

POLICY BRIEF

Building on synergies:
Harnessing community and smallholder
forestry for Sustainable Development Goals

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- Forests under pressure-Local responses to global issues. IUFRO World Series volume 32, 2014.
<http://www.iufro.org/science/special/wfse/forests-pressure-local-responses/>
- Special Issue: Incentives and constraints of community and smallholder forestry. Forests 7(9) 2016.
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Main messages

Community and smallholder forestry has contributed and can further contribute to the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Experiences in community and smallholder forestry across a broad array of contexts offer important lessons for progressing towards the SDGs.

Common constraints undermine community and smallholder forestry around the world including lack of fundamental rights (tenure), bureaucratic hurdles, unfavorable commercial arrangements and illegality. All these constraints are considered in specific SDGs as issues that need to be addressed. The success of community and smallholder forestry depends on meaningful progress in these SDGs.

Harnessing the potential of community and smallholder forestry to progress on the SDGs necessitates the development of a supportive institutional setting, unlocking economic opportunities, the realization of education and capacity building programs and a more systematic monitoring of outcomes.

Active collaboration and involvement of an array of stakeholders, including governmental organizations, NGOs, community based organizations and the private sector is necessary to support community and smallholder forestry and their contribution to the SDGs.

Efforts to attain the SDGs can lead to synergies among the goals, but can also lead to trade-offs that can undermine livelihood or conservation goals that can be achieved through community and smallholder forestry.

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the associated 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) present a novel approach to sustainable development. They propose coherent action and foster active engagement of all groups in society, and all countries. The successful implementation of such a holistic agenda requires innovative approaches, policies and instruments that overcome the limitations of more narrow sectoral perspectives. In the vast rural regions possessing natural and planted forests, community and smallholder forestry present opportunities to implement the SDGs and progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The role of forests and trees outside forests is recognized in the Agenda 2030. It is further emphasized by the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forest and its six Global Forest Goals. The Agenda 2030 explicitly mentions forests only in SDG 15 life on land and SDG 6 clean water and sanitation. This policy brief will show that forest management, protection and sustainable use involving millions of people who live in or near forests is essential to progress in at least six other SDGs as well.

Forests cover almost 4 billion ha, or about one third of the world's total land area (FAO 2016). They provide ecosystem services crucial for the welfare of people living in or near forests, and also for people living downstream from forests, and even in regions distant from forests. Forests – and trees outside forests – supply timber, non-timber forest products, fuelwood, medicines, food, and clean water. They sequester and store vast amounts of

carbon, influence rainfall, reduce flooding, and prevent soil erosion. Forested landscapes are important for recreation and nature-tourism, for physical and mental well-being, as well as for spiritual and aesthetic pleasure. Forests host over 85% of the earth's terrestrial biodiversity (GEF 2010), which provides genetic materials, potential future crop varieties, and medicines. Forest-related activities also provide employment and income to millions of rural dwellers (FAO 2014).

All people across the globe benefit from the ecosystem services that forests provide. The long-term sustainable provision of these goods and services often depends on the communities and families living in or near forests. Almost a third of all forestland, an estimated 513 million ha of forests, is legally owned or managed by indigenous and local communities (RRI 2016), the majority in Latin America. Furthermore, an important proportion of publicly owned forests are used and managed by indigenous and local communities without formal government recognition, but held under customary, community-based tenure systems (RRI 2014).

The livelihoods of an estimated 1.3 billion people depend to some degree on forests (WB 2016) and 300–350 million people live within or in close proximity to forests and fully depend on them for daily subsistence. Significant to the SDGs, an inordinate proportion of these people have been found to live in poverty.

This policy brief explores how community and smallholder forestry contribute to achieving SDGs, but also how making progress in the SDGs can

strengthen community and smallholder forestry. Below, it analyzes the contributions of community and smallholder forestry to SDG 1 no poverty, SDG 2 zero hunger, SDG 6 clean water, SDG 7 clean sustainable energy, SDG 8 decent work and economic growth, SDG 13 climate action, SDG 15 sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and SDG 16 peace, justice and strong institutions. Then, it presents examples of synergies and trade-offs between different SDGs that emerge when promoting community and smallholder forestry. The second half of the policy brief identifies the SDGs that are most relevant for supporting community and smallholder forestry and fostering successful outcomes, followed by the most important conclusions.

Community and smallholder forestry

In this policy brief community and smallholder forestry is used as an overarching term to refer to a wide range of situations that involve local people in forest-related activities, including farmers practicing agroforestry, small scale forest owners and communities managing degraded forests, forest remnants or large areas of natural forests.

