

## Communication by the Bureau of the 17th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

### Input to the 2022 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup>

#### (a) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF

In order to realize the future we want, the 2022 HLPF presents a critical opportunity to highlight contributions of forests and their untapped potential to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on the momentum generated through recent major forest-related developments in various fora such as UNFF, CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and FAO. Acceleration of progress towards SDG15 on life on land, among others, is crucial to attain by 2030 since the progress towards many of its associated targets, including those with a 2020 timeline, have stalled.

In this respect, it is critical that the HLPF:

1. seizes the opportunity and taps into the potential and capability of the UNFF to contribute to its deliberations on and success towards forest-related SDGs;
2. recognizes the UNFF as the only global policy body on forests with universal membership that captures forest-specific technical and policy capabilities, and assists delivery of important financing through the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN);
3. better leverages the UNFF to promote and highlight forest-related contributions to sustainable development, by helping to ensure and maximize complementarities, synergies and coherence among forest policies, programmes and projects of Member States, partners and stakeholders in advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030<sup>2</sup> (UNSPF); and
4. recognizes the role of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and its strategic vision towards 2030.

Given that the HLPF will likely reaffirm its commitment to accelerate the progress towards the SDGs through the accelerated implementation of the intergovernmentally-agreed frameworks and instruments, it may wish to draw particular attention to the UN Forest Instrument (UNFI), the UNSPF and its Global Forest Goals (GFGs) as critical elements for the 2030 Agenda's collaborative success.

#### **(b) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of the UN Forum on Forests, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs**

The compounding impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have dramatically exposed systemic vulnerabilities and inequalities in all economies and societies. The adverse impacts of the pandemic on livelihoods,

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<sup>1</sup> This input was prepared by the UNFF17 Bureau in response to the letter of the ECOSOC President dated 23 November 2021 inviting the UNFF to provide its substantive input to the 2022 session of HLPF for its review of the SDGs and the theme. This input will be accompanied by the Chair's summary of discussions to be considered at UNFF17 (9-13 May 2022) for submission to ECOSOC as the UNFF's input to the 2022 session of HLPF.

<sup>2</sup> A/RES/71/285

growth and employment have caused major setbacks to efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030. At the current rate, the total number of people living in extreme poverty and without jobs is projected to reach 876 million<sup>3</sup> and 207 million<sup>4</sup> in 2022, both well above pre-pandemic levels.

Concurrently, the interlinked and mutually reinforcing threats of climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, forest fires, desertification, land degradation, pollution and other disasters continue to threaten people's lives and the ecological integrity of the planet. Forest-based actions, grounded in sustainable forest management, have a crucial role to play in addressing those threats.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a stark reminder that the sustainable utilization, protection, conservation and restoration of nature, in particular forests, is essential to reducing the risk of infectious and zoonotic diseases. At the same time, while forests can offset many of the social, economic and environmental impacts of the pandemic and other global challenges, the COVID-19 crisis has also adversely affected the implementation of sustainable forest management, leaving the stability and viability of the forest sector in jeopardy in several regions.

Major initial socio-economic and environmental challenges related to forests and the forest sector resulted from mobility restrictions, reduction of capital investments and low prioritization of forests in national plans, shortage of skilled personnel, financial and technological constraints, disruption of trade and supply chains of wood and other forest products, delayed planting and other forest operations, and price increases of various goods and services.

Globally, the rate of forest loss remains alarming. Despite their critical importance to achieve SDG15 and all other SDGs, the proportion of forest area has continued to fall from 31.9 per cent of the world's total land area in 2000 to 31.2 per cent in 2020, a net loss of almost 100 million hectares, owing chiefly to large scale agricultural expansion, especially in the tropics<sup>5,6</sup>. Such rapid disappearance of forests, and continued pressure on forest ecosystems, signals the continuing need for accelerated action to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. This action needs to occur at all levels including working with landholders to support their economic, primary production and cultural needs to reduce the need for further land clearing/deforestation. Furthermore, actions to support the continued or improved implementation of sustainable forest management practices, including afforestation, reforestation and restoration of forest landscapes, as enshrined in the SDGs, particularly SDG15, remain ever critical.

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<sup>3</sup> UN DESA (2022), World Economic Situation and Prospects 2022, Available online at [https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2022\\_ES\\_EN.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2022_ES_EN.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> ILO (2022), World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2022, Available online at [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_834081.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_834081.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> UN DESA (2021), Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021, Available online at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2021.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> FAO (2020), Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020: Main report, Available online at <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9825en>.

