

Communication by the Bureau of the 19th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests**Input to the 2024 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development¹****(a) Impacts of multiple crises on the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 from the vantage point of UNFF.**

The world is in the midst of cascading and interlinked triple crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss affecting every sector and society, including forests and forest-dependent communities. These troubling developments paradoxically emphasize the critical role of forests in underpinning sustainable development in all its dimensions and promoting a coherent approach to address many of the pressing challenges, in particular biodiversity loss, climate change, and land and ecosystem degradation, and accelerate progress towards the attainment of the SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17. We lost around ten million hectares of forests to deforestation each year between 2015 and 2020.

For each of these complex global challenges, forests and forest-dependent people are both a casualty and an important part of the solution. The negative impacts of climate change will intensify as temperature rise. This means that acceleration of progress towards SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 along with responses to the climate and biodiversity crises must be rooted in the world's forests. The path forward needs to be paved with greater sustainability and a greener, more inclusive economy – of which healthy forest ecosystems and forest-dependent communities are an integral part. Serving as the “reservoirs” of money, food, water and carbon on the planet, sustainably resourced and managed forests can bolster employment, disaster risk reduction, food security and social safety nets, for starters. They can also protect biodiversity and advance both climate mitigation and adaptation. And with regard to global health, safeguarding and restoring forests are among the environmental actions that can reduce the risk of future zoonotic disease outbreaks.

(b) 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, considering the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets.

The threats and the drivers of deforestation must be addressed through a holistic and comprehensive landscape approach, including through sustainable forest management activities such as protection, afforestation, reforestation and forest landscape restoration.

Forests and no poverty (SDG1)

An estimated 1.6 billion people, especially women, children, landless farmers, and other vulnerable segments of society, rely on forests for their subsistence needs, livelihoods, employment, and income. In rural areas, 40% of the extreme poor live in forest and savannah areas. Many countries took steps to reduce poverty through community-based forestry, and provided substantial financial support to strengthen community forestry and ease poverty for forest-dependent people. These actions include: developing forest community plans; engaging local communities in supporting forest plantations; increasing employment in forestry for local communities; engaging NGOs and other stakeholders in

¹ This input was prepared by the UNFF19 Bureau in response to the letter of the ECOSOC President dated 10 November 2023 inviting the UNFF19 Chair to provide substantive inputs to the 2024 session of HLPF for its review of the SDGs and the theme.

promoting community-based, non-timber forest products; integrating local communities and indigenous peoples into forestry production; promoting forest stewardship contracting for achieving shared land management goals to meet local and rural community needs; and providing investment opportunities, specifically in carbon-related projects/programmes, and in creating green jobs wherein the local communities can also benefit from.

Forests and zero hunger (SDG2)

With the global population expected to reach over 9.7 billion by 2050, keeping hunger in check will mean increasing current food production substantially. While meeting these needs will require capitalizing on many ways forests can improve food security, forest contributions are often poorly reflected in national development and food security strategies. Coupled with poor cross-sectoral coordination, the result is that forests are, at present, not frequently considered in policy decisions related to food security, hunger, and nutrition. The one exception to this trend is agroforestry, which developing countries are increasingly using to improve their food security, especially in the face of climate change. In the meantime, many developing countries are promoting the production of non-wood forest products to acquire food from the forests. With climate-related warming and severe droughts and storms seriously impacting agricultural production, countries are expanding climate-resilient agroforestry. Present estimates indicate that agroforestry is practiced to different degrees and scales on 43% of the world's agricultural lands, thereby engaging approximately 1.2 billion people. It is crucial to accelerate a sustainable transformation of food and agricultural systems globally at all levels, taking into account interdependencies between food and nutrition security, agricultural production and intensification, and the need for sustainable land use and to halt deforestation.

Forests and climate action (SDG13)

Forest ecosystems are the largest terrestrial carbon sink, absorbing roughly 2 billion tonnes of CO₂ each year. Between 1990 and 2010, the total global forest carbon stock fell from 668 gigatonnes (Gt) in 1990 to 662 Gt in 2010, mainly due to a loss of forest area. Conversely, many countries also attribute forest disturbances to a variety of causes related to and intensified by climate change, such as insect infestations, fires, storms, and droughts. The inclusion of forest and other nature-based solution in national climate strategies and programmes prove to have positive impacts to raise public visibility of and political will for maintaining and enhancing forest carbon stocks. Incorporating forest and other nature-based solution open access to resources and promote intersectoral approaches to achieving the SDGs. Countries are seeking to move beyond siloed approaches and to mainstream forestry considerations across other sectors such as those addressing energy, agriculture, climate change, and environment in general. A group of countries signed the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use at UNFCCC COP26 and launched the Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership, committing to work together to implement solutions that reduce forest loss, increase restoration and support sustainable development, and to ensure accountability for the pledges that have been made. At UNFCCC COP28, countries placed forests and nature-based solutions in the centre of its discussions, and, through the outcome of the first global stocktake of the Paris Agreement, emphasized the critical importance of halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030, in alignment with the Global Forest Goals of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests.

