# TST Issues Brief: Forests[1]

## I. Stocktaking

### *1.a. The Importance of All Types of Forests and Trees outside Forests for Sustainable Development*

Forests are vital to achieving global sustainable development. They provide solutions for addressing many development challenges including poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, food security and agriculture, energy, clean water and watershed protection, biodiversity conservation, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, combating desertification and land degradation, and disaster risk reduction. Forests are vital for creating green economies, including green industries. More than 1.6 billion people worldwide depend on forests for food, medicines and fuel, as well as their jobs and livelihoods. The concept of sustainability was first coined in forestry science 300 years ago (Schmithüsen 2013), initially referring to the renewal and growth of trees and then expanded to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of forest management.

Globally, forests cover 31% of global land area (FAO 2010); they contain over 80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity (Hassan *et al.* 2005) and store more carbon than the atmosphere (FAO 2005). Healthy and resilient forests play a critical role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. As the largest storehouse of carbon after the oceans, forests have the potential to absorb and store about one-tenth of global carbon emissions projected for the first half of this century into their biomass, soils and products. As vital sources of energy, water, livelihoods and biodiversity, forests also play a critical role in climate change adaptation by supplying the ecosystem services that society depends on.

As part of larger landscapes, forests are intrinsically connected with other components of landscapes such as water, agriculture and biodiversity, just to name a few. Forests and trees outside forests provide multiple goods and services, including timber, paper, and numerous other products, as well as non-wood forest products (NWFP). Over 10 million people are employed in the formal forest sector (FAO 2010), and forests also provide employment to many seasonal workers in informal sectors around the world.

Forests make direct and tangible contributions to food security. Studies show that forests provide indirect yet reliable resources to fight poverty, particularly for the more vulnerable categories of people such as indigenous communities and women (Sam & Shepherd 2011). Rural communities often utilize a dual income-generating strategy between forests and agriculture, including through investment in livestock (e.g. silvopastoral practices) and agroforestry, although off-farm incomes and remittances are now increasingly common in Asia. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that three quarters of the world's freshwater, which is crucial for food production and human survival, are provided through forested catchments (Fischlin *et al.* 2007).

Developing countries account for nearly 90% of the consumption of fuel wood and charcoal, much of which is often collected by women and children (Lele *et al.* 2012). Between 65% and

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80% of the global population rely on medicines derived from forests as its primary form of health care, according to estimates by the World Health Organization (Lele *et al.* 2012).

The income generated from all types of forests and trees outside forests for people, countries and global trade is significant. In 2009, the formal forest sector's contribution to global gross domestic product (GDP) (from round wood production, wood processing and pulp and paper) was estimated to be nearly US$ 468 billion, accounting for nearly 1% of global GDP for that year (FAO 2009). In addition to monetary benefits, the value of the non-monetary benefits from forests – including environmental and social services to rural economies and households through the provision of energy, shelter and medicine – is estimated by some researchers to be equivalent to two to three times the estimated contribution to GDP (Agrawal *et al.* 2013). Yet, unlike other types of land use such as agriculture, many of these intangible benefits of forests are not factored into either public or private statistics.

***1.b. State of Forests***

In the last few years, deforestation - mainly the conversion of tropical forests to agricultural land – has shown a decreasing trend. This has been due to important measures that have been taken in many countries around the world. For example, countries such as Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Rwanda, China and Viet Nam have employed various measures to combat deforestation and to upscale opportunities for sustainable management of forests. In spite of these efforts, deforestation remains alarmingly high in many countries. Worldwide, around 13 million hectares of forest were converted to other uses or lost through natural causes each year in the period 2000-2010, including some of the most biologically diverse habitats on Earth. Afforestation and natural expansion of forests (primarily temperate and boreal forests) have reduced the net loss of forest, which fell from an average of 8.3 million hectares annually in the 1990s to 5.2 million hectares per year between 2000 and 2010. Deforestation not only results in a decrease in biodiversity and clean water, and an increase in soil erosion, land degradation and the release of carbon into the atmosphere; in most cases it also results in the loss of a major economic asset and livelihood opportunities. For example, approximately 60 million indigenous peoples are almost wholly dependent on forests (IBRD/World Bank 2004),. As such, deforestation exacerbates poverty, especially among the more vulnerable stakeholders including rural communities, indigenous peoples and women in developing countries.

