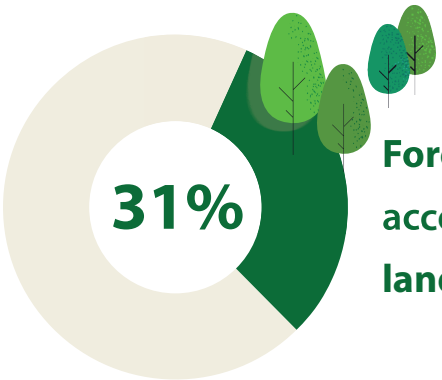
Why do **forests** matter?

Forests are of incredible importance to people and the planet. Not only are they recognized as a space for natural beauty, but **they provide an array of resources that support ecosystems and livelihoods.**

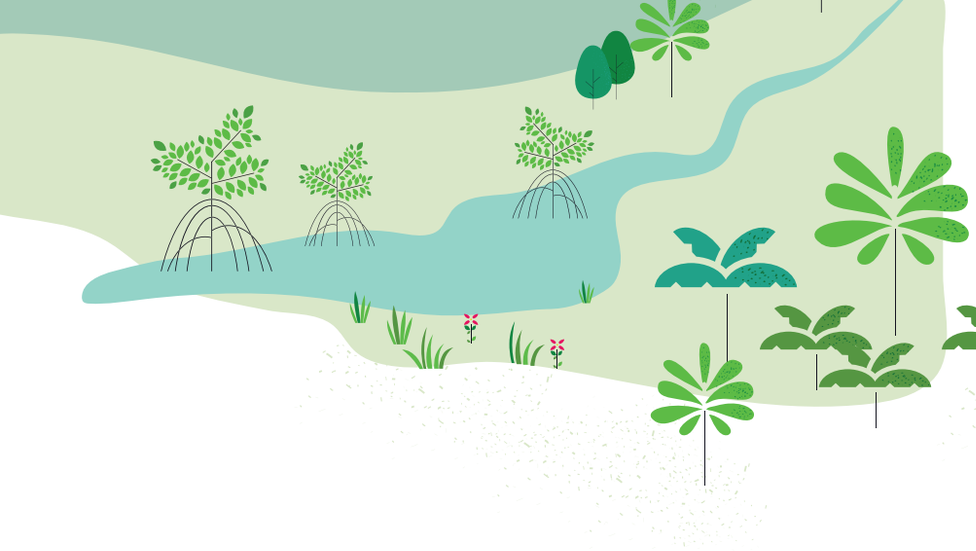


Forests cover 4.06 billion hectares, accounting for **31% of Earth's land surface.**

Although this area is shrinking due to deforestation and degradation, forests continue to host unique biodiversity, provide jobs, produce food, and help combat climate change.

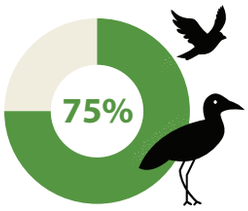
Biodiversity

Did you know that forests

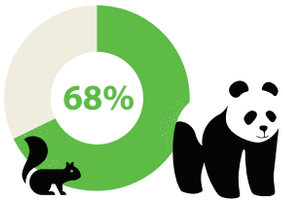


offer a habitat for 80% of amphibian species, 75% of bird species, and 68% of mammal species?

amphibian species



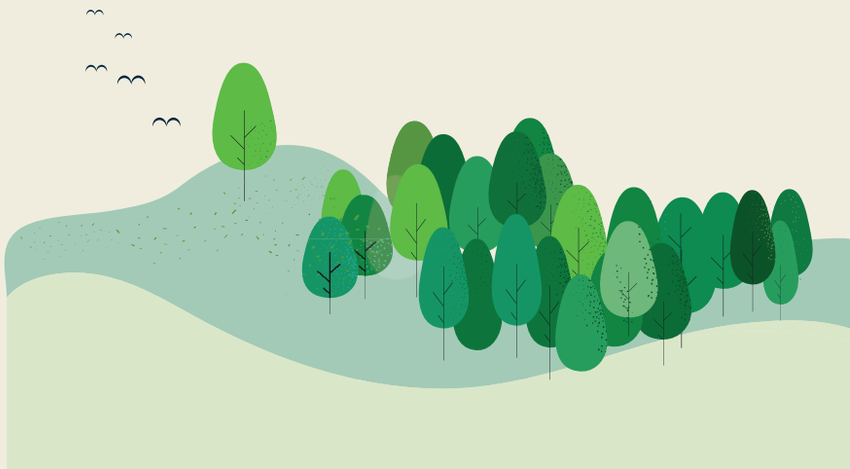
bird species



mammal species

Due to their importance for biodiversity, 700 million hectares of forest are in legally established protected areas.

