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"Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development"

ANNEX 2

Inputs by the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO)

The Committee on Forestry (COFO) is the highest FAO Forestry statutory body. The biennial sessions of COFO bring together heads of forest services and other senior government officials to identify emerging policy and technical issues, to seek solutions and to advise FAO and others on appropriate action. Since 2015 this includes in particular issues related to forests and trees and ways to enhance contributions across SDGs. This encompasses life on land including biodiversity preservation and restoration, climate change adaptation and mitigation as well as livelihoods and poverty, food security and nutrition, gender and youth aspects and other.

Other international organizations and, increasingly, non-governmental groups participate in COFO. Participation in COFO is open to all FAO member countries.

Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, COFO sessions have put SDGs at the center of deliberations. The 23rd session of COFO in 2016 *inter alia* focused on forests and agriculture: land-use challenges and opportunities, both of which are pointing to key areas for accelerated action and transformative pathways to deliver on the SDGs. The 24th session of COFO in 2018 examined forests' contributions to the SDGs, based on the analysis presented in the 2018 edition of the State of the World's Forests (SOFO). The 25th session of COFO in June 2020 focuses on "Forests and the SDG Decade for Action: solutions for climate change, biodiversity and people".

Key policies and measures to ensure "accelerated action and transformative pathways" for realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

a. Critical gaps in implementing the 2030 Agenda within the area of responsibility of the intergovernmental body (bearing in mind interrelations with other goals and targets)

Forests, covering around 31% of the world's terrestrial surface, contribute to multiple SDGs beyond SDG 15. Some 2.4 billion people rely on firewood and charcoal for cooking and/or heating¹. Overall, forests supply about 40 percent of global renewable energy in the form of woodfuel – as much as solar, hydroelectric and wind power combined². 1 billion people depend to some extent on wild foods, and forests are particularly relevant for livelihoods and safety nets for the extreme rural poor, given that around 40 percent of the extreme rural poor – some 250 million people – live in forest and savannah areas (ibd.). Currently, there is insufficient recognition that poverty alleviation, food security, food systems, addressing

¹ FAO 2014: The State of the World's Forests 2014: Enhancing the Socio-economic Benefits from Forests

² FAO 2018. The State of the World's Forests 2018: Forests Pathways to Sustainable Development

climate change and biodiversity loss and ending poverty are closely linked and that forests and trees play an important role in achieving the related SDGs.

There is a particular urgency of taking decisive action to halt deforestation, restore degraded forests, substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally. The Agriculture, Forestry and Land Use (AFOLU) sector is responsible for 23% of anthropogenic GHG emissions³, mainly from deforestation and agricultural emissions from livestock, soil and nutrient management. Acting as carbon sinks, they absorb the equivalent of roughly 2 billion tons of carbon dioxide each year². Forests are home to around 80% of terrestrial animal and plant species⁴, implying that fight against biodiversity loss is closely linked how land use change and forests are managed.

40% of deforestation in the tropics and subtropics is accounted for by large-scale commercial agriculture, 33% by local subsistence agriculture, followed by infrastructure and urban expansion (10% each) and mining (7%)⁵, while unsustainable exploitation of timber or fuelwood is a main contributor to forest degradation. This underlines the importance of implementing sustainable agriculture practices to support sustainable forest management, which is a critical gap.

A further issue to be addressed is the lack of data and information that decision makers need to make informed decisions. This includes better data on the role and critical interlinkages, both synergies and trade-offs, between forests and food security and nutrition, biodiversity, the water cycle, soil conservation, carbon sequestration, habitat protection, poverty and livelihoods. There is also a lack of data to support evidence-based policy decisions, including on incentives, on managing land-use change or on recognizing and managing the multiple economic, social and environmental values of forests. Data and evidence on pathways to address sustainability issues and trade-offs remains scattered and is often not available when and where needed.

b. Priority measures to:

i. accelerate action

COFO emphasized the urgent need to promote action to **halt deforestation and forest degradation**, and to increase forest cover in order to achieve SDGs. This includes implementation of sustainable forest management as well as sustainable integrated land use and related global and regional initiatives for forest and landscape restoration. Accelerating action on these will be critical in the fight against global warming and biodiversity loss as well as in enhancing livelihoods and income opportunities for rural populations, particularly the vulnerable and poor.

The Committee *inter alia* invited countries to

- integrate forestry into national plans and action to **address climate change**, including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans. This can include the enhancement of forest sinks in particular through afforestation, reforestation, improved forest and landscape management, and long-lived harvested wood products, in accordance with national priorities.
- develop technical skills to control transboundary forest pests and diseases and enhance forest fire management.

³ IPCC. 2019. IPCC Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems;

⁴ FAO 2020. The State of the World's Forests 2020: Forests, Biodiversity and People (forthcoming)

⁵ FAO 2016. The State of the World's Forests 2016: Forests and Agriculture: Land-use Challenges and Opportunities

- strengthen institutional frameworks and processes for their implementation and adequate monitoring, reporting and verification systems.
- develop and implement adaptation policies and measures to increase resilience and reduce vulnerability of forests, local communities and people against the negative impacts of climate change.

