



**15** LIFE  
ON LAND



## LIFE ON LAND: WHY IT MATTERS

### What's the goal here?

To sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.

### Why?

Forests cover nearly 31 per cent of our planet's land area. From the air we breathe, to the water we drink, to the food we eat—forests sustain us.

Forests are home to more than 80 per cent of all

terrestrial species of animals, plants and insects. However, biodiversity is declining faster than at any other time in human history.

Globally, one fifth of the Earth's land area (more than 2 billion hectares) are degraded, an area nearly the size of India and the Russian Federation combined. Land degradation is undermining the well-being of some 3.2 billion people, driving species to extinction and intensifying climate change.

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Biodiversity and the ecosystem services it underpins can also be the basis for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies as they can deliver benefits that will increase the resilience of people to the impacts of climate change.

## What does loss of forests mean?

Lost forests mean the disappearance of livelihoods in rural communities, increased carbon emissions, diminished biodiversity and the degradation of land. While forest loss remains high, 2020 data show that the proportion of forests in protected areas and under long-term management plans increased or remained stable at the global level and in most regions of the world.

An irreversible effect of human activity on the environment is species extinction, which upsets the balance of nature and makes ecosystems more fragile and less resistant to disruptions. A recent UN report on biodiversity found that around 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with

extinction, many within decades, more than ever before in human history.

## How does it affect our health?

Increased demand for animal protein, a rise in intense and unsustainable farming, the increased use and exploitation of wildlife, and the climate crisis are all driving the increased emergence of zoonotic diseases – diseases transmitted from wildlife to people – like COVID-19.

Every year, some two million people, mostly in low- and middle-income countries, die from neglected zoonotic diseases. The same outbreaks can cause severe illness, deaths, and productivity losses among livestock populations in the developing world, a major problem that keeps hundreds of millions of small-scale farmers in severe poverty. In the last two decades alone, zoonotic diseases have caused economic losses of more than \$100 billion, not including the

cost of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is expected to reach \$9 trillion over the next few years.

## What can we do?

Some things we can do to help include recycling, eating a locally-based diet that is sustainably sourced, and consuming only what we need. We must be respectful toward wildlife and only take part in ecotourism opportunities that are responsibly and ethically run in order to prevent wildlife disturbance. Well-managed protected areas support healthy ecosystems, which in turn keep people healthy. It is therefore critical to secure the involvement of the local communities in the development and management of these protected areas.

To find out more about Goal #15 and the other Sustainable Development Goals, visit:

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment>



**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**