

# THE RIO CONVENTIONS

## **ACTION ON FORESTS**





# **THE RIO CONVENTIONS** **ACTION ON FORESTS**

**Convention on Biological Diversity**

**United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification**

**United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**



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## Introduction

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### **The importance of forests in climate change, biodiversity and desertification/land degradation**

Forests cover approximately 30 per cent of the Earth's land surface and provide important ecosystem goods and services, including food, fodder, water, shelter, nutrient cycling, air purification, and cultural and recreational amenities. Forests also store carbon, provide habitat for a wide range of species and help alleviate land degradation and desertification.

All three of the Rio Conventions, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), acknowledge the important contribution of forests to the achievement of their respective goals and objectives.

This information brochure provides a snapshot of the synergies and linkages with respect to forests between combating climate change and desertification and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

### **Forest-related partnerships of the Rio Conventions**

The secretariats of the Rio Conventions collaborate with other relevant organizations on forest issues, including through the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) ([www.cpfweb.org](http://www.cpfweb.org)),

which consists of 14 international organizations, bodies and convention secretariats that have substantial programmes on forests. The mission of the CPF is to promote sustainable management of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end.

The secretariats collaborate closely with other United Nations organizations working on forest issues, including the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme. Other international organizations with implementation activities in the forest and land management sectors that the secretariats collaborate closely with are the World Bank, the International Tropical Timber Organization and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The GEF strategy on sustainable forest management is based on the principle that forest projects can and should contribute to several objectives of the Rio Conventions simultaneously.

In all these collaborative interactions, the secretariats advocate the strengthening of the capacities of countries and the promotion of policies and actions to combat forest biodiversity loss, desertification, land degradation, deforestation and forest degradation, to reduce emissions from land use and land-use change activities and to support adaptation through maintaining ecosystem services and providing livelihood options.

The Joint Liaison Group of the secretariats of the CBD, the UNCCD and the UNFCCC was established with the aim of enhancing coordination between the three conventions, including the sharing and exchange of information, outreach, supporting collaboration among national focal points, and exploring options for further cooperation between the three conventions.

One example of a joint outreach activity is the Rio Conventions Pavilion ([www.riopavilion.org](http://www.riopavilion.org)), a platform for raising awareness and sharing information about the latest practices and scientific outcomes on the co-benefits that can be realized through the implementation of the Rio Conventions. The Pavilion convenes on the margins of the conferences of the Parties of the three conventions. The Pavilion partners are extending the momentum of this collaborative initiative to this year's United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

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CHAPTER I

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## Forest mandates and action programmes

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## CBD

### Mandates/key decisions

The Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, adopted by the tenth Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD promotes the effective implementation of the Convention through broad-based action by all Parties and stakeholders in order to halt the loss of biodiversity and ensure that by 2020 ecosystems are resilient and continue to provide essential services for human well-being and livelihoods. As such, the plan is intended as the overarching framework on biodiversity, not only for the biodiversity-related conventions, but for the entire United Nations system.

At the heart of the Strategic Plan are 20 targets collectively known as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. These targets must be met by 2020 if the plan is to be realised. Several of the targets directly relate to forests and to the synergies agenda:

- **Target 5.** The rate of *loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved* and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced
- **Target 7.** *All areas under forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity*
- **Target 11.** *At least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas are conserved*
- **Target 14.** *Ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded*
- **Target 15.** *Enhance the resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification*

The implementation of the Plan coincides with the International Decade on Biodiversity 2011–2020, announced by the UN General Assembly in December 2010. The CBD is starting to monitor progress towards the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and its Aichi Targets. Key milestones in this process will be the submission of the fifth national reports by CBD Parties and the publication of the fourth Global Biodiversity Outlook, an analysis of the status of biodiversity globally, both in 2014.

### Action programmes underway, including any linkages

Forests are addressed under the CBD in numerous ways, including through programmes of work on forests, protected areas, islands, mountains, drylands, and inland water. The programme of work on forest biodiversity contains 130 specific actions to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of forest biodiversity at national level, including for example developing good forest governance, promoting law enforcement and addressing related trade. Every Party is expected to develop and periodically revise National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) as the main policy framework for national implementation. The CBD Secretariat supports implementation through publications, such as the CBD Technical Series, best practice guides, and capacity building workshops (see [www.cbd.int/forest](http://www.cbd.int/forest)). Partnerships such as the joint Initiative for Tropical Forest Biodiversity of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and CBD can facilitate financial and technical support for developing countries. In its approach, the CBD places particular emphasis on the rights of indigenous and local communities (Articles 8(j) and 10(c) of the Convention).