To address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and forest sector in support of the GFGs and SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17, the following main suggestions have been identified during the UNFF Expert Group Meeting on Assessment of the Impacts of COVID-19 on Forests and Forest Sector<sup>7</sup>.

- a. Actions and policies intended to reduce the impact of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector should be conducted in a manner that accelerates implementation of the UNSPF and its GFGs, as well as the SDGs. These actions should be linked to existing forest sector policy priorities, especially climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- b. Increased investments are needed to enhance forest resiliency and adaptive capacity to climate change. This can help forests to cope with negative impacts of climate change, protect people against current disease, and reduce future pandemics;
- c. Strategies that promote nature-based solutions to address short and long-term shocks to livelihoods should be applied, and policies to conserve, restore, and sustainably manage and use forests should be promoted as a means to create resilient and sustainable recovery plans;
- d. The lack of knowledge of the full value of forests, how to use it in national accounting, and how to translate such knowledge to concrete actions are fundamental gaps that have to be addressed. In this respect, the forest services and products, and the benefits of sustainable forest management for adaptive and resilient development need to be communicated more broadly to the public, as well as decision-makers;
- e. Improved communications can help with increasing the understanding of the important role of SFM and help counteract misinformation and misunderstandings of the role of forests. Enhanced communications can also help align opposing interests and enhance resilience of forest sector to cope with uncertainties and challenges posed by pandemic;
- f. Innovative forest management practices, like ecotourism, and forest landscape restoration should be promoted to increase economic performance of forests. Improved information exchange about business practices, new market opportunities, and digitalization should be also enhanced;
- g. Enhancing international cooperation in the areas of capacity building, including in forest education, and technological cooperation should be a main component of all strategies and measures to minimize the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector, particularly among women and youth.;
- h. Measures should be taken to strengthen monitoring and inspection of forests to prevent deforestation and forest fires, and to promote sustainable development. Forest dependent communities should be supported through social protection, livelihood options, as well as capital investments such as seeds and income generating activities. The most vulnerable and

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<sup>7</sup> Further information on the UNFF Expert Group Meeting is available on the UNFF website at: <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/events/unff-expert-group-meeting-assessment-of-the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-forests-and-forest-sector/index.html>.

marginalized groups such as indigenous peoples have specific challenges and needs and should be key stakeholders engaged in “building back better”;

- i. It is important to leverage support from the private sector and the international development community for a post-COVID-19 recovery, and to identify additional funding alternatives to support SFM and production of sustainable timber and non-timber products;
- j. Collaboration on forest-related policies and scientific research, in particular, with the health sector along the “One Health” framework should be promoted. Interdisciplinary research and synergies between foresters, environmentalists, and experts in human and wildlife infectious diseases should also be enhanced to prevent future zoonotic diseases; and
- k. Greater investments in new business opportunities, particularly in enhancing the skills of youth, women, and MSMEs should be promoted. The capacity of civil-society groups and their engagement in the implementation of recovery strategies should be strengthened.

The UNFF continues to monitor and assess progress made in other forest-related multilateral fora and agreements, such as the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, and the Alliance for the Conservation of Rainforests. In this respect, the UNFF at its seventeenth session (UNFF17, 9-13 May 2022) will convene the High Level Roundtable on forest-related multilateral developments to consider its response to, role in, and expectations in relation to these developments.

The UNFF also launched the Global Forest Goals Report 2021<sup>8</sup> during its sixteenth session (April 2021) and undertook the second assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector<sup>9</sup> for consideration during UNFF17.

**(c) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by the UN Forum on Forests**

Forests and forest-dependent people are both a casualty of and an important part of the solution to address the impacts of the pandemic and other global challenges. Forests provide socio-economic safety nets for people and communities in times of crises, sustaining the lives of those already at risk of being left behind. During the pandemic, the designation of the forest sector as an essential service has been common in all regions.

An estimated 1.6 billion people, 25% of the global population, rely on forests for their subsistence needs, livelihoods, employment, and income. Of the extreme poor in rural areas, 40% live in forest and savannah areas, and approximately 20% of the global population, especially women, children, landless farmers, and other vulnerable segments of society, look to forests to meet their food and income needs<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> UN DESA (2021), Global Forest Goals Report 2021, Available online at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Global-Forest-Goals-Report-2021.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Further information on the assessment is available on the UNFF website at: <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> UN DESA (2021), Global Forest Goals Report 2021, Available online at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Global-Forest-Goals-Report-2021.pdf>.

