

# Let us reflect on Sustainable Development Goal 15

## EARTH OUR HOME



cssjfed.org

“ . . . and God saw  
that it was good . . . ”

Genesis 1:25



**E**ARTH, our home planet, is the third planet from the sun and the fifth largest in the solar system. It is the only planet in our solar system known to harbour living things.

*It is alive with a unique community of life.  
The protection of Earth's vitality,  
diversity and beauty is a sacred trust.*

(The Earth Charter)

Take time to watch the 2009 documentary video 'Earth Our Home' ([goodplanet.org](http://goodplanet.org)) at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqxENMKaeCU> (1½ hours)

*(for convenience, the video can be watched in three segments of 30 minutes each)*

*In silence, reflect on the implications of what you have seen and heard about our one and only home.*

### We all evolved here together.

The Earth is populated by an incredible number of different living creatures who draw their sustenance from the ecosystems that surround and support them on God's good earth.

*“The same stream of life that runs through the world, runs through my veins night and day and dances in rhythmic measure. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth into numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers”.*

Rabindranath Tagore

**Pope Francis** calls us to a 'serene attentiveness' to nature:

*“Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and in constant interaction with it.”* (LS 139)

### GRACE BEFORE EATING

From air and soil, from bees and sun,  
from others' toil my bread is won.

And when I bite, the soil, the air,  
the bees and light are all still there.

So, I must think each day afresh  
how food and drink become my flesh.

And then I'll see - the air, the sun,  
the earth, the bee and me - **all one.**

*From 'Sacred Gaia' by Anna Primavesi*

Today we are facing **an array of ecological problems** stemming from our troubled human relationship with the rest of the physical creation. These ecological problems are at their origin, spiritual in nature.

## Poem – ‘PAY ATTENTION’

by Joyce Johnson Rouse ([www.earthmama.org](http://www.earthmama.org)) - Wisdom attributed to Chief Seattle.

### SDG 15's ambitious aims are:

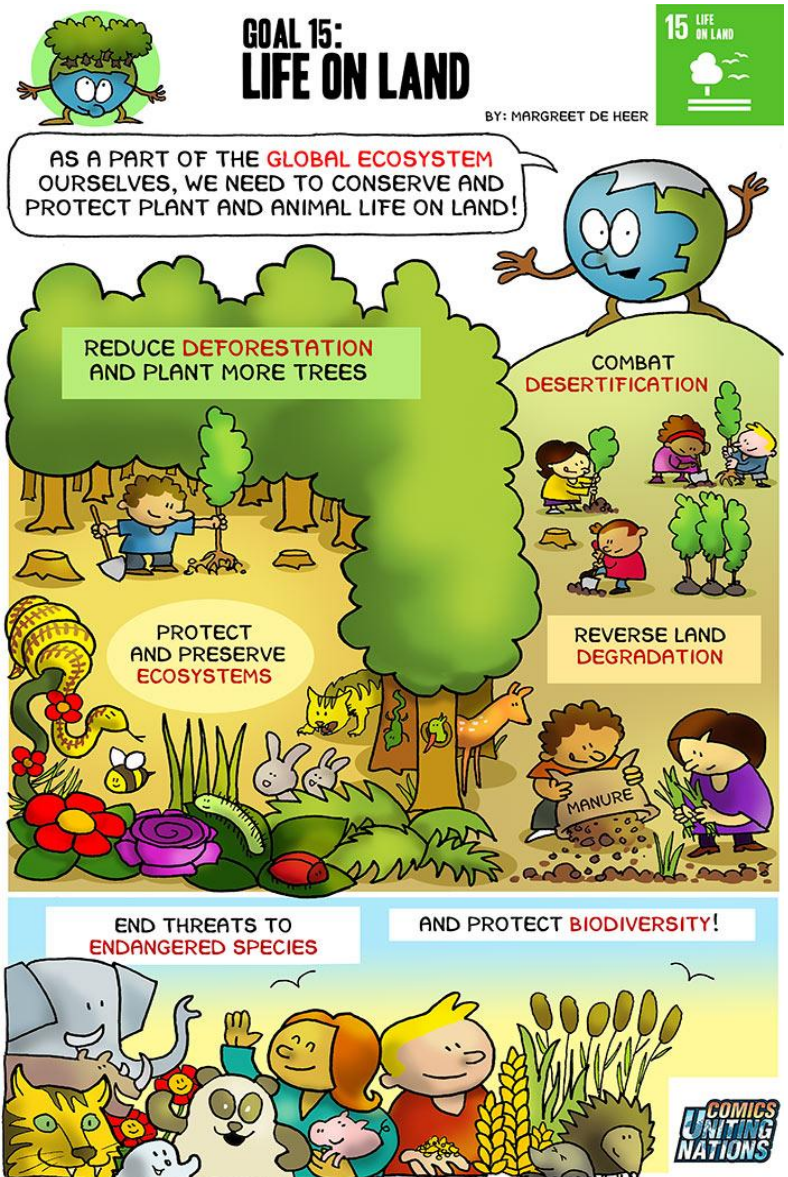
- to conserve, restore and use more sustainably, our terrestrial ecosystems which include soil, forests, mountains, inland freshwater, wetlands and drylands.

