



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

Introduction

SDG 15, “Life on Land,” seeks to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems through sustainable management. Its objectives include combating desertification, reversing land degradation, halting biodiversity loss, conserving forests, preventing poaching of endangered species, integrating biodiversity into planning, and promoting sustainable forest practices.

Key Components

- Ecosystem protection and restoration: This involves conserving and restoring terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems like forests, wetlands, mountains, and drylands.
- Forest management: Key actions include ending deforestation, promoting sustainable forest management, and restoring degraded forests.
- Combating land degradation: This component addresses desertification and aims to halt or reverse land and soil degradation.
- Protecting biodiversity: The goal is to conserve biodiversity, protect natural habitats, and prevent invasive alien species.
- End illegal wildlife trade: Urgent measures are needed to stop the poaching and trafficking of protected fauna and flora species.
- Integrating biodiversity into planning: This requires incorporating ecosystem and biodiversity considerations into government planning and increasing financial resources for conservation efforts.

Challenges and Progress

SDG 15 (Life on Land) aims to protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, but faces critical challenges, including accelerating species extinction, shrinking forest cover, and rapid land degradation (23 hectares lost per minute). While some nations have increased protected area coverage and legal frameworks, progress is slow and off-track globally, with over 1 million species at risk and 90% of deforestation driven by agriculture.

Challenges

- Deforestation: Global Forest cover is declining, largely due to agricultural expansion, which has led to a net loss of nearly 100 million hectares between 2000 and 2020.
- Land Degradation and Desertification: These issues threaten ecosystems and development, with millions of people experiencing food and water insecurity as land becomes barren.
- Biodiversity Loss: Species extinction is accelerating, and while conservation efforts are growing, the overall state of biodiversity remains negative.
- Illegal Activities: Poaching and the illegal trade of wildlife are major threats to species survival.
- Weak Governance and Implementation: Challenges exist in implementing sustainable practices, particularly in areas with weak governance structures and in engaging stakeholders like local communities effectively.
- Cross-cutting Issues: Climate change, poverty, and inequality are major factors that intersect with and exacerbate SDG 15 challenges.

Progress

- Expansion of Protected Areas: There has been progress in increasing the proportion of land under protection, with a growing number of protected areas and a commitment to protect at least 30% of land and sea by 2030 in some regions, such as the EU.
- Sustainable Forest Management: Some countries are making progress in sustainable forest management, and there are efforts to incorporate biodiversity values into accounting.
- Conservation Efforts: Some conservation efforts show positive results. For example, some studies show that conservation actions can help maintain the stability of certain wildlife populations and their habitats.
- National Frameworks: More countries are adopting legal and policy frameworks for biodiversity and environmental protection, though implementation varies.

Targets and Indicators

Goal 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	
Targets	Indicators

<p>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</p>	<p>15.1.1 Forest area as a proportion of total land area</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>15.1.2 Proportion of important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity that are covered by protected areas, by ecosystem type</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>15.2.1 Progress towards sustainable forest management</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>15.3.1 Proportion of land that is degraded over the total land area</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>15.4.1 Coverage by protected areas of important sites for mountain biodiversity</p>
<p>15.6 Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to</p>	<p>15.4.2 (a) Mountain Green Cover Index and (b) proportion of degraded mountain land</p>
<p>15.6 Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to</p>	<p>15.5.1 Red List Index</p>
<p>15.6 Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to</p>	<p>15.6.1 Number of countries that have adopted legislative, administrative and policy frameworks to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits</p>

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	15.7.1 Proportion of traded wildlife that was poached or illicitly trafficked
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	15.8.1 Proportion of countries adopting relevant national legislation and adequately resourcing the prevention or control of invasive alien species
15.9 By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts	15.9.1 (a) Number of countries that have established national targets in accordance with or similar to Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 14 in their national biodiversity strategy and action plans and the progress reported towards these targets; and (b) integration of biodiversity into national accounting and reporting systems, defined as implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting
15.a Mobilise and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems	15.a.1 (a) Official development assistance on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; and (b) revenue generated and finance mobilised from biodiversity-relevant economic instruments
15.b Mobilise 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.b.1 (a) Official development assistance on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; and (b) revenue generated and finance mobilised from biodiversity-relevant economic instruments

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	15.c.1 Proportion of traded wildlife that was poached or illicitly trafficked
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SDG 15 and the UNEP’s 2026-2029 Medium-Term Strategy

UNEP’s Medium-Term Strategy addresses SDG 15 (Life on Land) by tackling the triple planetary crisis—climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. It prioritises science-based solutions to halt nature loss, restore ecosystems, and implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework by 2030. Key efforts include managing forests, combating land degradation, and protecting biodiversity.

