How business leadership can advance Goal 15 on Life on Land

Terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems are under immense pressure as challenges including biodiversity loss, land degradation and illicit wildlife trade mount. Many biodiversity hotspots, including biodiverse savannahs, grasslands, and tropical rainforests, are under heightened threat from activities linked to global supply chains. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment states that biodiversity is the foundation on which human lives depend. Biodiverse ecosystems not only provide essential goods including food, water, fibre, and medicines, but also irreplaceable services such as the regulation of disease and the purification of air and water.

Business should, at a minimum, respect applicable environmental laws governing pollution, land-use, and life on land. Responsible business practice also adopts and integrates international standards that have been developed to support the core principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Nagoya Protocol. Crucially, these international standards recognize that natural resources are not infinite, and that genetic resources should be shared equitably.

There is significant scope for business leadership on Goal 15. Leadership involves understanding and valuing natural ecosystems, ensuring that activities across internal operations and the value chain contribute to protecting ecosystems, and innovating and providing finance for preservation and enhancement of ecosystems. To achieve this, they can adopt the highest environmental standards and implement procedures to protect natural ecosystems that are affected by business and supply chain activities, including land remediation and rehabilitation, and habitat protection and restoration. They are encouraged to do so through multi-stakeholder partnerships and standards where they can. As drivers of innovation, companies can commit to research, development and deployment of new technologies to help decouple economic activity from the degradation of natural ecosystems. Businesses can lead by galvanizing finance to create awareness, protect, and further develop natural ecosystems. Furthermore, current economic structures tend to undervalue natural ecosystems leading to the disproportionate conversion of these systems for agricultural or urban development uses. Businesses can play a key role in developing and adopting natural capital accounting protocol to correct for this.

Healthy natural ecosystems are foundational to many business activities and caring for them can deliver huge benefits to companies. Natural ecosystems that provide critical services to business and the business environment include food provision, water purification, hazard protection and nitrogen regulation. Forests and other highly biodiverse and carbon rich ecosystems have an irreplaceable role in air purification and carbon sequestration, which improves health outcomes for workers and boosts economic productivity. Forests also play a fundamental role in regulating the water systems on which businesses and employees rely. Natural ecosystems host a large amount of genetic and energy-related resources which have long-term medicinal, scientific and agricultural uses.

Since natural biomes are highly interlinked, action on Goal 15, such as the preservation of forests, can strongly contribute to Goal 13 on climate action and to Goal 14 on life below water. It can also directly contribute to ensuring that there is responsible consumption and production (Goal 12). Furthermore, action on Goal 15 can help reduce poverty and inequality (Goals 1 and 10). The rural poor rely on natural ecosystems for their daily needs. When the services provided from ecosystems are disrupted, the disadvantaged lack the means to replace them. With proper management, thriving ecosystems offers a path out of poverty. Preserving natural ecosystems also supports the natural mechanisms of disease control and the genetic resources that are critical for the discovery of new medicines; which can help advance Goal 3 on good health and well-being.
## Targets of Goal 15

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>Ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>Promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forest, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and increase afforestation and reforestation globally</td>
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<td>15.3</td>
<td>Combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world</td>
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<td>15.4</td>
<td>Ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity</td>
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<td>15.5</td>
<td>Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed</td>
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<td>15.7</td>
<td>Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products</td>
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<td>15.8</td>
<td>Introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems</td>
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<td>15.9</td>
<td>Integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts</td>
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## Business Actions

1. **Implement policies and practices to protect natural ecosystems that are affected by business and supply chain activities**

2. **Research, develop, and deploy products, services, and business models to help decouple economic activity from the degradation of natural ecosystems**

3. **Galvanize finance to create awareness, protect, and further develop natural ecosystems**

4. **Design and implement solutions to accurately value and respect natural capital, and drive wider adoption of these solutions**
### Do your actions satisfy the Leadership Qualities?

#### Intentional
- Is your company committed to supporting the achievement of Goal 15? Have you developed a holistic strategy that reflects this commitment, covering end-to-end operations and the wider community?
- Are you committed to learn from your actions and do you have processes in place to improve them accordingly?
- Is your strategy supported by the highest levels of management, including the Board of Directors?

#### Ambitious
- Do your actions achieve long-term outcomes that greatly exceed those resulting from current industry practice?
- Are your actions aligned with what is needed to achieve Goal 15?

#### Consistent
- Is support for Goal 15 embedded across all organizational functions?
- Are staff and board incentives aligned with achieving Goal 15?

#### Collaborative
- Do you proactively look for opportunities to partner with Governments, UN agencies, suppliers, civil society organizations, industry peers and other stakeholders to inform how to advance Goal 15?

