

Communication by the Bureau of the 20th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) - Input to the 2025 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development¹

(a) Impacts of multiple and interconnected crises on the implementation of SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17 from the vantage point of UNFF

The world is facing a series of interlinked and mutually reinforcing crises, including global economic shocks, extreme poverty, and the adverse impacts of climate change, as well as the alarming trends in global deforestation, desertification, sand and dust storms, and land degradation, biodiversity loss, pollution and waste generation. These challenges have strongly hindered sustainable development gains and are further exacerbated by persistent levels of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and socioeconomic and gender inequalities, and have had negative impacts on forests and other natural resources, as well as human health and well-being, in particular in developing countries and on forest-dependent communities, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and people in vulnerable situations, including stakeholders' efforts to implement SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only significantly affected global health systems, reversing steady progress in life expectancy over the past two decades (SDG 3), but also had its economic impacts from which many countries have not yet fully recovered. Women's participation in leadership and decision-making remains inadequate, as are the provisions for strengthening women's land ownership, considering different national development plans, strategies and circumstances. Forests and sustainable forest management can also play an important role in empowering women and girls by generating economic opportunities and access to important resources (SDG 5). Deforestation and degradation of ecosystems exacerbate health risks, gender equality, and economic vulnerabilities, while also impacting ocean health.

Forests have great potential to address these challenges and to accelerate achievement of the SDGs. Forests and trees outside forests play a vital role in securing a diversity of ecosystem services and underpin sectors such as tourism, industry, construction, health, and agriculture. For example, they protect soil, prevent floods, regulate surface and groundwater, and improve water quality, therefore maintain the health of oceans and seas (SDG 14). At the same time, deforestation continues in many regions, often in response to the demand for wood, food, fuel and fiber. To address current challenges and accelerate progress towards these goals, it is important to tap into the potential of forests and sustainable forest management.

(b) Three key areas where sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for achieving the SDGs and leaving no one behind are being effectively delivered, especially related to the cluster of SDGs under review in 2025, also bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets

The contributions of forests and ecosystem services they provide, are often undervalued or unrecorded in both national and international policy and economic frameworks. To address this gap,

¹ This input was prepared by the UNFF20 Bureau in response to the letter of the ECOSOC President dated 18 December 2024 inviting the UNFF20 Chair to provide substantive inputs to the 2025 session of HLPF on the theme and SDGs under review.

UNFF, its members, and stakeholders have continuously taken a wide range of sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based actions for achieving the SDGs and leaving no one behind, bearing in mind the three dimensions (environmental, economic and social) of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets. These include actions at the policy, technical and operational level to address the root causes, e.g. drivers of deforestation and degradation of forests and promote sustainable forest management through a multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral approach.

Policy solutions at the global and national levels

In 2024, ECOSOC adopted the UNFF19 high-level segment declaration, which provides a commitment to take urgent and accelerated actions to halt and, reverse deforestation and forest degradation and prevent land degradation by 2030, while achieving sustainable development. Furthermore, ECOSOC adopted the UNFF19 resolution² which provides an inclusive, and evidence-based blueprint and plan of action for countries, international organizations and stakeholders to implement the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) 2017-2030, achieve the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs through promoting sustainable forest management by 2030. The resolution recommends actions across ten areas arising from the midterm review of the effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forests. This includes actions related to the UNFF and its members; the secretariat of the UNFF; the Collaborative Partnership on Forests; the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network; the trust fund of the UNFF; the implementation of the UNSPF; the contributions of the Forum to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the communication and outreach strategy of the UNSPF; the involvement of regional and subregional partners; and the involvement of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.

The annex to the UNFF19 resolution includes the Quadrennial programme of work of the UNFF for the period 2025–2028, which establishes the thematic priorities for the two periods 2025–2026 (twentieth and twenty-first sessions of the Forum) and 2027–2028 (twenty-second and twenty-third sessions). The thematic priorities are based on the global forest goals and targets, taking into account the programme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and relevant international forest-related developments.

In recognition of the interlinkages between forests and sustainable forest management and SDG 5, the UNFF19 resolution calls on UNFF and its members to promote gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls and mainstream a gender perspective in the implementation of sustainable forest management. In recognition of the contributions and roles of multiple stakeholders, including women and girls, in the implementation of the UNSPF and achieving its GFGs, the resolution invites members of the Forum to:

- promote inclusive and participatory decision-making modalities, and enhance intersectoral collaboration, at the national and subnational levels.
- recognize, respect and protect forest tenure and/or user rights of both men and women, provide support and foster inclusivity in accessing forest financing.