Economy



Forests also contribute to the economy, with an estimated **33 million people** working directly in the forest sector.

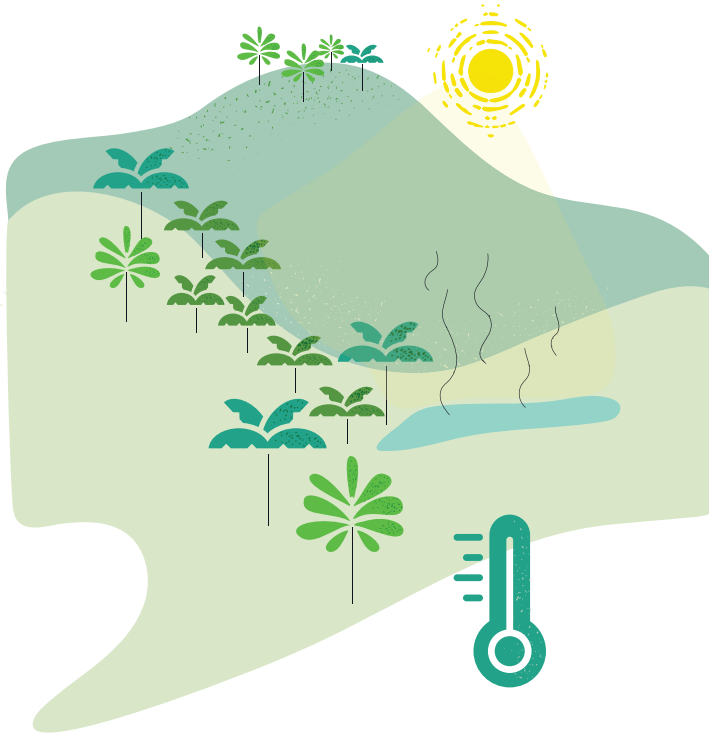
In 2015, this contributed
USD 1.52 trillion to world GDP.

Food & Agriculture

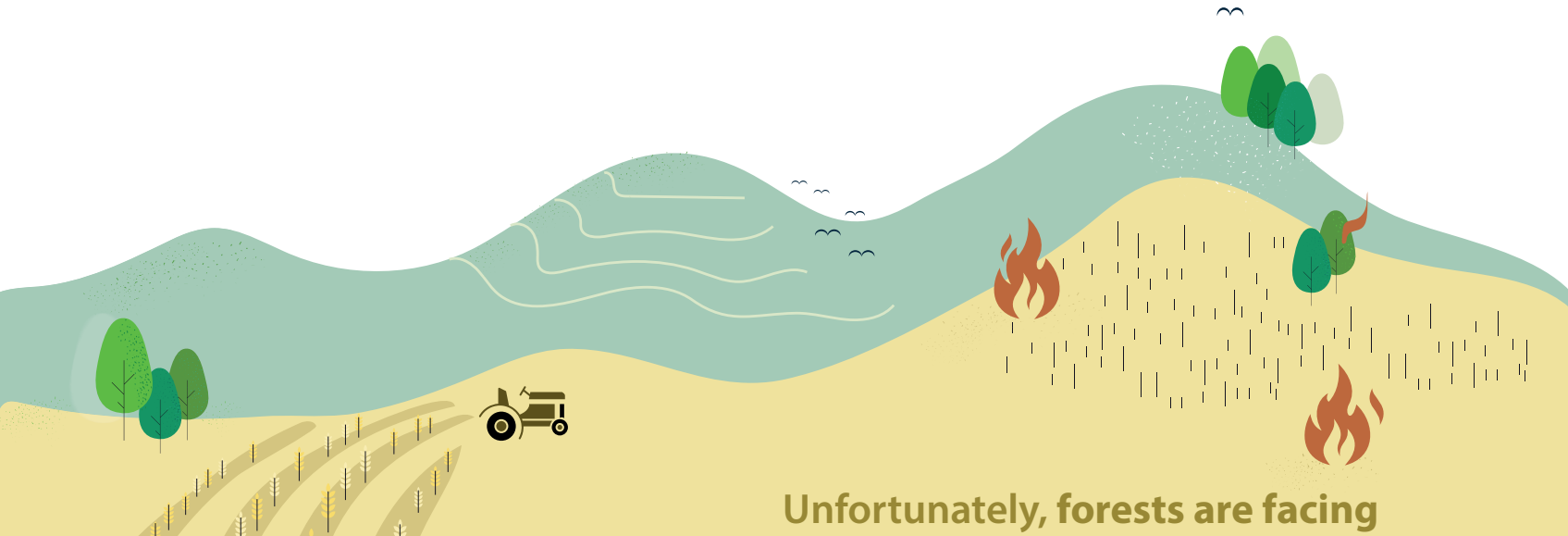
Forests are also important for food security, serving as a source of food for roughly 1 billion people worldwide.

