

## Forest biodiversity in international conservation policies and negotiations



*Despite several internationally agreed goals on forest conservation, the global rate of forest loss continues to be alarmingly high. If this trend is not reversed ecosystem integrity as well as human well-being will be impaired in many regions of the world. Climate change effects, soil erosion and human migration are likely to increase as a consequence. Currently, strategies for a more effective conservation of forest biodiversity are deliberated in different international policy processes in which numerous organizations and initiatives are involved. This fact sheet gives a short overview over the most important internationally agreed goals and highlights some of the issues to be dealt with during upcoming negotiations.*

### BACKGROUND

Forests are indispensable parts of our biosphere. They are the habitat for millions of plant and animal species, regulate our climate and water supply,

store carbon, prevent erosion, and provide resources and shelter for animals and humans. Forests sustain life on earth. But the world's forests are under enormous pressure.

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According to the Global Biodiversity Outlook 4 [1], deforestation rates are still alarmingly high. In some areas, deforestation has been slowed down or even stopped (e.g. in the Brazilian Amazon, in China and Vietnam) but these positive trends are entirely overridden by further large-scale destruction, fragmentation and degradation of forests in other areas of the world.

The main driver of forest loss is land use change, particularly its conversion into arable land.

### FORESTS IN INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION POLICIES AND NEGOTIATIONS

In 2010, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted a Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for 2011-2020. It includes the twenty Aichi Biodiversity Targets of which the fifth reads: "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."

Already since 2002, the CBD runs its programme of work on forest biodiversity, which aims at "reducing the threats to forest biological diversity, the creation of an institutional and socio-economic environment that will facilitate the conservation and sustainable use of forest biological diversity, and the assessment and monitoring of forest biodiversity" [2].

Despite this effort and other internationally agreed goals (see Box 1), Aichi Target 5 will likely be missed by 2020, calling for "a multiplication of actions to control deforestation and habitat fragmentation" [1].

In upcoming meetings of CBD-bodies (SBSTTA 19 and COP 13<sup>1</sup>), ways of more effective contributions of other organizations to the achievement of the forest-related Aichi Targets will be considered [3].

In particular, SBSTTA might recommend that the CBD should join forces with the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), the member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)<sup>2</sup> and other international organizations<sup>3</sup>. SBSTTA might further recommend that COP 13 should encourage the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to identify critical areas for technical and financial support to member states, and to improve monitoring of progress and reporting [3].

The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), a global science-policy interface established in 2012, aims at providing the CBD and other multilateral environmental agreements, as well as national governments, with up-to-date knowledge on selected

<sup>1</sup> SBSTTA 19 = Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice in November 2015; COP 13 = Meeting of the Conference of the Parties in December 2016

<sup>2</sup> Today the CPF consists of 14 member organizations: the Secretariat of the CBD, the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), The World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and the World Bank. It has the mandate to support the work of UNFF, to enhance cooperation and coordination among its members, and to gather support from their governing bodies for its activities.

<sup>3</sup> Such as Biodiversity International, Conservation International, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Forest Peoples Programme, Global Forest Watch, the World Wide Fund for Nature, and the World Resources Institute

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thematic and methodological topics with regard to nature and nature's benefits to people.

Currently, several assessments are underway that examine global and regional biodiversity, its ecosystems and the essential services they provide to society, as well as possible policy options on how to safeguard them.

Several of these assessments include forests as one of the targeted ecosystems, such as the assessment on land degradation and restoration, the assessment on sustainable use of biodiversity, as well as the four regional assessments and the global assessment [4].

### BOX 1: INTERNATIONAL GOALS ON FORESTS

At the global level, important – and widely congruent – political commitments on forests are [3]:

- The Aichi Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as well as its forest programme
- The REDD+ (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) activities under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- The four Global Objectives on Forests by the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) and its United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)
- The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) with relevance to forests
- The New York Declaration on Forests (voluntary commitment)

## FORESTS IN INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE POLICIES AND NEGOTIATIONS

Deforestation and forest degradation are estimated to contribute globally to approx. 17% of all greenhouse gas emissions [5]. During the past decade, tremendous areas of tropical forests were cleared in order to convert the land for agricultural purposes (such as the production of beef, palm oil and soy). The responsibility for leaving this detrimental pathway lies jointly with the governments, the business sector and the consumers.

The most important global mechanism established under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to combat deforestation is REDD+ (= Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). It provides financial incentives for developing countries "to foster conservation, sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks" [6].

In 2013, a large step forward was taken when the UNFCCC-COP 19 adopted the "Warsaw Framework for REDD+". In June 2015, the Climate Change Conference in Bonn (preparatory meeting for UNFCCC-COP 21) agreed on further details and drafted decisions concerning the financing mechanism (now anticipated to be a mixed-financed model combining public sources, such as the Green Climate Fund, with private sources, such as market-based mechanisms) and the inclusion of payments for non-carbon benefits such as biodiversity and benefits for local communities.

With its upcoming 21<sup>st</sup> meeting in December 2015 in Paris (COP 21), the UNFCCC is expected to fully integrate a REDD+ mechanism into the new climate agreement. However, REDD+ has always



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been criticized, the most serious concerns being the following:

- REDD+ is not sufficiently taking into account whether a forest's biodiversity is high or low (problem of missing 'biodiversity safeguards' and of different definitions of the term 'forest'<sup>4</sup>),
- REDD+ is not able to ascertain that the forests in consideration would have been logged without the mechanism in place (problem of non-additionality),
- REDD+ does not ensure that the non-deforested areas are indeed conserved in the long-term (problem of non-permanence), and
- REDD+ does not prevent that forests are cut elsewhere instead (problem of leakage).

Furthermore, local stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples, fear that they will not benefit – or even suffer from – REDD+, as it may influence the value of land and may therefore stir up conflicts about land tenures.

None of these challenges is completely solved and they remain to be tackled in upcoming negotiations at the global but also at the sub-global level.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2014) Global Biodiversity Outlook 4. Montréal, 155 pages.
- [2] <https://www.cbd.int/>
- [3] UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/19/8: Forest Biodiversity: Role of International Organizations in Supporting the Achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets
- [4] <http://www.ipbes.net/index.php/work-programme>
- [5] IPCC, 2007 Fourth Assessment Report, as cited by <http://un-redd.org/AboutREDD>
- [6] Hein, Meijer & Rodríguez de Francisco: "What is the Potential for a Climate, Forest and Community Friendly REDD+ in Paris?", Briefing paper 3/2015, German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), [https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/BP\\_3.2015.pdf](https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/BP_3.2015.pdf) (accessed 2 Nov 15)

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of 'forest' is a controversial issue in international environmental negotiations. In particular, the definition of the UN-FCCC is raising concerns because it allows also plantations and 'temporarily unstocked areas' to qualify as forests. For this reason, the term 'natural forests' instead of 'forests' is used in the REDD+ framework where it refers to biodiversity safeguards: "The following safeguards should be promoted and supported: [...] That actions are consistent with the conservation of natural forests and biological diversity, ensuring that the actions [...] are not used for the conversion of natural forests [...]" (Decision 1/CP.16, see: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf>).