



## Plea to include an SDG concerning

***“Halting deforestation and forest degradation globally and restoring 15% of currently degraded forest ecosystems. Ensuring sustainable management of forests.”***

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FSC proposes the inclusion of a Sustainable Development Goal on forests, focusing on *“halt-  
ing deforestation and forest degradation globally by 2020, and restoring 15% of currently de-  
graded forest ecosystems. Ensuring sustainable management of forests by that date”*. This  
SDG would support the Aichi Targets 5, 7 and 15 (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010).  
And it would build upon the forest criterion of MDG 7 “Ensure Environmental Sustainability”.

Not having forests under the SDGs would give a wrong signal: that either the fate of forests is  
not essential for the wider sustainable development agenda, or that the problems with forests  
have been resolved. “The Millennium Development Goals Report 2012” by the UN shows that  
forest cover continues to decline rapidly in Africa and Latin America, while also in Asia the  
problem continues to exist, compensated at the moment mainly by impressive increase of  
forest cover in China (and to a lesser extent India and Vietnam). And this focus on forest cover  
(quantity) does not take into account trends in forest degradation (quality).

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### **Motivation**

#### **Why are forests important?**

Forests have many functions for local people, for societies and for the planet as a whole. They  
provide food, building materials, shelter, medicines and fuel. They keep soils in place and act  
as giant sponges, globally providing an estimated 75 percent of usable water. They are the  
home of most plants and animals; they provide genetic diversity; they play an important role in  
climate regulation.

International trade and industrialization would not have been possible without timber, for  
ships, for energy and as the basis of products. Paper is essentially a *forest* product, and the  
forest constitutes an essential resource for furniture and the construction of buildings, includ-  
ing floors, ceilings, etc.



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Forests still provide livelihoods for much of the world's population, particularly in the tropics. A billion people are entirely or partly dependent on forests for food, shelter, fuel and economic activities, and another billion depend on them for fuel for cooking and heating.

### **Our dependence on forests will only increase**

Forests are an essential element of our past and future. WWF's recent *Living Forests Report* underlines the dimensions of the challenge: by 2030 the use of timber will more than double; in 2050 timber use will be between three and four times what it was in 2010. One scenario is linked to an ambitious but necessary shift towards the use of renewable and climate-neutral resources, including forest products, but even in the 'do-nothing' scenario a similarly rapid increase is indicated.

WWF, in particular, expects a dramatic increase of the non-household use of wood as fuel, but demand for saw wood, veneer and pulp is also likely to increase considerably. Indeed forest products will play an essential role in a global economy that reduces impact on the environment:

- Biomass now provides 9 percent of global primary energy supply, and it will increasingly replace fossil fuel for electricity and heat production. While some of it will come from agriculture and waste, those sources are limited and in agriculture there is competition with food and fiber production.
- In construction, green building methods will increase the use of timber as this has a smaller ecological footprint than, in particular, cement and bricks, and better energy-isolation characteristics.
- Forest materials will increasingly be used to replace fossil substances in plastics, chemicals, etc.

### **How are forests doing?**

Throughout history, the planet has lost an important part of its forest cover, initially in the northern hemisphere. In recent decades, forest degradation and deforestation have been concentrated in tropical regions. Reasons include clearing for cattle, commercial agriculture, plantations, infrastructure, urbanization and weak law-enforcement. This has led to both positive and negative social impacts, but the current trend is clearly negative, sometimes dramatically so.



NGOs, governments and business have started to act to reverse the trend, but with mixed results: according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) the global loss of natural forests slowed somewhat from 16 million hectares a year in the period 1990–2000 to 13 million hectares a year during 2000–2010. Even this lower rate, which represents a yearly loss of area comparable in size to Nicaragua, is (as the FAO points out) alarmingly high. From a total global forest area of 4 billion hectares, this is a 7 percent loss in just 20 years.

Part of the loss of natural forest cover is compensated for with an increase of 50 million hectares of globally planted forest in the last decade. According to FAO, tree plantations today represent nearly 7 percent of the world's total forest area.