#### Accountable
- Do you publicly express your commitment to advance Goal 15?
- Do you identify, monitor, and report on impacts, including potentially adverse impacts?
- Do you mitigate risks associated with your action?
- Do you remediate negative impacts associated with this action?
- Do you engage stakeholders in a meaningful way?

### Guiding Questions

**Key Considerations for Goal 15**

Intentionality is a key aspect of protecting life on land. A commitment in corporate strategy and top-level leadership can motivate employees, and can be used to communicate the strategic objective to suppliers to ensure respect and support for biodiversity in the wider supply chain.

Ambitious action to protect life on land requires minimizing and ultimately negating a company’s impact on natural ecosystems. It involves innovation across business activities and the value chain to decouple economic activity from the degradation of natural capital.

Consistency requires the company to have incentive structures that promote the protection of natural capital across all business functions. A natural capital accounting protocol which values ecosystem degradation and is reflected on financial accounts is a system that encourages consistent behaviour.

Collaboration to protect natural ecosystems requires working with members of the supply chain to build capacity and ensure that they can also undertake measures to protect life on land. It requires working closely with government authorities and scientific bodies to understand key conservation priorities.

Accountability is critical to the protection of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems. Business actions to protect these ecosystems should be measurable and verifiable. The impact of business activities on ecosystems should be continually monitored and accounted for, with meaningful engagement with impacted communities to minimize risks of negative impact.
How taking action on Goal 15 is interconnected with other Goals

The Global Goals are inherently interconnected. Action taken toward one Goal can support or hinder the achievement of others. Identifying and addressing these interconnections will help business to build holistic and systemic solutions that amplify progress and minimize negative impacts. To help build a greater understanding, we have illustrated some of the ways in which the Goals connect. These are not exhaustive, and we encourage business to consider how they apply in their own operations.

Maximise likelihood of positive impact on:

Protecting terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems contributes directly to climate action (Goal 13) by preserving natural carbon sinks and helping ensure responsible consumption and production (Goal 12). Since many communities, especially rural communities, rely on natural ecosystems for their livelihoods, action to protect these ecosystems also helps reduce poverty and inequalities (Goals 1 and 10). A close link between life on land and life below water means that Goal 14 also benefits from action to preserve life on land. Preserving natural ecosystems facilitates provision of the natural mechanisms of disease control and the genetic resources that are critical for the discovery of new medicines; this can help advance Goal 3 on good health and well-being.

Minimise risk of negative impact on:

There may be trade-offs in the short term between protecting terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems, and pursuing economic growth or infrastructure development. For example, current accounting methods may show that it is more valuable to transform a forested area into an apartment block. However, this trade-off may disappear if ecosystem services are valued appropriately.
BUSINESS ACTION 1
Implement policies and practices to protect natural ecosystems that are affected by business and supply chain activities

Companies have a responsibility to abide by national environmental standards and international treaties. Leading companies go beyond this and set new benchmarks on pursuing growth without damaging natural ecosystems. They are encouraged to do so through multi-stakeholder partnerships and standards. Leading companies implement procedures to protect natural ecosystems across multiple tiers of their supply chains. This can include supplier selection and working with strategic suppliers to help build their capacity to adhere to, and exceed, environmental standards.

Example practice

- A British retailer ensures that all of its products comply with the standards set by the Responsible Fishing Scheme and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC); it takes additional measures to ensure supply chain traceability and adhere to robust sustainability standards.

- A cosmetics company takes robust action to source its raw material from sustainable sources to ensure that its business does not contribute to deforestation; it has time-bound targets with the aim of being deforestation-free by 2020.

- An outdoor apparel and equipment manufacturer audits the materials and methods it uses to make products, taking responsibility for the entire lifecycle of products. It examines how it uses resources at buildings and facilities to ensure that natural ecosystems are not directly or indirectly harmed by activities.

- A large media company measures its indirect impact on forest ecosystems by monitoring its consumption of paper-based products; it enacts a ‘no deforestation policy’ and only sources paper products that comply with FSC standards or are recycled. It encourages and helps other paper suppliers to follow similarly high standards.

- A food producer in Brazil investigates its supply chain to ensure that its operations do not illegally encroach upon natural ecosystems and communities; it takes steps to ensure that the physical presence of business operations does not undermine the health of terrestrial ecosystems and supports afforestation efforts.

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

Accountability: valuable ecosystems often underpin livelihoods for vulnerable groups, such as indigenous people and the rural poor. When taking action to protect these ecosystems, social safeguards should be in place and any risk of negative impacts managed. This includes meaningful engagement with potentially affected populations to understand how action can respect and support their human rights.

