some 90 per cent of global deforestation.



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- The world's forest area continues to shrink, although at a slower pace than in previous decades. From 2015 to 2020, the annual rate of deforestation was estimated at 10 million hectares, down from 12 million hectares over 2010 to 2015. The proportion of forest area globally declined from 31.9 per cent in 2000 to 31.2 per cent in 2020, primarily due to agricultural expansion.
- Up to 40 per cent of the planet's land is degraded, directly affecting half of humanity and threatening roughly half of global GDP (US\$44 trillion). Overall, commitments to land restoration are estimated at 1 billion hectares, out of which over 450 million hectares are committed through land degradation neutrality targets.
- While wetlands provide a number of ecosystem services, over the past 300 years, wetland ecosystems have experienced an 85 per cent loss in extent.

There have however been positive developments. The global coverage of protected areas has increased, although the encouraging trend has slowed down in the last few years. In addition, large regional differences exist in the establishment of protected areas.

To date, 132 countries and the European Union have ratified the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity.



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The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic reconfirmed what so many experts have been saying for years: there is a need to reimagine the relationship between people and nature. Zoonotic diseases are only one outcome of the resource intensive ways we consume and produce. The pandemic has highlighted the inequalities that exist between different countries and different segments of society. Around the world, the poorest and the most vulnerable have traditionally relied on forests and small-scale fishing, and the loss of jobs and income have only strengthened the reliance on these safety nets.

To build back better following the global COVID-19 pandemic, recovery measures need to support progress towards SDG 15. However, data on stimulus packages and recovery measures doesn't match these objectives. Based on OECD data on recovery measures, potentially environmentally harmful government support amounts to more than USD 680 billion annually around the world, including subsidies to fossil fuel production and consumption, and environmentally harmful agricultural support. This means that after only two years, these subsidies already cancel out the USD 1 090 billion of green spending to be spent over multiple years. The world is losing, or knowingly not choosing the opportunity to truly build back better.

The pandemic boosted the use of digital services in many areas but digitalization for protection of nature still remains an underutilized area. At the grass-roots level, access to digital services, information and data (including from remote sensing) will be crucial to empower communities.



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Policies and actions to maximize synergies, mitigate trade-offs and drive transformation

To build back better following the COVID-19 pandemic, progress under SDG15 needs to shift from incremental to transformative change, with multi-sector, multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Transforming global food systems is critical to implementing SDG 15, and active follow up of the UN Food Systems Summit can help drive this change. In order to drive an SDG-based food systems transformation, there is a need to promote systems thinking, utilize integrated land use plans, tackle perverse subsidies, revitalize Indigenous and local food systems, and develop inclusive stakeholder processes. Better circular economy approaches and changes in consumer behavior are needed, including to tackle food waste and better reflect externalities in food prices.

Fostering the One Health approach can help not only to prevent outbreaks in zoonotic diseases, but also tackle other urgent issues such as ensuring food safety and combatting antimicrobial resistance through nature-positive action.

Tackling the root causes of biodiversity loss is the only way to stop the current decline, and transitions are needed across land use, forest management, climate action, health systems, fisheries and oceans management and urban development in an integrated way. Some of the lessons learned from the Aichi targets include the need for even clearer goals and targets and effective review of these, the need to ensure a whole-of-society approach in implementation, and the need to provide sustained and targeted support to countries. The required



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means of implementation should accompany the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.



Putting a value on our natural capital is needed since markets everywhere are still failing to incorporate the true value of nature. The adoption of the SEEA (System of Environmental Economic Accounting) was an important step, but many countries have not yet incorporated these guidelines into their policy frameworks. Financing gaps must be addressed, and positive incentives created to promote a system-wide shift to better value for nature.



Tackling corruption and strengthening legal frameworks, including to curb poaching and trafficking, is needed. Poaching and trafficking have severe links to not only biodiversity loss but also to the spread of zoonotic diseases, increased corruption, weakening of rule of law, and losses in tax revenues and tourism income. They also serve as means of financing for other forms of illegal activities. There is a need to enhance legal cooperation among countries, to harmonize legislation, promote sharing of information and intelligence, and to enhance enforcement capacities. In general, criminal justice should not be an afterthought in our SDG actions.



Means of implementation

While there is no magic recipe for transformation, some of the key enablers include, among others, fair access to scientific and technical data and knowledge, stable financing, transparency, quality education, capacity building, nature-based policies, and long-term political will.



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Enhanced and innovative use of data and monitoring is needed, especially when assessing the integration of ecosystem and biodiversity values into long-term national development planning. This includes open and democratic use of data and cross-discipline science. Increased use of Indigenous and traditional knowledge can enhance the effectiveness of our policy interventions while empowering communities. Participation of Indigenous and local communities in decision-making must be improved.

A rights-based approach to environmental protection is needed to ensure the rights of the vulnerable in particular. It can also enhance intergenerational justice and help in raising generations that care. Better governance and increased and stable financing will be crucial when the financing gap between what is available and what is needed is still in the factor of trillions of US dollars. Tackling harmful incentives and particularly harmful agricultural and fisheries subsidies is urgent.

Proposed guiding questions:

- What concrete measures can help reshape the human-nature relationship and accelerate the shift of development to a more sustainable path?
- What are the main governance, regulatory and market failures that need to be overcome in this decade, and which policy area and actions are necessary to activate a system-wide shift to better value for nature and to integrate nature protection in decision making?



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- What opportunities do the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the land degradation neutrality target, the Global Forest Goals of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, and the Paris Agreement implementation processes offer to promote more impactful, large-scale change for the protection and sustainable management of terrestrial ecosystems, biodiversity and land resources?
- Where are opportunities to ensure fair, effective, inclusive, and transparent participation of rights holders, especially women and Indigenous peoples, civil society, and other stakeholders in the SDG 15 process?