

# Forests Post-2015: Maximizing Synergies between the Sustainable Development Goals and REDD+

Policy Brief No. 3, September 2015



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## Key messages:

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have raised a collective international ambition to conserve forests, setting universal targets including a halt on deforestation by 2020. Given that the land sector represents a quarter of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, this ambition is also highly significant for the UNFCCC. Developed countries are asked to work both domestically and in collaboration with developing countries to halt tropical deforestation.
- REDD+ can be a useful means to deliver on the SDGs in developing countries – not just with respect to forests, but also on other related goals such as the promotion of sustainable agriculture and poverty eradication. The SDGs, in turn, provide an additional institutional incentive to pursue effective REDD+ actions.
- REDD+ objectives overlap with SDG 13 (climate change mitigation) and SDG 15 (sustainability of terrestrial ecosystems), but in order for synergies to materialize, REDD+ implementation and work on SDGs in developing countries need to be streamlined to avoid duplication of efforts, inefficient dilution of resources, or conflicting policies at the domestic level.
- REDD+ actions that deliver non-carbon benefits (e.g. biodiversity conservation, local socioeconomic benefits, governance improvements) can also help achieve additional SDGs, such as SDG 1 (poverty eradication) and SDG 2 (sustainable food security), among others.

# 1. Forests and land use in the SDGs

**The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) galvanize the call for forest protection and sustainable land use worldwide.**

The SDGs represent the core elements of a new global agenda on environment and development. They renew commitment to sustainable development and, over the coming 15 years, should increase political attention, public pressure, and financing for 17 goals. Whereas under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) environmental sustainability was limited to a single separate goal (MDG 7), sustainability cuts across the SDGs. Moreover, some SDGs are transformational in nature, such as the calls for promoting sustainable production and consumption (SDG 12) and for addressing inequalities within and among countries (SDG 10).

Multiple SDGs address forests and land use. In particular, SDG 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”) includes the ambitious target of halting deforestation by 2020 (Target 15.2). This universal agreement goes beyond the earlier pledge that 44 national and subnational governments made in the 2014 New York Declaration on Forests to achieve this goal by 2030.<sup>1</sup> In line with many Aichi Targets of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, SDG 15 also demands fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources (Target 15.6), measures to end illegal trade of wildlife products (Target 15.7), and an increase in ambition to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 (Target 15.5).<sup>2</sup>

Forest conservation also relates to other goals such as SDG 2 (sustainable agriculture and food security) and SDG 13 (combating climate change). Agricultural land expansion is responsible for three-quarters of all tropical deforestation.<sup>3</sup> Without sustainable and more productive agriculture, this expansion may be impossible to halt. Therefore, it is essential to adopt an integrated “landscape approach” that regards forests as part of broader land-use systems that need to be made wholly sustainable and address multiple needs, such as food security *and* forest conservation. Likewise, the land sector needs to be recognized as crucial for tackling climate change, as it accounts for one-quarter of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>4</sup>

Notably, the SDGs make forest conservation a universal goal, not just a goal for the developing world. While the MDGs committed only developing countries, the SDGs commit all countries. Developed countries thus have double the responsibility: to pursue domestic action while also helping promote sustainable development in developing countries. Clearly the world’s largest economies exert significant global influence – through domestic policies, as major trading partners and as sources of investment – so it is essential that they use such influence responsibly in support of the SDGs. Examples of this support could include implementing demand-side signals and incentives for sustainable land use, and providing financial and technological backing for SDG efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> New York Declaration on Forests (2014). “Forests: Action Statements and Action Plans”. New York, UN Headquarters.

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly (2015). “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (Finalised text for adoption). New York, UN Headquarters.

<sup>3</sup> Hosonuma, N., Herold, M., De Sy, V., De Frieds, R.S., Brockhaus, M., Verchot, L., Angelsen, A., Romijn, E. (2012). “An assessment of deforestation and forest degradation drivers in developing countries”. *Environmental Research Letters* 7(4), 1-12.

<sup>4</sup> IPCC (2014). “Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change”. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, AR 5, Working Group III. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg3/>.

## 2. REDD+ as a mechanism that can help achieve SDGs

**REDD+ constitutes a ready-made mechanism for international collaboration on forest conservation and sustainable land use. The promotion of non-carbon benefits, in particular, can expand the scope of REDD+ actions for progress on a number of SDGs.**

REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries)<sup>5</sup> is a mechanism under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) whereby developing countries can receive results-based payments for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the forest sector, on the basis of internationally agreed rules for implementation and standardized methodologies for measuring, reporting and verifying those emissions reductions. Therefore, REDD+ provides a useful means of action that can help achieve various SDGs.