The sustainable management of these ecosystems and their biodiversity is essential if human, plant and animal life is to continue to thrive. The services and benefits supporting our physical and mental well-being are **irreplaceable**.



“We need to respect and defend the rights of nature. We know that when we disrespect and harm nature, we diminish ourselves and impoverish our children. A human right to life and dignity is meaningless without water and wilderness.”

<http://therightsofnature.org>



<http://margreetdeheer.com/eng/globalgoals.html#goal15>

**The Rights of Nature** is about recognizing that our ecosystems – our trees, oceans, animals, mountains – have rights just as we have rights. Rights of Nature is about balancing what is good for human beings against what is good for other species, what is good for the planet as a whole.

**It is the holistic recognition that all of life, all ecosystems on our planet are deeply intertwined.**

## DID YOU KNOW?

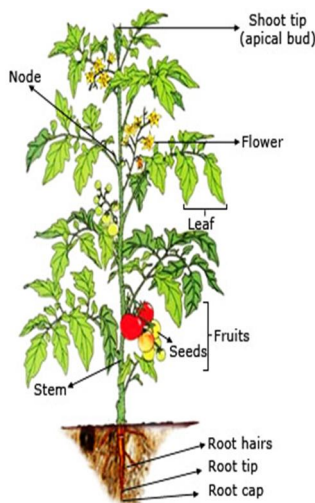
**BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY:** Biodiversity underpins the health of the planet and has a direct impact on all our lives. The Earth's natural assets are made up of plants, animals, land, water, the atmosphere AND humans! Together we all form part of the planet's ecosystems. Biodiversity is the link between all organisms on earth, binding each into an interdependent ecosystem, in which all species have their role. **It is the web of life.** It is the resource upon which families, communities, nations and future generations depend. If there is a biodiversity crisis, our health and livelihoods are at risk too.

**SOIL:** Soil is a remarkable substance that turns unusable materials into plant food, it stores carbon, filters water and protects us from floods. Soil is formed from thousands of years of physical and biological processes and, as it takes so long to re-form, it is effectively non-renewable. Each passing minute all around the world, the soil is assaulted, suffocated, contaminated, exploited, poisoned, mistreated, and depleted. The degrading of soils is a threat to our ability to produce food now and into the future, so food security and livelihoods are at risk, if we allow the condition of our soils to continue to decline.



