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High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable development (HLPF) 2023

10-19 July 2023

“Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”

ANNEX 3

Inputs by the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO)

The Committee on Forestry (COFO) is the highest Forestry statutory body of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). 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 has included, in particular, issues related to forests and trees, and ways to enhance contribution across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 26th session of COFO (COFO 26) was held from 3 to 7 October 2022. In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the session was convened in a hybrid modality, on an exceptional basis. COFO 26 provided important guidance on several policy areas, which are outlined in section (d).

COFO considers the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2020 report a major contribution to the monitoring of SDGs with respect to forests. FAO, through FRA, leads the quantification efforts on the “total area of forests managed for soil and water conservation as a primary objective”. According to FRA 2020, the total area of forests managed for soil and water conservation reached 398 million hectares (ha) or 12 percent of the total forest area globally – an increase of 119 million ha since 1990 (FAO, 2020). FAO considers the innovative System for Earth Observation, Data Access, Processing, and Analysis for Land Monitoring (SEPAL) a game changer in developing open source, transparent and reliable forest data.

The FAO Science and Innovation Strategy is a tool to accelerate the implementation of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It covers all sectors and areas of agrifood systems, including crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture. COFO recognizes the need for diverse range of forest innovations (technological, including digital, social, policy, financial and institutional in nature) to contribute to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

(a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body,

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:

SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation

The global water cycle is highly dependent on the interactions between forests and water. Forests and trees provide key ecosystem services: improving water quantity and quality, sustaining biodiversity, and providing climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits, including protection against soil erosion, sea level rise and the amelioration of floods and droughts. The forest-water nexus is key to SDGs 6, 13, 14 and 15. Together, these SDGs support the implementation of other SDGs by ensuring that the ecological infrastructure is in place and able to adapt to climate change.

FAO has been able to accelerate progress, address gaps and support Member Nations in the sustainable management of forests for water-related benefits including through:

- the development of science-based management guidance such as the [Guide to forest-water management](#);
- the development of state of the art monitoring tools such as the Forest & Landscape Water Ecosystem Services Tool ([FL-WES tool](#)) and the SEPAL Resilient rivers and basins beta app ([Resilient rivers and basins module](#));
- the design of a suite of capacity development materials targeting multiple sectors and stakeholders (e.g. [Forest-water e-learning](#), [forest-water capacity development guide](#), and Resilient Rivers e-learning, which will be available by mid-2023); and
- building a community of practice that brings together scientists and practitioners for sustainable watershed management.

The interrelationship between forests and water is recognized in SDG targets 6.6 and 15.1 with indicators 6.6.1, 15.1.1 and 15.1.2 being particularly relevant. While the relationship is recognized in the targets, the current SDG indicators and their methodologies provide limited information that accounts for this connection, with forests and water being treated separately, reflecting sectoral dynamics. This creates gaps when informing policy and practice and should be addressed.

SDG11 on sustainable cities and communities

COFO 24 recognized that sustainable management of urban and peri-urban forests and trees, and their integration in urban planning, can help with achieving the SDGs, ensuring people's health and well-being, and tackling climate change.

COFO recommended to: (i) increase knowledge transfer and exchange on urban and peri-urban forests and trees through active participation in regional technical networks; and (ii) foster inter-sectoral coordination between the various levels of governments (national, regional, local) on the development of policies and urban planning approaches, to fully exploit the contribution of urban and peri-urban forests to SDG 11 and 15.

The pandemic has brought new awareness of the importance of access to green space as a means of improving the physical and mental health of urban dwellers. This is one of the key themes to be discussed at the 2nd World Forum on Urban Forests¹ in Washington, DC from 16 to 20 October 2023, which will be co-organized by FAO.

¹ <https://www.worldforumonurbanforests.org/>

(b) Three key areas where transformative actions for accelerated progress have been successful, and three key areas where support is most urgently needed, with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023:

Data innovation

Transformative progress was made in developing quality forest data to accelerate countries efforts towards the SDGs. FAO considers the innovative System for Earth Observation, Data Access, Processing, and Analysis for Land Monitoring (SEPAL²) a key platform for specific remote-sensing based analysis of forests and monitoring of SDG targets. By combining modern geospatial data infrastructures with powerful open-source data processing software and putting this all in a supercomputing environment, immediately accessible to users anywhere in the world, the potential for the SEPAL platform is limited only by the imagination of its users. In the coming years, SEPAL will further advance the generation forest and land-use data, enabling countries to attract public and private actors for forest-related actions towards the achievement of the SDGs, Global Forest Goals, the Paris Agreement and the new Global Biodiversity Framework. Building on SEPAL, FAO, together with partners, launched the Forest Data Partnership³, which aims to halt and reverse forest loss by collaboratively improving global monitoring of forests and supply chain tracking, and accelerating restoration.

Bioenergy and innovations in wood construction

Bioenergy use is still the primary energy source for cooking and heating for more than two billion people around the world. Support is required to promote the sustainable use of bioenergy by increasing efficiency in woodfuel conversion and utilization processes, enhancing the use of wood residues for energy, and increasing access to forms of modern energy.

