



**Input to the 2016 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
Bureau of the 12th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF12)**

1. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level:

1.1 Forests reflect the integrated, indivisible and universal nature of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The sustainable management of all types of forests and trees outside forests substantially contributes to a significant number of the 17 SDGs. Over 1.6 billion people depend on forests for subsistence, livelihoods, employment and income generation. It is globally recognized that forests provide a wide range of goods and services, which address many of the most pressing sustainable development challenges.

1.2 To ensure the realization of all benefits from forests, for the sustainable development of all people, and ensure that no one is left behind, in May 2015 at the 11th session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF), 197 Member States adopted the resolution on the international arrangement on forests (IAF) beyond 2015, as well as the UNFF11 Ministerial Declaration. Together, the UNFF11 resolution and the Ministerial Declaration chart a vision for multilateral policies and the institutional framework on forests for the next 15 years. The UNFF11 outcomes represent a global effort to ensure that forests remain a critical component in global sustainable development for all and to help ensuring that no one is left behind.

1.3 Furthermore, the UNFF11 resolution outlines five objectives for the IAFⁱ, and firmly advances the work of the IAF into the broader 2030 Agenda, including by extending the timeline of the Global Objectives on Forests (GOFs) to 2030, and by agreeing to develop a Strategic Plan for the IAF with the timeline of 2017-2030.

2. Identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges:

2.1 Several gaps and challenges require urgent attention to ensure that no one is left behind, these include:

Reversing the trend of deforestation and forest degradation

2.2 Ministers at UNFF11 voiced their deep concern on the continued deforestation and degradation of forests in many regions and underscored the need to reverse this trend. Concern was also expressed about the urgent need to address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. Ministers also committed to adopt cross-sectoral approaches and foster collaboration to address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in a coherent and coordinated way and to increase the valuation and recognition of the full value of forest goods and services, which create opportunities to address many of the most pressing sustainable development challenges.

2.3 The GOF1 of the UN Forest Instrumentⁱⁱ aims to reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation. The GOF1, SDG 15 and targets 15.1 and 15.2 are mutually supportive and, provide a strong basis for action to reverse the trend of deforestation and forest degradation.

Fragmentation persists and lack of policy coordination on forests

2.4 Forest-related issues continue to be addressed in a fragmented manner within the UN system and beyond, including in areas related to poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, food security and agriculture, energy, clean water and watershed protection, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity conservation, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, as well as combating desertification and land degradation, sustainable consumption and production, among others. The UNFF, with Member States of the Forum, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and Major Groups, recognize that this fragmentation requires urgent attention and enhanced cross-sectoral coordination in order to deliver coherent, efficient, and inclusive follow-up and review for forest-related SDGs and targets at the global level.

Accessing and mobilizing funding for sustainable forest management (SFM) remains a challenge

2.5 Target 15.b under the 2030 Agenda emphasizes the need to mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance SFM and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation. Domestic resource mobilization should be strengthened including through international support to developing countries to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection. Similarly, the UN Forest Instrument recognizes that effective implementation of SFM is critically dependent upon adequate resources, including financing, capacity development and an enabling environment for investment mobilization, as well as the transfer, on mutually agreed terms, of environmentally sound technologies. The GOF4 of the UN Forest Instrument also aims to reverse the decline in official development assistance for SFM and mobilize significantly increased, new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of SFM. The GOF4 and target 15.b are mutually supportive and, provide a strong basis for action to mobilize significant resources for forests.

2.6 In addition to investment in carbon, biodiversity, and combatting desertification, other aspects relating to forests receive limited or no funding. There is still a lack of recognition of the significance of the multiple functions and dimensions of SFM as a stand-alone issue at both global and national levels. The significant flow of finance that targets the carbon content of forests has led to a focus on predominantly high forest cover countries (HFCC) with high rates of deforestation, leaving out HFCC with lower rates of deforestation, low forest cover countries, and small island developing states, trees outside of forests and plantations from receiving proper funding under the relevant schemes. Obstacles to the mobilization of forest finance include poor information access, complicated application procedures, inadequate enabling conditions, insufficient capabilities, and problems associated with eligibility.

Improved monitoring, assessment and reporting is needed

2.7 Substantial information gaps continue to exist in assessing the progress in implementation of the UN Forest Instrument and on achieving the GOFs, illustrating the need to further strengthen national capacities for forest-related reporting to review progress in achieving SFM while further streamlining and harmonizing reporting among forest-related processes, as well as reducing reporting burdens and synchronizing data collection. Discussions are underway to address the information gaps and capacity deficiencies. Nevertheless, the HLPF, in the follow-up and review of the implementation of the SDGs, could build on the existing UNFF reporting mechanisms, and strengthen voluntary national reporting.

3. Valuable lessons learned on ensuring that no one is left behind:

The need for a strategic and coherent approach

3.1 As per the UNFF11 resolution, the Forum is fully integrating the 2030 Agenda and other important forest-related processes into its work through the development of the Strategic Plan of the IAF for the period 2017-2030, adhering to the principles identified in the 2030 Agenda, including ensuring that no one is left behind. The IAF Strategic Plan 2017-2030 will serve as a framework to enhance coherence and to guide and focus the work of the IAF and its components.

3.2 The Strategic Plan will incorporate a mission and vision, the GOFs and the forest-related aspects of the 2030 Agenda, take into account significant forest-related developments in other forums, as well as identify the roles of different actors and the framework for reviewing implementation.

3.3 The UNFF will ensure timely action and relevance to other existing processes of the Strategic Plan by operationalizing it through quadrennial programmes of work which set out priority actions and resources starting with the period 2017-2020, thereby considering and addressing SFM policies and practices that reduce the fragmentation and maximize their synergies.

Good governance, community-level action, and participation at all levels are critical

3.4 The GOF2 of the UN Forest Instrument aims to enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people. Ministers at UNFF11 welcomed efforts by countries and stakeholders to advance the sustainable management of all types of forests, including the role of collective action by indigenous and local communities and community-based SFM.

3.5 The UN Forest Instrument emphasized that implementation of SFM is critically dependent upon good governance at all levels. Ministers at UNFF11 stressed the need to promote SFM and address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, including by strengthening forest governance through, inter alia, promoting secure land tenure rights and stakeholder participation. They committed to review and, as needed in accordance with national legislation, policies and priorities, improve forest-related legislation, strengthen forest law enforcement and promote good governance at all levels in order to support SFM, create an enabling environment for forest investment, and combat and eradicate illegal practices, as well as promote secure land tenure.

4. Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of this principle:

4.1 While some progress has been made towards achieving the GOFs, further efforts are needed to strengthening national capacity to implement SFM. A large gap remains between accessing and mobilizing forest financing needs and current financing flows for SFM at all levels, which negatively and disproportionately affects some of the most vulnerable countries and populations. As enshrined in Target 15.b, mobilizing financing for SFM is essential for progress towards SDG15, and for ultimately ensuring that forests contribute substantially to the realization of the principle of “no one is left behind, either in rural and marginalized communities that depend upon them in direct ways, or for all communities that benefit from soil and water conservation and quality, disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and other ways.

4.2 Ministers at UNFF11 invited Forum members, financing institutions and the private sector to aim to ensure that investments and development finance take appropriate account of the role of forests in poverty eradication and sustainable development and to give financing for SFM greater priority and increased relevance, including through the recognition of the public goods and services that forests deliver. They invited existing and emerging forest-related financing initiatives, including the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund, to support the implementation of SFM, consistent with their mandates.

4.3 Member States at UNFF11 decided to establish the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, and further decided that it should promote the design of national forest financing strategies to mobilize resources for SFM and facilitate access to existing and emerging financing mechanisms in order to implement SFM. They also decided that the Network should ensure that special consideration is given to countries with special needs and circumstances, in gaining access to fundsⁱⁱⁱ.

4.4. Ministers at UNFF11 also committed to review and, as needed, in accordance with national legislation, policies and priorities, improve forest-related legislation, strengthen forest law enforcement and promote good governance at all levels in order to support sustainable forest management, create an enabling environment for forest investment and combat and eradicate illegal practices, as well as to promote secure land tenure

5. Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required:

5.1 The UNFF is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with specific expertise on all issues related to forests. The Forum can contribute substantially to the work of the HLPF in the follow up, review and implementation of the forest-related SDGs, with the full engagement of stakeholders and other IAF components. The IAF Strategic Plan is expected to clarify how the Forum will contribute to the work of the HLPF, in particular, in relation to the follow up, review and implementation of the forest related SDGs and targets.

5.2 In this respect, the HLPF may wish to:

(a) Invite ECOSOC functional commissions with respective areas of expertise on issues related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, to include a standing item in their agenda in order to facilitate their contributions to the HLPF;

(b) Invite UNFF to enhance coherence, cooperation, and synergies between the IAF Strategic Plan and the 2030 Agenda, including through systematic contributions of forest-related information, feedback, and knowledge as channelled by the UNFF to the HLPF, as part of the review and follow up on the implementation of the respective SDGs and targets.

6. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind:

6.1 To accelerate progress in ensuring that no one is left behind, it is essential to undertake forest-related policies that improve the lives of the world’s poorest. These could include, for example, (i) integrating forestry in rural development and poverty alleviation strategies and programs; (ii) land tenure and ownership policies that benefit local communities and indigenous peoples;

(iii) policies to increase access of local communities and small forest-based enterprises to financing; (iv) policies to promote payments and associated monitoring and reporting for forest environmental services to forest communities; and (v) undertaking reforms that support women's equal rights to economic resources including access to ownership of land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources in accordance with national laws.

6.2 It is equally important to strengthen coordination and collaboration on all issues relating to forests and to promote complementarity and coherence between the IAF, the 2030 Agenda and other forest-related processes. In this regard, the UNFF with its universal membership and comprehensive mandate plays a vital role in addressing challenges and issues relating to forests in a holistic and integrated manner and in contributing to the work of the HLPF and other processes to achieve globally agreed goals and targets related to forests.

ⁱ The five objectives of the IAF are: (i) To promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, in particular the implementation of the UN Forest Instrument; (ii) To enhance the contribution of all types of forests and trees outside forests to the post-2015 development agenda (2030 Agenda);(iii) To enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels; (iv) To foster international cooperation, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, as well as public-private partnerships and cross-sectoral cooperation at all levels; and (v) To support efforts to strengthen forest governance frameworks and means of implementation, in accordance with the UN Forest Instrument, in order to achieve sustainable forest management.

ⁱⁱ The four Global Objectives on Forests to be achieved by 2030 are: 1. Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation; 2. Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people; 3. Increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests; and 4. Reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management and mobilize significantly increased, new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management.

ⁱⁱⁱ Please see operative paragraph 13e of resolution 2015/33.