The resulting trends differ considerably across the planet: the EU and the US see a (slow) increase in forest cover after centuries of loss; Russia and Canada are stable; Africa and Indonesia are losing forest cover fast (5 percent in 10 years); Latin America too (4.5 percent in 10 years); Australia saw dramatic losses recently (3 percent between 2005 and 2010).

The most impressive *increases* are seen in China (15.7 percent in 10 years) due to a combination of protection of natural forests and rapid growth of plantations. About 30 percent of plantations in the world are in China.

### **Impacts of deforestation and forest degradation**

Not all forests have the same value in terms of biodiversity, environment, and social and economic meaning. The figures above do not show the degradation of forests that is happening in many places. Planted forests are very important for the production of timber (some 65 percent of global industrial wood-supply, according to the FAO), but their biodiversity and environmental value is normally much less than natural forests.

There is a clear environmental concern about deforestation and forest degradation. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that 17 percent of anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases is due to deforestation and forest degradation – more than either agriculture or transport sectors.

But it does not stop there. Deforestation and forest degradation can cause important losses of fertile soil and clean and reliable water reserves, destabilizing weather and wiping out plant and animal species. Social impacts should not be underestimated either: forests are a source of food, fuel, construction materials, jobs and shelter for people.

In many cases, conversion into agricultural land is the cause of deforestation, but often this leads to only temporary economic gains. According to the United Nations Environment Pro-



gramme (UNEP): “...deforestation and forest degradation may produce attractive short-term returns, but the cost of annual losses of natural forest capital due to deforestation and degradation has been estimated at \$2 trillion to \$4.5 trillion per year.”<sup>1</sup>

### **How to maintain forests for people and planet**

We cannot deny the spatial impacts of a fast-growing population and the need for increased production of food and goods, or that the claims of the global population have surpassed the capacity of the planet. We need to realize sustainable and fair production and consumption patterns – in the environmental, social and economic senses – or face chaos and disaster.

Halting deforestation and forest degradation is essential to sustainable development. We need to be able to rely on forests in the future for all the uses mentioned above. There is not one single policy to achieve this but rather a combination of:

- a. Promotion of sustainable management of, in particular, forests that are managed for human needs; voluntary Certification schemes, such as FSC, can play a key role here.
- b. Protection of valuable natural forest areas;
- c. Fighting illegal logging;
- d. Integrated spatial, landscape policies, including reforestation and forest restoration programmes;
- e. Efficient production and consumption to limit the demand for forest resources.

All solutions have to be environmentally effective, socially acceptable and even attractive, and they must make economic sense.

It is important to see forests as part of the ‘global commons’: we must halt the decline of forests for the sake of the planet itself; we must maintain and reinforce their multiple functions, and cooperate as governments, international institutions, business and civil society organizations in achieving this.

### **What governments should do**

They should implement, through national programmes, partnerships with business and civil society and pursue the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, in particular 5, 7 and 15, which by 2020 aim to:

<sup>1</sup> UNEP/GC.27/16/Add.1. “Environmental Challenges within sustainable development and the contribution of the UNEP to the sustainable development goals and the promotion of sustainable consumption and production (discussion paper by the executive director).”



- At least halve the loss of forests and where feasible brought close to zero;
- Significantly reduce degradation and fragmentation and manage forests sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity;
- Restore 15 percent of currently degraded ecosystems, which includes forests.

Governments should systematically practice 'sustainable public procurement' for forest products. This entails demanding clear evidence of sustainable forest management, such as FSC certificates. They should also create the right fiscal and financial conditions to mainstream payments for ecosystem services in economies, promote 'cascaded' use of timber where feasible (for durable goods and paper first, and waste for fuel), and set sustainability criteria for the use of biomass energy.

Governments should take part in the Bonn Challenge, initiated by the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration, aiming for restoration of 150 million hectares of degraded landscapes by 2020. According to the World Resources Institute, an estimated 2 billion hectares of degraded and deforested land worldwide exist that could be transformed into resilient, multifunctional assets for rural communities.