Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

OUTLOOK

Rapid and continuing land use change and increases in demand for natural resources and arable land present serious challenges for the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems in the region. Although total forest cover has increased slightly due to increased forest plantation, biodiversity-rich primary forests are still under pressure. The region accounts for about one third of all threatened species; however, there are programmes achieving success in stopping habitat destruction and in reducing the menace to threatened species (tigers and snow leopards, in particular).

THE PHOTO

Rice fields belonging to local hill tribes in Sapa, Viet Nam

Photo credit: Kibae Park/United Nations
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**INSIGHTS**

- Terrestrial ecosystems are linked to the other goals through the range of essential ecosystem services provided to people and to economies—provisioning services (fresh water, food, fibres, fuel, pharmaceuticals); regulating services (climate regulation; disaster risk reduction); cultural services (spiritual enrichment, recreation, aesthetic benefits); and supporting services (nutrient and water cycling). Biodiversity loss, ecological degradation and water-related disaster risks are growing in areas affected by forest loss.

- Rural livelihoods are intimately impacted by the health of terrestrial ecosystems. The drivers of land-use change vary between subregions, and degradation of terrestrial ecosystems entails forgone benefits in terms of the multiple services provided by terrestrial ecosystems, including for rural livelihoods, disaster risk reduction, water supply, food security and carbon sequestration.

- Although terrestrial protected areas are expanding, progress is slow, and capacity to sustainably manage these areas may not be keeping up. Key strategies to increase protected areas include expanding the role of the private sector and communities through innovative and diverse participatory governance models, such as community conservation areas and biodiversity heritage sites. Involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders to effectively support the management of protected areas will be critical so that they become more than just “paper parks”.

- Socioeconomic threats to terrestrial ecosystems can be addressed by integrating ecosystem values into planning. Efforts in this direction need to be stepped up. The increasing demand for the non-monetary values of terrestrial ecosystems can provide incentives for their conservation and sustainable use.

- The risks of invasive species are growing as globalization proceeds. Invasive species impact natural resource-based livelihoods, such as fishing and food production.

- Access to and the sharing of benefits from terrestrial ecosystems is likely to become increasingly inequitable, given the increased demand for ecosystem services and the constrained natural resource base. Focusing on the implementation of global frameworks, such as the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing, is important to ensure the fair and equitable use of benefits, especially from genetic resources.
**BRIGHT SPOTS**

**Sustainable terrestrial ecosystems**

- In 2014, almost half of the region (24 countries) had protected terrestrial areas, totalling almost 3.2 million square kilometres and accounting for 13.9 per cent of the land in these countries. Bhutan and Brunei Darussalam have protected areas that are more than 40 per cent of their surface area (Bhutan at 49.2 per cent and Brunei Darussalam at 36.4 per cent in 2014), while China and India have made progress in expanding forest and protected area coverage.

- There are positive trends in reforestation and afforestation that are resulting in substantial increases in secondary-forest cover. In many countries, ambitious national biodiversity targets have been established in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans as instruments for implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity.

- There are good regional examples of countries participating in global conservation efforts and addressing threatened species issues, such as the Global Tiger Recovery Programme and the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Programme, in which all tiger and snow leopard range countries have strong participation.

**HOTSPOTS**

**Primary forests**

- Between 2000 and 2015, roughly 135,333 square kilometres of natural forest area (calculated as forest area minus planted forest) was lost in the region, roughly three times the size of Denmark, and accounting for 10.6 per cent of the world’s total natural forest loss. The largest loss was registered in South-East Asia, which lost around 158,862 square kilometres of natural forest area within the same period.

- The Asia-Pacific region’s share of protected terrestrial areas is smaller than the global average and is far below the 17 per cent global Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity. In 2012, the share was 11.5 per cent, compared with 14.3 per cent worldwide. Afghanistan and the Maldives had the lowest percentage of protected terrestrial areas, with less than 1 per cent.

**Habitat degradation and biodiversity loss**

- In 2016, the five countries in the Asia-Pacific region with the largest number of threatened species were Australia, China, India, Indonesia and Malaysia.
EMERGING ISSUES

- Globally, large-scale acquisitions of land by overseas investors are concentrated in South-East Asia and Africa. The disadvantages of these investments outweigh the benefits to local communities, among other impacts. Some forms of agricultural investments—notably large-scale investments in land concentrated in South-East Asia and Africa—can entail significant risks, reducing access to natural resources and cause the loss of livelihoods, especially where land rights are unclear and governance is weak. Enclave projects with few links to the surrounding rural economy and investments that shift labour from traditional livelihood activities to the production of non-edible or export crops may also present significant risks to food security and livelihoods.

- Large-scale destruction and conversion of primary forests due to the increase in the production of commodities, such as palm oil, combined with the lack of application of environmental standards, legal loopholes, corruption (weak governance and private rent capture) will further have a detrimental effect on ecosystems and the livelihoods of local communities.

- Reconciling the exploitation of natural resources, such as mineral resources, with sustainability will require strengthening institutions that facilitate dialogue and the wide participation of local communities and stakeholders (including the private sector).

- A primary issue concerning threatened species (such as elephants, rhinos, pangolins, tigers and snow leopards) and biodiversity in general is that of unsustainable and/or illegal trade in wildlife and forest products. The value of illegal wildlife trade is estimated at $7 billion to $10 billion globally, making it the fourth most lucrative crime, with rapidly growing economies in the region driving it. Wildlife trade robs countries of natural capital while negatively impacting national and local revenues.

TARGETS

15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements

15.2 By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

15.3 By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world

15.4 By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development

15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species

15.6 Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed
15.7 Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products

15.8 By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species

15.9 By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

15.a Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

15.b Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation

15.c Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities