

Communication by the Bureau of the 14th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

Input to the 2019 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development¹

I. Identification of progress, gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges in achieving the SDGs and in relation to the theme within the area under the purview of UNFF

Forest-based climate solutions to build resilience and inclusive societies

The world's forests are essential to stabilize the global climate and provide a crucial foundation for the future prosperity of people and the planet. Sustainably managed forests are productive, resilient and renewable ecosystems that provide essential goods and services to people worldwide, contributing to inclusive societies and reduced inequalities while sustaining economies.

Through their ecosystem services, forests and trees are a key determinant of local, regional and global precipitation and temperatures patterns, acting as a natural air conditioner. Globally, forests constitute a vital part of the carbon cycle, absorbing, recycling and storing large amounts of carbon dioxide, regulating the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Forests are a proven natural tool that contributes to mitigating emissions of carbon dioxide and remove additional carbon from the atmosphere.

Despite their critical importance, forests continue to be lost and damaged in many parts of the world. Annually, over 7 million hectares of natural forests are converted to other land uses owing to large-scale commercial agriculture and other economic activities with regional variation. While the rate of deforestation has slowed down in many regions over the past decade, it is estimated that that of tree cover loss has steadily been rising in the tropics since 2000 due to human and natural causes, including fires and storms.

II. Valuable successful experiences and lessons learned on empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality

Sustainably managed forests benefiting inclusive development

When sustainably managed, forests provide an irreplaceable foundation for economic activities across sectors through provision of wood and non-wood products, as well as ecosystem services to meet the growing demand for food, fuel, fodder, shelter, clean air, soil and water. Conversely, if not sustainably managed, forests could become a source for conflict and social and environmental problems in a broader context potentially leading to a creation of marginalized populations.

¹ This input was prepared by the UNFF14 Bureau in response to the letter of the ECOSOC President dated 26 November 2018 inviting the UNFF to provide its substantive input to the 2019 meeting of HLPF to be convened under the auspices of ECOSOC. This input will be accompanied by the UNFF14 input to be finalized based on the discussions during UNFF14 (6-10 May 2019) for submission to the President of ECOSOC.

Tenure rights and local communities

Deforestation rates have been found markedly lower in communities with legal rights to their forests and government support for enforcement and management than other areas. For the forest-dependent communities, the depletion of forest resources directly translates into the erosion of the income sources, aggravating inequalities due to reduction and loss of income. Implementation of legal frameworks for the transfer of rights to specific communities has seen uneven progress owing chiefly to limited institutional capacities for their enforcement. Such uncertainties surrounding forest tenure often prevent long-term planning for forest management, subsequently hindering implementation of and investment in sustainably managed forest resources.

Forest products for value-addition and livelihoods

Moreover, value-addition and diversification of non-wood forest products is critical to improve livelihoods and economic growth at the local level. While local communities often use non-wood forest products for their domestic daily needs as a source of food, fodder, medicine and income, these local populations tend to only be marginally integrated in value chains despite their essential role in the collection and processing of products, and thus limiting the production of many non-wood forest products and their potential contributions to local and national economies.

Forest education and learning opportunities for all

Furthermore, as the growing number and proportion of the world's population resides in urban areas, forest education plays a key role in promoting sustainable living, production and consumption of forests and other natural resources through formal, non-formal and informal education approaches. A wide array of interdisciplinary education and training programmes in many countries also place forest issues as part of essential components to facilitate multidimensional understanding of sustainability.

III. Emerging issues likely to affect inclusiveness and equality at various levels

Understanding the contribution of forests to inclusiveness and equality

Much of the contributions by forests to sustainable development, including subsistence benefits, informal work opportunities and environmental services, continue to be underestimated and unrecognized in policy planning and economic activities, as well as official economic data and statistics in many countries, posing fundamental challenges to enhance inclusiveness and equality at all levels. Public institutions hold a key role in balancing social and environmental benefits of forests with their economic values.

IV. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global, regional and national levels

Forests providing subsistence and safety nets

The world's forests play a central role in providing subsistence benefits and social safety nets for over 1.6 billion people, including estimated 300 to 350 million people who live within and around forests who depend almost entirely on forest resources for their subsistence. Rural poor derive a considerable share of their household income from forest products. Secure land and forest tenure rights of local communities therefore provide a critical foundation to ensure that no one is left behind.

V. Areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required

Advancing implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030

The UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 (UNSPF) and its six Global Forest Goals (GFGs) provide a solid framework for collective actions at all levels to address the challenges that world's forests are facing and to maximize the contribution of forests to all SDGs, including those under consideration of the 2019 HLPF. Therefore, accelerating implementation of the UNSPF should be further emphasized by the HLPF.

Greater synergies and global partnership for forests

Moving forward, it is critical to strengthen coordination and collaboration on all issues relating to forests and to advancing global forest policy coherence within the UN system, in particular, through integration of the GFGs and targets of the UNSPF in the national sustainable development plans of countries, as well as the operational programmes of the member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests² (CPF).

VI. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in empowering people, ensuring inclusiveness and equality, and achieving SDGs

Promoting comprehensive and inclusive partnerships for sustainable forest management at all levels

To maintain the crucial contribution of forests to empowerment of people, inclusiveness and equality, as well as the achievement of the SDGs, it is imperative to reverse the loss of forest cover and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation. It is also essential to have an integrated, participatory and inclusive approach to forests and other sectors at the time of policy planning and implementation.

Within and beyond the forest sector, there is an overarching need for a positive enabling environment for private sector activity in promoting sustainable forest management. Progress towards SDG 16 (promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development) and SDG 17 (on means of implementation) will be necessary to create this enabling environment.

Improving governance in support of local communities

It is central to simplify regulatory frameworks for small-scale and community forestry and incentivize local added value and investments in sustainable forest management, including through simplified management plans and tax regimes, fiscal stability and tax deductions, and infrastructure to facilitate

² The CPF comprises 15 international organizations: Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Secretariat, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Secretariat, International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Secretariat, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat, United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat, World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and the World Bank.

market access. Technical support, capacity building (organizational, technical, financial, commercial) and inclusive finance are key in catalyzing local small-holders and community forestry initiatives.

Forest education and science

Governments and stakeholders could promote forest-based education for sustainable development by harnessing growing scientific research and utilizing and adapting such knowledge in terms of policy, extension, communication, and education. Specific measures could include systematic research on forests in education, development of global core curriculum on forests and strengthening teachers' trainings and education networks, among others.