Climate change

Climate change has many linkages with forests: they store carbon, affect albedo, and influence water vapour emissions in the atmosphere. Moreover, as climate change impacts worsen, forests will become more important for agriculture and combatting urban heat.



Threats to forests



Unfortunately, forests are facing

threats all around the world, including **deforestation**, **climate change**, and increased **natural hazards**, such as **forest fires.**

Agricultural expansion is the cause of almost **90% of global deforestation**

Although efforts have been made to decrease deforestation and encourage sustainable forest management over the past decades, there has still been an overall decline in forest areas. About 10 million hectares of forest were destroyed every year between 2015 and 2020.

SDG Linkages

In light of these threats, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

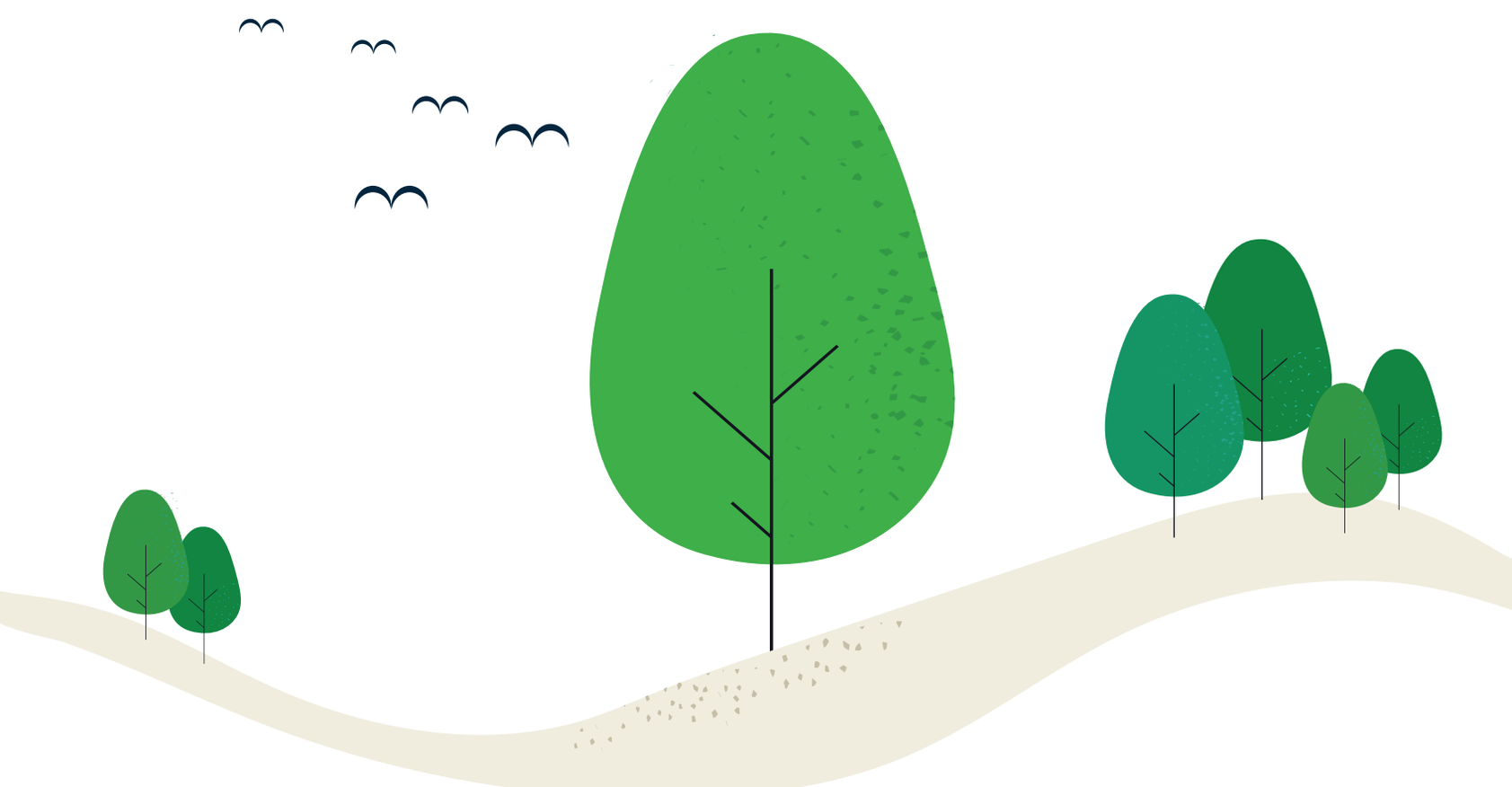
have specifically acknowledged the importance of protecting forests.

