The Committee on Forestry (COFO) is the highest forestry governing 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 issues related ways to enhance forests’ contribution across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 26th session of COFO (COFO 26) was held from 3 to 7 October 2022. COFO 26 provided important guidance on several policy areas, which are outlined in section (I) below.

Section I – COFO 26 recommendations regarding the SDGs under review

**SDG Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere**

The Committee on Forestry:

- invited FAO to continue supporting the provision of sufficient, reliable information and knowledge, the development of innovative tools, as well as mobilization of finance on the topics covered in the State of the World’s Forests Report 2022 (SOFO 2022), for science- and evidence-based policy decisions and effective programmes for forestry and agrifood systems transformation and development at national, regional and global levels and contributing to poverty eradication efforts, in a coherent manner according to, and dependent on, national context and capacities;
- on drivers of deforestation and land degradation, requested FAO and Members to put greater emphasis on ways to decouple growth in agricultural production from forest and other biodiversity loss, keeping in mind the necessity of poverty eradication and fighting hunger, and the needs of developing countries in terms of financial assistance and capacity building.

**SDG Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture**

The Committee on Forestry made several recommendations in relation to the agriculture-forestry nexus, paying attention also to the need for coherence across public finance policies and for innovative financial mechanisms to properly value forests’ multiple contributions to food security:

- requested FAO to continue actively identifying the important and mutually beneficial linkages between agriculture and forestry and scaling up its related activities;
- recommended FAO to continue collecting and analysing necessary science- and evidence-based data on agriculture and forestry interdependencies, including on the direct and underlying
drivers of deforestation and land degradation, by further enhancing consistency between agricultural and forest data sets;

- invited FAO to support Members, upon request, to further identify opportunities and implement actions to improve **complementarity between the agriculture and forestry sectors and strengthen coordinated policy responses towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, recommending that these initiatives do not create unnecessary barriers to trade and benefit the situation for small-scale producers who are key for global food production;
- encouraged FAO to continue playing an active role in relevant international and regional fora by promoting open dialogue on enhancing and **promoting sustainable agrifood systems** and further working with other international partners, including all relevant stakeholders and particularly members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), to upscale synergies between agriculture and forestry;
- invited FAO to support Members, upon request, to further identify opportunities and implement actions to improve **complementarity between the agriculture and forestry sectors and strengthen coordinated policy responses towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, recommending that these initiatives do not create unnecessary barriers to trade and benefit the situation for small-scale producers who are key for global food production;
- encouraged FAO to continue playing an active role in relevant international and regional fora by promoting open dialogue on enhancing and **promoting sustainable agrifood systems** and further working with other international partners, including all relevant stakeholders and particularly members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), to upscale synergies between agriculture and forestry;
- invited FAO to report regularly on the **mainstreaming of biodiversity in the agriculture and forestry sectors**;
- on drivers of deforestation and land degradation, requested FAO and Members to put greater emphasis on ways to **decouple growth in agricultural production from forest and other biodiversity loss, keeping in mind the necessity of poverty eradication and fighting hunger**, and the needs of developing countries in terms of financial assistance and capacity building;
- welcomed the **strengthened coordination between the Committee on Forestry (COFO) and the Committee on Agriculture (COAG)** and encouraged FAO to continue its intersectoral work;
- encouraged Members to promote coherence across public finance policies and mechanisms, to consider increasing financial support to **enhance the contribution of forests and trees to sustainable agrifood systems**, and to promote innovative financial mechanisms to assign value to the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of forests, such as payments for ecosystem services.

**SDG Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts**

The Committee on Forestry:

- **recognized the potential of forests to help mitigate the impacts of global challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic**;
- encouraged FAO to promote awareness raising, capacity building, research and innovation, and to facilitate access to markets and investments – including through global, regional and national policy dialogues, as appropriate – and technical exchanges, for an effective contribution of sustainable wood products and their value chains to mitigate climate change and support climate adaptation, substituting carbon-intensive products and increasing resilience to climate change, including through the Collaborative Partnership on Forests’ joint initiative “Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World”;
- recommended FAO to continue its **support for strengthening the role of forest ecosystems in global climate policy**, and support Members, upon their request, in developing their capacities for forest-related climate action, facilitating access to climate finance, and scaling up action on the ground, and report back to the Committee on this work, as appropriate;
- invited FAO to assist Members in **optimizing the mitigation, adaptation and resilience potential of forests by halting forest loss and degradation, restoring degraded lands and drylands, and implementing sustainable forest management, taking into account national contexts, priorities and capacities**.
noted with concern the risks associated with the increase in frequency and intensity of damaging wildfires around the globe, which are driven, inter alia, by climate change and unsustainable land-use change, and invited FAO to support coordinated efforts among Members in areas such as knowledge sharing, fire review and analysis, risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery, e.g. through fire management networks.

SDG Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

The Committee on Forestry:

• invited Members to promote greater and inclusive policy coherence between the agriculture and forestry sectors, including through integrated land use planning, landscape approaches and secured access to land, as well as support to small-scale producers, family farmers, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

SDG Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

The Committee on Forestry:

• recommended FAO to strengthen its leadership role in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), and facilitate active participation of CPF members in the mid-term review of the International Arrangement on Forests;
• strengthen cooperation on science, research, technology and innovation to support conservation and sustainable use and management of forests and the production and use of forest products, including through the voluntary sharing of knowledge and practices, research and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms and through increased global, regional, and interregional partnerships, including with micro-, small- and medium-scale producers;
• recommended FAO to continue supporting, as appropriate, increased cooperation and coordination between international policies and activities related to wood and non-wood forest products, especially through the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), to maximize synergies and co-benefits;
• encouraged FAO to continue playing an active role in relevant international and regional fora by promoting open dialogue on enhancing and promoting sustainable agrifood systems and further working with other international partners, including all relevant stakeholders and particularly members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), to upscale synergies between agriculture and forestry;
• recommended FAO to continue help reduce the reporting burden, enhance synergies and information sharing and increase transparency of forest-related data and reporting through:
  o further strengthening collaboration with the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ) partners, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and other partners, including UN entities;
  o continued development and harmonization of methods and definitions for forest data collection, including using remote sensing and conducting related capacity development.
Section II - Submission proposal for the online form

Inputs to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2024

Inputs from functional commissions of ECOSOC, other intergovernmental bodies and forums to the 2024 HLPF. The input from the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO).

1. Entity/ Intergovernmental body or forum

   FAO Committee on Forestry

2. Contact person

   Günter Walkner (Austria), Chairperson of the 27th Session of the Committee on Forestry

   Malgorzata Buszko-Briggs, Secretary of the Committee on Forestry

3. Contact details

   COFO@fao.org

4. Impacts of multiple crises on the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body.

   The confluence of planetary-scale crises poses a serious threat. It has sharply raised awareness of critical weaknesses and risks in societal and economic systems, including humanity’s relationship with and impacts on nature. Forests have been hard-hit in recent decades by clearance and unsustainable practices, but they have also always been an important resource for human well-being and wealth creation.

   The Committee on Forestry identified impacts and risks associated with climate change, forest and biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, poverty and inequality, and the increase in frequency and intensity of damaging wildfires around the globe.

   COFO took note that there can’t be a healthy economy on an unhealthy planet and made several recommendations to enable forests and trees to play crucial roles in addressing these crises. COFO recommended implementing integrated risk management approaches and forest-related adaptation measures; strengthening the role of forest ecosystems in global climate policy, and support Members in developing their capacities for forest-related climate action, facilitating access to climate finance, and scaling up action on the ground; optimizing the mitigation, adaptation and resilience potential of forests by halting forest loss and degradation, restoring degraded lands and drylands, and implementing sustainable forest management, taking into account national contexts, priorities and capacities.

5. Three key areas where sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions for achieving the SDGs are being effectively delivered, especially related to the cluster of SDGs under review in 2024, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets.

   - Concerning SDGs 1 and 2 on poverty and hunger, COFO highlighted ways to decouple growth in agricultural production from forest and other biodiversity loss, keeping in mind the necessity of poverty eradication and fighting hunger, and the needs of developing countries in terms of
financial assistance and capacity building. The Committee invited FAO and Members to work collectively to halt forest loss and degradation, restore degraded lands and drylands and enhance the sustainable management and use of forest resources, taking into account national priorities and circumstances, and to promote the important role of forests and their social, economic and environmental benefits, including as a contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Global Forest Goals.

