

31 January 2014

Target the forests!

*Forests in Sustainable Development Goals – a view from Europe*¹



A view drawn from a meeting of Europe-based experts in Geneva, 22-23 January, convened by the Economic Commission for Europe – Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry, and the Food and Agriculture Organization – European Forestry Commission.

Why forests matter for SDGs

Forests make big targets – for both good and bad. Planting trees, or cutting down forests, has major consequences. If we manage forests well they will give us goods and services that we cannot live without. If forests disappear we lose any prospect of sustainable development. Forests and trees are rooted in life and livelihoods. They can be grown, improved and looked after – they are renewable. It would be hard to find a simpler and more universal way of changing the world for the better than by planting and managing trees.

How forest targets can be incorporated in SDGs

Full integration of the benefits of trees and forests in the SDGs is both desirable and feasible. Aspirations for trees and forests can be both universal and differentiated to local circumstance. Many forest related targets already prevail in international policy instruments, the main ones being: Rio conventions; forest sector instruments; food and agriculture goals and challenge targets; and trade and economic development conventions and initiatives. There is thus much good work already done, much to build on in considering the following main three options:

- **Stand-alone forests Goal with targets and indicators.** This would bring very useful attention to the massive potential benefit of forests for sustainable development, and show how that potential can be realised through a balanced and holistic approach.
- **Sub-goal of a natural resources or ecosystem services Goal with targets and indicators.** This would catalyse the necessary integration of forests and trees with related sectors, but would likely result in fewer forest-linked targets and indicators than either of the other options.
- **Forest targets and indicators in several or most of the SDGs.** This is the most ambitious option since it requires attention to the huge potential benefits that management of forests and trees can deliver to a full range of goals for sustainable development.

Hybrid options are also imaginable, and perhaps likely. All these options should be considered carefully in the SDG development process. The renewable, manageable, multifunctional nature of forests and trees means that all of these options are valid - and the following suggested targets and indicators can be integrated into the SDG framework whichever option is chosen.

¹ This paper was written by James Mayers of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) following the Geneva meeting. It has benefitted greatly from review by many of the participants, but it may not fully reflect their views. Contact: james.mayers@iied.org

10 key targets for forest and trees in SDGs

Strong evidence and public opinion in a wide range of countries worldwide, and substantial existing levels of international agreement, suggests that 10 key targets – here arranged in three groups – can be justified and incorporated into the SDGs (See Figure 1). These targets will need to be further developed to be specific, time-bound and measurable. The meeting in Geneva did not discuss or develop indicators for these targets, but two tentative examples of the kinds of indicators that may be needed are also offered under each target below:

Social and cultural benefits from forests and trees improved

- 1. Income and employment from forests and trees in rural areas increased**
 - \$/household from forest products and services, disaggregated by gender
 - Number of jobs and \$ wages paid in forest resource production and management
- 2. Rights, tenure and governance of forests strengthened**
 - % secure local land and resource tenure
 - % forest products from legal and sustainable sources
- 3. Food security and nutrition contribution of forests and trees enhanced**
 - % of households with access to nutritious forest foods and woodfuel
 - % change in adoption of tree-based agricultural and soil conserving practices