COFO called for enhanced responses to address threats to forest biodiversity, recognizing that the implementation of sustainable forest management is important for **mainstreaming biodiversity** in forestry. The Committee invited countries to integrate the conservation and use of forest genetic resources into national forest programmes and other relevant national strategies and programmes, taking into account the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), and make innovative use of traditional knowledge;

Welcoming the findings and recommendations of the 44th Committee on Food Security and Nutrition in 2017, which *inter alia* emphasized that sustainable agriculture, food security and improved nutrition cannot be achieved at the expense of and without forests, the Committee called for promoting and developing policies and measures that lead to **sustainable value chains for forest and agricultural products**. This requires positive incentives to companies and small producers in a way that addresses food security concerns. Illegal logging and related trade needs to be addressed and sustainably produced wood promoted. COFO also underlined the need to mainstream the important role of forests and trees for food security and nutrition in policies and programmes as well as strengthening the capacity of government institutions and of local communities to integrate food security and nutrition objectives into their sustainable forest management practices. This includes taking measures to promote the sustainable production of wood-fuel as well as the efficient and safe use of wood-fuel for cooking and water sterilization. COFO also invited countries to promote the provision of secure tenure rights, including to local communities.

ii. **ensure transformative pathways to realize the decade of action for achieving the 2030 Agenda.**

COFO stressed the need for a **complementary and integrated approach** for agriculture and forests; strengthening dialogue with agriculture, fisheries and other relevant sectors on joining efforts for transformative change towards the achievement of the SDGs. This includes actions to eradicate hunger and eliminate poverty, while conserving and sustainably managing natural resources, adapt and mitigate climate change effects in line with the recommendations of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF);

At **national levels**, integrated approaches to national development policies and strategies as well as consistent cross-sectoral policies that integrate forests, agriculture and food security and nutrition are a central component of transformative pathways for achieving the 2030 Agenda. This requires inter-sectoral dialogues among agricultural sector ministries, other ministries and relevant stakeholders in order to address the vulnerabilities and mitigation potential of forests and to promote more holistic landscape-based approaches in the face of climate change, including measures to reduce risks of natural disasters.

At **global levels**, COFO called for the implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) aligned with the 2030 Agenda, enabling the forest sector to contribute to the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, including moving forward to halting deforestation by 2020. The Committee noted the importance of the work of the **Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)** in supporting the implementation and noted the benefits of inter-regional collaboration and encouraged further steps in this regard;

COFO emphasized the need to strengthen **the capacity of government institutions and of local communities** to provide enabling frameworks for action, including by adjusting and applying adequate policy instruments, including training and capacity building. It also pointed to the need to develop integrated land use planning as a strategic framework that takes into account the important role of forests in the water cycle, soil conservation, carbon sequestration and habitat protection, thus safeguarding their contributions to sustainable agriculture and food security in order to support achievement of the SDGs;

COFO emphasized action on responsible **investment and finance for sustainable forest management, sustainable agriculture and food systems**. It called for a boost in investments, including through existing international financial mechanisms, in line with the 2030 Agenda. It drew attention to the need and opportunity to scale up successful initiatives that could generate significant multiple benefits, including through results-based payments in the context of REDD+. It invited countries to strengthen the mobilization of innovative and enhanced financing for the restoration of degraded lands and to provide enhanced enabling conditions for increased private sector investment in forest and landscape restoration. The Committee also identified the following actions:

- strengthen public-private and private-private partnerships in financing for SFM;
- build capacity for larger scale investments for climate change adaptation and mitigation in agriculture, forestry and other land use sectors;
- strengthen partnerships to help countries' access to international climate finance, including from bilateral sources and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Global Environment Facility (GEF), as well as NGOs and the private sector;

The Committee noted the need to enhancing **governance of land use including by strengthening security of tenure**, especially for local communities and smallholders, and to promote forest tenure rights of local and indigenous communities, in accordance with the VGGT⁶. Equally important are clear legal frameworks governing land-use change, including secure land-tenure systems that recognize traditional customary rights to use land and forest products. COFO also called for specific policies and investment for improving the livelihoods of mountain peoples, increasing their resilience and reducing disaster risk.

COFO called for **enhancing the role and to promote the involvement of private sector and other stakeholders**, including rural and indigenous communities, in actions. It sees a need to promote the role of civil society, local communities, women and youth as agents of change and a need to strengthen capacities in implementation and innovation in the private sector and smallholders and their organizations, including women's organizations.

COFO underlined the importance of **improving data and information** of the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda. This includes:

- improving data collection and strengthening capacities to generate the knowledge needed for mainstreaming the role of forests and trees in food security and nutritional policies, including through South-South collaboration;
- support countries to develop monitoring systems for forest degradation;
- provide additional technical and capacity-building support to set up forest monitoring, reporting and verification systems to be able to address deforestation and climate change, and help implement REDD+ and alternative strategies, forest financing strategies and investment plans.