SDG Target 15.2

SDG Target 15.2 states:
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.

This target sets forth the ambition to both **prevent future degradation of forests**, and restore those that have already been impacted, giving clear attention to forests and their needs.

Beyond SDG target 15.2, decreasing deforestation and protecting forest ecosystem services also **provides benefits for food security, the economy, climate, and biodiversity** – which all have a role in different SDGs.



Good Health and Well-being

The extensive use of woodfuel is a large contributor to household air pollution, causing an estimated 1.63-3.12 million premature deaths each year. Forests are also a vital source for pharmaceuticals and act as a barrier between humans and zoonotic diseases.

Zero Hunger

Forests provide **nutritious food** sources and **wood fuel** for cooking. Areas with heavy deforestation and declining rainfall could see **heavy agricultural losses threatening food security.**

Decent Work and Economic Growth

The forest sector employs millions and contributes billions to global GDP. Global increase in housing demand provides an opportunity for the creation of green jobs through sustainable wood production and primary processing.

Climate Action

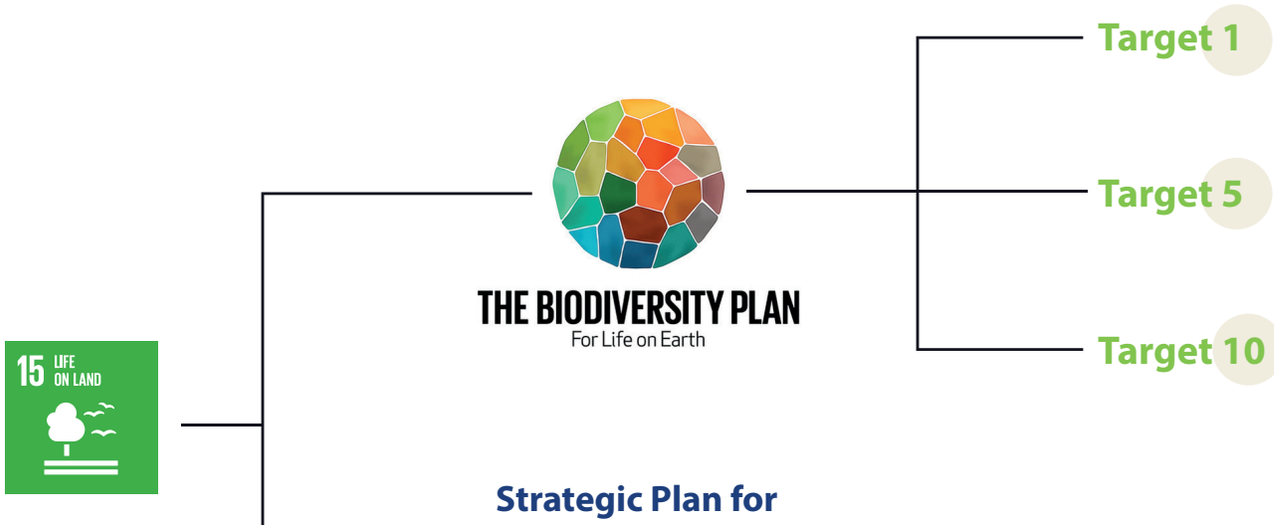
Life on Land

Forests provide a habitat for a huge variety of plant and animal species. Conservation and sustainable forest management is key to ensuring the protection of this rich biodiversity.

The total carbon stored in forests was estimated at 662 Gt in 2020 , contained in living biomass, dead wood, litter and soil organic matter. Forests play a crucial role in the global carbon cycle, as carbon can be released due to deforestation, fire and tree decay.

The SDGs are also closely linked with the objectives of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, or MEAs. These MEAs set forth specific goals and targets related to their objectives, for instance conservation of biological diversity, protection of migratory species, or stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations. These inter-linkages can be explored in greater depth on InforMEA's Goals page.