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Forests, communities and SDGs

Community and smallholder forestry contribute to reducing poverty, SDG 1, by providing income and generating employment. An extensive study across 24 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America found that among people living in or near forests, the average forest-derived income amounted to 22% of household income, including subsistence use. Forest incomes, however, varied considerably between locations, from 63% in a site in Bolivia to as low as 5% in a site in Indonesia. Wood fuels (fuel wood or firewood and charcoal) accounted for the largest proportion of income (35%), followed by food (30%). Wood used for construction and fiber products made up 25% of

forest income, including poles and sawn wood, and non-wood products like leaves, thatching grass, and bamboo (Angelsen et al. 2014).

The importance of forest food for rural households, like fish and bush meat, wild fruits, vegetables, and mushrooms (Angelsen et al. 2014), clearly illustrates that forests play an important role in food security targeted in SDG 2. Local forest management also benefits agricultural production by protecting soils and soil fertility, regulating water flow and climate, and by providing habitat for pollinators and organisms that contribute to biological control (Jamnadas and McMullin 2015).

BOX 1: Challenges for smallholder forestry in the Western Amazon

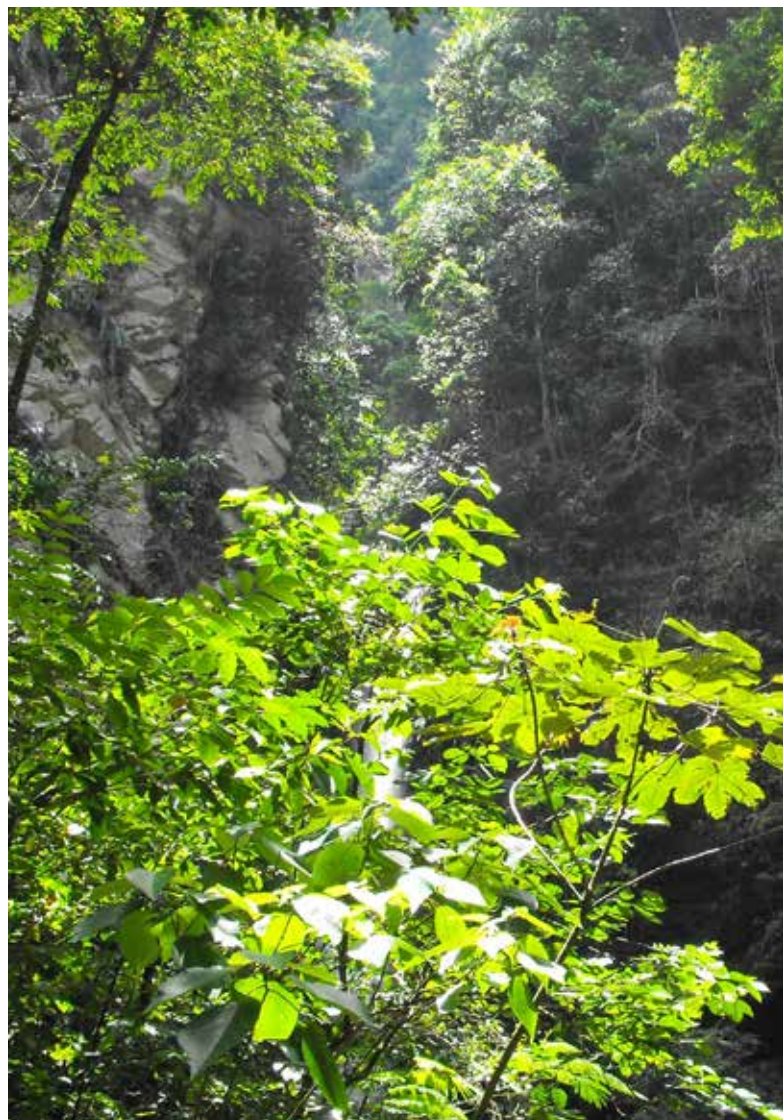
During the last two decades Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru have undertaken forest policy reforms aiming at clarifying forest rights, supporting the adoption of sustainable forest management and assuring legal timber supply. These reforms aligned with wider market liberalization and state democratization. However, the lack of incentives for smallholders to pursue sustainable forest management (SFM), along with restrictive forest regulations and ineffective enforcement, has tended to work against the goals of the forest reforms. Recognition of tenure rights is difficult to implement, legalization of timber extraction is costly and the economic rationale of small-scale timber extraction often prevents adoption of SFM. Nonetheless, in spite of regulatory and institutional constraints, communities and smallholders continue to make a significant contribution in meeting a growing demand for timber by engaging in dynamic market networks that combine legal and illegal sources of timber supply. Smallholders have found ways to navigate the new legal and institutional landscape but these reduce their capacity for capturing greater benefits in the timber markets, which may work against forest conservation in the long run, thereby undermining local commitment to SFM.

