Forests cover 30.7 per cent of the Earth’s surface and, in addition to providing food security and shelter, they are key to combating climate change, protecting biodiversity and the homes of the indigenous population. By protecting forests, we will also be able to strengthen natural resource management and increase land productivity.

At the current time, thirteen million hectares of forests are being lost every year while the persistent degradation of drylands has led to the desertification of 3.6 billion hectares. Even though up to 15% of land is currently under protection, biodiversity is still at risk. Deforestation and desertification – caused by human activities and climate change – pose major challenges to sustainable development and have affected the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the fight against poverty.

Efforts are being made to manage forests and combat desertification. There are two international agreements being implemented currently that promote the use of resources in an equitable way. Financial investments in support of biodiversity are also being provided.

The Lion’s Share Fund

On 21 June, 2018, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), FINCH and founding partner Mars, Incorporated, announced the Lion’s Share, an initiative aimed at transforming the lives of animals across the world by asking advertisers to contribute a percentage of their media spend to conservation and animal welfare projects.  The Lion’s Share will see partners contribute 0.5 percent of their media spend to the fund for each advertisement they use featuring an animal. Those funds will be used to support animals and their habitats around the world. The Fund is seeking to raise US$100m a year within three years, with the money being invested in a range of wildlife conservation and animal welfare programs to be implemented by United Nations and civil society organizations.

Forests

Around 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihood, including 70 million indigenous people.

Forests are home to more than 80 per cent of all terrestrial species of animals, plants and insects.

Between 2010 and 2015, the world lost 3.3 million hectares of forest areas. Poor rural women depend on common pool resources and are especially affected by their depletion.

Desertification

2.6 billion people depend directly on agriculture, but 52 per cent of the land used for agriculture is moderately or severely affected by soil degradation.

Arable land loss is estimated at 30 to 35 times the historical rate

Due to drought and desertification, 12 million hectares are lost each year (23 hectares per minute). Within one year, 20 million tons of grain could have been grown.

74 per cent of the poor are directly affected by land degradation globally.

Biodiversity

Illicit poaching and trafficking of wildlife continues to thwart conservation efforts, with nearly 7,000 species of animals and plants reported in illegal trade involving 120 countries.

Of the 8,300 animal breeds known, 8 per cent are extinct and 22 per cent are at risk of extinction.

Of the over 80,000 tree species, less than 1 per cent have been studied for potential use.

Fish provide 20 per cent of animal protein to about 3 billion people. Only ten species provide about 30 per cent of marine capture fisheries and ten species provide about 50 per cent of aquaculture production.

Over 80 per cent of the human diet is provided by plants. Only three cereal crops – rice, maize and wheat – provide 60 per cent of energy intake.

As many as 80 per cent of people living in rural areas in developing countries rely on traditional plant-­‐based medicines for basic healthcare.

Micro-organisms and invertebrates are key to ecosystem services, but their contributions are still poorly known and rarely acknowledged.

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

By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world

By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development

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

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

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

By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species

By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation

Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities

There are some encouraging global trends in protecting terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity. Forest loss is slowing down, more key biodiversity areas are protected and more financial assistance is flowing towards biodiversity protection. Yet, the 2020 targets of Sustainable Development Goal 15 are unlikely to be met, land degradation continues, biodiversity loss is occurring at an alarming rate, and invasive species and the illicit poaching and trafficking of wildlife continue to thwart efforts to protect and restore vital ecosystems and species.

Protecting important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity is vital for ensuring long-term and sustainable use of terrestrial and freshwater natural resources. The global mean percentage of each key biodiversity area covered by protected areas increased from 33.1 per cent in 2000 to 46.1 per cent in 2018 for terrestrial areas, from 30.5 per cent in 2000 to 43.2 per cent in 2018 for freshwater areas, and from 32.9 per cent in 2000 to 44.7 per cent in 2018 for mountain areas.

Healthy mountain ecosystems are fundamental to ensuring the provision of ecosystem services to upland communities as well as lowland peoples. As of 2017, 76 per cent of the world’s mountain areas were covered by a form of green coverage: 41 per cent by forests, 29 per cent by grassland/shrubland and only 6 per cent by cropland.

From 2000 to 2015, more than one fifth of the Earth’s total land area was degraded, largely due to human-induced processes, such as desertification, cropland expansion and urbanization. During the same period, there were significant productivity declines in land cover, with grasslands incurring some of the greatest losses.

The most fundamental and irreversible human impact on nature is species extinction. The Red List Index – which measures the risk of extinction, in which a value of 1 indicates no threat to any species, and a value of 0 indicates that all species are extinct – has deteriorated from 0.82 in 1993 to 0.73 globally in 2019.

The Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity creates incentives to conserve and sustainably use genetic resources and biodiversity. As at 1 February 2019, 116 countries had ratified the Nagoya Protocol (an increase of 46 since 2016) and 61 countries had shared information on their access and benefit-sharing frameworks through the Access and Benefit-Sharing Clearing-House (representing an increase of 55 countries).

In 2017, bilateral ODA in support of biodiversity was $8.7 billion, an increase of 15 per cent in real terms over 2016.