***“A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself.”***

– Franklin D Roosevelt



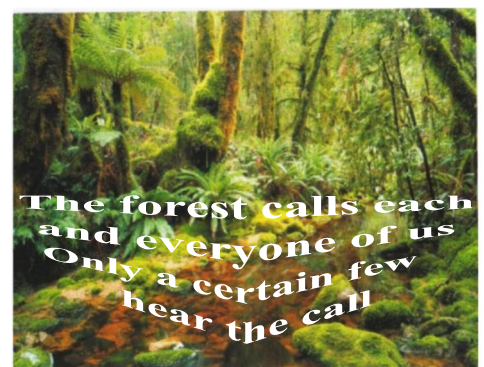
**PLANT LIFE :** Wild flowers, plants and fungi are the life support for all our wildlife and their colour and character light up our landscapes. Plant life provides 80% of our human diet and we rely on **agriculture** as an important economic resource and for our sustenance and livelihoods. But without our help, this priceless natural heritage is in danger of being lost. Over recent years, we have seen unprecedented **land degradation, loss of arable land, drought and desertification**, all of which adversely affect poor communities globally. Due to drought and desertification, each year 12 million hectares are lost (23 hectares per minute), where 20 million tons of grain could have been grown.



***‘The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future not only for food but also for curing disease and for other uses. Different species contain genes which could be key resources in years ahead for meeting human needs and regulating environmental problems.’*** Laudato Si, 32

**FORESTS** account for 30% of earth’s surface, providing vital habitats for millions of species and sources of clean air and water, as well as being crucial for combating climate change. Forests are the world’s air-conditioning system – the lungs of the planet. Around 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihood. This includes some 70 million indigenous people.

Most of us sense that taking a walk in a forest is good for us. We enjoy the beauty and peace of being in a natural setting. Now, research is showing that visiting a forest has real, quantifiable health benefits, both mental and physical. Even five minutes around trees or in green spaces can improve health. Think of it as a prescription with no negative side effects, that's also free. Spending time around trees reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, improves mood and helps us focus.



**ANIMAL LIFE & SPECIES EXTINCTION:** Every species needs a certain amount, and type, of habitat to find food, shelter and mates, but for a growing number of animals, the space where their ancestors found those things is now overrun by humans. Unlike the mass extinction events of geological history, the current extinction challenge is one for which a single species - ours - appears to be almost wholly responsible.



In fact, 99% percent of currently threatened species are at risk from human activities, primarily those driving habitat loss, poaching, introduction of exotic species and global warming.

The **little bit of good news** is that protected areas, the "frontline of conservation," have kept extinction rates of mammals, birds, and amphibians 20% lower than they would have been without these refuges. Nearly 13 % of Earth's land has been set aside, but only 2% of the ocean is part of a refuge. (*National Geographic – Stuart Pimm & colleagues*)

### Reflect and share:

1. How can we develop a more contemplative attitude and a deeper sense of the sacredness of all creation?
2. What specific actions can we take to reduce the negative effects which our lifestyles are having on earth our home and on other species?

Check your ecological footprint: <http://footprint.wwf.org.uk/questionnaires/show/1/1/1>  
See: [http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/biodiversity/what\\_you\\_can\\_do/](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/biodiversity/what_you_can_do/)

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Use the Reflection:** "From Tourists to Pilgrims: Recovering a Sense of the Sacred":  
[http://www.holycrossjustice.org/resources/HCIJO%20Document%20Library/FromTouriststoPilgrims\\_read.pdf](http://www.holycrossjustice.org/resources/HCIJO%20Document%20Library/FromTouriststoPilgrims_read.pdf)
- **Join the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature:** <http://therightsofnature.org/individual-form>
- **Download and explore how to use the EARTH CHARTER** and apply its principles at home, work, and in your local community. The Earth Charter seeks to inspire in all of us a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the whole human family, the greater community of life and future generations. **It is a vision of hope and a call to action.**  
<http://earthcharter.org/discover/download-the-charter/>
- **Sign a petition** calling for soil protection measures to be brought in across Europe
- **Suggested video clips:**
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOwpXGl1i9U>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBBiziHbkww>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6jKpMUI690>
  - <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/186738/endangered-species>
  - <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/sep/29/plant-species-face-extinction>



*Reflection prepared by Sr. Maureen O' Connell, SW Prov. Ireland,  
using material received from  
Presentation Associate, Teresa Homan, New Zealand  
Produced by the Presentation Union Justice Network*