Source:

Pacheco, P., Mejía, E., Cano, W. and de Jong, W. 2016. Smallholder Forestry in the Western Amazon: Outcomes from Forest Reforms and Emerging Policy Perspectives. *Forests* 7(9): 193; doi:10.3390/f7090193.

The crucial role of wood fuel is a case in point. In much of sub-Saharan Africa more than 90% of the people rely on fuelwood and charcoal for cooking and heating (Angelsen et al. 2014). Wood-based energy is important in rural areas, but also among urban dwellers in many developing countries. While the use of biomass for energy is recognized as often being inefficient, and is often harvested in an unsustainable fashion, it is a renewable energy source, and thus has great potential to contribute to SDG 7 on clean, sustainable energy.

An additional advantage of fuelwood and charcoal is that its production and distribution generate income for tens of millions of households in rural areas. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, the wood fuel sector employs an estimated seven million people (WB 2016). Globally the forest sector generates an estimated 13.2 million formal jobs and an additional 41 million informal jobs (FAO 2014). Small and medium sized forest enterprises dominate the forest sector in developing countries. They amount to 80–90% of forestry enterprises and provide over half of forestry employment in many countries (Macqueen 2008), but largely operate in the informal economy (*See Box 1*). Timber and non-timber forest products based activities and entrepreneurship can thus provide employment in forested regions and have potential to support progress towards SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth.



Global water security depends on forests as about 75% of the world's accessible freshwater originates in forests (FAO 2017). Forests ensure the sustainable and regulated provision and purification of water. As a consequence, where local communities and smallholders manage large forested areas, they contribute to the achievement of SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation. Communities and smallholders also contribute to SDG 13 on climate action, because forests under their stewardship store significant amounts of carbon, and thus contribute to climate change mitigation. The forests that are either legally owned or customarily held by indigenous and local communities store 24% of the total aboveground carbon. While this is the case, at least one-tenth of the carbon that is stored in tropical forests under community management is held without formal recognition (RRI et al. 2016).

Forests held by communities and smallholders also contribute to SDG 15 on sustainable management of terrestrial resources and halting the loss of

biodiversity. Community forests overlap with the specific geographic areas where the vast majority (85%) of the global terrestrial biodiversity is found (GEF 2010).

In many forest regions of the world, customary or other locally devised rules, norms and decision-making procedures regulate access to and use of natural resources. Institutional strengthening and development, where required, can build on these local institutions and associated governance practices, as they are more likely to lead to accountable and inclusive institutions that will be embraced and adopted by forest communities. Communities living in or near forests and protected areas are strategically positioned to safeguard endangered species from illegal harvesting, poaching and other illicit activities. This potential can be harnessed to progress towards the attainment of SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

These illustrative examples show that in many locations community and smallholder forestry can contribute to achieving SDGs locally, but also at broader spatial scales. Water purification and regulation are essential for the well-being of people living in nearby cities. Carbon storage and sequestration contribute globally to climate change mitigation. Biodiversity conservation is for the benefit of the global community at large, for present and future generations. Therefore, local actions can directly and indirectly affect the extent and condition of forests and how they contribute to human and economic wellbeing, locally, regionally and globally, spanning both geographic and temporal scales.

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Synergies and trade-offs

The SDGs are closely interlinked and efforts to pursue them will inevitably lead to trade-offs in some cases, and potential synergies in others. In other words, when community and smallholder forestry successfully contributes to objectives associated with some SDGs, they may limit or hinder the achievement of others. For example, initiatives that pursue poverty alleviation (SDG 1) through forest-based activities often focus on timber production, while sustaining forest cover. However, these efforts to increase incomes may influence natural forest ecosystems, thereby conflicting with biodiversity conservation targets (SDG 15). Conversely, when forest protection is prioritized in the pursuit of biodiversity conservation, it can and often does restrict opportunities for local communities to bolster livelihoods through forest-related activities.