The interconnectedness of forests with other sectors has been long recognized. The causes of deforestation and forest degradation are multiple, complex and often geographically specific, but some general trends have been identified over the past decade (Kissinger *et al.* 2012). At the global level, the most immediate and proximate cause is the expansion of large-scale, commercialised agriculture and rapid urbanization. Commercial timber extraction, livestock production and agriculture, as well as charcoal production are among the main drivers of forest degradation in various regions. Climate change could also impact the growth and productivity of forests, both directly, due to changes in atmospheric carbon dioxide and climate, and indirectly, by altering the frequency and severity of forest disturbances like fires, droughts and development. These could result in major shifts in forest ecosystems, including in terms of species composition, health and overall resilience. Forests have also suffered due to corruption and illegal logging, and other illegal practices in the sector (World Bank 2006).

Ensuring the provision of forests services and products has led to the development of the concept of sustainable forest management (SFM). SFM is "a dynamic and evolving concept [that] aims to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations" (UNFF 2007). SFM has further

been operationalized with a wide range of criteria and indicators, based on its widely accepted seven thematic elements: (a) extent of forest resources; (b) forest biological diversity; (c) forest health and vitality; (d) productive functions of forest resources; (e) protective functions of forest resources; (f) socio-economic functions of forests; and (g) legal, policy and institutional framework. With its multiple facets ranging from conservation to sustainable use and restoration, SFM is now widely regarded as one of the most effective tools to combat deforestation and forest degradation and their underlying causes within and outside the forest sector. There are many approaches that promote SFM. One of these approaches is "forest landscape restoration" which promotes the management of forests and trees outside forests in broader, integrated multi-use landscapes, reinforcing synergies between forests and other land uses such as agriculture.

Forests are also a key component for creating a green economy. In turn, a green economy will also promote sustainable forest management. The green economy concept, as agreed during the Rio+20 Conference, is considered a major tool for achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty.

Another effective means to advance SFM is through Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+). REDD+ offers incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions, benefiting from carbon potential of forests, and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development.

### *1.c. Existing Forest and Forest-Related Agreed Goals, Targets, Criteria and Indicators (C&Is) in Environmental, Economic and Social Aspects*

In order to catalyse actions to protect and sustainably manage forests, a wide range of goals, targets and related processes have been agreed upon, along with sets of criteria and indicators (C&I). While this list includes multiple goals, targets and C&Is that are synergetic and in some cases overlapping, they do not necessarily cover all important aspects and issues that relate to forests, people and development. Silos and gaps persist in these areas and further efforts should be made, including as part of consultations on the sustainable development goals (SDGs):

1. Millennium Development Goal number 7 (2000–2015) focuses on ensuring environmental sustainability, with Target 7B to reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss. The Goal included a set of indicators, among them, on the proportion of land area covered by forest (7.1); total water resources used (7.5) terrestrial and marine areas protected (7.6); and species threatened with extinction (7.7). The significance of forests under this goal and related targets, however, is restricted to their environmental contributions, and their crucial social and economic contributions are neglected. It is, however, important to note that while forests are only mentioned in MDG7, they contribute substantively to reaching all MDGs directly or indirectly.

2. The non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (NLBI) agreed by the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007 is the only global intergovernmentally agreed instrument on all types of forests, and contains actions at all levels to promote SFM. This instrument includes four Global Objectives on Forests to: (i) reverse the loss of forest cover through SFM and increasing efforts to prevent forest degradation; (ii) enhance forest benefits and their contributions to internationally

agreed development goals; (iii) increase the area of sustainably managed forests, and (iv) reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management.