Globally, an estimated three billion people (40 percent of the world population) will need new housing by 2030, which translates into a need for 300 million new dwellings between 2016 and 2030. The construction sector was responsible for almost 40 percent of energy- and process-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2018. Support is required for the adoption of alternative construction approaches, including the increased use of wood, to reduce the carbon footprint of the built environment.

(c) Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerate progress towards multiple SDG targets, including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs:

The key findings of the 2022 edition of *the State of the World's Forests* (SOFO 2022)⁴ recognize the potential of forests to help mitigate the impacts of global challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss and the COVID-19 pandemic.

SOFO 2022 explores the potential of three forest pathways for achieving green recovery and tackling multidimensional planetary crises, including climate change and biodiversity loss.

² <https://www.un-spider.org/links-and-resources/gis-rs-software/system-earth-observation-data-access-processing-and-analysis>

³ <https://www.forestdatapartnership.org/>

⁴ <https://www.fao.org/publications/sofo/2022/en/>

The three interrelated pathways are (i) halting deforestation and maintaining forests; (ii) restoring degraded lands and expanding agroforestry; and (iii) sustainably using forests and building green value chains. The balanced, simultaneous pursuit of these pathways can generate sustainable economic and social benefits for countries and their rural communities, help sustainably meet increasing global demand for materials, and address environmental challenges.

In this context, COFO invited FAO and Members to work collectively to promote the important role of forests and their social, economic and environmental benefits, including as a contribution to achieving the SDGs and Global Forest Goals.

(d) Assessment of the situation in the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and 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:

COFO 26 provided important guidance on several policy areas relevant to the SDGs under review, including the following:

- Regarding SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, COFO emphasized bioenergy among the key options for achieving climate goals, advising that it could bring major socioeconomic benefits, as the second largest employer in the renewable energy sector. As mentioned above in section (b), traditional bioenergy use is the primary energy source for cooking and heating for more than two billion people around the world, especially in the world's most impoverished regions. The extensive traditional use of bioenergy has negative impacts, particularly on human health and the environment. Modern use of bioenergy, especially woodfuels, would play a key role in achieving net-zero emissions, as reflected in the roadmap set out for the global energy sector by the International Energy Agency, which stated that modern bioenergy use would need to increase by around 60 percent between 2020 and 2050 alongside a shift away from the traditional use of biomass.
- FAO has been supporting Members in promoting sustainable production and consumption of woodfuels, and more broadly bioenergy, through technical assistance and information sharing. Recent activities include analysis and assessment of the policies and strategies relevant to interventions in the charcoal sector in Africa; new modelling for the estimation of global woodfuel production; and greening the humanitarian response in displacement settings for enhanced energy access and livelihood resilience.
- COFO invited FAO to continue collecting, assessing, and disseminating information on good practices in sustainable production and trade of charcoal and other forms of wood energy, with a view to supporting Members' efforts and dialogue towards the transition to sustainable uses of wood fuels and meeting the SDG targets of sustainable energy for all by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050.
- With regard to SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, COFO recognized the contribution of forests and forest products to sustainable industrialization and innovation. The production of wood products commercialized in formal markets world-wide contributed USD 663 billion to global GDP, providing some 33 million people with work – representing about 1 percent of global employment. Forests and trees directly benefit at least 3.27 billion people (75

percent of the non-urban population) who live within one kilometre of a forest and outside urban areas, through the provision of ecosystem services such as food, raw materials and medicinal resources, derived from wood and non-wood forest products. Overall, forest products provide cost-effective and innovative contributions at scale to carbon neutrality, while building synergies with broader aims for economic recovery, growth of rural areas and circular economy innovation.

- Innovation is a key for FAO as outlined in its FAO Science and Innovation Strategy (2022-25) that aims to strengthen FAO's work on science and innovation by providing the Organization with world-wide guidance, coherence and alignment in those areas.
- As requested by its Members, FAO will continue to enhance and facilitate the access of family farmers, producer organizations and the private sector, including small and medium enterprises, to markets, industries, innovation and finance. This is aimed at promoting the sustainable consumption and production of sustainable wood and non-wood forest products and their value chains, to further advance sustainable development in its three dimensions (economic, social and environmental) and to foster science and innovation in the forest sector and beyond.
- With regard to SDG17 on partnerships, COFO appreciated the work of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) in supporting the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan on Forests. The CPF is an innovative voluntary inter-agency partnership on forests that was established in April 2001 in response to an invitation issued in the resolution 2000/35 by the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC) that established the International Arrangement on Forests and the UN Forum on Forests. The Partnership is currently comprised of 15 international organizations, institutions and secretariats that have substantial programmes on forests.⁵

⁵ The Collaborative Partnership on Forests comprises: the Center for International Forestry Research, Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Global Environment Facility, International Tropical Timber Organization, International Union for Conservation of Nature, International Union of Forest Research Organizations, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Forum on Forests, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, World Agroforestry Centre and the World Bank.