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“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of 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. Facing the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sustainable Development Goals remain the shared vision to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. With just 10 years to go, global effort needs to remain focused on delivering the 2030 promise—by mobilizing more governments, civil society, businesses and calling on all people to make the Goals their own. The 25th session of COFO and the 7th World Forest Week explored the contributions that the forest sector can make to the SDG Decade of Action as well as to recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, including on solutions for climate change, biodiversity and people.

Suggested outline¹

a. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 HLPF

- **Impact on the social protection, health and safety of the peoples who depend on the forests for their livelihoods (Goals 1, 3, 5, 8):**
 - o It is estimated that 80-90 percent of forest enterprises are small and medium forest enterprises (SMFEs) (Mayers, 2006), while approximately 75 percent of forest production is informal (FAO, 2014). Most SMFEs therefore do not have access to social benefits and economic

¹ The headings and bullets are included as per the suggested outline annexed to the letter of the President of ECOSOC. Notes on expected contents are included in each section in *italic*.

- incentives. The lack of employment led to a reverse migration from cities to rural areas, spreading the disease to remote, unprepared locations.
- Forest products are helping keep people safe and healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic: They provide, personal protective equipment; hygiene and sanitary products; ethanol for sanitizer; respirator paper; and packaging for food and other items. Globally, there has been increased – and in some cases, record – demand for forest-derived hygiene, paper and packaging products.
 - Forests are acting as safety nets for vulnerable people during the pandemic. Forests and trees provide security for and increase resilience among family farmers, indigenous peoples and local communities and the vulnerable. Forests offer food when supply chains are disrupted and during economic hardship, provide medicinal plants, and create employment and income.
 - Urban forests and green spaces play a critical role in human health through prevention of respiratory and non-communicable diseases. They also help promote healthy lifestyles. During the ongoing pandemic, urban forests and green space have played a critical role in helping maintain the mental and physical health of urban dwellers, particularly during the lockdowns.
- **Disruptions in forest production and trade, putting businesses at risk and jeopardizing law enforcement (Goals 8 and 16)**
- Globally, trade in forest products declined by about 8% due to the pandemic (Jan-Nov 20 compared to Jan-Nov 19). Forest workers with minimal social support – such as casual workers, micro, small and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs), small-scale farmers, and women – have been among the hardest-hit. MSMEs account for up to 80-90% of total forest-related jobs in some countries and employ formally about 40 million people in forestry worldwide.
 - The crisis offered an opening to relax law enforcement to the extent of enabling large-scale illegal activities and fraudulent practices, while attention was focused on immediate economic impacts. The reverse migration also put pressure on forest resources through illegal charcoal production, conversion of forests to agriculture and other unplanned activities where livelihoods based on legal activities were sacrificed in favour of quick economic gains.
- **Biodiversity loss, deforestation and forest fragmentation increase the risk that infectious diseases emerge.**
- Food insecurity and a decrease in household incomes led to increase the reliance of smallholders on forests and forest products for subsistence, including medicinal plants and wildlife, which could result in overharvesting of natural resources. Deforestation has been another consequence which increased wildlife habitat disruption and biodiversity loss².

² SOFO 2020: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8642en/CA8642EN.pdf>

- Deforestation and forest fragmentation bring people and livestock into closer contact with wildlife, increasing human–wildlife conflicts and the risk of disease transmission between them. Landscape changes and biodiversity loss involve major shifts in the ecology of pathogens and the wildlife species they use as hosts and reservoirs, thus altering disease patterns. Approximately 70 percent of emerging infectious diseases and almost all recent epidemics have originated in animals, especially wildlife.

Actions, policy guidance, progress, challenges and areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the SDGs and to the theme within the area under the purview of your intergovernmental body;

- Investing in the restoration of degraded forests and landscapes is an important pathway to recovery from the pandemic. There is a strong need to unlock investments that create jobs and income and that mitigate the risk of future zoonotic diseases.
 - In the frame of the UN system efforts to reduce deforestation, ensure the prominent consideration of deforestation in the UN Food Systems Summit, the UNFCCC COP26, and CBD COP15, as well as the UN Decade of action to deliver the SDGs and the UN Decades on Family Farming and on Ecosystem Restoration.
 - Enhance learning and sharing about solutions to the short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to forest ecosystem restoration and to family farming.
 - Need for an integrated land management promoting intercultural dialogue of knowledge with indigenous peoples and local communities of owners of forests and forest lands.
 - Strengthen the promotion of sustainable management of wildlife along the whole wild meat value chain and the adoption of measures to better prevent zoonotic disease risk, including through the One Health approach and collaboration with the World Organisation for Animal Health and the World Health Organization.
 - Recognize the importance of plant health and the need to address issues through a One Health approach, strengthen further the international standard setting activities and enhance visibility of the work of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and CODEX Alimentarius.
 - COVID-19 recovery strategies must recognize that ecosystem integrity plays a key role in keeping societies healthy and on a path towards sustainability. Productive, sustainably managed forests are essential nature-based solutions to avert a climate crisis and for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
 - Deploy recovery actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that support the transition to low-carbon economies and enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems, and other co-benefits and continue supporting countries' National REDD+ Strategies and implementation action plans.
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b. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind”

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires halting deforestation, protecting intact forests and restoring degraded forest landscapes – and an upsurge of action by communities, forest industries and responsible businesses provides the best hope of doing so.

○ **Indigenous peoples – Climate Change and Nutrition**

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the impacts of climate change on the indigenous peoples and the forests they rely on. Chad, for example, has lost nearly one-third of its forest cover in the last 20 years, and the country is struggling with increased desertification and a dramatically shrinking Lake Chad. Worldwide, indigenous peoples are suffering from droughts, floods and increased temperatures, and communities are going hungry.