(c) 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.²

Enhancing forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits (based on Global Forest Goal 2)

Countries reported to have taken a wide range of institutional, legislative, technical and financial actions to enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits in order to mitigate and address the impact of ongoing crises, such as recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. These national actions created a unique opportunity to further invest in, expand and promote sustainable forest management practices. Investments in sustainable forest management and jobs in forestry offer opportunities for a green and sustainable recovery as healthy forests build resilience against the occurrence of future pandemics.

Countries also reported to have implemented several programmes and activities that promote employment, empowerment and poverty eradication, particularly in rural areas, demonstrating that forests can help meet subsistence needs and serve as safety nets in times of crisis. Such programmes and activities include the development and implementation of national policies, strategies and plans that leverage forests for food security, including through the promotion of non-wood forest products, agroforestry, agricultural diversification and the use of forest plantations, as well as the establishment of community forests and shelterbelts.

Increasing significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests (based on Global Forest Goal 3)

Many countries took concrete measures to make progress in the conservation and management of forests. A number of countries developed and implemented legislation, codes and policies, which had specific provisions addressing protected areas, sustainable forest management and the promotion of markets for legally-harvested products from sustainably managed forests. These actions contributed to the expansion of forest areas designated as protected areas to approximately 18 per cent of forest areas globally.

Globally, a growing proportion of forests is under long-term forest management plans, and the supply of forest products increasingly comes from sustainably managed forests in many countries and regions. Building on such trends, awareness-raising initiatives and programmes can harness further public support towards sustainable forest management, including protected areas.

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 (based on Global Forest Goal 4, 5, 6)

The majority of reporting countries developed and implemented financial strategies to achieve sustainable forest management, putting forth and reviewing legislation and policies on investment and finance. These actions signal a growing commitment to increasing, mobilizing and improving access to

² Response to this question is based on information provided by Member States that submitted voluntary national reports and voluntary national contributions to the UN Forum on Forests.

forest financing at the national and international levels. Despite the progress made, almost all developing countries face a lack of resources, including financial resources, as a major challenge to the attainment of the global forest goals. Over a quarter of developing countries submitting national reports indicated that inadequate funding hindered their progress towards achieving the goals.

With regard to promoting governance frameworks to advance implementation, countries increasingly recognize the contribution of forests to national sustainable development strategies, making strides towards improved cross-sectoral coordination in government agencies and expanded stakeholder engagement in policy formulation, planning and implementation, including through national forest programmes and national land use planning processes.

In relation to enhancing cooperation, coordination and coherence for sustainable forest management, countries continue to expand stakeholder involvement in reaching forest-related goals and objectives in close collaboration with civil society, the private sector and local authorities at the national and local levels. Many of these collaborative actions have been implemented through cross-sectoral mechanisms, including programmes implemented through the United Nations system.

(d) Follow-up actions and measures being undertaken by the UNFF to support implementation of the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit.

The UNFF serves as the responsible intergovernmental body for follow-up and review of the implementation of the UNSPF and achievement of its GFGs, 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 in advancing the implementation of the UNSPF.

In this regard, the UNFF will continue to play a key role in advocating forests and sustainable forest management to address multiple environmental objectives, including through increased efforts towards forest and ecosystem restoration actions, and to mainstream and scale up forest-related actions in national development programmes.

The forthcoming nineteenth session³ of the UNFF (UNFF19, 6-10 May 2024) will hold policy discussions on the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests⁴, including interlinkages between the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and targets and the SDGs under in-depth review by the HLPF in 2024. UNFF19 will also convene its high-level segment, and undertake the midterm review of the effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forests in achieving its objectives, taking into account the Political Declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit and other major forest-related developments.

(e) Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF

We recognize that the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030 (UNSPF) and its Global Forest Goals (GFGs) are a global plan of action for countries, the United Nations system, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and all other actors to turn the tide on deforestation and forest degradation to

³ Further information on UNFF19 is available on the UNFF website at:
<https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html>.

⁴ A/RES/71/285

ensure the provision of the economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits of forests for the present and the future generations.

As Member States takes on the implementation of the Political Declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit and the eventual outcome of the midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests, we call for concrete steps, collectively and individually, to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the GFGs by 2030. Such actions should include increasing financial, technical and technological collaboration, enhancing forest governance and forest law enforcement and increasing the involvement of local communities and relevant stakeholders in decision-making and implementation of policies.

We also encourage Member States and all partners to promote coherence and integration of forest-related actions in the nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement, the national biodiversity strategies and action plans for the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Land Degradation Neutrality targets, as well as reflect these agreements in their forest-related actions, in accordance with the mandates and principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. In doing so, it is critically important to enhance efforts towards achieving sustainable forest management, halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation, and increasing the production of non-wood forest products, including forest-based food, by 2030 in support of the Paris Agreement temperature goal and in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, as emphasized in the outcome document of UNFCCC COP28⁵.

⁵ FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.17