SDG 15.2 is mapped to Targets 1, 5, and 10 of the Kunming Global Biodiversity Framework, and Target 1.2 of the Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024-2032 (Draft Resolution).



SDG
Target 15.2

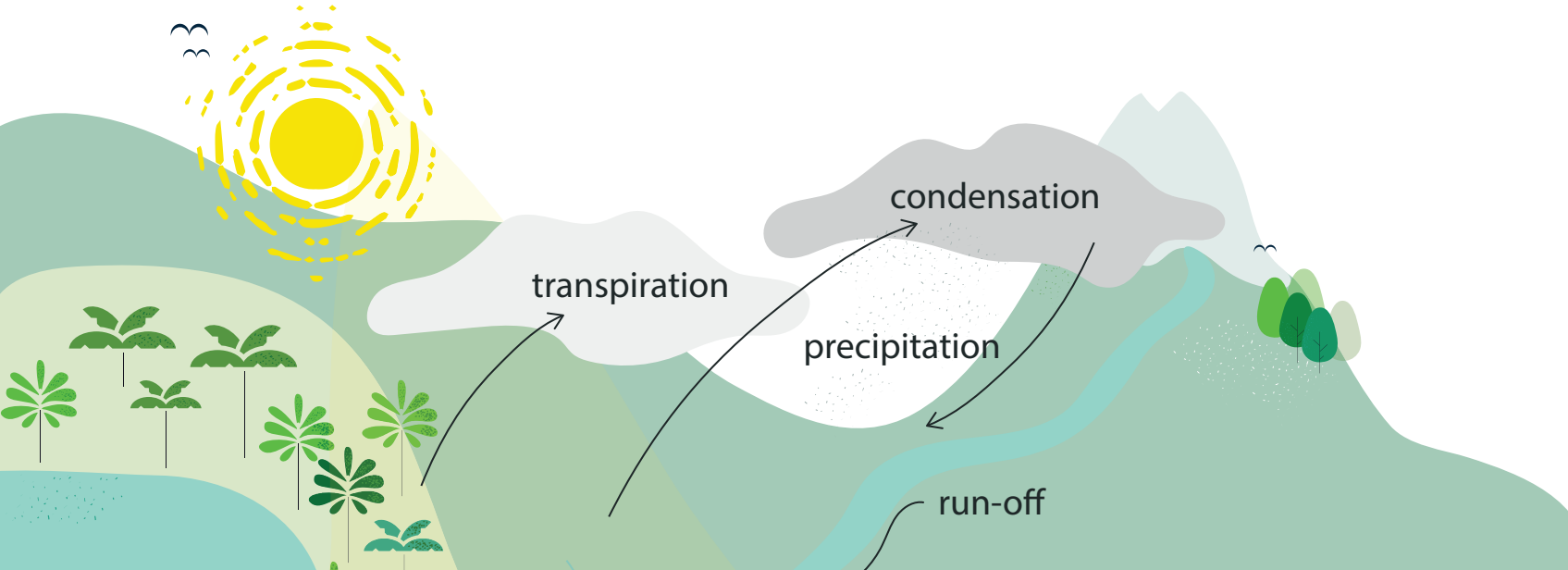
Migratory Species

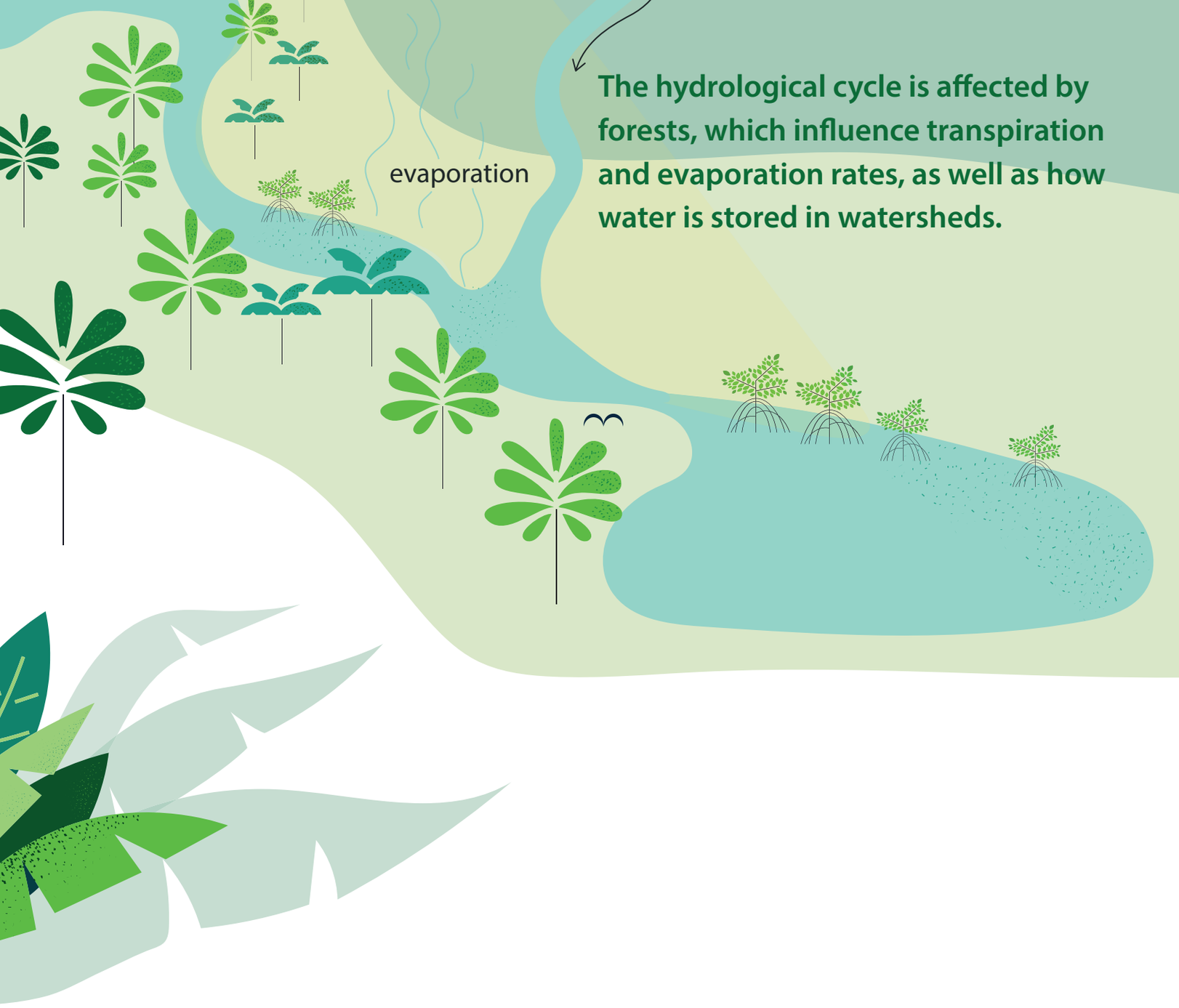
CMS

Target 1.2

Linkages with **wetlands**

Forests are also intrinsically linked to both wetland and water resources – making them an important ecosystem for implementing several Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).





The hydrological cycle is affected by forests, which influence transpiration and evaporation rates, as well as how water is stored in watersheds.

Wetlands are also threatened ecosystems, with more than half having been lost since 1900. Wetlands depend on forests to help protect water catchments and serve as natural barriers to protect freshwater. Forests also help regulate soil erosion and prevent pollution, desertification, and salinization of freshwater ecosystems. They help mitigate floods and ensure a steady water flow during drier seasons.

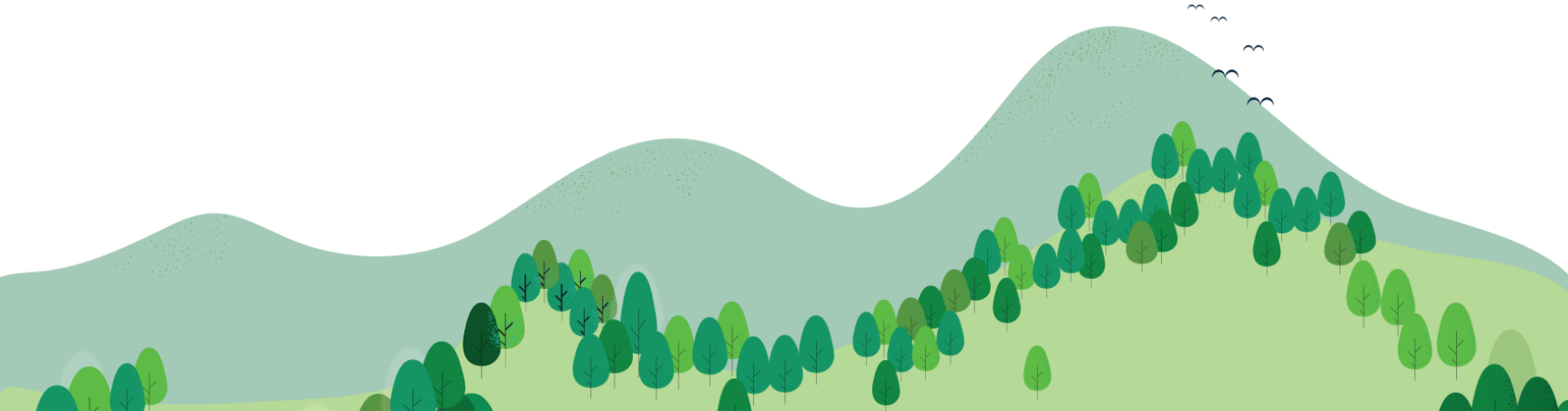
At the same time, forests often use groundwater as a source of freshwater and depend on wetlands to help support the diverse species inhabiting them.