*Key decisions: X/2, X/33, X/35, IX/5, VI/22.*

The CBD also supports REDD-plus discussions and activities with the goal to ensure that REDD-plus provides benefits for biodiversity and indigenous and local communities. For example, the CBD and its partners have supported discussions on REDD-plus safeguards under the UNFCCC by offering capacity building and consultation workshops.

### Next steps of relevance to Rio+20 and beyond

The *Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization* was adopted at COP 10 to further operationalize one of the three objectives of the Convention: the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. The Nagoya Protocol, and how it relates to the programme of work on forest biodiversity, is a priority for the Convention in coming years. The Nagoya Protocol will create greater legal certainty and transparency for both providers and users of forest genetic resources by establishing more predictable conditions for access, and by helping to ensure the sharing of benefits from the utilization of these resources.

Another key issue for the CBD on forest ecosystems will be to support Parties in restoring forest landscapes in a way that provides benefits for biodiversity and for indigenous and local communities. Parties and partners attending the conference “Bonn Challenge on forests, climate change and biodiversity,” held Bonn, Germany, in 2011 announced the ambition to restore at least 150 million hectares of degraded forest landscapes by 2020 in support of Aichi Target 15, which would contribute significantly to the objectives of all three conventions. The CBD will support this commitment through capacity-building and guidance on ecologically and socially sound forest landscape restoration.

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## UNCCD

### Mandates/key decisions

*“Forests are critical to the eradication of poverty in the drylands. They are also the first step towards healing the drylands and protecting them from desertification and drought.”<sup>1</sup>*

2011 marked both, the International Year of Forests with an emphasis on forests that serve people and the second year of the UN Decade on Deserts and the Fight against Desertification, and hence gave UNCCD the opportunity to focus on dryland forests and the call, “forests keep drylands working”<sup>2</sup>.

Deforestation and the resultant desertification adversely affect the productivity of the land, human and livestock health, and economic activities such as ecotourism. Forests and tree cover prevent land degradation and desertification by stabilizing soils, reducing water and wind erosion, and maintaining water and nutrient cycling in soils. Sustainable use of goods and services from forest ecosystems and the development of agroforestry systems have the potential to contribute to poverty reduction, making the rural poor less vulnerable to the impacts of desertification and land degradation. The loss of vegetation through deforestation and the resultant desertification and land degradation cause biodiversity loss and contribute to climate change by reducing carbon sequestration.

There are several provisions to ensure the integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and sustainable land-use patterns in the text and the annexes of the Convention.

In addition, the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention (2008–2018) (The Strategy), or decision 3/COP.8, contains four strategic objectives: to improve the living conditions of affected populations, to improve the condition of affected ecosystems, to generate global benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD, and to mobilize resources to support implementation of the Convention through building effective partnerships between national and international actors.

*Key decisions: 8/COP.4, 2/COP.6, 12/COP.7, 3/COP.8, 4/COP.8.<sup>3</sup>*

### Action programmes underway, including any linkages

National action programmes (NAPs)<sup>4</sup> contain the national strategies for land and drought-related policies and serve as an important tool in guiding the implementation and monitoring of the country’s efforts toward combating desertification/land degradation and the affects of drought (DLDD).



In the context of the reporting processes, several affected country Parties included in their national reports various afforestation and reforestation activities as well as their efforts toward sustainable forest management and agroforestry conservation<sup>5</sup>. These formed the sectoral action plans that they are undertaking at the national level within the framework of their NAPs.

Thematic programme networks (TPNs) of institutions and agencies linked together via an institutional focal point provide structural support to the regional action programmes (RAPs), subregional action programmes (SRAPs) and the NAPs, which form the core of the actions for combating desertification in the region. For example, in Africa TPN2 aims to promote agroforestry and soil conservation, and in Asia the same TPN is fostering agroforestry and soil conservation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, where tree removal, cropping and overgrazing have resulted in severe soil erosion and watershed depletion. Other areas of interest for TPNs and RAPs are low forest cover countries, tropical dryland forests and REDD-plus.

### Next steps of relevance to Rio+20 and beyond

The Convention will continue advocating for sustainable land management (SLM) and a measurable target on land degradation as a means of combating DLDD and hence deforestation. Within the context of The Strategy, the Convention further supports affected country Parties in mainstreaming SLM in the development and implementation of their NAPs, e.g. by mainstreaming SLM in the development

of national forestry policies. The establishment of an Integrated Investment Framework for SLM, as called for by The Strategy, can support countries to mobilize financial resources to fund projects and programmes related to SLM.