During the pandemic, forest-dependent populations have faced job loss, reduced income, diminished access to markets and information, and for many women and youth, a contraction in seasonal employment. Many of these populations are already marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples and women, least able to access critical socio-economic safety nets. Many forest-dependent populations, especially those in remote or hard to reach places, have faced difficulties accessing healthcare or find that government assistance programmes and basic services are disrupted.

The pandemic-driven health and socio-economic impacts have also increased pressure on forests. As more and more vulnerable people have turned to forest products and forest resources as a coping mechanism to seek food, fuel, shelter, and protection from the risks of COVID-19, these ecosystems are beginning to show signs of stress. Several regions found the stability and viability of their forest sectors in jeopardy<sup>11</sup>.

#### **(d) Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review**

The present global challenges and ongoing policy responses serve to reaffirm the important role that forests can play in improving the socio-economic and environmental conditions of people and the planet. The global community increasingly recognizes and promotes application of forest-based actions as a solution to many of the global challenges, as indicated by 141 Member States signing the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use.

These developments have created unique opportunities to advance implementation of the globally agreed forest-related commitments enshrined in various instruments. It also provides a great opportunity for the UN system and its partners and stakeholders to play an active role in advancing a coherent and synergetic agenda on forests, agriculture, land, biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. Enhanced cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies within and among these partners and stakeholders is key to the achievement of the SDGs and the GFGs.

The UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 (UNSPF)<sup>12</sup>, including its six Global Forest Goals, provides a framework of forest-based actions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, and the CBD and the outcome of the ongoing consultations on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), comprised of 15 international organizations, has provided some assistance in synergizing actions but there is more work to be done.

In this regard, UNFF at its sixteenth session considered its thematic priorities for the biennium 2021–2022 in support of the implementation of the UNSPF and interlinkages between the GFGs and targets and the SDGs, the work towards a post-2020 global biodiversity framework and other international forest-related developments. The main points emerged from the discussions can be found in the Report of the 16<sup>th</sup> session<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> UN DESA (2022), Co-Chairs' summary of the UNFF Expert Group Meeting on the Assessment of the Impacts of COVID-19 on Forests and Forest Sector, Available online at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Co-Chairs-Summary-EGM-COVID-19-impact-Feb-2022.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> A/RES/71/285

<sup>13</sup> E/2021/42-E/CN.18/2021/8

**(e) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda**

The UNFF serves as the responsible intergovernmental body for follow-up and review of the implementation of the UNSPF and achievement of its GFGs<sup>14</sup>, thereby supporting the acceleration of the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The UNFF addresses issues relating to forests in a holistic and integrated manner with the engagement of all partners and stakeholders at all levels, particularly the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, in advancing the implementation of the UNSPF.

For the biennium 2021-2022, the thematic priorities for the sixteenth and the seventeenth sessions of the UNFF<sup>15</sup> are: (i) reversing the loss of forest cover (GFG 1); (ii) enhancing forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits (GFG 2); and (iii) mobilizing financial resources and strengthening scientific and technical cooperation; promoting governance frameworks to advance implementation; and enhancing cooperation, coordination and coherence, for sustainable forest management (GFG 4, 5 and 6).

The forthcoming seventeenth session<sup>16</sup> of the UNFF (UNFF17, 9-13 May 2022) will hold policy discussions on the implementation of the UNSPF, including interlinkages between the GFGs and targets and the SDGs under in-depth review by the HLPF in 2022, consider proposals made during technical discussions held during UNFF16. UNFF17 will also convene a High-level Round Table on Forest-related Multilateral Developments, such as the Glasgow Declaration on Forests and Land Use, to provide a platform for senior officials of Member States, non-government and non-UN actors, and the UN system to highlight roles of forests in addressing ongoing global challenges, and the interlinkages of forests and other issues in the agenda of major international fora.

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<sup>14</sup> A/RES/71/285

<sup>15</sup> Thematic priorities of the UNFF for each biennium are based on the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and targets, taking into account the programme of the HLPF and relevant international forest-related developments. Further information on the UNFF16-17 thematic priorities is available on the UNFF website at:

<https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/UNFF16-17-Thematic-Priorities-rev.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Further information on UNFF17 is available on the UNFF website at:

<https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html>.