3. The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for 2011-2020, and the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets represent a universally agreed framework for action on biodiversity and a foundation for sustainable development for all stakeholders. The Strategic Plan was adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and subsequently recognized by the UN General Assembly and supported by the governing bodies of other biodiversity related conventions. Among the 20 time bound Aichi Targets, the most relevant for global SDG targets include those with quantitative parameters, such as Target 5 (to halve deforestation and the loss of other natural habitats by 2020), Target 11 (to protect 17% of land and 10% of oceans through protected areas by 2020), Target 15 (restore 15% of degraded lands by 2020), as well as Target 7 (sustainably managed areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry) and Target 14 (safeguarding essential ecosystems and social equity).

4. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has provisions for Parties to implement mitigation actions in the land use, land-use change and forestry sector (LULUCF), including: (i) reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD-plus); (ii) reducing emissions and enhancing removals from LULUCF; and (iii) afforestation and reforestation project activities under the Clean Development Mechanism.

5. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) adopted a 10-year Strategic Plan for 2008 to 2018 with several forest-related commitments and indicators, notably within Strategic Objectives 2 (improving affected ecosystems) and 3 (generating global benefits); and two specific impact indicators: land cover status and the population proportion in affected areas living above the poverty line, for measuring impact of progress in stopping and reversing land degradation and restoring lands.

6. The Bonn Challenge, established in September 2011 as a vehicle to support the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, calls for the restoration of 150 million ha of deforested and degraded lands globally by 2020.

7. At the regional level, the European Union set up an action plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) with the goal of preventing illegal timber imports. Other countries – notably USA and Australia – have introduced legislation promoting legality in timber trade.

8. The European Legally Binding Instrument on Forests presently is being negotiated and its conclusion could be a milestone development with impacts on regional and global forest policies.

9. At the global and regional levels, several sets of C&Is for SFM and related processes have been established, notably indicators used in FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment and the C&Is of the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), of the Montreal Process, and of Forest Europe (the pan-European policy process which also produced general and operational level guidelines for SFM).

10. A range of private sector and market-based initiatives have been set up, including voluntary codes of conduct and certification schemes such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

## II. Overview of proposals

### *2.a. A specific SDG on forests*

There are numerous international initiatives that deal with various aspects of forests. While this proliferation has enriched international and national institutional frameworks on forests, this has also contributed further to the fragmentation of the already highly complex international forest policy portfolio.

A specific SDG on forests would help address this challenge by providing a clear yet highly visible and effective guidance on how to ensure a comprehensive, consistent and balanced approach to forests and their relation to people and sustainable development. A specific SDG on forests could be one way to restore the balance between the limits of the resources to deliver products and services (sustainability) and the need to ensure commensurable upstream flows to enable (restore) forests to answer to the broad social demands. Such an SDG could also capture all the goods and services provided by forests, which would not necessarily be the case if forests were to be subsumed under a broader SDG.

An SDG on forests could also help to promote creation of an enabling environment for and the promotion of environmental sustainability, socio-economic development, good governance and rule of law, poverty eradication, and gender equality, all of which are essential for SFM. Moreover, as forests are the key endogenous economic motor for vast disadvantaged and low populated areas like the Amazon or Congo Basin or the boreal belt, a specific SDG on forests could also allow consideration of the living conditions of people in the most disadvantaged areas.

Such an SDG could benefit from existing and proven reporting mechanisms. Besides the nine international and regional sets of C&Is (see section 1.c above), processes such as the time-tested Global Forest Resources Assessment and National Forest Monitoring and Assessment Programme (FAO) are working to further extend the capacity and the harmonisation of reporting across countries. This would provide for effective monitoring of the SDGs.