Effective forest management is crucial for protecting wetlands, biodiversity, and water resources, and vice versa. As a result, the linkages should be accounted for when considering policy implementation. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands takes a holistic approach through its concept of "wise use"; similarly, the Convention on Biological Diversity uses an "ecosystem approach" to ensure that all aspects are considered.

Ramsar

Convention on Biological Diversity

Data Mining Exercise



To better explore these linkages, InforMEA has undertaken a data mining exercise to identify how forestry is related to SDG indicators and MEA reporting. Based on this work, **a link was established that showcased the utility of reporting on forest-relevant MEAs** (such as the CBD and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands) and **measuring SDG indicator 15.2.1** (progress towards sustainable forest management).

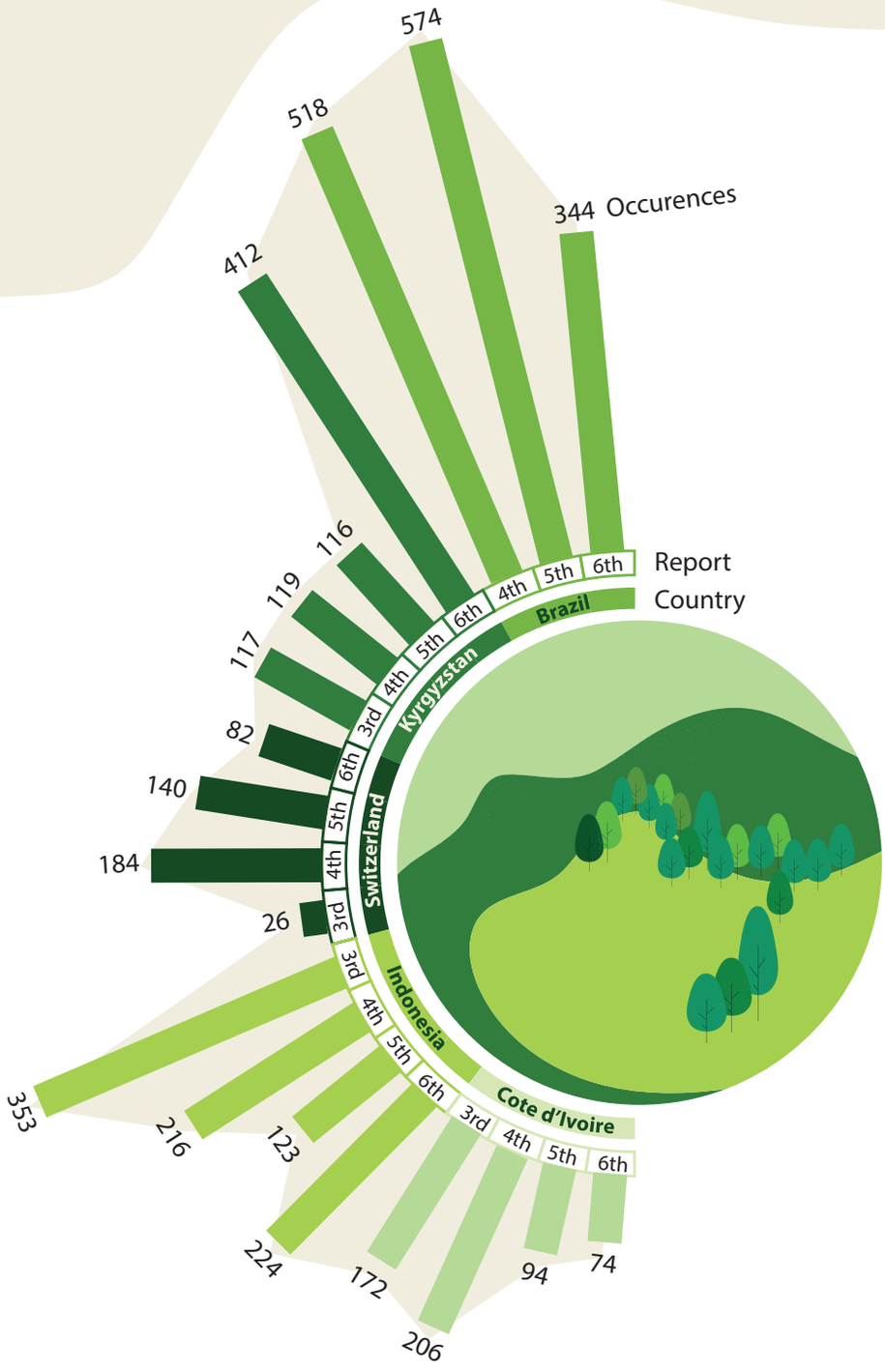
This data mining exercise honed a list of key words that indicate that rich data for the SDG indicator is contained in MEA reports prepared by countries. **This list can be used by countries to facilitate the reporting process on SDGs** and ensure that cross-cutting information is captured throughout the reporting process.

