



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Inputs of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) to the thematic review of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2022

“Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

ANNEX 2

Inputs by the 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 Sustainable Development Goals.

COFO considers the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2020 report as a major contribution to the monitoring of SDG 15. COFO recognized that the world’s forest area continues to decrease but at a slightly slower rate than previous decades.¹ Despite the overall loss of forest, the world continues to progress towards sustainable forest management. Since 2010, there has been a 27 percent increase in forests under certification schemes and the proportion of forest within protected area has now reached 18 percent. Forests are also accumulating biomass and carbon. Furthermore, the total percentage of world forests under a long-term management is increasing.

Although it is too soon to analyze the long-term impacts, if any, of COVID-19 on the forest sector, in the short term, there have been effects on supply and demand for products, trade patterns and supply chains. However, it is not clear to what extent any of these are temporary or may persist as durable structural changes. Overall, there was a 5.1 percent reduction in forest product exports in 2020 and a 7 percent drop in imports, but the trade fluctuated over the year. However, the dramatic decline in the second quarter of 2020 was followed by a steep recovery.

(a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17

FAO published new information on global forest resources, their management and use in its Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 (FRA 2020) report. For the first time, data for the report were collected and compiled using an on-line interactive platform that was aimed to reduce countries’ reporting burden and improve quality and consistency of reported data.

¹ Forest Resources Assessment FAO, 2020

The results of FRA 2020 were published in a number of different formats. FRA 2020 Key Findings are available as a static pdf and as a digital report. A more comprehensive FRA 2020 Main report was published on-line together with individual reports for all 236 countries and territories of the world. All country reported data and metadata were made available also digitally through the FRA platform.

The recent results of the FAO global remote sensing survey² confirmed the results based on country-reported data. The deforestation is slowing down, and it is driven by agricultural expansion. According to the survey, conversion to cropland dominates forest loss in Africa and in Asia. In South America most of deforestation is driven by livestock grazing.

The novelty of the new on-line FRA reporting and dissemination platform and the role of FRA as the only provider of reliable and updated information on the world's forest resources has been recognized by COFO members.

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COVID-19 has caused disruptions in the demand, export prices and supply chains for a wide range of forest-related products. In Africa, for example, a fall in cocoa export prices and a decrease in demand threatened the livelihoods of farmers in West Africa, showing similar trends with other forest products. Increased illegal harvesting of timber and non-wood forest products was observed in regions like Africa by populations, who have had their incomes and livelihoods negatively impacted due to COVID.

(b) 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

The sustainable use of forest resources will continue contributing to a green recovery and the opportunity to decarbonize multiple economic sectors in the context of a circular bioeconomy. It can thus play a crucial role in safeguarding human health, including by increasing food security, maintaining biodiverse and resilient ecosystems.

The increased use of wood in construction can contribute to economic development in the global South. For example, under one scenario, it has been estimated that the production and primary processing of wood to meet expected demand for housing could contribute up to USD 83 billion

² <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7449en/cb7449en.pdf>

to Africa's bio-economy by 2050 while creating some 25 million jobs through the additional forest plantations and processing needed to develop the building materials. Unlocking this potential, however, requires investment to strengthen technological and human capacity.

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

The 25th session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) was held from 5 to 9 October 2020. In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the session was convened virtually, on an exceptional basis. COFO25 provided important guidance on several policy areas, relevant to the SDGs under review:

- It welcomed the launch of *the State of the World's Forests 2020 on Forest, Biodiversity and People*, jointly prepared by FAO and UNEP, and recommended consideration of SOFO2020 key findings in the negotiations of the post 2020 biodiversity framework.
- Noting the importance of forest biodiversity for ecosystem services and food security, it requested to strengthen forestry considerations in the work on mainstreaming biodiversity across agriculture sectors. It also called to step up actions to halt deforestation, forest degradation and loss of forest biodiversity and support Members in their efforts, including through fostering various forms of international cooperation.
- Recognizing the role of forests and forestry in contributing to healthy diets and preventing all forms of malnutrition, COFO25 highlighted the relevance of forests for the provision of additional jobs and income and ensuring livelihoods.
- It recommended to increase collaboration with and the engagement of the private sector, family farmers, smallholders, communities and entrepreneurs, as active agents of change, as well as forest and farm producer organizations to support activities of the UN Decades on Family Farming and on Ecosystem Restoration, and to scale up its support to forest and farm producer organizations through the FAO's Forest and Farm Facility
- The Committee recommended to scale up forest and landscape restoration efforts, at all levels.
- The Committee recognized the role of forests and sustainable forest management in building climate change resilience and in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and encouraged Members to put emphasis on accelerating implementation of national REDD+ strategies and action plans.
- COFO25 invited Members to promote policy coordination and align public incentives to halt deforestation, in accordance with national legislation, and foster sustainable food systems.

The Committee emphasized the need for continued collection and dissemination of timely, high quality and transparent data for forest monitoring, and requested the FAO to:

- continue to produce a FRA report every five years.
- develop, in consultation with Members, Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ) partners, international experts and other stakeholders, a flexible FRA reporting process that allows voluntary updates of key indicators related to SDG15 and other indicators at the discretion of Members, as new information allows, while ensuring data quality and transparency.
- develop, in consultation with Members, guidance and operational tools for more consistent reporting on forest characteristics, including on primary forests, and suggestions on using remote sensing, based on country capacity and capability.

(d) 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

- COFO25 encouraged Members to integrate their priorities in forestry in post COVID-19 recovery plans and in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, and recommended continued prioritization to the implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals;
- and highlighted that the investments in forest restoration also contribute to economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, by creating green jobs, generating incomes, improving human health and increasing food security.