### *2.b. A cross-cutting 'Integrated Landscapes SDG' focusing on land, forests, biodiversity, water and other renewable natural resources*

Forests are an integral part of landscapes that provide essential resources for sustainable development, poverty eradication and building shared prosperity. This vision of integrated management of natural resources covers the three dimensions of sustainability and is focused on the well-being of present and future generations. There is also a significant connection between integrated landscape management, conflict resolution, disaster mitigation and social inclusion and empowerment. The forest landscape restoration approach to SFM could be envisaged in this SDG, emphasising the importance of safeguarding our natural resources as the planet's life support system and their role as the foundation of sustainable and economic development.

A cross-cutting SDG would highlight the full value of natural resources and their multiplier effects not only to the environment, but also for economic growth, social development, gender

equality and peace and security – thus replacing the "silo" approach of the current MDG7. Under such a goal, various existing targets on terrestrial natural resources set forth in the outcomes of major UN conferences and meetings, such as the Global Objectives on Forests, the Biodiversity targets and the sustainable land management approach of the UNCCD could be aligned and utilized. Inclusion of a specific target on forests with related indicators under such a cross-cutting SDG, along with similar targets on other issues covered under a cross-cutting SDG could further enhance coherence among various interconnected renewable natural resources.

Existing and proposed goals relating to renewable natural resources, such as land, forests, energy, biodiversity and water, as well as targets on poverty reduction, ecosystem restoration and sustainable agriculture, could similarly be aligned or included under such a cross-cutting SDG. The resulting targets and indicators should provide linkages which are mutually supportive, consistent, measurable and complementary in relation to the other proposed SDGs. They should integrate and cover the critical inter-linkages of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

## III. Possible suggestions on the way forward

### *3.a. The need for an integrated, cross-sectoral, cross-institutional and gender sensitive SFM from local to global levels*

Inclusiveness is a key component of SFM. At all levels, relevant institutions, stakeholders and sectors need to participate in forest-related decision-making. Inclusiveness reflects the reality of SFM as an approach deeply connected with a range of issues from related sectors (agriculture, water, land, energy, tourism, etc.) to human rights (including rights of access to resources and land tenure) and economic development (especially as forest goods and services cross-cut several productive sectors including agriculture). In return, forest-related decision-making should be integrated within these sectors' strategies and planning processes .

Inclusive governance and decision-making approaches are crucial, wherein equitable legal, land and forest tenure systems are in place. It is essential that state and non-state institutions dealing with forest policies are professionally capable and adequately resourced. Inclusiveness should also ensure that all stakeholders participate in decision-making processes so the resulting outcomes are fair, equitable and appropriated by all for effective implementation. This is especially valid for the most vulnerable population categories – indigenous peoples, the rural poor, and women and children – that often rely, economically and culturally, more heavily on forests than others. Including these stakeholders, in addition to non-forest sector stakeholders, in decision-making helps promote buy-in and ownership and ensures sustainability of policies and programmes, which in turn continue to play a key role in reducing poverty and contributing to food security.

### *3.b. Means of Implementation: Finance, technology and capacity-building for forests*

Broadening and diversifying the range of revenues for and from forests is critical to SFM. Rising to this challenge demands concerted action on several fronts which include: (i) elevating the profile and significance of SFM and its contribution to pressing global issues; (ii) effectively demonstrating the multiple values and benefits public and private investment in SFM; (iii) creating new revenue streams and innovative finance mechanisms which are available to and benefit women and men equitably; (iv) promoting entrepreneurial skills and technical capacities for better accessing and utilizing all sources of financing; (v) accurately reflecting forest services

in decision-making and national accounting systems, and (vi) having reliable and current information on forest resources and land use (inventories).