Convention on Biological Diversity

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is linked to forests because of their role in hosting and nourishing countless species and serving as some of the richest habitats in the world.

In reports to the CBD, it was established that the topic of forestry is generally oversaturated making the linkage more difficult to identify.

Occurences of the key word «forest»
Convention on Biological Diversity



Eventually, a series of key words was identified that can be consistently used to find information relevant to SDG indicator 15.2.1.

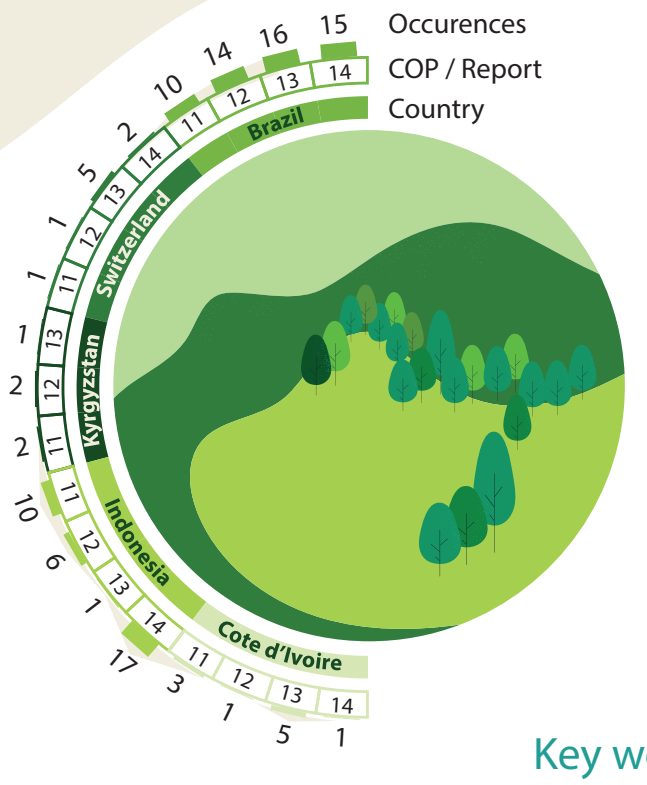
Key word occurrences:

Production forest	34
Certificate / certification	176
Forest certification	29
Deforestation	182
Reforestation	107
Sustainable forest	127

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is also closely linked to forest ecosystems. The Convention has three types of forested wetlands that are classified as Wetlands of International Importance: intertidal forested wetlands; freshwater, tree-dominated wetlands; and forested peatlands.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands results differed significantly compared to those for the CBD. Although having similar mechanisms for regulating biodiversity, the two Conventions have different links with forestry and how the sector interacts with other Convention priorities, so the key words differed.

Occurences of the key word «forest»
Ramsar Convention



Key word occurrences:

Forest	277
Forestry	243
Forest management	35
Certificate / certification	11
Deforestation	20
Reforestation	16

InforMEA is the United Nations information portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Covering an array of resources on different environmental topics, like forest management, users can see relevant treaty texts, COP decisions, national plans and reports, laws, court decisions and more.

InforMEA
UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION PORTAL ON MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

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