² [E/RES/2024/15](#)

The resolution also highlights the interlinkages between sustainable forest management and the promotion of sustained, inclusive and economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8). UNFF members, partners and stakeholders are invited to strengthen collaboration in advancing sustainable forest-based bioeconomy approaches and contribute to improved livelihoods, including through building capacities of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, underlining the need to ensure sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

In their national reports to UNFF, countries have reported on their activities to enhance the participation and representation of women in forest management institutions, promoting the effective access of women to the control and use of forest resources and the effective participation of women in decision-making at the household and community levels. Countries have taken specific actions toward promoting gender equality in the forest sector, such as the establishment of specialized agencies, women's councils, departments charged with promoting and increasing gender equality in the workplace and of leadership and decision-making by women. Lastly, according to the responses received, more women are currently employed in the forest sector than in the past, and women are more frequently appointed to higher-level positions in the forestry administration in reporting countries.

Facilitating access to finance and data related to financing for forests

Further financing and investments are necessary to enhance resilience and sustainable forest management, including forest conservation and restoration in support of the GFGs and SDGs. In resolution 2024/15, ECOSOC invited members of the Forum to strive to strengthen the provision and mobilization of resources to forests, for their conservation, restoration and sustainable management, including through promoting and using innovative financial mechanisms, such as payments for ecosystem services, blended finance, and sustainable financing policies, as appropriate. In response to this invitation, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) will continue to play its important role in supporting members of the Forum, upon their request, in mobilizing, gaining access to and enhancing the effective use of existing financial resources from all sources for sustainable forest management. The GFFFN is also fostering collaboration and supporting countries in the mobilization of financial resources from all sources.

In recognition of the interlinkages between forests and multiple SDGs, including SDG 5 and 8, the GFFFN, in conducting technical assistance activities in support of members of the Forum, has emphasized the importance of stakeholder consultations in the development and implementation of national forest financing strategies and project proposals for the mobilization of forest finance, including for supporting forest conservation, restoration and sustainable use and management goals. Engaging the private sector, academia and research, and civil society organizations, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, is key to strengthening forest contributions to sustainable development, as well as ensuring that no one is left behind.

In addition, the UNFF Clearing House on Forest Financing launched in 2021 constitutes a valuable source of information and data on financing for forests. The Clearing House consists of a public website and databases with more than 300 entries on financing opportunities, learning materials related to mobilizing financial resources for forests, and good practices and lessons learned. The UNFF Secretariat also publishes the Quarterly Highlight on Forest Financing, a communication

product initiated in 2022 to disseminate information on forest financing, including recent developments, financing opportunities, and other updates to the Clearing House.

In their national reports to UNFF, most 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 forest financing at the national and international levels.

Many Member States have further engaged in the development and implementation of the innovative financial mechanisms at the global level, such as payments for ecosystem services, to leverage new and additional resources for forest conservation, restoration and sustainable management. Brazil and other countries have, for instance, engaged in the development and implementation of the Tropical Forests Forever Facility.

In its *Joint Call to Action on Forests 2030* launched at the SDG Summit in 2023, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) committed to taking action to address the fragmentation of finance for forests, engage actively with the private sector to facilitate the leveraging of private investment, and encourage and assist Member States in increasing public investment for forests including through developing innovative green financing mechanisms.

Country Led Initiatives on cross-cutting issues

Members of the Forum are taking several initiatives to advance implementation of the SDGs and GFGs, with focus on sustainable forest management, while leaving no one behind. In recent years, the world has witnessed an alarming increase in the scale and duration of catastrophic forest fires, which contributes to global carbon emissions and air pollution, with significant impacts on human health and well-being (SDG 3). The Country Led Initiative (CLI) hosted by India in October 2023 provided an opportunity to reflect on issues of forest fires/wildfires. This meeting also discussed best practices on prevention and restoration by considering recent technological developments, innovation and methods, including recent global frameworks and mechanisms on forest fire management. Given the increasing frequency and intensity of such events, the CLI recommended the development of integrated approaches to prevent and manage forest fires and manage post-fire landscape restoration, while incorporating technology and digital solutions, considering recent developments and innovation. The CLI also recognized the roles of young people and women in the implementation of integrated forest fire management strategies and recommended strengthening the involvement and capacity-building of civil society stakeholders.

Republic of Congo organized a CLI on promoting afforestation and reforestation, Morocco is planning to organize a CLI on promoting funding and innovative technology for forests, and Austria is planning a CLI on sustainable forest-based bioeconomy approaches.

(c) Three examples of measures to accelerate progress towards SDGs through well-coordinated actions in key transitions to bring progress to scale (food security, energy access and affordability, digital connectivity, education, jobs and social protection, climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution), building on interlinkages between SDGs to ensure cohesive progress

Example 1: Accelerate progress towards SDGs through reversing the loss of forest cover worldwide and increasing efforts to prevent forest degradation

Forests are under threat, mainly due to deforestation due to unsustainable practices across economic activities, illegal logging, forest degradation, climate change, drought, increased forest pests and diseases and wildfires, which negatively affects biodiversity, the climate and local communities whose livelihoods depend on forests.