REDD+ objectives are most closely related to SDG 13 (mitigating and adapting to climate change) and SDG 15 (territorial ecosystems sustainability). While REDD+ results and payments are calculated, communicated and financed exclusively on the basis of reduced tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per year, its actions can also help promote additional, non-carbon benefits such as biodiversity conservation, local socioeconomic development and improvements in governance.<sup>6</sup> These benefits have been recognized by UNFCCC Parties as “crucially important” to reducing risks of reversals, securing carbon permanence and ensuring the long-term sustainability of REDD+ actions.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, broad REDD+ actions can also help deliver on a number of SDGs. For instance, REDD+ implementation strategies that promote sustainable economic alternatives for local actors can reduce human pressure on forests while at the same time increase the incomes of small-scale food producers (SDG 2, Target 2.3) and help to reduce poverty (SDG 1). If such local economic alternatives would involve value addition (i.e. more than raw-material production), they would also help reach SDG 9 on the promotion of inclusive and sustainable industrialization. Therefore, there is plenty of room for REDD+ actions to help fill finance and institutional gaps and help meet several SDGs.

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<sup>5</sup> UNFCCC (2010). “Report of the Conference of the Parties on its sixteenth session, held in Cancun from 29 November to 10 December 2010”. FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.1.

<sup>6</sup> See Bastos Lima, M.G., Braña-Varela, J., Gupta, A., Visseren-Hamakers, I., Huynh, T.B., Kleymann, H., Van Dexter, K., and Belecky, M. (2014). “Promoting Non-carbon Benefits in REDD+ Actions”. WWF-WUR brief no.1.

<sup>7</sup> UNFCCC (2013). “Report on the workshop of the work programme on results-based finance to progress the full implementation of the activities referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70”. FCCC/CP/2013/5, <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2013/cop19/eng/05.pdf>, paragraph 56.

### 3. Recommendations for building “forest synergies” between the SDGs and REDD+

**It is important to coordinate the development of national REDD+ strategies with the national response to the SDGs. This will help avoid duplication of efforts, dilution of resources and policy conflicts. It will also help develop locally suitable “mixes” of synergistic policy instruments that can deliver multiple benefits in REDD+ actions and cost-effective fulfilment of the SDGs.**

- **Do not take non-carbon benefits from REDD+ actions for granted.** Non-carbon benefits must be actively pursued if they are to materialize. If REDD+ implementation were to seek only the maximization of carbon stocks through tree plantations, biomass could come at the expense of biodiversity. Socioeconomic benefits, too, depend largely on the inclusion of local actors in REDD+ actions – as on the terms and conditions of such an inclusion. There might be trade-offs between reducing emissions and promoting non-carbon benefits, and these trade-offs need to be acknowledged and negotiated openly.
- **Acknowledge the potential trade-offs and conflicts of interest between the SDGs.** There may be trade-offs between SDGs. For example, the promotion of short-term economic growth (SDG 8) could easily come at the expense of climate change mitigation (SDG 13). To achieve all goals, as indicated in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, they need to be approached in a balanced manner.
- **Coordinate implementation of REDD+ objectives and the SDGs to avoid redundancies.** REDD+ implementation already requires developing countries to increase institutional capacities related to forests, such as the creation of National Forest Monitoring Systems and the establishment of reference levels on greenhouse gas emissions and forest cover. Implementation of the SDGs (particularly the pursuit of targets from SDG 15) should be streamlined with REDD+ strategies to avoid duplication of efforts, dilution of human or financial resources, and domestic policy conflicts.
- **Promote non-carbon benefits as a way to make progress on SDGs through REDD+ actions.** The promotion of biodiversity conservation (including agro-biodiversity), socioeconomic benefits to local actors, and governance improvements through REDD+ can help meet other SDGs. For example, REDD+ actions that foster sustainable agriculture alongside forest conservation could benefit small-scale food producers (Target 2.3), ensure genetic diversity of crops (Target 2.5), and eventually improve access of sustainable small-scale production industrial processes to finance and markets (Target 9.3).

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**Suggested citation:**

Bastos Lima, M.G., Ashley-Cantello, W., Visseren-Hamakers, I., Gupta, A., and Braña-Varela, J. (2015). Forests Post-2015: Maximizing Synergies between the Sustainable Development Goals and REDD+. WWF-WUR Policy Brief No. 3.

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**Acknowledgements:**

This is the third policy brief of a collaboration on REDD+ between WWF's Forest and Climate Programme and Wageningen University and Research Centre's REDD@WUR Network. We thank the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) for financially supporting our work.