The effects of pursuing some SDGs on community and smallholder forestry may depend on the context, i.e. the socioeconomic and ecological conditions and the development trajectories followed. For instance, industrial and infrastructure development (SDG 9) can potentially have positive or negative impacts on forests and forest-related income generation. As an example, expanding road networks are recognized as one of the main drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, diminishing forest benefits to communities. On the other hand, roads can enhance market access, thereby boosting local benefits from the commercialization of forest products. Industrial and infrastructure development may also provide employment, improve access to credit and enhance the availability of public services.

Another example relates to the pursuit of food security (SDG 2), which may lead to the conversion of productive land under forests, including community forests, into agricultural production. In a similar fashion, the production of biomass for energy purposes (SDG 7) may reduce land available for food production and/or for community forestry activities. Successful integration of different land uses that balance the above mentioned trade-offs, has led to the development of multifunctional landscapes where community and smallholder forestry coexists with other land uses. These multifunctional landscapes and the community and smallholder forests therein contribute to sustainable use and management of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15), while synergistically supporting sustainable management of watersheds and the availability of water (SDG 6).

Progress in attaining the SDGs through local forest management often requires an inter-sectoral approach involving other sectors, such as agriculture, energy and water in conjunction with the sustainable use and management of forest resources.

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SDGs for creating an enabling environment for local forest management

The accumulated experiences from community and smallholder forestry amassed over many decades offer invaluable lessons for furthering progress towards the SDGs, while supporting local forest-based development. The success of community and smallholder forestry is largely dependent on a number of conditions, which interact in complex ways. They can be grouped into four broad categories:

1. **Policies, institutions and governance**, including land tenure and rights to forests and trees, regulatory framework and public administration, representation, participation and stakeholder cooperation, mechanisms for decision making, issues of power, enforcement of laws and regulations, and reconciliation of cross-sectoral policies and issues
2. **Empowerment, capacities and culture**, including education, technical, managerial and leadership capacities, issues related to security and conflict, gender issues and culture
3. **Economic opportunities and access to markets**, including livelihoods, commercial opportunities, linkages to markets and value chains and access to capital
4. **Extent and condition of natural resources**, including the extent of forest area, forest condition, forest health, age and species structure

The experiences from community and smallholder forestry also reveal common constraints and barriers associated with the conditions included in these four broad categories that often limit the success of community and smallholder forestry and its potential contributions towards the SDGs. Significantly, many of the SDGs and associated targets specifically address these constraints. As a consequence, progress on these SDGs would help reduce or eliminate a number of these constraints and barriers and support community and smallholder forestry.

Policies, institutions and governance

The interplay among policies, laws, regulations, bureaucracies and administration as well as mechanisms of decision making, largely define the prospects for local forestry activities and their eventual success. Collectively, however, they often result in an institutional environment that is poorly adapted to the realities and needs of local forest managers. Development towards a just, equitable and fair institutional setting that addresses the issues alluded to above is an important element in several of the SDGs and associated targets. Of particular relevance, SDG 16 focuses on the development of more effective, inclusive and transparent institutions, by ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (target 16.7), promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice (target 16.3), reducing corruption (target 16.5) and providing legal identity for all (target 16.9).



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Legal ownership of land and forests is a fundamental condition for communities to benefit economically from forests, crucial for garnering support for the sustainable use of natural resources. Equal rights to land and resources are also critical for enabling women and marginalized groups to participate effectively in forest and tree-based activities and benefit from them in a fair and equitable fashion. SDGs 1, 2 and 5 include targets on ownership and secure rights over natural resources; target 1.4

emphasizes equal rights to economic resources, ownership and control over land and other forms of property and target 5a does the same specifically for women; target 2.3 promotes secure and equal access to land, and other productive resources.

Throughout the world, communities are often required to comply with cumbersome regulations drafted for large scale industrial operations which require capacities far beyond the abilities of community members and local government staff

(See Box 2). Simple bureaucratic procedures and locally appropriate standards and regulations are needed to accommodate varied local conditions, and to facilitate rather than restrict responsible stewardship. Concerted efforts to create bureaucracies that are supportive of local actors are of fundamental importance to community and smallholder forestry. When achieved, local actors often become effective allies in implementation of laws and policies and can play an important role in stemming illicit activities like illegal logging. To fully embrace this paradigm shift, governmental organizations often need to strengthen capacities to provide proper support to participatory,

representative and inclusive decision making. As was pointed out earlier, institutional development is more effective when it builds on local institutions and governance arrangements.

Alignment among different sectoral policies and policy implementation is crucial for supporting local forest-related development and reducing pressures leading to forest conversion. This requires understanding local livelihood strategies as well as local and landscape level land use dynamics. This issue is specifically addressed by Goal 17 which emphasizes the need for policy and institutional coherence.

Box 2: Prohibitive regulations restrict income generation for community forestry

A recent study in Cambodia, Nepal and Vietnam found that numerous, often prohibitive, regulations restrict forest communities from making a decent living from forests, specifically from the sale of timber and timber products, or developing commercial community forest enterprises. In all three countries, the regulations and the steps required for compliance, e.g. in developing and getting approval of the management plan, are complex. Complying with the regulations often require capacities beyond the abilities of community members and local government staff. The regulations are input-oriented, focusing on what and how something should be done. Efforts for harnessing community forestry to improve forest conditions, maintain ecological services and improve livelihoods should be facilitated by regulations that are simple and outcome-based. Norms and regulations should be practical, easy to understand, and straightforward to comply with. They should focus less on what is extracted from forests and where and how it is processed, transported and marketed, and more on the state of the forest after harvesting. Collaboration among key stakeholders is needed for developing forest monitoring that focuses on mutually agreed forest management outcomes. Capacity development and information databases that are accessible to communities for retrieving information regarding, e.g. timber prices and market structure, and increasing private sector investments and partnerships for building capacities and skills would further facilitate market access and support the development of commercial forest activities that benefit communities.

Source:

Gritten, D. et al 2015. *An Uneven Playing Field: Regulatory Barriers to Communities Making a Living from the Timber from Their Forests—Examples from Cambodia, Nepal and Vietnam*. *Forests*, 6(10), 3433-3451; doi:10.3390/f6103433.



Empowerment, capacities and culture

SDG 4 targets the advancement of primary education and technical and vocational skills, eliminate gender disparities in education and vocational training and empower women. Free, equitable primary and secondary education helps local people in their forest activities. It empowers local actors, particularly indigenous people and other vulnerable groups. Local forest users learn to understand laws, regulations and policies, which facilitates their participation in society and the exercise of their rights. Education and capacity building can also provide technical skills and knowledge on agroforestry, bioenergy, natural forest management, reduced-impact logging, forest monitoring and plantation forestry. It can also concentrate on skills and capacities associated with commercialization and integration into supply and value chains, markets for forest goods and services, managerial requirements such as finance and administration, enterprise development, and leadership (*see Box 2 and Box 4*). SDG 13 draws attention to raising capacities and awareness particularly on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

Local forest management is often rooted in local culture, knowledge and traditions, including long lasting customary rules. The recognition and respect for local culture and knowledge has been seen to favor outcomes that support progress towards the SDGs. However, the SDGs address these aspects only partly; target 2.5 focuses on promoting access to and fair and

equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, and target 4.7 on appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. Nevertheless, the fundamental importance of cultural concerns and local knowledge for sustainable development is widely acknowledged.



SDG 5 promotes gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. Girls and women have an important role in forestry activities, especially related to non-timber forest products, such as fuelwood, forest foods and medicines. Their empowerment contributes to sustainable forestry, as well as to equitable sustainable development. SDG 10 centers on reducing inequalities and empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all. Eliminating inequalities can be pursued by promoting access to and sustainable use of natural resources and harnessing forest resources for poverty alleviation and increasing economic and social equity. Promoting equal access to natural resources can reduce income inequalities within communities but also among economic actors within the larger landscapes. The pressures on forest resources resulting from people's mobility can be mitigated through planned and well-managed policies that support orderly and responsible migration.

Economic opportunities and access to markets

Communities and smallholders can enhance forest-derived incomes, if afforded the opportunity to participate in sustainable and profitable supply and value chains. This can be achieved by supporting micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (*See Box 3*). New markets for the large diversity of forest and tree based products and forest services, like watershed protection, carbon sequestration,



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and tourism offer the potential to increase forest incomes. SDGs 8 and 9 specifically promote productive activities, employment, entrepreneurship and innovation and encourage growth and formalization of small and medium sized enterprises. Target 8.3 calls for policies that support the creation of decent jobs, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encouraging the formalization and growth of

micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, with access to financial services. Target 9.3 furthermore calls for increasing access of small scale enterprises to affordable credit and their integration into supply chains and markets. For their part, target 2.3 focuses on increasing agricultural productivity through markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment, and target 1.4 on access to and financial services, including microfinance for all.

Partnerships between local forest managers, community enterprises and private sector companies can support local economies and livelihoods,

and boost regional and national economic growth. Goal 17 encourages and promotes effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, and recognizes the important role of private business activity, investment and innovation in driving job creation and economic growth.

