

Goal 15:

LIFE ON LAND

The earth is diverse and colourful. Estimates of how many species exist, range from two million to thousands of millions!¹³ Certainly, humans share this planet with a myriad of plants and animals. The biological diversity and ecosystems on earth are fundamental to our life. We need the cycles that give us oxygen to breathe and clean water to drink, we need to harvest the earth to get food.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 is about taking care of this enormous wealth. We need to create a lifestyle and build communities that do not threaten biodiversity and destroy ecosystems. Unfortunately, we have a long way to go.

We consume much more of the earth's resources than is sustainable. Removing a small piece of nature, to build a road for example, does not necessarily have a major impact in itself. But when more and more pieces of nature are destroyed, the sum of this destruction has catastrophic consequences. Every five seconds, rainforest is disappearing corresponding to the size of a football pitch.¹⁴ That's 12 football pitches per minute, 720 per hour and 17,280 a day. Deforestation is a disaster for biodiversity, for the people who live in the forests and for the climate. Halting deforestation and restoring degraded forests is an important part of SDG 15.

Biblical reflection

"You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams, the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work" (Psalm 104:10-13). The Bible is generous in describing the magnitude and beauty of creation; always praising God who cares about all life, including birds and animals.

The Greek New Testament uses the word *oikoumene* when speaking about the whole inhabited world (for instance in Luke 2:1). This word comes from *oikos* (house) and refers to the global household and all that belongs to it – humans, fauna and flora. Both "economy" and "ecology" are rooted in this concept and should be understood within this totality.

Today, both the diversity and the balance in nature are threatened. A wounded creation "has been groaning in labour pains" and is longing for its redemption (Romans 8:21-22). To care for creation means to join in praising God, affirming that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). It also means to acknowledge our belonging to a household with kinship ties to all forms of life – as the gracious gift of being and a vocation to serve.

Questions

- The verb "to steward" means to manage property on behalf of someone else. What do we mean when we say that humans have a special responsibility to steward creation and all life on earth?
- What does it mean when we say that we humans are related to all life on earth?

Challenge

Preserving life on land is a matter for international, national and local politics. Can you think of examples of dilemmas where nature conservation is pitted against other interests? What can we do to become better at taking care of nature?

Prayer

*Father God, you who have given life to everything that crawls, creeps and flies,
Awaken our awe of all living things.
Help us tread carefully and let diversity flourish.
Thank you for everything that belongs to the whole.
Teach us to find our place in your teeming world.*

*We commit everything and everyone, into your hands, Lord.
Amen.*