Furthermore, in 2012–2013, UNCCD affected country Parties will measure, monitor and report for the first time on the mandatory impact indicator land cover status and some provisionally accepted impact indicators that can be reported on a voluntary basis (change in land use, plant and animal biodiversity, carbon stocks above and below ground, and land under sustainable land management). These impact indicators will inform the monitoring and assessment of the status of dryland forests.

- 1 Statement of Mr Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD on the occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification, 17 July 2011.
- 2 The UNCCD slogan for 2011.
- 3 The text of the Convention and the decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties are available at <[www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention](http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention)> and <[www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/official-documents](http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/official-documents)> respectively.
- 4 NAPs submitted to the UNCCD secretariat are available at <[www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/Action-programmes](http://www.unccd.int/en/about-the-convention/Action-programmes)>.
- 5 National reports submitted to the UNCCD secretariat are available at <[www.unccd-prais.com/Home/Reports](http://www.unccd-prais.com/Home/Reports)>.

## UNFCCC

### Mandates/key decisions

The UNFCCC recognizes the important role that forests play in climate change mitigation, as they represent a significant global carbon stock. The intergovernmental process of the UNFCCC considers policies and methodological guidance for land use, land-use change and forestry activities with the aim of enhancing actions on mitigation in the forest sector.

1. Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD-plus)

Parties to the UNFCCC acknowledge the significant contribution of deforestation and forest degradation to global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Parties have affirmed the urgent need to take further action to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries. Since the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties

good progress has been made in developing methodological guidance, identifying essential elements, principles and safeguards and considering financing options for implementing REDD-plus at the national level.

*Key decisions: 1/CP.13, 2/CP.13, 4/CP.15, 1/CP.16, 2/CP.17 and 12/CP.17.*

## 2. Land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) in developed countries

The Conference of the Parties and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, through their decisions, stipulate commitments and provisions for developed country Parties in their implementation, reporting and accounting of LULUCF activities. These Parties report and account for their greenhouse gas emissions by sources and removals by sinks for the LULUCF sector as part of their annual accounting of greenhouse gas inventories under the UNFCCC. For the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (2008–2012), Parties had the option of electing to report and account for emissions and removals from the following land use activities: forest management, cropland management, grazing land management and revegetation. For the second commitment period, reporting and accounting for emissions and removals from forest management is mandatory. Parties may elect to report and account for emissions and removals from the other LULUCF activities as mentioned earlier and wetland drainage and rewetting.

*Key decisions: 16/CMP.1, 2/CMP.6, 2/CMP.7.*

## 3. Afforestation and reforestation project activities under the clean development mechanism

The objective of the clean development mechanism (CDM) is to assist developing country Parties to achieve sustainable development and to contribute to the ultimate objective of the UNFCCC, and to assist developed country Parties to achieve compliance with their emission reduction commitments. In the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, reforestation and afforestation projects located in developing country Parties are eligible for crediting under the CDM. Such projects support sustainable development and benefit biodiversity and environmental conservation.

*Key decisions: Decisions: 5/CMP.1, 6/CMP.1*

## Action programmes under way, including any linkages

Many developing country Parties require technical and institutional capacity-building and need to build experience with demonstration activities as part of their efforts to implement actions relating to REDD-plus. The Conference of the Parties has encouraged all Parties in a position to do so to support and strengthen the capacities of these countries to collect and report the data and information necessary for REDD-plus implementation. In addition, all Parties, relevant international organizations and stakeholders are encouraged to ensure coordination of REDD-plus activities in order to enhance synergies and to avoid duplication of effort. Therefore, the Conference of the Parties has requested the secretariat to enhance coordination of capacity-building activities relating to REDD-plus.

## Next steps of relevance to Rio+20 and beyond

Within the process, all Parties continue to work on guidance on the implementation of REDD-plus activities. At the same time, a number of developing countries are already in the process of formulating their national strategies or action plans on REDD-plus. Consequently, on-the-ground experiences and capacity-building activities, such as those being supported by the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Programme) and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, will continue to provide valuable feedback to the process and to the Parties.

The UNFCCC secretariat will continue to maintain the REDD Web Platform as a means for online information and experience sharing. It has also set up an interactive discussion forum to enhance sharing of information, experiences and lessons learned on the use of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change guidance and guidelines for estimating emissions and removals from REDD-plus activities.

The Xingu River in Brazil captured by Envisat  
Photo by ESA





CHAPTER II

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**Success stories and  
results achieved**

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## CBD

Since the inception of the CBD, many countries and regions have considerably moved ahead with its implementation. For example, Brazil has significantly reduced deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon since 2002, and designated half the Amazonian state of Acre's territory as protected areas. Similarly, Liberia set aside 30 per cent of forest land for conservation; Malaysia and Viet Nam have established forest corridors to connect forest biodiversity hotspots; and India enacted landmark legislation which assigned ownership rights to minor forest produce to indigenous peoples and local communities (CBD Fourth National Reports).