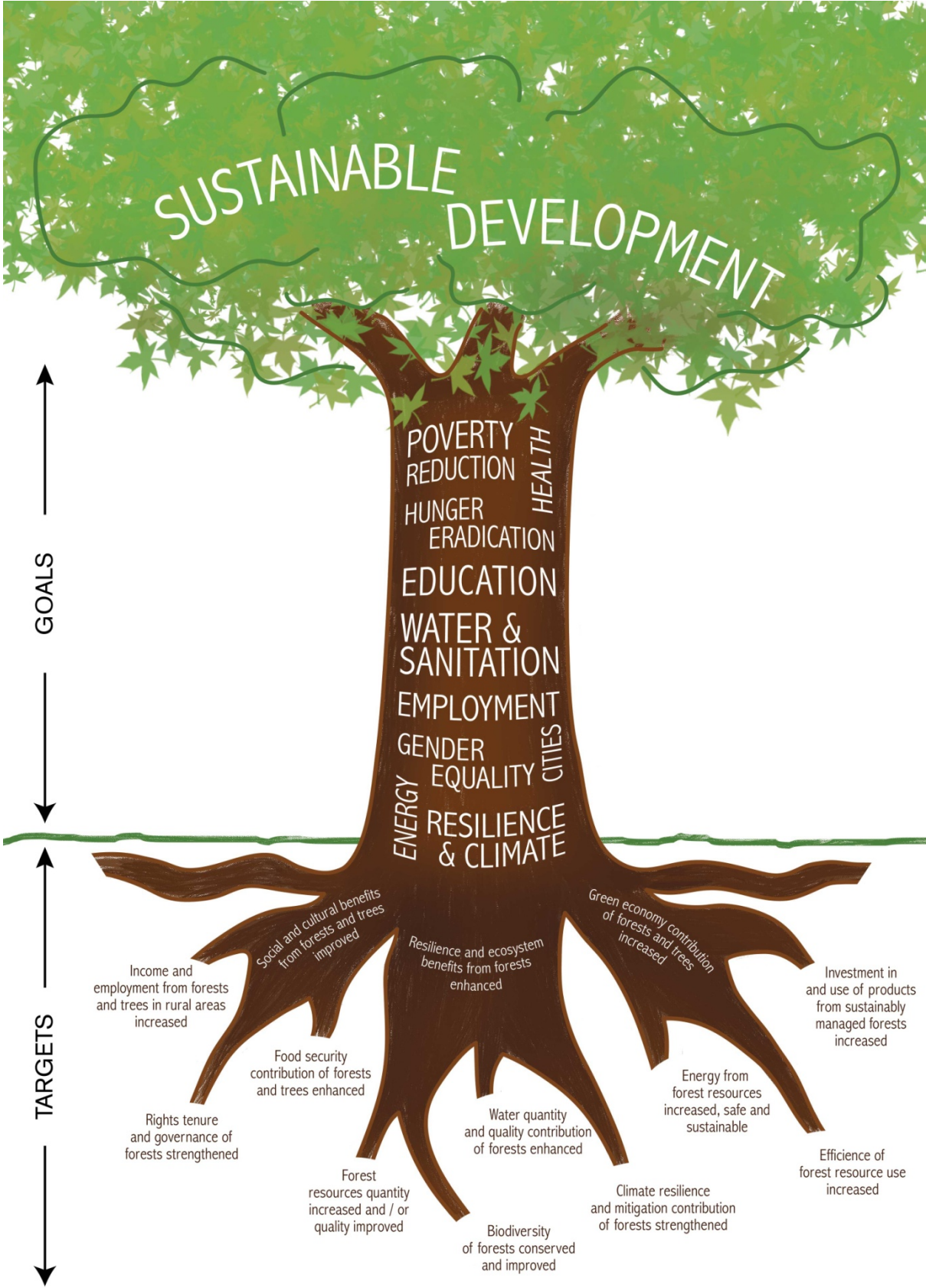
Resilience and ecosystem benefits of forests enhanced

- 4. Forest resources quantity increased and/or quality improved**
 - Hectares under approved forest management plans
 - m³ and quality/composition of trees outside forests
- 5. Biodiversity of forests conserved and improved**
 - Hectares under protection and management for optimising biodiversity
 - % change in number/area of *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation of forest genetic resources
- 6. Water quantity and quality contribution of forests enhanced**
 - % change in water quality and quantity in and from forest areas
 - Hectares of forests contributing to management for watershed conservation
- 7. Climate resilience and mitigation contribution of forests strengthened**
 - % change in forest management and trees in farming systems for climate adaptation
 - % change in carbon stocks in forest and tree biomass and forest soil

Green economy contribution of forests and trees increased

- 8. Energy from forest resources increased, safe and sustainable**
 - % of forest biomass in total energy supply
 - % change in safety and efficiency in forest biomass energy
- 9. Efficiency of forest resource use increased**
 - % change in efficiency of production and processing of wood and non-wood products
 - % change in efficiency of use of wood and paper products
- 10. Investment in, and use of, products from sustainably managed forests increased**
 - \$ value change in investments in sustainably managed trees and forests
 - \$ value change of exports and imports from sources verified as legal and sustainable

Figure 1: Root causes – suggested targets on forests and trees in the SDGs



Key elements in the process needed from now on

During 2014, the process of developing the SDGs will likely see many twists and turns - even before the intergovernmental negotiations and, with luck, the sign-off by heads of state in late 2015. The meeting in Geneva did not discuss this process in detail but two areas in particular seem to need increased attention through specific initiatives:

- ***Dialogue with less clearly-heard voices and geographies.*** Targeted multi-stakeholder dialogue is needed, involving particular mixes of existing SDG framework 'insiders', with other relevant sectors, disciplines and major groups, and both public and private sector actors – in Africa, South Asia and Latin America in particular.
- ***Strengthen country capacity to define what to build on and how.*** Substantial efforts will be needed to develop capacity to adapt and apply the SDG framework in ways that are driven by national priorities, experience and the building blocks available. Initial consideration of the practicalities of SDG implementation could usefully help shape the framework itself.

In conclusion, it is hoped that these actions proceed not through 'special pleading' for forests, but by demonstrating and developing understanding of how trees and forests can be best incorporated in the SDG framework, and how that can stimulate action.