Interconnectedness: healthy natural ecosystems are closely interlinked with, and contribute to, climate action (Goal 13) and life below water (Goal 14). As they underpin livelihoods, they also contribute to reducing poverty (Goal 1), hunger (Goal 2) and health and well-being (Goal 3).
BUSINESS ACTION 2
Research, develop, and deploy products, services, and business models to help decouple economic activity from the degradation of natural ecosystems

Companies can lead on Goal 15 by undertaking and supporting research, development, and deployment activities with an aim to introduce viable technologies that help decouple economic activity from environmental degradation. This can comprise new products and processes to minimise the impact of economic activity on natural ecosystems and protect and enhance the capacity of natural ecosystems. These innovations can have applications throughout the value chain, including in processes to extract and produce basic materials, through to consumption of products and services.

Example practice

- A company develops fully biodegradable products and packaging, and promotes industry-wide adoption
- A biotechnology firm conducts research to develop compounds that can sustainably replace palm oil to tackle deforestation
- A company develops high-yield seed varieties and crop rotation programs to ensure that soil remains productive and fertile
- A technology company develops an app for small-holder farmers that connects them to suppliers where they can access the tools and knowledge necessary to farm sustainably

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

Ambition: ambitious action involves making a significant contribution to minimizing and ultimately negating the degradation of natural ecosystems throughout the lifecycle of the product or service. New technology should be shared widely, inspiring action through adoption by other stakeholders

Interconnectedness: new technologies to decouple economic activity from the degradation of natural ecosystems can contribute to advancing all other people and planet sdgs. They can also contribute to sustainable production (Goal 12), innovation (Goal 9), and economic growth (Goal 8).
BUSINESS ACTION 3
Galvanize finance to create awareness, protect, and further develop natural ecosystems

Companies in all sectors, from finance to industries with a direct impact on their environment, play a role in allocating capital in a way that is commensurate with protecting and developing healthy natural ecosystems. Companies with sufficient clout to influence investment decisions of others can lead by galvanizing finance to support ecosystem conservation, restoration and development efforts, and build awareness among relevant stakeholders. They can identify funding gaps and focus particularly on regions that do not have the capacity to finance support for natural ecosystems, so as to maximize positive impact.

Example practice

• An apparel and equipment retailer establishes a venture fund which backs start-ups with an aim to protect natural habitats
• A large commercial bank sets up a department specialized in environmental finance and helps structure and place a forest-backed bond that attracts more than $150 million in institutional investor financing

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

Ambition: galvanizing financial resources should involve generating additional finance from other stakeholders including businesses, governments, and ngos. It should result in measurable, long-term benefits to natural ecosystems

Accountability: valuable ecosystems often underpin livelihoods for vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples and the rural poor. When taking action to protect these ecosystems, social safeguards should be in place and any risk of negative impacts managed. This includes meaningful engagement with potentially affected populations to understand how action can respect and support their human rights

Interconnectedness: healthy natural ecosystems are closely interlinked with, and contribute to, climate action (Goal 13) and life below water (Goal 14). As they underpin livelihoods, they also contribute to reducing poverty (Goal 1), hunger (Goal 2) and health and well-being (Goal 3).
Companies can lead by designing and implementing solutions that can help integrate the full value of natural capital into decision-making relating to the business’ end-to-end operations, but which are also replicable and applicable beyond that. Methods can include natural capital accounting and innovative methods for payments for ecosystem services. Leading companies make sure that these solutions gain traction by collaborating with Governments, supply chain members and other stakeholders to build capacity for reflecting the full value of natural ecosystems in decision-making. They also showcase their own solutions to protect ecosystems.

**Example practice**

- A utility incorporates natural capital accounting in its assessments, financial accounts, and strategy to ensure that protecting natural assets is incentivised at all levels of decision-making
- A construction company adopts a biodiversity offset policy: if it is unavoidable to negatively affect a part of the natural habitat in one area, it creates an equivalent amount of natural habitat in another area, after consulting with the affected stakeholders and government authorities
- A tourism company implements a program to support local communities managing natural assets, such as forests and streams. It also implements a program to support impoverished communities near its game parks so that people do not have to rely on illegal poaching to meet their basic needs

**Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...**

**AMBITION:** Ambitious action on valuing and respecting natural capital would have a significant impact on end-to-end operations and inspire action beyond.

**Accountability:** newly acquired information on negative and positive impacts on natural capital should be made transparent to the public, so that other stakeholders can use it to inform their own actions.

**Interconnectedness:** solutions for valuing and respecting natural capital can benefit natural ecosystems which is required for advancing all aspects of the 2030 agenda. It can also contribute to sustainable production (Goal 12).
References

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UN Global Compact Industry Matrix

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SDG Reporting - An Analysis of the Goals and Targets

Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform SDG 15

New York Declaration on Forests