⁶ FAO 2012. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security

Contribution of the intergovernmental body to accelerated action and transformative pathways and realizing the decade of action and delivery for achieving the 2030 Agenda within its area of responsibility (including its cooperation with ECOSOC and other intergovernmental bodies).

The FAO Committee on Forestry **welcomed the alignment of FAO's work in forestry with the SDGs** and commended FAO for the efforts made in enhancing coordination both internally and externally. It encouraged further exploring synergies with other organizations, relevant processes and across programmes, including strengthening coordination of relevant ongoing initiatives at the country level; COFO also encouraged FAO to explore options for linking the work of the regional forestry commissions to other policy areas and working groups, in order to increase relevance and effectiveness, create synergies, and strengthen attention to forest issues in FAO Regional Conferences;

The Committee **endorsed the five interconnected principles of sustainable food and agriculture developed by FAO⁷** as an approach to promote sustainability for agriculture, forestry and fisheries, based on balancing the different dimensions of sustainability across sectors and along value chains; and welcomed the fact that these were also being discussed by other FAO Technical Committees, promoting a more coherent and integrated approach and more effective cooperation across sectors.

The Committee welcomed [FAO's Strategy on Climate Change](#) and called for strengthening the implementation and monitoring the strategy by ensuring food security, agriculture, forestry and fisheries are considered in an integrated and holistic way, thereby enhancing resilience.

COFO welcomed the development of the [FAO Strategy to Mainstreaming Biodiversity Across Agricultural Sectors](#) and a related action plan to mainstream biodiversity in the forest sector and supported **FAO's initiative to serve as a Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform** covering forestry, fisheries and agriculture, in an integrated manner. It encouraged coordinating and supporting the implementation of the [Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources](#) of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, in collaboration with the regional networks on forest genetic resources and relevant international organizations, bodies and processes.

COFO called to support efforts of [FAO's Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism](#), including by working together with other efforts such as the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration. It also encouraged and supported the cross-sectoral initiative on bio-economy for its role in sustainably providing goods and services across economic sectors.

COFO recognized the **role of FAO in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)** as a member and the chair, and stressed the importance of the work of the CPF in **supporting the implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests** and other global forest-relevant instruments.

COFO noted the need to strengthen commitments to improving forest governance and promoting sustainable forest management as enabling factors for addressing illegal deforestation, advancing trade in legal timber and wood products, and supporting climate change initiatives.

It noted the need to strengthen tenure rights taking into account the **Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security**.

⁷ FAO. 2014. Building a common vision for sustainable food and agriculture: Principles and approaches;

With regard to **data and information**, the Committee acknowledged the progress made on the Global Core Set of Forest Related Indicators and promoted FAO's global Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) as the main reference data source on forest resources at the global level and endorsed the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on National Forest Monitoring⁸. It recommended to:

- align FRA as necessary towards the needs of SDGs monitoring and to the reporting needs of other global forests processes, aiming at the production and dissemination of robust forest physical and socioeconomic information, including by using remote sensing.
- support countries with tools, methodologies and capacity-building for generating better information and data on forests' contribution to the SDGs, continuing to explore new and innovative tools and techniques to further improve collecting, analyzing and reporting data on forest and related aspects;
- support countries in strengthening the collection, analysis and dissemination of forest data with a view to supporting the national SDG indicator framework and country reports to regional and global review processes as well as in developing appropriate tools and methodologies for Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) in the context of REDD+ and for monitoring forest degradation;
- pay special attention to collecting gender-disaggregated data;
- promote global and regional knowledge sharing on best practices and lessons learned for the enhancement of data collection and analysis of forest statistics and information;

COFO 2020 will discuss results of [FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020](#), which, *inter alia*, provides data used to report on SDG indicators 15.1.1 and 15.2.1. It will also discuss FAO's report on the "State of the World's Forests 2020: Forests, Biodiversity and People"

Selected recommendations for accelerating progress and moving on transformative pathways for realizing the decade of action, for possible use in drafting the HLPF declaration.

The FAO Committee on Forestry recognized the urgency of actions to prevent deforestation and forest degradation as well as actions promoting the enhancement of forest sinks in particular through afforestation and long-lived harvested wood products, in accordance with their national priorities. It called for actively pursuing more integrated approaches to restoration of degraded lands at landscape level and better engaging the private sector in such initiatives. In order to address forest related emission reduction and adaptation actions COFO called for adequate recognition of the role of forests and tress in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), adaptation communications, and national adaptation plans,

The FAO Committee on Forestry supported the use of the five interconnected principles of a common vision for sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries developed by FAO, as a framework for policy dialogue on sustainability and called for promoting sustainable value chains in agriculture and forestry that prevent deforestation and forest degradation, including through positive incentives to companies and small producers in a way that addresses food security concerns.

⁸ FAO. 2017. FAO Voluntary Guidelines on National Forest Monitoring