

United Nations Forum on Forests

POLICY BRIEF



Natural Resources: A Cross-Cutting Sustainable Development Goal in the context of the post-2015 UN development agenda

Forests in the broader landscape of Development and Sustainability

The period from 2013 to 2015 will shape future work on the implementation of the Rio+20 outcome, including the development of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the post-2015 development agenda and the integration of the two. These are extremely important processes for forests and, therefore, need to be addressed by UNFF10 and in the lead up to the consideration by UNFF of the future of the international arrangement on forests at its eleventh session in 2015.

The SDGs: Framework and Focus on Forests

Given the high degree of global interdependence and the need for an efficient framework for action to respond to a number of challenges that have become more pressing, the need establishment of agreed and overarching goals for the international community was agreed to at the Rio+20 Conference. Member States called for the SDGs to be action-oriented, concise, easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities¹.

A joint timetable for a decision on defining the SDGs, and developing a post-2015 UN development agenda, requires exploring the most effective overarching goals for the SDGs. The challenge is how to set such goals when every institution, organization and convention or

Member State is seeking to have its own issue(s) captured as a SDG.

The Significance and Cross-Cutting Nature of Natural Resources

The importance of natural resources, including energy, water, forests, land, agriculture, and biodiversity for achieving sustainable development objectives and eradicating poverty in the context of the future development agenda for the UN beyond 2015 was widely supported at the Rio+20 Conference. There were also quite extensive debates between Member States on whether or not it is necessary to set up specific targets for natural resources such as energy, water, land and forests. "Natural resources" is also an important issue in the current consultations on the post 2015 UN development agenda. As a matter of fact, there has been an evolving vision on natural resources, in which natural resources provide a wide range of services that go beyond purely environmental services and touch upon the livelihoods of people, their future, their environment and their economic life.

Natural resources provide vital services and resources to people, with at least 1.6 billion people directly depending on forests as natural resources, for their livelihoods including food, firewood, fodder, water, and medicine. The majority of these people are poor and live in and around forests. For the rural poor, access to food, fuel, water and medicine is vital, and forests complement products obtained from agriculture to meet those needs². There is also a

¹ A/RES/66/288-Rio+20 Outcome Document: "The Future we want"

² UNFFS Policy Brief on "Forests and Poverty and Eradication of Poverty- August 2012

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significant connection to conflict, violence and disaster in the context of natural resources – this is bound to worsen in future years.

A Cross-Cutting SDG on Natural Resources

During the Rio+20 Conference, countries discussed and agreed on priority areas for actions which include important natural resources namely: forests, energy, water, land, biodiversity and oceans. There were also intensive discussions on setting goals for a number of these issues so to help countries to address the challenges they are facing. The challenge is reconciling a larger number of priority areas for action with the criteria set by the Heads of State and Government at the Rio+20 Conference for the SDGs.

To address this challenge and to devise an integrated, unified, efficient and feasible development agenda for post-2015 that has sustainable development at its core, an approach must be taken that:

(a) recognizes the interconnectedness of global challenges and clearly demonstrates the economic, social and environmental benefits of each action in an integrated and comprehensive manner; (b) recognizes the different levels of development among countries; (c) maintains the momentum in achieving poverty eradication and food security; (d) addresses the cross-cutting impacts of conflicts, disasters and inequality on all goals; and (e) makes use of the cross-cutting, multifunctional role of natural resources for economic growth, social inclusiveness, poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and peace and security.

In employing such an approach, one option would be to agree on a cross-cutting goal on natural resources, to be included as a sustainable development goal and to be integrated across the post-2015 UN development agenda.

The post-2015 and the Rio+20 follow up processes may require the full integration of such a cross-cutting goal on natural resources to highlight the full value of natural resources not only for the environment, but also for economic growth, social development, and peace and security. Under such a goal, various existing targets on natural resources set out in the outcomes of major UN conferences and meetings, such as the global objectives on forests, as well as existing and new proposed goals and targets relating to other natural resources could be included, subject to agreement among countries. The targets and indicators under a cross-cutting goal on natural resources should be mutually supportive, consistent, measurable and complementary, so that they cover all of the critical components of the challenges to sustainable development, and each of its three pillars, as well as their integration.

Finally, integration of a cross-cutting goal on natural resources in the post-2015 UN development agenda by including it among other sustainable development goals, would reinforce the coherence and convergence between the SDGs and the post 2015 development agenda which has been called for by the world leaders at the Rio+20 Conference and by the UN Secretary General³.

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³ Please see paragraph 249 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document, and the Secretary General report A/67/257