

Sustainable Development Goals Position Paper

How The Rainforest Alliance Aligns With and Contributes To
the Sustainable Development Goals

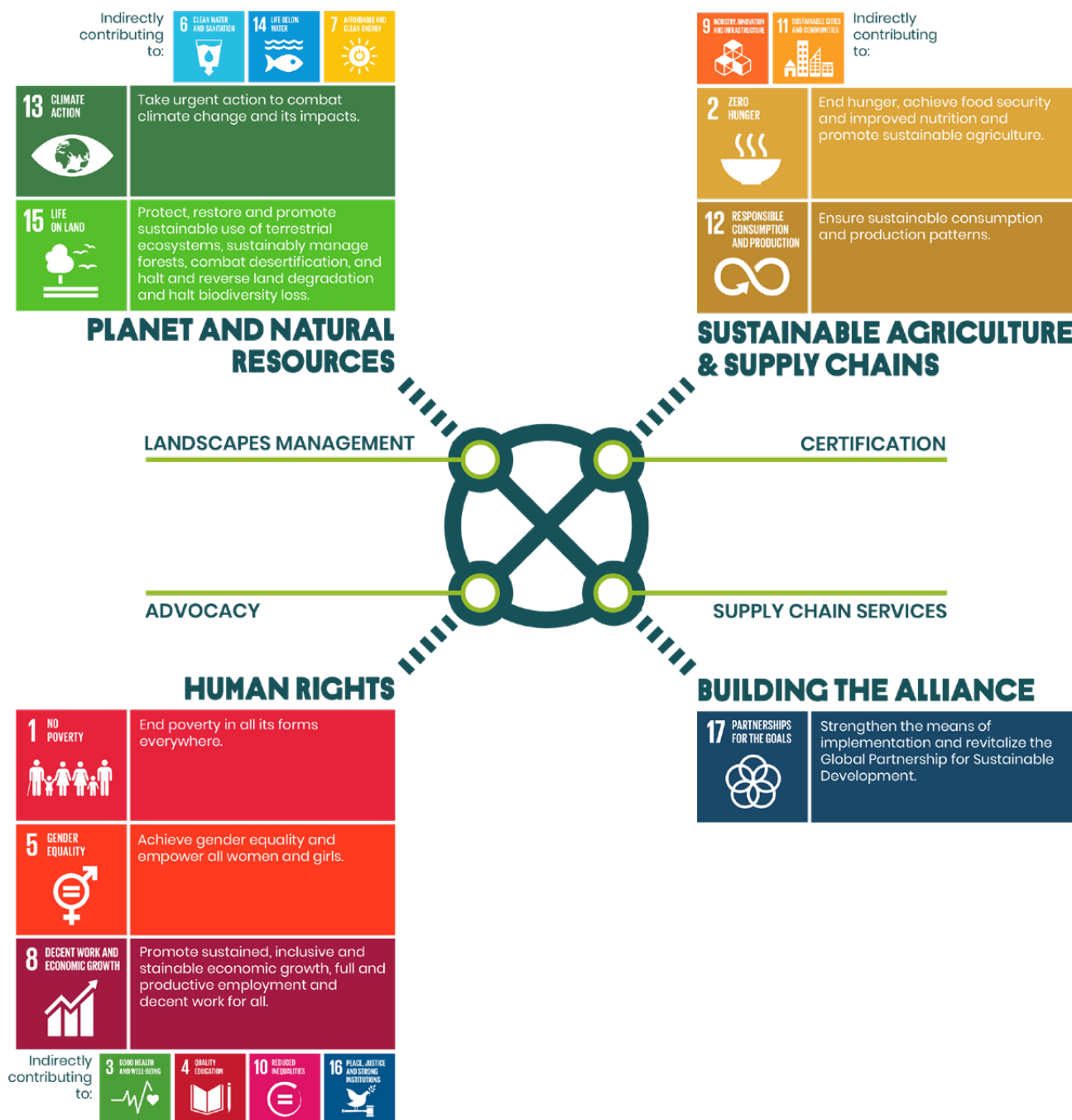
The Rainforest Alliance is an international non-profit organization working in 70 countries at the intersection of business, agriculture and forests. We are building an alliance to create a better future for people and nature by making responsible business the new normal.



