

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Thematic review of SDG 15, 13 July 2018 from 10:00 to 13:00
Conference Room 4 at UN Headquarters

Intervention by Ms. Martha Rojas Urrego
Secretary General Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

How can we change the narrative of how we approach SDG 15 to capture a more holistic accounting of the value of nature and its ecosystems, and what role can Governments play?

Which are the most critical interlinkages with other goals and targets in terms of co-benefits or trade-offs? How can they be leveraged towards progress?

In looking at how to change the narrative and make critical interlinkages across SDGs to better account the value of nature, I will focus in a particular ecosystem = wetlands. Wetlands include freshwater ecosystems such as lakes, rivers, swamps, and marshes and also marine and coastal water related ecosystems such as mangroves, tidal flats and coral reefs.

- 1) why wetlands are important for SDG15,
- 2) challenges and opportunities regarding their connection/interlinkages with other SDGs with suggested key recommendations to achieve the biodiversity and SDG ambitions.

1) Wetlands and SDG 15

SDG 15 refers explicitly to terrestrial ecosystems, forests, desertification and biodiversity, but it encompasses all types of land-based ecosystems and biodiversity.

If we look at Target 15.1., it lists more specifically the types of ecosystems that need special attention.

Target 15.1.¹ refers explicitly to terrestrial and “**inland freshwater ecosystems** and their services”, and specifies “forests”, mountains, drylands AND “**wetlands**”. However, inland water ecosystems and more broadly wetlands are not featured prominently in discussions on SDG15. Wetlands are actually addressed as “water related ecosystems” in SDG 6 on water and in “marine and coastal ecosystems” in SDG14. This is thus a key connection that needs to be made with SDG 15, especially as wetlands are key to achieve the biodiversity ambition.

- Wetlands are very rich in biodiversity: 40% of all the world’s species live and breed in wetlands.
- Wetlands are one of the most productive ecosystems; range of all ecosystem services provided by wetlands are higher than those of other ecosystems (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for Water and Wetlands, 2013): include water quantity and quality, livelihoods food security, most efficient natural carbon store.

¹ [Target 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.]

- Despite these critical roles and other contributions of SDGs, wetlands are the most threatened ecosystem. WETIndex: 40% of wetlands have been lost over the last 40 years, 76 % species are threatened. 81% of populations of freshwater species have declined globally, decline sharper than any other terrestrial or marine biome

2) Challenges and opportunities regarding their connection/interlinkages with other SDGs with suggested key recommendations to achieve the biodiversity and SDG ambitions.

1. **Urgency** to conserve and sustainably use **wetlands as part of efforts to achieve SDG15**. Need to link and connect across biodiversity related SDGs. Cross reference and common story line in SDG15 with SDG 6 and 14 in which these important ecosystems are being considered. (Target 15.1.).

Of the 47 Countries reporting their voluntary national reviews in 2018 at least 10 make reference under Goal 6 and 13 under SDG 15 to actions on wetland conservation including Ramsar Sites, wetlands and water-resources protection, ground-water management, and river-basin management.

2. Need **integrated approaches**, integrate biodiversity in strategies and programs to implement SDGs. Wetlands provide an important opportunity to change the narrative, in particular by:

- a. **Linking biodiversity with water**. There cannot be Sustainable Development without water, and wetlands are essential to ensure availability and quality of water, as sources of water, in their role regulating water flows and buffering disasters, and as by their role in purifying water as the kidneys of the Earth. Need integrated approaches such as river-basin and IWRM and integrate them in efforts to achieve SDGs6.
- b. **Linking to climate change**: wetlands are the most effective nature carbon store, 30% carbon. Peatlands. Integration in NDCs.

⇒ **Most important level of integration at national level**, focal points for MEAs, statistical divisions, SDG focal points.

3. Use and **scale up existing mechanisms** for conservation and wise use of wetlands especially MEAs, beyond the Rio Conventions. Biodiversity-related conventions such as Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 170 CPs, most of them here today, platform for local to global action, from designation of wetlands of international importance to wise use of all wetlands.

- **Biodiversity monitoring and assessment**: Goal 6, Indicator 6.6.1 on extent of water related ecosystems (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and UNEP co-custodians) and SDG 15. Under Indicator 6.6.1 support at national level for inventories and national reporting (validated data of Ramsar National Reports). Global Wetland Outlook and other IPBES and MEAs assessments.
- **Conservation and sustainable use of sites of international importance: Ramsar Sites, World Heritage Sites**. Ramsar Contracting Parties are designating Ramsar Sites to achieve Aichi Biodiversity Target 11. “By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved”.

4. Increase **funding to support biodiversity goals** looking for investments that **achieve multiple benefits and engage different partners and stakeholders**: achieve various SDGs, including biodiversity, water, food security, carbon storage. **Wetlands are a cost effective and sustainable solution** = Where greatest impact can be achieved.

To close:

- Importance of conservation and sustainable use of **wetlands to achieve SDG15**, and need to cross reference with SDGs that consider these ecosystems (SDG6 and 14). The 2020 review of indicators could be an opportunity to reinforce these links.
- Need for **integration across SDGs** and cost effectiveness in investments where greatest impact can be achieved. Break out silos, using linkage with water in narrative on importance of wetlands for SDG 6 and more broadly people's livelihoods, prosperity and wellbeing.