- **Concerning SDG 13 on combating climate change**, COFO recommended FAO to continue its support for strengthening the role of forest ecosystems in global climate policy, and support Members, upon their request, in developing their capacities for forest-related climate action, facilitating access to climate finance, and scaling up action on the ground. The Global Fire Management Hub launched by FAO and partners in 2023 will provide stronger support for the development of regional and national capacities on this topic.

- **Concerning SDG 17 on finance and partnerships**, COFO encouraged Members to provide resources to support the conservation, restoration, sustainable use and management of forests and the development of sustainable forest value chains, particularly in developing countries, to enhance capacity building and technical and scientific cooperation, and recommended FAO to support Members in their efforts to access finance opportunities for forest-related actions. The Committee appreciated the work of FAO and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests in supporting the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan on Forests. The Partnership is currently comprised of 16 international organizations, institutions and secretariats that have substantial programmes on forests.\(^1\) COFO further appreciated the work under the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ) partners to reduce the reporting burden enhance synergies and increase transparency of reporting processes and resulting data.

6. Three examples of specific actions, policies and measures that are most urgently needed to effectively deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving the SDGs.

COFO considered three pathways\(^2\) involving forests and trees offering means by which societies, communities and individual landowners, users and managers can derive more tangible value from forests and trees while addressing environmental degradation: (1) halting deforestation and maintaining forests; (2) restoring degraded lands and expanding agroforestry; (3) sustainably using forests and building green value chains to help meet future demand for materials.

COFO is, in this regard, promoting cross-sectoral policy approaches acknowledging the multiple interlinkages between the agriculture and forestry sectors and common solutions for more sustainable agrifood systems. COFO further recommended continuing collecting and analysing necessary science- and evidence-based data on agriculture and forestry interdependencies, including on the direct and underlying drivers of deforestation and land degradation, by further

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enhancing consistency between agricultural and forest data sets, and compiling case studies and good practices.

COFO focused on forest-sector innovations towards a more sustainable future, outlining innovations that have the potential to scale up forest conservation, restoration and sustainable use, create new information tools as well as finance and investment models and mechanisms, as solutions to global challenges.

7. Follow-up actions and measures being undertaken by your intergovernmental body or forum to support implementation of the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit.

COFO places huge emphasis on periodically reviewing global developments and their implications for forests and forestry, and giving guidance to its members and FAO accordingly. Through a close collaboration with the six Regional Forestry Commissions the Committee facilitates policy and programme coordination between the global and regional levels, and helps translating global recommendations to action at all levels.

COFO in particular addresses forests and sustainable production of wood and non-wood forest products, agriculture and forestry linkages, forest solutions for combating climate change, forest fires, mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors, forest resources assessment, finance and investments, restoration of ecosystems, and decoupling growth in agricultural production from forest and other biodiversity loss.

COFO relentlessly seeks ways to reduce the reporting burden, enhance synergies and information sharing and increase transparency of forest-related data and reporting, development and harmonization of methods and definitions for forest data collection, including using remote sensing and conducting related capacity development, to enable countries and the international community to follow the progress in implementing global commitments.

The Committee on Forestry is in the process of setting three forestry objectives for FAO in forestry, directly contributing, to the Political declaration, in particular to paragraph 19. The three objectives are: (1) conserving and restoring forest ecosystems to ensure life on land and the resilience and transformation of agrifood systems; (2) enhancing sustainable production and build sustainable green value chains and the bioeconomy, including by restoring the productivity of forests and agrifood systems; (3) Scale up science-based innovation in forestry to accelerate agrifood systems transformation.

The FAO-chaired Collaborative Partnership on Forests launched its Joint Call to Action for Forests towards 2030³ at the 2023 SDG Summit calling for urgent global action to unlock the potential of forests for people and the planet. The CPF Joint Call to Action⁴ is a vehicle to bring much-needed attention to the forefront of achieving global forest-related goals and to the contribution of forest conservation, restoration and sustainable use in this regard. It is targeting four focus areas, notably (1) implementation and action; (2) data, science and innovation; (3) finance for forests; and (4) communication and awareness raising.

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8. Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF.

COFO recommends the HLPF to consider recognizing the potential of forests to contribute to the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 and forests' contribution to help mitigate the impacts of global challenges, including hunger, poverty, climate change, biodiversity loss and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COFO recommends to work towards improved complementarity between the agriculture and forestry sectors and strengthen coordinated policy responses towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recommending that these initiatives do not create unnecessary barriers to trade and benefit the situation for small-scale producers who are key for global food production;