○ **Endangered Farm Producers’ livelihood**

Production and trade disruptions affect entire value-chains and put livelihoods and businesses at risk. Day labourers or part-time workers and small, informal business operators are hit as they often have no social safety net to fall back on.

Similarly, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and forest and farm producer organizations (FFPOs) have very low capacity to delay their spendings without earnings. MSMEs account for over 50 percent of total forest-related employment, and employ approximately 40 million people worldwide in the formal and informal sectors.

○ **Women**

Steady progress were made to empower women by supporting their participation in legal and sustainable fuelwood and charcoal production. However, COVID-19 has meant reduced access to markets and trading opportunities, impacting women who rely on selling forest products in cities that are currently off-limits. The COVID-19 crisis also put increasing pressure on forest resources through illegal charcoal production, often involving women, where livelihoods based on legal activities are sacrificed in favour of quick economic gains. In some countries, restrictions on travel and movements affected the transportation and trade of fuelwood (particularly charcoal) and consequently also the reliable access to energy for cooking in urban areas.

c. Cooperation, measures and commitments at all levels in promoting sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

FAO’s first objective is to help ensure the health and security of all involved in forest-related activities, particularly those most dependent on forests, forest products and forest-related incomes. FAO is working with a wide range of partners to address the impacts of COVID-19 on livelihoods and forests in different contexts, and to enhance forestry contributions to health and crisis recovery, building back stronger and more resilient communities and societies. The following measures are being taken or related commitments were made as per the Committee on Forestry’s recommendations:

- Adjust the Committee on Forestry's Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2020-2023 to new realities in a post-COVID-19 world and to address its mid and long-term impacts.
- Cooperate with the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat in preparing an initial assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable forest management to be presented at the 16th Session of UNFF.
- support capacity building, and provide technical assistance and data to underpin national efforts to enhance, redesign and implement, as appropriate, policies and actions to halt deforestation and forest degradation, and support adaptation measures, including in the context of post COVID-19 recovery actions, related to forests, and promote South-South and Triangular Cooperation.
- Need to position the forestry sector as one priority in public policies and highlight the essential role of *forest-related activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in countries mostly dependent on forests.*
- strengthen contributions from the forest sector to the improvement of food systems and stepping up action on halting deforestation, by promoting synergies and addressing trade-offs between forestry and agriculture in initiatives and projects, including through COVID-19 pandemic recovery measures.
- review the activities of *Silva Mediterranea* to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on Mediterranean forest ecosystems and related livelihoods, and how forests and forestry can contribute to the recovery from the pandemic in the region.
- recognize the significance of developing sustainable food systems in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, acknowledged the important role of forests, trees, agroforestry and other innovative forest-related approaches in this regard and underscored the importance of coordination of all stakeholders in adopting a food systems approach, in line with national priorities and capacities, and highlight the added urgency in light of the COVID-19 pandemic;

Members of the Committee on Forestry were invited to:

- deploy recovery actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that support the transition to low-carbon economies and enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems, and other co-benefits.
- support the implementation of the UN Decade of Family Farming and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in ways that address both short term impacts of COVID-19 and lead to long term resilience of family farmers, forests and forest dependent communities and businesses, including through national level implementation and voluntary contributions, as appropriate.
- integrate their priorities in forestry in post COVID-19 recovery plans and in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

d. Various measures and policy recommendations on building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

- Avoiding deforestation

- identify and promote new technologies and digital innovation for data collection and dissemination on forest resources, their sustainable management and use - including livelihoods and socio-economic data - as well as on forest products, in synergy with other relevant data-related initiatives of FAO, such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative.
- support Members in developing financial instruments to address deforestation, including through payments for ecosystem services;
- integrate forestry in FAO's Hand-in-Hand initiative with interested partners, at the request of the Member;
- together with other organizations of the CPF, build on outcomes of a joint initiative of the CPF "Working Across Sectors to Halt Deforestation and Increase Forest Area: From Aspiration to Action".
- Other initiatives in the forest sector in which FAO participates: internal cross-sectoral initiative on 'Transforming food systems to feed the planet without deforestation', the System-wide Working Group to Turn the Tide on Deforestation and a possible initiative on forest foods.
 - One Health and forest biodiversity
- consider an initiative to mainstream biodiversity in food systems, in consultation with Members.
 - Restoration
- ensure close coordination and collaboration between the UN Decade of Family Farming and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
- FAO Position paper on Ecosystem restoration of production ecosystems in the context of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
- The International Commission on Poplars and Other Fast-Growing Trees Sustaining People and the Environment (IPC), through its Executive Committee, was encouraged to take concrete actions through fast-growing tree species, where appropriate, to support the UN Decade of Action, UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and UN Decade of Family Farming.
- ensure the prominent consideration of deforestation in the UN Food Systems Summit, the UNFCCC COP26, and CBD COP15, as well as the UN Decade of action to deliver the SDGs and the UN Decades on Family Farming and on Ecosystem Restoration.

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dependent communities and businesses, including through national level implementation and voluntary contributions, as appropriate.

Selected recommendations for accelerating progress towards achievement of specific SDGs under review in 2021, which are, 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships.

Proposed recommendations for the Ministerial HLPF declaration:

- In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we highlight the urgency for all stakeholders to coordinate the adoption of a sustainable food systems approach that acknowledges the important role of forests, trees, agroforestry and other innovative forest-related approaches, in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- We welcome actions to enhance global work on afforestation, reforestation, forest restoration and healthy ecosystems at all levels for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, contributing to the UN System-wide efforts to "Turning the tide on deforestation" and the prevention of future pandemics, and to take into account forest-related issues in the preparation of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit.