

SDG 15 interventions

UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2018

Geneva, 1-2 March 2018

Session 1: Sustainable Forest Management and SDGs intervention by Jouni Nissinen

I am here today to speak as a representative of civil society, as part of the UN ECE Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism. As was discussed this morning, to achieve the SDGs we need action in every country, and to consider the linkages between them. The UNECE is the world's largest producer, importer and consumer of timber and wood-based products. It's essential that this consumption doesn't lead to destruction of forests, ecosystems, and wildlife globally and that it doesn't jeopardize the well-being of local communities. Thus, the UNECE countries should take a global leadership in sustainable forest management both at home and abroad.

1) Addressing forest loss and Illegal logging

A recent science article comes to the conclusion that in the tropics, forest degradation is responsible for almost 70% of net forest related GHG-emissions, while deforestation "only" 30%. That means that it is very important to focus more on preventing further forest degradation in the tropics. Certification is a concrete tool to do so. Consumers of tropical timber can promote this by requiring certification. As a matter of fact, the UN indicators for SDG 15.2. include forest certification – it is the most concrete tool mentioned to promote and measure SFM. In the EU, more than 50% of all forests are certified, or more than 60% of productive forests (Eurostat). In other parts of the UNECE, certification is also widely applied.

Legal harvesting and trade is a precondition, but it is not enough. We demand that all UNECE countries ensure sustainable forest management at home and promote this abroad, with special emphasis on the tropical countries, including through public procurement policies. We also call upon all UNECE countries to promote the application of credible forest certification schemes for production and consumption, while reviewing the impact of such schemes at a regular basis. In such reviews prevention of land grabbing at the expense of the local population needs to be included.

2) to increase the climate resilience of forests

Forests also need to be recognized as delivering a dual benefit in the fight against climate change: they support both mitigation and adaptation. Increasing the climate-resilience of forests will ensure that they can absorb carbon emissions and support resilient, healthy populations. Mangrove forests can help protect from tropical storm surges; intact rainforests "make the rain" to provide water for people and to support agriculture. On the other hand, failing to ensure that forests are resilient in a changing climate means an increased risk of forest fires, with devastating consequences for people and wildlife.

To increase the climate resilience of forest biodiversity, we should make sure that there are functioning north-south corridors of suitable habitats for the species to migrate to avoid the warming climate. The resilience can be further improved by increasing key natural forest features in commercial forests, such as, dead wood in various phases of decay.

A concrete issue that would help fight climate change and protect biodiversity in forested areas is the restoration of wetlands. As Achim Steiner, the director of UNDP has put it: "Restoration of peatlands is a low hanging fruit, and among the most cost-effective options for mitigating climate change."

3) Sustainable use of forest material

It is obvious that forests have an important role as resource providers. Wood use is essential in reducing the ecological footprint of the construction sector, wood fibres will have to replace oil as resource for chemicals etc. Such use needs to be aligned with maintaining and improving the role of forests as ecosystems and means that cascaded use is important to limit demand and improve resource efficiency. Therefore, promotion of bio-energy from wood is the wrong way to go, and often has perverse impacts on climate.

Many low-income rural communities in many EECCA countries still rely on expensive and often illegally logged firewood to survive in winter as there are no natural gas connections working. E.g, in Georgia, almost 500.000 people use firewood for heating, which costs them some 30% of their household budget and degrades local forests. In rural areas, CSOs have created renewable energy cooperatives and SMEs and are creating local jobs for women and men in building, installing and servicing solar water heaters.

4) interconnected themes

It is crucial to involve local inhabitants in planning local forest management and biodiversity restoration processes. Sustainably managed forests have a direct influence into many of the other SDGs. To give a few examples:

- Good health and well-being (Goal 3): Forests play a part in reducing the spread of diseases such as malaria – areas with high rates of deforestation are linked with increased malaria prevalence. As an example: there's scientific proof that being just 15 minutes in a forest already lowers your blood pressure.
- Clean water and sanitation (Goal 6): With over three-quarters of the world's accessible freshwater coming from rivers in or around forests, good forest health is paramount to achieving Goal 6.
- Zero hunger and sustainable agriculture (Goal 2): Forests are a source of food in many countries. This food provides vital nutrition and is often a significant boost to the local economy.
- Climate action (Goal 13): Globally, forests store an estimated 296 Gt of carbon.[4] If we can take actions to reduce deforestation and degradation, and maintain forest sequestration, we could contribute 24-33% of all carbon mitigation required.

- Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12): Sustainably produced commodities, e.g. those produced through developing deforestation-free supply chains and different forest landscape restoration activities, are a prerequisite to transition towards sustainable consumption (SDG 12).

4) involving indigenous peoples

Particularly, in the Nordic countries and northwestern most areas of Russia we have the reindeer herding Sami people who are, the only recognized indigenous people in the EU, and they are threatened by intensive forestry and mining. They also need a voice in the HLPF.

Session 2: Biodiversity at the Heart of Sustainable Development – Toward Transformation and Resilience intervention by Silvia Guzzini

My name is Silvia Guzzini from WWF International and I am speaking as a representative of civil society, as part of the UNECE Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism.

The trends of biodiversity loss are today deeply alarming. The pressure on natural resources and ecosystem services upon which humanity depends is fast approaching a tipping point undermining sustainable development and increasing the risk of humanitarian crises by reducing access to quality air, food and water, as well as resilient ecosystems to current and future generations.

The environment remains still marginalized in the implementation of the SDGs. There is still a false sense of tradeoffs between protecting the environment and protecting people, rather than recognising their interdependence. Business-as-usual is not an option anymore to achieve sustainable development: urgent action to reverse the negative trends of biodiversity loss and restore nature by 2030. Our well-being and survival as a species depends on it.

1. To achieve the transformational change to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda, it is critical to integrate biodiversity and ecosystem services into non-environmental policies and sectors (e.g. social, economic, finance, tourism, climate), and promote nature based solutions, such as ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.
2. Horizontal and vertical policy coherence at Regional and Global levels remains essential to achieve the SDGs, including through the alignment of targets, indicators, reporting mechanisms, and financing mechanisms among different frameworks. For SDG15 this will be particularly critical in 2020 when many targets will expire and the goal will need to be align to the new CBD global biodiversity framework.

3. Biodiversity provides us with food and resources necessary for economic development. However, industrialized agriculture drives deforestation (80%) and takes up 75% of agricultural land while only providing food for 30% of the world's people. Peasant farmers who use the remaining 25% of agricultural land feed 70% of the world's population. In order to achieve zero hunger, we need to focus on sustainable agriculture as a solution. A replicable example which goes in this direction is the recent announcement by the government of France of a plan to finance organic agricultural practices to reach the objective of making 50% of all food in public sector organic or local within 5 years.
4. Protecting and sustainably managing biodiversity is also essential as it also provides us with many ecosystem services which are critical to ensure the capacity of nature to renew and restore itself and to ensure our long-term well-being and survival, and the enjoyment of basic human rights (e.g. forests provide important ecosystem services such as purifying water and recharging aquifers or reducing risk of flooding, contributing to the resilience of our ecosystems).
5. Biodiversity is directly linked to people's health: it is the source of important medical and pharmacological properties and discoveries, and its loss has been linked to the increased emergence and transmission of infectious diseases, e.g. malaria. Infectious diseases debilitate populations and undermine efforts to deliver the SDGs.
6. Finally, it is critical to involve local communities in biodiversity conservation and restoration strategies to ensure their success. The traditional knowledge held by the communities, their customary laws and community protocols are the ingredients without which we cannot achieve effective and sustainable progress in the use of resources and protection of ecosystems and biodiversity.