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## UNCCD

Apart from dry forest preservation, the UNCCD is promoting SLM techniques like conservation agriculture, agro-forestry and soil conservation in drylands, where tree removal, cropping and overgrazing result in soil erosion and watershed depletion. Agro-forestry in drylands can help restoring land, while feeding the inhabitants. For example, through the successful implementation of agro-forestry techniques, land improvement trends have been observed on over five million hectares in Niger. In India *Prosopis cineraria*<sup>6</sup> based agro-forestry helped to control wind erosion and water erosion, improvement in land productivity and conservation of soil and water resources. In Peru afforestation and reforestation of degraded lands is being done by planting trees, regenerating natural ecosystems and control of pastoralists to improve the living conditions of the affected population and improve the conditions of affected ecosystems.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Prosopis cineraria* is a hardy, leguminous tree species of desert regions, which farmers have been growing for ages because of its multi-purpose uses, soil fertility enhancing ability as well as symbiotic effect on associated crop yield.

<sup>7</sup> The examples used in this paragraph are excerpts of the National Reports submitted to UNCCD in 2010 (4th reporting cycle).

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## UNFCCC

The progress in negotiations on REDD-plus has encouraged the implementation of several demonstration activities. These allow the sharing of lessons-learned and experiences.

The REDD Web Platform is an online portal to share information, enhance understanding and build capacities relating to REDD-plus among Parties, relevant organizations and stakeholders. More than 40 Parties have already used it to share their experiences with REDD-plus implementation, including those gained from demonstration activities, methodological approaches taken and the implementation of safeguards. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are also contributing to the platform.

Over the period between 2007 and 2011 the number of registered afforestation and reforestation project activities under the CDM increased 37-fold, with projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

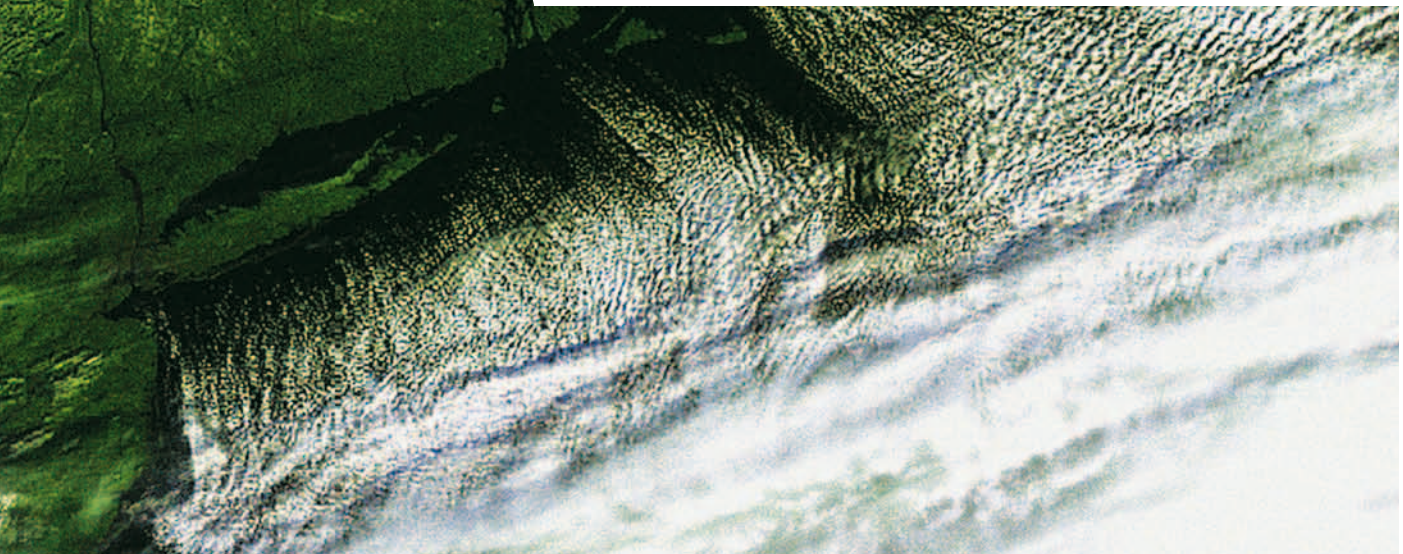


CHAPTER III

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**Challenges to implementation  
and opportunities to contribute  
by relevant stakeholders<sup>8</sup>**

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Key *challenges* for the implementation of forest-related commitments, guidance and actions under the three conventions include:

- To better address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and improve inter-sectoral coordination in planning and implementation;
- To build institutional and technical capacities and to ensure robust and transparent measurement, reporting and verification;
- To ensure the provision of adequate and predictable financial and technological support for REDD-plus actions and other forest-related policies under the conventions;
- To increase public awareness of the importance of forests for sustainable development, including dryland forests;
- To promote market development for local, sustainable forest products and services;
- To improve quality and enhance availability of scientific data on forests, including for dryland forests and low forest cover countries (LFCCs), to positively influence the development and the implementation of national policies.

Main *opportunities* include:

- Increasing political will to slow, halt and reverse forest cover and carbon loss, and to restore significant areas of degraded forest landscapes;
- New and existing forest programmes and projects that provide multiple benefits and improve ecosystem services, and meet the adaptation needs of forest-dependent communities;
- Broad implementation of sustainable management of forests;
- Broad participation of developing countries in implementation of actions to reduce deforestation and forest degradation, to promote sustainable land management and to combat biodiversity loss and desertification and land degradation;
- Increased protection of forest ecosystems, including dryland forests, resulting in an enhanced ability of these ecosystems to provide goods and services, and hence, increasing income opportunities and improved livelihoods of local populations;
- In addition to the generation of climate change mitigation benefits, the generation of substantial REDD-plus co-benefits, such as poverty alleviation and the enhancement and protection of other ecosystem services;

- Enhanced decision-making processes at national and local levels through integrated natural resource management as a means of conserving and sustaining forest resources.
- The involvement and participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in decision-making and implementation of actions.

### **Conclusion on the synergy of the Rio Conventions in contributing to sustainable development**

In all three conventions, Parties have taken decisions to promote, support and/or encourage the sustainable management of forests and the maintenance and enhancement of the economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests. The policies of the three conventions and their implementation complement each other. The table on page 14 illustrates the synergies between the three forest-related decisions of the Rio conventions.

Table 1. The synergies between the three forest-related decisions of the Rio conventions

Aichi Biodiversity Targets (CBD decision X/2)	REDD-plus elements (UNFCCC decision 1/CP.16)	DLDD and sustainable forest management (SFM) (UNCCD decision 4/COP.8)
<p>5. By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing emissions from deforestation</li> <li>• Reducing emissions from forest degradation</li> <li>• Conservation of forest carbon stocks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce SFM as a means of preventing soil erosion and flooding, thus increasing the size of atmospheric carbon sinks and conserving ecosystems and biodiversity.</li> <li>• Strengthen the capacity of LFCCs to combat desertification, land degradation and deforestation.</li> </ul>
<p>7. By 2020 areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable management of forests</li> <li>• Actions are to be consistent with conservation of natural forests and biological diversity and are to incentivize the protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services</li> </ul>	<p>Reinforce SFM as a means of preventing soil erosion and flooding, thus increasing the size of atmospheric carbon sinks and conserving ecosystems and biodiversity.</p>
<p>11. By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial areas are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation of forest carbon stocks</li> <li>• REDD-plus activities should be consistent with the objective of environmental integrity and take into account the multiple functions of forests and other ecosystems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce SFM as a means of preventing soil erosion and flooding, thus increasing the size of atmospheric carbon sinks and conserving ecosystems and biodiversity.</li> <li>• Strengthen the capacity of LFCCs to combat desertification, land degradation and deforestation.</li> </ul>
<p>14. By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation of forest carbon stocks</li> <li>• Enhancement of forest carbon stocks</li> <li>• REDD-plus activities should promote and support full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities</li> </ul>	<p>Strengthen SFM and integrated water management to maintain ecosystem services in affected areas, prevent soil erosion and flooding, increase the size of atmospheric carbon sinks, and conserve and sustainably use biodiversity.</p>
<p>15. By 2020, ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks has been enhanced, through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing emissions from deforestation</li> <li>• Reducing emissions from forest degradation</li> <li>• Conservation of forest carbon stocks</li> <li>• Sustainable management of forests</li> <li>• Enhancement of forest carbon stocks</li> </ul>	<p>Strengthen SFM and integrated water management to maintain ecosystem services in affected areas, prevent soil erosion and flooding, increase the size of atmospheric carbon sinks, and conserve and sustainably use biodiversity.</p>



People plant trees on the 34th national Tree Planting Day in Wuhan, China  
Photo by Cheng Min, Xinhua





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