

## CHALLENGES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 15

- » The contribution of indigenous peoples with their knowledge and their diverse approaches and strategies of locally adapted models of life, economy and development are of great importance for the conservation of ecosystems with their biological diversity. This contribution is inseparable from the protection of their rights.
- » A sustainable implementation of SDG 15 should follow a holistic approach to ecosystems, which also includes the people who use them sustainably and focuses on their experiences in dealing with changes in ecosystems.
- » Biodiversity and its conservation should not be reduced to monetary valuation and ecosystem services, but non-monetary and intangible assets as well as non-economic incentives such as the appropriate recognition of indigenous territories should be given greater consideration.
- » The implementation of sub-target 15.1 must pay particular attention to the rights of indigenous peoples to their land and to the use of natural resources, as well as to consultation and participation in measures for the conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems. This can prevent their ancestral and traditionally used territories from being declared as 'abandoned' or 'unused' and, for example, used for FLR measures against their rights and interests. Their rights in this respect are, among others, anchored in Article 15.1 of ILO Convention 169.

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Front page: Parque de la Papa, Indigenous Bio-cultural Area, Provinz Písaq-Cusco, Peru, ©Sabine Schielmann  
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Pelargonium Sidoides (ACB Researcher, Cover Photo: Mariam Mayet (2010), *The Pelargonium Patent Hearing. A Briefing Paper by the African Centre for Biodiversity*. © The African Centre for Biosafety 2010)

Für den Inhalt dieser Publikation ist allein das Institut für Ökologie und Aktions-Ethnologie verantwortlich; die hier dargestellten Positionen geben nicht den Standpunkt von Engagement Global gGmbH und dem Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit sowie den weiteren Förderinstitutionen wieder.

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Joint steps towards Sustainable Development: : Indigenous communities as partners in forest, climate and land protection

# SDG 15

„Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss“



## Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2015, the international community adopted „The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development“, comprising 17 global *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) which unite the three dimensions of sustainable development – the economic, social and environmental. All countries are called upon to implement these goals. Human beings are at the core of sustainable development processes and their implementation.<sup>1</sup>

Indigenous peoples - with about 370 million people worldwide who identify themselves as such – are important partners in the realization of sustainable development because of their knowledge, traditional practices, technologies, strategies and innovations. They make valuable contributions to the sustainable use of natural resources, to the protection of biodiversity, forests and climate and therefore to the fulfillment of the SDGs.

In order to be able to make these contributions, indigenous peoples' rights have to be guaranteed, in particular as they pertain to land, resources and self-determined development. As a precondition for the self-determined improvement of the living conditions of indigenous peoples and other disadvantaged population groups, the implementation of Agenda 2030 must follow a human rights based approach – also in and by Germany.

### With the present series of fact sheets INFOE would like to

- make indigenous peoples' contributions to sustainable development more visible and understandable
- promote the recognition of indigenous rights in the implementation of the SDGs
- promote a human rights based approach to the implementation of the SDGs by Germany

## SDG 15 Protecting life on land ...

Plants and their products represent 80% of the human diet, recreation and medicine worldwide. Forests cover about 30 percent of the Earth's surface, provide habitats for millions of species and are sources of clean air and clean drinking water. The destruction of ecosystems therefore threatens not only the habitat of plants and animals but also human beings.<sup>2</sup>

SDG 15 aims to protect and restore ecosystems on land (forests, marshes, deserts and mountains) by 2020, as intact ecosystems form the indispensable foundation of human existence and sustainable development.<sup>3</sup> In addition, intact ecosystems with their natural biodiversity protect against environmental disasters, such as flooding and landslides, and are more adaptable to climate change.



### ... through the protection of land ecosystems, their restoration and sustainable use, ...

The protection and sustainable use of ecosystems and their biodiversity are the main objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which is an important basis for the implementation of SDG 15, particularly at the international level. The Convention is the only instrument under international law to choose a holistic ecosystem approach for preserving biodiversity and sustainable use. A key principle of the ecosystem approach is the clear consideration of the social dimension of the management and protection of land, water and natural resources. This recognizes that people and their cultural diversity can be an integral part of ecosystems and their sustainable management. Thus, the ecosystem approach

is a central strategy for sustainable development which takes into account both cultural and biological diversity as well as their direct linkage.

