

UNFF17 Chair's summary on item 3(a)(v) on interlinkages between the global forest goals and targets and the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2022 and international forest-related developments

INPUT TO THE HLPF 2022

This input to the 2022 High-Level Political Forum is the Chair's summary of the policy discussions during UNFF17 on agenda item 3(a)(v), which also includes input provided earlier by the UNFF17 Bureau to the 2022 session of the HLPF¹. This input is not a consensus negotiated outcome of UNFF17. The format for the input is based on the guidance provided by the ECOSOC President in his letter of 23 November 2021.

(a) 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 COVID-19 pandemic has exposed systemic risks and issues resulting from nature loss, particularly deforestation and forest degradation, as the sustainable utilization, protection, conservation, and restoration of nature is essential to reduce the risk of infectious and zoonotic diseases, as well as offset many of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of other global challenges.

In this respect, 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. Sustainable forest management and sustainable value chains of forest products can also facilitate collaboration across sectors and stakeholders and enhance human and social capital to realize transformative changes and overcome negative impacts of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis has adversely affected the implementation of sustainable forest management, leaving the stability and viability of the forest sector in jeopardy in several regions. 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 tropics².

Rapid disappearance of forests 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 provide adequate access to innovation, capacity building and relevant technologies and in doing so support their economic, primary production and cultural needs to reduce the need for further land clearing and deforestation.

(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, within the respective areas addressed by the UN Forum on Forests

¹ Further information on the UNFF17 Bureau's input is available on the HLPF website at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=30022&nr=3176&menu=3170>.

² 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>.

Due to the forests' contribution to addressing global pressing challenges, and the various products, services and livelihoods provided to the people who depend directly or indirectly on forests worldwide, leveraging the full potential of forests and their sustainable management will help “Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

An estimated 1.6 billion people, 25% of the global population, rely on forests for their subsistence needs, livelihoods, employment, and income. 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 jeopardy³.

(c) 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. Conversely, scaling up poverty eradication strategies for forest-dependent people remains essential to address the social and economic challenges often underlying forest degradation. The global community increasingly recognizes and promotes application of forest-based initiatives, programmes and strategies as a means to enhance national efforts to address many of the social, economic and environmental challenges, as shown *inter alia* by 141 Member States that signed the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use.

The UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 (UNSPF)⁴, including its six Global Forest Goals, provides a reference for forest-based actions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, and the CBD. The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), comprised of 15 international organizations, has played a key role in synergizing actions and providing assistance, even if further work remains to be done.

In this regard, UNFF at its seventeenth 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, and other international forest-related developments. Actions and policy recommendations that

³ 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>.

⁴ A/RES/71/285

emerged from the discussions can be found in the UNFF17 omnibus resolution and the UNFF17 Chair's summary⁵.

(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

Recent forest-related developments have created relevant 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, consistent with mandates and priorities of different initiatives and multilateral agreements. 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 UNFF serves as the responsible intergovernmental body for follow-up and review of the implementation of the UNSPF and achievement of its GFGs⁶, 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.

The UNFF continues to monitor and assess progress made through other forest-related global developments, including the Glasgow Declaration on Forests and Land Use. In this regard, the UNFF should also step up its actions on forest restoration, in the context of UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and to scale up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide, including forests and generate forest-based social, economic and environmental benefits. The UNFF also launched the Global Forest Goals Report 2021⁷ during its sixteenth session (April 2021) and undertook the second assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector⁸ for consideration during UNFF17.

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

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, particularly SDG15;

⁵ UNFF17 omnibus resolution and the Chair's summary are available on the UNFF website at:

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

⁶ A/RES/71/285

⁷ 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>.

⁸ Further information on the assessment is available on the UNFF website at:

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

2. recognizes the UNFF as the global policy body on forests with universal membership that captures forest-specific technical and policy capabilities, and assists delivery of important financing through its Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN);
3. considers the relevant elements of the UNSPF as a reference framework for its forest-related work to enhance progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, to promote forest-related actions, to improve the understanding of the interlinkages between the social, economic and environmental benefits of forests, including for the eradication of poverty, and to promote effective cooperation and collaboration on forest related matters;
4. 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 UNSPF, and
5. Takes note of 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 relevant elements for the 2030 Agenda's collaborative success.