- **Strategic Focus (2026-2029):** The strategy, as outlined in [UNEP/EA.7/3](#), aims to reverse biodiversity loss through conservation, sustainable land management, and restoration, with a particular focus on achieving a land-degradation-neutral world by 2030 (Target 15.3).
- **Key Initiatives:** UNEP leads the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) alongside the FAO, covering both terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems.
- **Goal 15 Alignment:** UNEP’s work directly supports all SDG 15 targets, including:
 - **15.1 & 15.2:** Conserving/restoring terrestrial/inland freshwater ecosystems (forests, wetlands, mountains).
 - **15.3:** Combating desertification, restoring degraded land.
 - **15.5:** Halting biodiversity loss.
 - **15.a & 15.b:** Mobilising financial resources for conservation.
- **Operational Approach:** UNEP works with governments and civil society to strengthen the environmental rule of law, raise awareness of environmental rights, and protect vulnerable communities.

This strategy directly supports the implementation of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), which seeks to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030.

Relevant Linkages with other SDGs

SDG 15 (Life on Land) is intrinsically linked to the 2030 Agenda, with 96% of non-SDG 15 targets exhibiting synergies, while 32% present trade-offs. It acts as a foundation for

human wellbeing, directly impacting climate (SDG 13), clean water (SDG 6), poverty reduction (SDG 1), and sustainable consumption (SDG 12).

Key Synergies and Interlinkages:

- **SDG 13 (Climate Action)**: Protecting forests and restoring degraded land (targets 15.1, 15.3) are crucial carbon sinks for mitigating climate change.
- **SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)**: Healthy terrestrial ecosystems, such as mountains and forests, are essential for regulating water cycles, quality, and supply.
- **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)**: Sustainable land management ensures long-term soil fertility and agricultural productivity, though over-expansion of agriculture (approx. 90% of global deforestation) creates a major trade-off with biodiversity.
- **SDG 1 (No Poverty)**: Terrestrial biodiversity supports livelihoods, particularly for indigenous communities and rural populations, acting as a safety net.
- **SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)**: Reducing waste and sustainable consumption (e.g., of paper, wood, soy, palm oil) reduces pressure on ecosystems.
- **SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)**: While renewable energy is vital, poorly managed biofuel production can drive deforestation, showing a trade-off with biodiversity (target 15.2).

Key science reports for SDG 15

Key scientific reports and assessments driving the implementation and monitoring of **SDG 15 (Life on Land)** focus on biodiversity loss, forest management, and land degradation. These reports are primarily produced by UN agencies (UNEP, FAO, IPBES, UNCCD) and provide data on targets 15.1 (forests), 15.3 (land degradation), and 15.5 (biodiversity).

Here are the key science reports for SDG 15:

1. Global Biodiversity Assessment & Status

- **IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (2019)**: Known as the most comprehensive assessment, it found that 1 million species are threatened with extinction, mainly driven by human activities like land-use change.

- **The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species:** Repeatedly cited to measure **Target 15.5** (species extinction risk), it shows a deterioration of over 12% in species survival probability between 1993 and 2024.
- **IPBES Sustainable Use Assessment (2022):** Focuses on the use of wild species and highlights that indigenous stewardship manages 40% of terrestrial conserved areas.

2. Forest and Ecosystem Monitoring

- **The State of the World's Forests (SOFO) - FAO:** A biennial report providing data on forest area decline, sustainable forest management (Target 15.2), and the role of forests in biodiversity.
- **Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) - FAO:** Supplies data on the net loss of forests, which decreased from 31.9% of total land area in 2000 to 31.2% in 2020.
- **State of Nature in the EU (2020):** A key regional report noting that only 14% of EU forest habitats are in good conservation status.

3. Land Degradation and Restoration

- **Global Land Outlook (GLO) - UNCCD:** Provides scientific evidence on land degradation neutrality (Target 15.3). It indicates that over 100 million hectares of healthy land are degraded annually.
- **World Atlas of Desertification:** Maps the anthropogenic, climatic, and socioeconomic drivers of land degradation.

4. Progress and Metrics

- **The Sustainable Development Goals Report (Annual - UN Stats):** The official UN report outlining progress, with specific, detailed sections on Goal 15, including Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) coverage.
- **The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022):** Sets the global agenda to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030, renewing momentum for SDG 15.

Funding for SDG 15

Financing Sustainable Development Goal 15 (Life on Land) requires a massive escalation in investment to bridge a funding gap estimated at roughly **\$300 billion annually**. Achieving this goal, which focuses on protecting, restoring, and promoting sustainable

land use, requires a blend of public, private, and innovative financial mechanisms, along with policy reforms to align financial flows with ecological preservation.

Here is what is needed to finance SDG 15:

1. Massive Scaling of Financial Resources

- **Annual Investment Demand:** Combatting desertification, land degradation, and biodiversity loss demands an estimated **\$1 billion per day** between 2025 and 2030.
- **Bridging the Gap:** Current funding levels are insufficient, with annual biodiversity funding sitting at roughly \$66 billion, just 18% of the estimated needs.
- **Targeted Finance:** Resources must be directed toward sustainable forest management, reforestation, conservation of habitats, and combating poaching and trafficking.

2. Innovative Finance and Private Sector Engagement

- **Global Carbon Markets:** The emergence of carbon markets can catalyse financial inflows to support SDG 15 through REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) initiatives.
- **Blended Finance & Impact Investment:** Using public or philanthropic capital to de-risk investment opportunities, thereby attracting private, commercial capital for nature-based solutions.
- **Conservation Finance:** Expanding the use of forest-backed bonds, green bonds, and sustainability bonds to finance ecosystem restoration.
- **Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES):** Creating financial mechanisms that value and pay for services provided by healthy ecosystems, such as water purification or carbon sequestration.

3. Public Finance and Policy Reform

- **Official Development Assistance (ODA):** Increasing ODA, which is a key source of public financing for developing countries, to support biodiversity and sustainable land management.
- **Reforming Harmful Subsidies:** Eliminating subsidies that contribute to land degradation, deforestation, and biodiversity loss.
- **National Biodiversity Strategies:** Incorporating natural capital accounting into national accounting systems to reflect the true value of ecosystems.

4. Support for Local Communities and Institutions

- **Empowering Local Stakeholders:** Directing financial support to those who manage the land directly, including indigenous peoples, local communities, and smallholder farmers.
- **Capacity Building:** Strengthening the ability of developing nations to manage natural resources sustainably through better technology, research, and governance.
- **Strengthening Local Capital Markets:** Empowering local financial intermediaries to fund smaller-scale, localised, high-impact conservation projects.

5. Leveraging International Cooperation

- **Framework Implementation:** Implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which provides goals and targets for financing through 2030.
- **Technology and Knowledge Sharing:** Promoting the transfer of technologies to decouple economic activity from environmental degradation.

Summary of Key Actions:

To achieve SDG 15, stakeholders must move from "post-intervention" measures to "preventive measures" (e.g., stopping deforestation rather than just restoring it). The return on investment is high, with studies suggesting that every dollar invested in land restoration can yield \$7 to \$30 in benefits.

SDG 15 and the Just Transition

SDG 15 (Life on Land) contributes to a just transition by ensuring that the shift to a green, low-carbon economy does not neglect ecosystems or the communities reliant on them. It promotes a sustainable, inclusive approach to biodiversity and land management that protects vulnerable populations and creates equitable livelihood opportunities.

Key ways SDG 15 contributes to a just transition include:

- **Protecting Livelihoods of Local Communities:** SDG 15 promotes the conservation and sustainable use of forests, wetlands, and drylands, which are essential for the survival and economic well-being of local and Indigenous communities.
- **Green Job Creation:** Efforts to restore degraded land and manage forests sustainably create new, sustainable employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas (e.g., native seed collection, forest management).

- **Integrating Biodiversity into Planning:** SDG 15 calls for integrating ecosystem values into national and local planning, ensuring that land-use changes do not disproportionately affect marginalised groups or accelerate ecological decline.
- **Supporting Sustainable Agriculture:** By encouraging agro-ecological farming, agroforestry, and biodiversity-friendly production methods, SDG 15 helps farmers adapt to environmental changes and secure their livelihoods.
- **Equitable Resource Access:** It emphasises the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources.
- **Nature-Based Solutions:** Implementing nature-based solutions (e.g., restoring mangroves or forests) protects communities from extreme weather events, reducing the vulnerability of frontline communities to climate change.

By addressing the social and environmental impacts of land degradation and biodiversity loss, SDG 15 ensures that the transition to a sustainable future is socially equitable.