Introduction

In September 2015, the United Nations agreed on a global collaborative partnership to transform our world. Through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders committed to putting in all necessary efforts to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. This ambitious diplomatic effort aims to reach significant improvements in topics ranging from human rights, environmental sustainability, climate change, prosperity, and peace.

At the Rainforest Alliance, we envision a world where people and nature thrive in harmony. Many of the causes that we have dedicated ourselves to for the past 30 years are reflected in these goals. This paper outlines some of the areas in which our work is aligned with the 2030 Agenda and how our work with producers, companies, and governments contributes to reaching many of the 17 sustainable development goals.



Sustainable Agriculture And Supply Chains

The Rainforest Alliance is all about changing the way the world produces, sources and consumes. This means we align closely with SDG 2, which includes the promotion of sustainable agriculture, and with SDG 12, which raises the issues of resource efficiency, waste reduction and the need to mainstream sustainability practices across all sectors, in order to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.



Through our certification program, producers are trained in various topics, including better agricultural practices such as climate-smart solutions. Our standard sets requirements regarding the use of agrochemicals, soil conservation, biodiversity, water management, amongst other topics. Together, these efforts help farmers transition towards better agricultural practices, which are essential in reaching the “sustainable food production systems (...) and resilient agricultural practices”¹ that target 2.4 sets.

Our 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard recognizes that sustainability is a journey, not an end in itself. Accordingly, the most recent version of our certification program has moved beyond a pass/fail model and adopted an approach that incentivizes continuous improvement, as well as a contextualized approach that can reflect the many different types of farms, supply chain actors, countries and production sectors we work with.



Target 12.6 highlights that it is necessary to “encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices”². The Rainforest Alliance continues to work towards more sustainable products and companies in several ways.

Firstly, through our certification program, which allows companies to source more responsibly grown products. In our 2020 Certification Program, we also promote a greater sense of shared responsibility across the supply chain, and encourage companies to acknowledge the price of sustainable production and share investments needed to advance sustainability progress at origin, namely through the payment of a sustainability differential and sustainability investments³.

Secondly, through our tailored supply chain services, where we offer technical and advisory services to businesses to help implement their sustainability commitments using best practices and definitions, such as those outlined in the Accountability Framework, or work with sustainability front-runners to help develop and implement innovative solutions for their supply chains as well as sector-wide initiatives.

Finally, through our advocacy with key company and public sector policy makers to promote the development and adoption of better policies, bringing us to our goal of making responsible business the new normal.

More sustainable ways of consumption and better supply chains require efforts from more than just producers and companies. Governments and international organizations also have an important role to play. We believe that regulation is an important step to achieve more sustainable supply chains, and therefore we advocate for the development, adoption, and implementation of legislation that can bring positive impacts for the people and the planet, both in producing and consuming countries. This translates into our support for human rights and environmental due diligence legislation and non-deforestation commitments, for example.

Finally, as the Rainforest Alliance we aim to help consumers make better choices, inspiring them so that they can do as much as they can and join the Alliance. One way is through the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal, which helps identifying items on the supermarket shelf that come from more responsible sources. We also interact daily with thousands of followers on social media who are interested in how their behavior can influence the world around them, and help them make the changes they can. Both of these points exemplify our contribution towards the achievement of target 12.8, which aims to “ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature”⁴.

Planet And Natural Resources

The 2030 Agenda recognizes climate change as “one of the greatest challenges of our time” and warns that “the survival of many societies, and of the biological support systems of the planet, is at risk”⁵. Linked to climate change is also the issue of deforestation – forests clean the air, absorb CO2 emissions and are the most powerful and efficient carbon-capture system on the planet, which makes them a key natural climate solution⁶. Moreover, forests are home to 80% of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity and provide livelihoods for 1.6 billion people⁷.

The goals related to the environment are as ambitious as they are important for the future of our planet. They represent commitments to, for instance, improve capacity on climate change mitigation and adaptation (target 13.3) and promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, and increase afforestation and reforestation globally (target 15.2).



SDG 13 | Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Climate change disproportionately affects poor rural communities, where people often heavily depend on agriculture and forests as their main livelihood source. For this reason, we work with these communities, through certification and landscape programs, to increase their resilience to climate change, and to share practices that will combat it. In this way, we contribute towards goal 13.

Through our certification program, farmers receive training and guidance on how to assess the risks posed by climate change and how to adopt climate-smart farming methods such as planting new trees, introducing new crop varieties or improving soil management to address the identified threats. These kinds of natural climate solutions play a crucial role in helping to solve the climate challenge and keeping it within safe boundaries – in fact, they could help us achieve 37% of our climate targets that are needed by 2030⁹, because natural climate solutions increase carbon storage and/or avoid greenhouse gas emissions across global forests, wetlands, grasslands, and agricultural lands.

Apart from certification, we also implement such approaches at a landscape scale. For instance, the Rainforest Alliance introduced climate-smart agriculture in the Juabeso-Bia District of Ghana, with the aim of improving the capacities of farmers to mitigate and adapt to climate change while simultaneously increasing productivity. The project trained approximately 2000 farmers, improved economic opportunities, improved governance and increased carbon stocks through forest restoration.



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

With reference to SDG 15, and particularly regarding the importance of forests and the threat of deforestation, we use a comprehensive range of strategies to conserve forests around the world, through forest restoration and improved land management, for example. Environmental protection and livelihood provision are closely connected to land and tenure rights: when people can earn a sustainable livelihood from their land, the pressure to expand into forested areas can be reduced. For example, when communities are given the necessary land and tenure rights, in combination with the opportunity to develop community led enterprises, this can significantly contribute to forest protection and conservation. This is why we work with forest communities, especially through landscape approaches, to develop sustainable economic activities and opportunities to improve their livelihoods while preserving the forests which they depend on.

An example of the connection between community-centered, more sustainable economic development initiatives and healthy forests is found in Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve. There, within community-run forest concessions, we helped to create an alliance between communities, local and national government bodies, and international companies to catalyze transformation in a landscape once known for high deforestation rates and devastating poverty. As a result, many jobs were generated, improving livelihoods. Not only families in these concessions have risen out of poverty⁹, but they did so while preserving and restoring the forest. The concessions maintained a near-zero rate of deforestation throughout the years, and 2017 was the first year since 2000 where a net gain of forest was found in the MBR; 34% of these forest gains were found inside these community forest concessions¹⁰.

Human Rights

Several of the sustainable development goals aim to reinforce and mainstream human rights. At the Rainforest Alliance we develop solutions to address the many issues which undermine the rights of farmers and forest communities. More specifically, our work intertwines with SDGs 1, 5 and 8.



SDG 1 | End poverty in all its forms everywhere

SDG 1 represents the ambitious task of ending poverty. Extreme poverty, particularly, is more prevalent in rural settings: it is estimated that 10% of the global population live in extreme poverty, and of those, approximately 80% live in rural areas¹¹. People in these areas often see their income being dependent on agriculture, which means that their income is extremely vulnerable to extreme weather events and price fluctuations. Farmers can find themselves trapped in poverty cycles because of insufficient access to infrastructure, services and markets. These constraints make it more likely that people rely on having their children work instead of attend school, or become vulnerable to situations of forced labor themselves.

The Rainforest Alliance employs different tools which aim to achieve better livelihoods for people whose income depends on agriculture and forestry. Through our certification program, we aim to achieve sustainable livelihoods for farmers and workers around the world, and therefore we have developed approaches to enabling living incomes and living wages. We recognize that the responsibility for improving livelihoods must be shared across the supply chain so that the risks, costs, and burdens don't fall on farmers alone, and therefore we require supply chain actors to pay a Sustainability Differential and make Sustainability Investments. We also create transparency on the gap between current and to a living wages by requiring yearly assessments of compensation made to all types of workers, and support the measuring of progress when it comes to income through our Living Income Tool, among other interventions¹².

Aside from certification, we develop other interventions with the goal of creating more sustainable livelihoods. We partner with other organizations which share a similar mission and together develop approaches to mitigate poverty and improve livelihoods, in initiatives such as Malawi Tea 2020 and the Global Living Wage Coalition. Moreover, we advocate for policies that can lead us to better supply chains in which farmers are adequately compensated for their work. This means that, through advocacy, we push for *“sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, (...) to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions”*¹³, as called for in target 1.b.



SDG 8 | Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

SDG 8 emphasizes the need to provide decent work for all – an effort that includes eradicating child labor and forced labor, protecting labor rights, and promoting safe and secure work environments. These are complex issues – over 152 million children worldwide are engaged in child labor, the majority (71%) in the agricultural sector¹⁴ – that require coordinated action from governments, companies and individuals alike.

On the matter of decent work, we leverage our standard in order to promote worker's rights and improve their conditions, which includes setting criteria to deal with issues of discrimination and workplace harassment and violence. Certificate holders, particularly large farms that hire workers, are held accountable and must respect the worker's rights when it comes to wages, working hours, health and safety and freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Our 2020 certification program includes an 'assess and address' approach to human rights violations. This more effective approach incentivizes farmers and communities to tackle human rights violations such as workplace violence and harassment, forced labor, child labor or discrimination, rather than hiding the problem. This is an important tool – human rights abuses, such as for instance child labor, have complex social, economic and political causes, and because of that simple prohibition isn't enough. With this approach, farmers will have access to training and be required to have systems in place to assess, mitigate, and monitor risk of such incidents on farms and take immediate action if they are found. Auditors will check whether farms have put a well-functioning system in place, as well as look for any cases of human rights violations.

We also promote decent work through other interventions. Our supply chain services include sharing knowledge and advising companies on how to dig into their supply chains and exploring what to do in case they find human rights violations. Likewise, the landscape projects that we carry out in different regions often focus on supporting people to find ways to make a living in a more sustainable way.



SDG 5 | Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

There is a long path towards gender equality everywhere, including in rural settings: women represent almost 70% of the agricultural labor force in many developing countries but are often marginalized. Many challenges are faced to-day by both female farm workers and female farmers.

Female farm workers are often paid less than men, can be subject to gender-based violence and abuse¹⁵, and overall tend to have less access to knowledge, opportunities and resources; this means they are less likely than men to benefit from better paid jobs, trainings, and often have limited representation in management positions or in workers' unions. Female farmers, on the other hand, struggle with lack of access to land, credit, inputs and resources, as well as lack of access to membership of cooperatives.

Certification can be used as a powerful tool to support women empowerment. Our standard addresses topics such as sexual harassment, working conditions, protection of pregnant women, and paid maternity leave. We also support gender equity by requiring the collection of disaggregated data to identify gaps and by requiring certified farms and supply chain actors to appoint a liaison representative or committee to prevent, monitor, and remediate gender discrimination or harassment¹⁶.

Through our advocacy work, we try to reduce the differences between men and women when it comes to their ability to have their voices heard in cooperatives, farmer or worker organizations and trade unions. Often working with local partners, we develop advocacy strategies that promote gender equality by enabling equal access for men and women to resources, services, benefits, and decision-making positions.

Ultimately, we recognize the importance of gender equality, and we promote and protect it in our organization and in all areas of our work, whether that is through certification, supply chain services, advocacy or landscape initiatives.

Building The Alliance



SDG 17 | Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

The last sustainable development goal is one that truly resonates with us. It calls for stronger multi-stakeholder partnerships that are capable of mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technically and financial resources to support the achievement of the SDGs.

This has been our approach for the past 30 years. The Rainforest Alliance is armed with the expertise and longstanding partnerships of two leading international sustainability organizations that joined forces in early 2018 – the Rainforest Alliance and UTZ. Now, as one organization, we continue to build a broader alliance by bringing together diverse partners that, together, can make deep-rooted change on some of our most pressing social and environmental issues.

All our intervention strategies rely on the strength of the alliances that we form by engaging with farmers, communities, companies, civil society organizations, governments, and consumers, who all join us in our common sustainability journey. This translates into 2 million certified farmers, 7 million hectares of certified farmland across 63 countries, more than 130 countries where you can buy products with our label, and over half a million consumers who engage with us through our social media channels to learn more about our work and the impact of their choices.

Our greatest strength is our alliance itself. By working together with these diverse stakeholders, we are building an alliance to improve livelihoods, protect biodiversity, amplify the voices of farmers and forest communities, and help them mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Conclusion

Through our four interventions – Landscapes Management, Certification, Advocacy and Supply Chain Services – the Rainforest Alliance works to create a better future for people and nature by making responsible business the new normal. In many ways, this is strongly tied with the purpose of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Likewise, many of the challenges addressed by the SDGs – poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, and prosperity – are the same issues that we tackle, focusing on the intersection of agriculture, forests, and business.

The different work that we carry on, often alongside our partners (SDG 17), aims to achieve responsible supply chains and consumption (SDG 12), for which more sustainable agricultural practices are needed (SDG 2). We believe that the farmers who grow the products that we all enjoy are entitled to earn a decent income that prevents them from being trapped in the cycle of poverty (SDG 1 and 2), as well as having their human rights respected, and that is why we dedicate ourselves to causes such as the fight against labor exploitation (SDG 8) and the empowerment of women (SDG 5). Moreover, we work with rural communities to increase their resilience to climate change (SDG 13) and to conserve forests (SDG 15), to take action against the climate crisis and deforestation.

Because our mission is so closely aligned with the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our work relates to several of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The Rainforest Alliance offers the tools that enable companies to take action and to increase their contribution to reaching the SDGs. Likewise, when we advocate for governments to step up and commit to sustainability, we believe that their efforts will have a positive impact and bring us all closer to achieving the goals.

We applaud the fact that the SDGs have a holistic approach towards sustainability, emphasizing that working together is essential for their achievement. We firmly believe that the road to a more sustainable future depends on our ability – as individuals, as organizations, as governments – to partner up with others who have similar objectives in order to maximize our impact, and ultimately create a better future for people and nature.

References

- 1 United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2015
- 2 United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2015
- 3 The Sustainability Differential is a mandatory payment of an additional cash amount to certified producers over and above the commodity market price. In addition, buyers of Rainforest Alliance certified products are required to make 'Sustainability Investments' needed to enable producers in their supply chain to be compliant with the Farm Requirements and report on them. For more on our Shared Responsibility approach, visit <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/resource-item/whats-in-our-2020-certification-program-shared-responsibility/>
- 4 United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2015
- 5 United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2015
- 6 Natural climate solutions (NCS) are actions in the agriculture, forestry and other land-use sectors that help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, capture and store emissions and improve the resilience of ecosystems such as through reforestation, agroforestry, forest protection, forest management and improved cropland management.
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- 8 Griscom, Bronson W. et al, "Natural Climate Solutions". Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, vol. 114, no. 44, 2017
- 9 Stoian, D.; Rodas, A.; Butler, M.; Monterroso, I.; Hodgdon, B., "Forest concessions in Petén, Guatemala: A systematic analysis of the socioeconomic performance of community enterprises in the Maya Biosphere Reserve", Bogor, Indonesia, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), 2018
- 10 CONAP and WCS, with the support of USAID and USDO/ITAP, "Monitoreo de la Gobernabilidad en la Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, actualización al año 2017", 2018
- 11 De La O Campos, A.P., Villani, C., Davis, B., Takagi, M., "Ending extreme poverty in rural areas – Sustaining livelihoods to leave no one behind", Rome, 2018
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- 13 United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2015
- 14 International Labour Organization, "Child Labour", <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/child-labour/lang--en/index.htm>, 2016
- 15 WWF, "SDGs mean business: How credible standards can help companies deliver the 2030 agenda", 2017
- 16 For more on our Gender Equality approach through certification, see <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/resource-item/whats-in-our-2020-certification-program-gender-equality/>

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