Indigenous peoples because of their ways of life are dependent on the intactness of the ecosystems in and with which they live. Therefore, SDG 15 and its sub-targets are of fundamental relevance to them. On the other hand, the traditional forms, technologies and practices of ecosystem management of

indigenous peoples, their agricultural production and food systems, traditional medicine and the sustainable use of traditional medicinal plants and diverse cultivated plant and crop varieties are essential elements of the ecosystem approach. They are exemplary models for a good practical implementation of the ecosystem approach and should be recognized as such.<sup>4</sup>

Of particular importance for indigenous peoples are forest ecosystems, since the life of 60 to 150 million indigenous people is directly dependent on forests.<sup>5</sup> The conservation, restoration and sustainable use of forest ecosystems are a key focus within SDG 15. Germany is one of the countries that are particularly committed to the restoration of forest landscapes (Forest and Landscape Restoration/FLR). FLR is a new approach that

tries to involve all stakeholders of the affected land use sectors in the context of participatory decision-making processes. FLR is an active process to identify, negotiate and implement practices that seek to balance the environmental, social and economic benefits of forests within an expanded view of land use. FLR focuses on 'unproductive' or abandoned cultivated land, deforested land and steppes, so-called 'degraded land'.



Existing indigenous knowledge of land use systems forms the basis for the regional development concept of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in Central Nepal. Small and decentralized projects that are based on the use of renewable resources are being developed there in close cooperation with the indigenous inhabitants to improve their living conditions and protect the ecological sensitive high mountain area.<sup>7</sup>

### ... the conservation of biological diversity ...

The global loss of biodiversity is a central threat to human health and food security as well as to achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals. It is estimated that 130 species become extinct each day. At the same time, the loss of habitat is now one of the most important threats caused by serious environmental changes

### SDG 15.5

*„Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species“*

and human interventions, such as climate warming, pollution of habitats, over-fertilization, overfishing, hunting and resource exploitation.<sup>8</sup> In Germany, approximately 29% of the 32,000 native species of animals, plants and fungi are endangered, 5.6% even extinct.<sup>9</sup>

### ... the conservation of biological diversity ...

Many of the areas and ancestral territories of indigenous peoples are among the regions with the highest biological and genetic diversity worldwide. With their rich cultural heritage, comprising extensive knowledge and diverse forms of traditional practices of locally adapted economies, they contribute significantly to the protection and preservation of these areas. The traditional agricultural and resource use practices and indigenous peoples' forms of ecosystem management as well as their comprehensive knowledge about the properties, effects and utilization of numerous plants and animals, constitute an important contribution to the preservation of the variety of seeds, crops and animals.

Therefore, the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples should be recognized and integrated on an equal footing with other knowledge systems as the basis for innovations and solutions of global crises. The contributions of indigenous peoples to the preservation of biological diversity and the diversity of cultivations and crops, to preserving ecosystems and thus to achieving sustainable development are of great importance for the whole of mankind and should be respected, taken into account and promoted.

However, examples of the exploitation of indigenous knowledge and genetic material in their territories for commercial and other interests by the pharmaceutical industry, seed companies, botanical, zoological and microbiological research institutes, genetic engineering companies are numerous.

The German company Schwabe, for example, patented a geranium species (*Pelargonium Sidoides*), cultivated by indigenous people in South Africa, for exclusive rights of use without compensating local communities.<sup>11</sup>



A certain degree of protection against exploitation and recognition of indigenous knowledge and practices is provided by Article 8 (j) of the CBD, which explicitly calls for the preservation of the knowledge and abilities of indigenous communities and their approval and participation in the use of knowledge and resources.

### Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity

*„Subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices;“*



<sup>1</sup> UN GA: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development A/RES/70/1

<sup>2</sup> World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) (2016), Living Planet Report 2016, S.16.

<sup>3</sup> Die Bundesregierung (2016): Deutsche Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie 2016, S.196.

<sup>4</sup> IIPMG - Indigenous Peoples Major Group (2015), Policy Brief on Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Development Agenda: A Working Draft, S. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Sophie Chao (2012) FOREST PEOPLES: Numbers across the world. Forest Peoples Programme – FPP, S.3.

<sup>6</sup> FAO (2015), Unasylva 66/3, S. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Bhujju, U.R. et al (2007). Nepal Biodiversity Resource Book. Protected Areas, Ramsar Sites, and World Heritage Sites. International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology, in cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dgvm.de/themenschwerpunkte/biodiversitaet/>

<sup>9</sup> World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) (2016), Living Planet Report 2016, S.12

<sup>10</sup> Forest Peoples Programme, the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2016) Local Biodiversity Outlooks. Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' Contributions to the Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. A complement to the fourth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook. Moreton-in-Marsh, England.

<sup>11</sup> Mariam Mayet (2010), The Pelargonium Patent Hearing. A Briefing Paper by the African Centre for Biodiversity. The African Centre for Biosafety 2010