UN Convention on Biological Diversity and Partnerships and Commitments

UN Convention on Biological Diversity

The United Nations [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#) is a global treaty aimed at conserving biodiversity, ensuring the sustainable use of biological resources, and promoting fair and equitable benefit-sharing. It establishes international targets through the Conference of the Parties (COP) and related protocols, with 196 member states committed to fostering harmony between humanity and nature.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted during the [fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties \(COP 15\)](#) following a four-year [consultation and negotiation process](#). This historic Framework, which supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and builds on the Convention's previous Strategic Plans, sets out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. Among the Framework's key elements are 4 goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030.

The implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework will be guided and supported through a comprehensive package of decisions also adopted at COP 15. This package includes a monitoring framework for the GBF, an enhanced mechanism for planning, monitoring, reporting and reviewing implementation, the necessary financial resources for implementation, strategic frameworks for capacity development and technical and scientific cooperation, as well as an agreement on digital sequence information on genetic resources.

In adopting the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, all Parties committed to setting national targets to implement it, while all other actors have been invited to develop and communicate their [own commitments](#). At the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the world will take stock of the targets and commitments that have been set.

SDG 15 Partnerships and Commitments

There are over 1,300 partnerships and initiatives made for [SDG 15; they can be viewed here](#).

- **Forest protection and climate action:** Partners commit to sustainable forest management, combating global warming, and preserving forest resources by harvesting sustainably.
- **Biodiversity conservation:** Initiatives focus on developing knowledge about biodiversity to help species renew, preserving wildlife habitats, and implementing anti-poaching programs.
- **Land restoration and desertification:** Commitments include restoring degraded land and combating desertification.
- **Community well-being:** Partners work to improve the well-being of local populations by ensuring access to education, healthcare, and housing, often by linking it to conservation efforts.
- **Sustainable agriculture:** Partnerships promote organic farming to protect biodiversity and land quality, often with a focus on fair trade and safe working conditions.
- **Fashion and textiles:** Brands and retailers are partnering on initiatives like the Conscious Fashion and Lifestyle Network to promote responsible consumption, as seen in partnerships that support women in the cotton industry and organic farming practices.
- **Public and private sector collaboration:** The [UN Global Compact](#) and other platforms encourage businesses to integrate sustainability into their operations, creating jobs and ensuring safe working conditions while protecting the environment.
- **National strategies:** Countries develop their own national strategies to integrate SDG 15 and its targets into their plans for sustainable development.
- **Public and community action:** Initiatives include volunteer clean-up events to protect local ecosystems and reduce harmful products like pesticides.
- **Education and awareness:** Partners develop educational tools and programs to raise awareness about the importance of protecting terrestrial ecosystems.

Examples of SDG 15 partnerships

- **Forest and Farm Facility (FFF):** In Vietnam, the FFF partnered with the Vietnam National Farmers Union to help forest-dependent farmers increase their income through sustainable, organic cinnamon farming, which in turn protects the forest.
- **Sustainable Colombian Livestock ([Ganadería Colombiana Sostenible](#)):** This project integrates trees into livestock production systems (silvopastoral systems) to improve farm productivity while also enhancing biodiversity, carbon storage, and water regulation.
- **University of Minnesota Duluth:** The university partnered with Minnesota Power and Saint Louis County Land and Minerals Department to provide environmental education and research opportunities for over 8,500 participants in the upper Midwest.
- **[UN ActNow campaign](#):** This campaign has partnered with the advertising and tech industries to create interactive tools, like the ActNow app, to help individuals reduce their environmental footprint.
- **[Swarovski Foundation](#):** The foundation partners with organisations like the Swarovski Waterschool and the Conscious Fashion and Lifestyle Network to promote sustainable practices in industries like fashion.
- **Costa Rica:** This nation is an example of a successful public-private partnership, where the government's strategy for sustainable development, implemented since the late 1980s, has led to a significant increase in forest cover.

Key events for SDG 15 in preparation for the 2027 High-Level Review of the SDGs

February 16-29, 2026: Rome, Italy - [Sixth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation](#).

May 27-29, 2026: Montreal, Canada, [Fifth meeting of the Compliance Committee under the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing](#).

June 1-4, 2026: Montreal, Canada, Sixth meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee on Capacity-building for the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol.

June 10-12, 2026: Montreal, Canada, Twenty-first meeting of the Compliance Committee under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

June 16-28, 2026: Montreal, Canada, Fifteenth meeting of the Liaison Group on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

July 27-1 August 2026: Nairobi, Kenya. Twenty-eighth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice.

August 4-12, 2026: Nairobi, Kenya. Seventh meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation.

October 19-30, 2026: Yerevan, Armenia. Twenty-eighth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice.

October 19-30, 2026: Yerevan, Armenia. Twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

October 19-30, 2026: Yerevan, Armenia. Sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilisation.