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► **To cite this version:**

C. Santamaria, B. Bodin. Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and forest-related Aichi Biodiversity Targets. *Forêt Méditerranéenne*, 2017, XXXVIII (3), pp.419-420. hal-03556659

**HAL Id: hal-03556659**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03556659v1>**

Submitted on 4 Feb 2022

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# Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and forest-related Aichi Biodiversity Targets

by Catalina SANTAMARIA & Blaise BODIN

Parallel to the 5<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Forest Week (20-24<sup>th</sup> of March 2017, Agadir, Morocco), the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (Biodiversity Convention) organized a capacity-building workshop for Mediterranean and other countries on the restoration of forests and other ecosystems to support the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. The workshop was organized through the Forest Ecosystem Restoration Initiative (FERI), supported by the Korean Forest Service of the Government of the Republic of Korea.

The workshop gathered government representatives and experts from 11 countries; Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, State of Palestine, Sudan, and Tunisia, to review their national commitments relating to Aichi Biodiversity Targets: 5 (to halve the rate of natural habitat loss), 14 (to safeguard essential ecosystem services) and 15 (to restore 15% of degraded ecosystems), and their stages of implementation. The focus of the workshop was framed by the principles and key activities of the Short Term Action Plan for Ecosystem Restoration, adopted at the 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Parties to the Biodiversity Convention (2-17 December 2016, Cancun, Mexico).

Implementation of these Aichi Biodiversity Targets is particularly pressing for the Mediterranean forests, woodlands, and scrub biome,

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which is highly biodiverse, providing habitats for many species. Ecosystems in this region are subject to increasing pressures from population growth, urban expansion and climate change. With historically high levels of degradation and high population densities, a specificity of the region is that the interpretation of these targets may have to focus on ecosystem functions, improving the quality and connectivity of high-biodiversity areas, including areas that deliver important ecosystem services such as water provision; and avoiding further loss or reduction of natural ecosystems.

With the sessions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Forest Week providing a backdrop to the discussions, participants engaged in a review of their national commitments, assessing the extent to which they were Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound (“SMART”). Staff from the Biodiversity Convention presented a regional report “Rapid Assessment of Progress Under Aichi Biodiversity Targets 5, 14 and 15 in the Mediterranean region” and highlighted best practice examples of SMART targets in the region. On-line exercises were also provided for participants to review concepts, tools and the approaches taken.

Each country was provided a dossier containing a nationally-specific assessment of information of progress on their national commitments associated to Targets 5 and 15. Nationally-specific reviews of national commitments, under the Biodiversity Convention and other environmental agreements, provided a basis for discussion on the

importance of aligning the implementation of these agreements at the national scale. National targets and associated action plans under the Biodiversity Convention, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the UN Convention on Combating Desertification, as well as the Strategic Framework on Mediterranean Forests, all involve the management of ecosystems. Whilst these commitments and actions should strive to be as specific and quantitative as possible, they must also promote synergy and coherence in their implementation.

Experts from partner organizations were invited to present relevant themes such as the Red List of Ecosystems (IUCN), which seeks to provide a framework for assessing the level of degradation and risk of collapse of a variety of ecosystems. This framework was welcomed by participants as a relevant decision-support tool for the prioritization of actions under Aichi Targets 5 and 15, but many reaffirmed the lack of sufficient data at the national scale to meaningfully undertake such assessments. Success stories from the field were also showcased, with a presentation on the Herdade Freio do Meio in Portugal, a farming estate which managed to reconcile sustainable production of a range of agricultural products, cork extraction and nature conservation. Participants also took part in interactive exercises, including the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology, (IUCN and WRI). The exercise stimulated a challenge in the definition of national restoration priorities: the reconciliation of the views of a range of stakeholders on the objectives of restoration actions.

Participants concluded the meeting with key take-away messages that underlined common challenges such as: the gathering of baseline data on the state and trends of ecosystems, agreeing to clear definitions and metrics for concepts such as “degradation” or “natural forest” and determining the objectives of restoration along with indicators to evaluate progress. Participants also underlined the value of these exchanges to learn from the experience of other countries faced with a similar ecological context.

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