Due to the magnitude of the problem, it is important to diversify sources of finance for forests and in particular to explore cross-sectoral sources, and to identify the ways and means that other sectors can contribute to implementing SFM. Based on a four-year intersessional work and preparation of various inputs including the findings of the 2012 study on forest financing by the Advisory Group on Finance of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), and the Facilitative Process' inputs, Member States at the 10th Session of the UNFF in April 2013 adopted a key decision on mobilizing financing for forests. The key agreed actions include strengthening policy and legislative frameworks (*e.g.*, by emphasizing the forest sector's role in supporting SDGs), establishing national forest financing strategies, setting up national forest funds, strengthening national capacity and institutions, private financing for forests and data collection, specific measures on improving access to funds (particularly among more vulnerable and marginalized groups, including the poor, indigenous peoples and women), addressing the thematic, geographic and data gaps in forest financing and increasing finance for the implementation of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI); and inviting the Global Environment Facility to consider the possibility of establishing a specific focal area on forests within its next replenishment of the (GEF). Member States also decided to consider, as an integral element of the overall review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests at the eleventh session of UNFF in May 2015, a full range of financing options and strategies, including the establishment of a voluntary global forest fund, in order to mobilize resources from all sources in support of sustainable forest management for all types of forests and trees outside forests.

Among additional processes, much can also be learned from the CBD Resource Mobilisation Strategy, approved in 2008, which is based on 6 guiding principles (promoting efficiency and effectiveness; building synergies; supporting innovation; strengthening capacity; raising awareness; and taking into account gender and socio-economic perspectives). If designed properly, market-based approaches such as payments for environmental services with robust and participatory governance arrangements could also potentially increase financing for local communities.

More support is needed from other sectors and stakeholders, in particular finance institutions and private sectors to further promote both public and private financing for SFM. This will require reforms leading to the creation of an adequate investment climate, better access to long-term finance, infrastructure and labour force development.

### *3.c. Enabling conditions and monitoring frameworks*

A multi-sectoral enabling environment is essential for effectively mobilising public and private financing for SFM. There are a number of conditions to enable the effective implementation of SFM, including the following:

- Integrated natural resource planning and management at the landscape level as a pre-requisite of broader sustainable development policies for SFM;
- Sound forest inventories, scientific knowledge as well as traditional forest-related knowledge should be recognised as bases for decision-making;
- Concerted efforts, including regional cooperation, are required to ensure forest monitoring and assessment through the integrated use of remote sensing and *in-situ* observations;

- Criteria and indicators need to be further developed to reflect the inclusion of SFM in broader issues such as natural capital, resource efficiency, procurement, distribution and consumption, mineral resource extraction, enabling conditions and gender perspectives;
- Accountability frameworks ensure transparency, confidence and therefore the effectiveness of rights, responsibilities and financial flows;
- Good governance is a *necessary* condition for SFM. Efforts to improve governance in forest management over the past decade have been commendable, resulting in significant positive changes which need to be further pursued. In this respect, FAO and the World Bank have set up a framework for assessing and monitoring forest governance;
- Gender-equitable forest tenure and resource rights regimes are crucial pre-conditions for effective policy implementation and law enforcement, which rely on clearly defined rights and responsibilities of different stakeholders;
- Environmental, social and gender safeguards and information systems are necessary to guarantee policy design and implementation within basic principles of social equity, and
- Engaging all stakeholders is essential, including indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities, as well as the private sector which plays an increasing role in implementing and financing SFM. Participatory processes should include gender-sensitive consultations and ensure long-term engagement.

***3.d. SDGs and Forests: the next steps and overall framework***

Both above-mentioned options in 2a and 2b for the integration of forests into the SDGs require all environmental, economic and social dimensions of forests and trees outside forests and their contributions to sustainable development to be recognized. It is also crucial for the OWG on the SDG to take into full account the interconnections of forests with other areas such as water, energy, biodiversity, agriculture, land, and food security. Equally, it is just as important to recognize the multiple benefits and inter-relationship of these issues. To this end, the possible SDG or target on forests should be accompanied by a process of setting specific targets and indicators at the national, regional and global levels to facilitate its transformation into concrete actions at all levels. Finally, the implementation of the SDG would be greatly enhanced by identifying and linking environmental, social – including gender – and economic criteria and indicators to measure progress. This would ensure that the SDGs can make a significant contribution to implementing SFM around the world.

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