Box 3: Small forest-based enterprises in The Gambia

In Africa, The Gambia has been a pioneer in developing community forestry as a mechanism for transferring forest ownership from the government to local communities and encouraging collaborative approaches in the form of participatory governance. Capacity building and strengthening institutions at the local level that enable local people to control their own resources and develop and run small forest enterprises has been a central component of the community forestry strategy. A study of 16 small forest enterprises focusing on different forest-based activities (firewood, branchwood, beekeeping, furniture and ecotourism) located in the Western region of The Gambia shows that the establishment of community forestry and the creation of an enabling environment, including capacity building and rational policies, can foster business success and ultimately generate positive outcomes, including a higher degree of empowerment, continued access to forest resources and generating additional sources of income. Despite these accomplishments, some of the studied enterprises faced serious obstacles that related to corruption, illegal activities, and the imposition of difficult requirements for updating community forestry management plans and limited access to financial services.

Source:

Tomaselli, M.F. and Kozak, R. et al. 2014. *Small forest-based enterprises in The Gambia: Opportunities and Challenges*. In: Katila, P., Galoway, G., de Jong, W. and Pacheco, P. (eds.) *Forests under Pressure – Local Responses to Global Issues*. IUFRO World Series Vol 23, p. 315-328.



Extent and condition of natural resources

The extent and condition of forest and tree resources define to a significant degree the scope and ecological basis for forest management and use, and the options for subsistence and commercial use of forests (*See Box 4*). SDG 15 comprehensively addresses the need for conservation, sustainable management of forest resources and restoration of degraded areas. Target 6.6 specifically calls for the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems including forests.

Reliable information on forest resources is of fundamental importance for planning and tracking sustainable forest management and use. Forest resources assessment and monitoring methods that are suitable for local conditions are needed to provide affordable and accessible information to local forest managers. Local forest stewards are well positioned to monitor forest use and condition as well as compliance with forest rules and regulations for curbing illegal activities. Harnessing this potential also requires development of capacities in monitoring (SDG 4).

Box 4: Increasing forest-based income in Mozambique

In Mozambique, forest-policy reform combined with financing, technical advice, training and exchange visits, and the support from the Forest Service in reducing illegal logging and exploitation of forest resources by outsiders have facilitated community engagement in forest management activities. Yet, local communities still face challenges to fully realize forest-based income e.g. due to conflicting perceptions and interpretations of customary and statutory regulations and complex and restricting policies concerning community participation in forest-related decision making. Forest-based income alone is seldom sufficient to support household needs; it is used to complement other income sources. More attention should be paid to promote forest growth, replanting, coppice management, and conservation for improving forest conditions to ensure sustainable availability of forest goods and services, and to increase forest-based incomes. In the face of increasing pressures on forests, developing alternative livelihood options to extractive forest activities could support local livelihoods and improve forest conditions.

Source:

Sitoe, A. and Guedes, B.S. 2015. *Community Forestry Incentives and Challenges in Mozambique*. *Forests* 6(12), 4558-4572; doi:10.3390/f6124388.



Conclusions

Community and smallholder forestry already make an important contribution to achieving the SDGs. This contribution can be further increased through the implementation of the SDGs that support the creation of an enabling environment for local forest-related development. The success of community and smallholder forestry depends on meaningful progress in a number of SDGs and associated targets, which relate to the development of a supportive institutional setting, economic opportunities, education and capacity building. Advancing towards these goals can generate positive feedback loops that will support community and smallholder forestry and further boost progress towards the SDGs. Active collaboration and involvement of an array of stakeholders, including governmental organizations, NGOs, community based organizations and the private sector is necessary for harnessing the opportunities created by the close alignment among many of the SDGs and the conditions that support community and smallholder forestry.

Community and smallholder forestry and its close alignment with the SDGs provides an illustrative example of the linkages among different goals, and how in different contexts, complex interactions between resource use and the SDGs may lead to opportunities for synergies, complementarities and positive feedback loops, in conjunction with unavoidable trade-offs.

The case of community and smallholder forestry and SDGs emphasizes the relevance and importance of communities and rural dwellers that live in or near forests, in achieving the Agenda 2030. They have an important influence on the permanence and condition of forests and forest landscapes. This influence will to a large extent define the goods and services that forest provide, to the communities themselves and to the global community at large. The contribution of forests to achieving the Agenda 2030 can only happen in close partnership with forest communities and smallholders.

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