In line with GFG1, countries have taken several legislative and policy actions to reverse the loss of forest cover and prevent forest degradation, using existing forest laws and codes, as well as national forest programmes and strategies as their frameworks. Many countries reviewed or revised these instruments, incorporating stakeholder consultations to inform policy. Some countries have passed legislation with the goal to make their markets deforestation-free. Despite coordination challenges, countries have sought to move beyond siloed approaches and to mainstream forests and forestry considerations across other sectors such as those related to energy, and agriculture.

Efforts to implement global commitments under various conventions related to climate change, biodiversity conservation, trade in wildlife, and desertification have often buoyed efforts to increase forest cover. For instance, the forest component of countries' Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans may make an important contribution to reversing the loss of forest cover worldwide.

Some countries set a national target to expand or maintain natural forest area or plant trees. In addition, forest monitoring units and services were strengthened in most countries. Developing tree species resilient to harsh conditions and incentivizing sustainable and biodiversity-friendly afforestation through national emission trading systems and voluntary carbon markets could also make significant contributions to sustainable development. To mitigate the risks posed by the increasing frequency and intensity of forest fires, which leads to loss of forests, countries have also adopted integrated fire management strategies, implemented regular silvicultural practices and the reduction of fuel loads, and promoted the utilization of forest products for long-term carbon storage.

Example 2: Accelerate progress towards SDGs through increasing 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

In line with GFG3, many countries in recent years, have taken concrete measures to increase the protection and sustainable management of forests. Several countries developed and implemented legislation, codes and policies, with provisions addressing protected areas, sustainable forest management and the promotion of markets for 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. A growing proportion of forests is under long-term forest management plans globally, and the supply of forest products increasingly comes from sustainably managed forests in many countries and regions, though progress is uneven across countries and regions.

To further strengthen these measures, it is important to harness further public support towards sustainable forest management, including protected areas; to advance partnerships between governments and relevant stakeholders; to implement global forest-related commitments,

including through financing from all sources for forest conservation and forest restoration efforts; to promote trade of forest products from sustainably managed forests; and to support forest enterprises and ensure their long-term sustainability.

Example 3: Accelerate progress towards SDGs through promoting governance frameworks to implement sustainable forest management, including through the United Nations Forest Instrument, and enhance the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In line with GFG5, many countries have set formal forest-related policies and laws in place. However, the different degrees of enforcement of these laws and policies have a significant impact on forest outcomes. Many countries have implemented measures to combat illegal logging and associated trade, such as mechanisms for the monitoring and tracing of wood and wood products in trade, regional or global cooperation agreements and instruments.

Countries increasingly recognize the contribution of forests and sustainable forest management to national sustainable development strategies, resulting in the integration of forests into their broader development or poverty reduction and food security plans and strategies. Countries have also taken strides towards improved cross-sectoral coordination and expanded stakeholder engagement in policy formulation, planning and implementation, including through national forest programmes and national land use planning processes. *(based on Global Forest Goals report 2021).*

(d) Follow-up actions and measures being undertaken by the UNFF to support implementation of the 2023 SDG Summit Political Declaration and the outcomes of the 2024 Summit of the Future, to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The UNFF serves as the intergovernmental body responsible for follow-up and review of the implementation of the UNSPF³, and the achievement of its GFGs, thereby supporting the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the outcomes of the relevant UN Summits.

At the nineteenth session of the UNFF (UNFF19) in 2024, the UNFF undertook its midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests and charted the course towards 2030. The outcome of the review is contained in ECOSOC Resolution 2024/15 and outlines a set of actions towards 2030 on key areas for the UNFF and its members, the implementation of the UNSPF, the UNFF's contributions to the 2030 Agenda, among others.

The forthcoming UNFF20 (5-9 May 2025)⁴ will hold technical discussions on the implementation of the UNSPF, including interlinkages between the GFGs and the SDGs under in-depth review by the HLPF in 2025 and 2026. Other key issues on the agenda include means of implementation, monitoring, assessment and reporting, and communication and outreach.

Comprehensive forest monitoring, assessment, and reporting are widely recognized as essential for informed and evidence-based decision-making on forests. The Forum has regularly called upon member States to develop adequate monitoring systems and upon relevant international entities,

³ [A/RES/71/285](#)

⁴ Further information on UNFF20 is available on the [UNFF website](#).

especially member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, to share data and streamline reporting on forests. In 2025, the Forum will conduct its second round of national reporting to assess progress made in the implementation of the UNSPF and the achievement of its GFGs and targets. The country reports will be used in the preparation of the Global Forest Goals Report, scheduled for release in 2026, while the report will rely on quantitative data from the upcoming FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025 and use other relevant sources as appropriate.

(e) Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2025 HLPF

The UNFF invites the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to:

- i. Recognize the increasing threats of forest fires and forest pests & diseases due to climate change and the need for active silvicultural practices to maintain forest health and resilience.
- ii. Recognize the multiple values and contributions of forests and sustainable forest management to sustainable development in its three dimensions, economic, social and environmental, as well as the myriad benefits provided by all types of forests and trees outside forests, including their critical role in watershed management and securing water resources, and to place forests and sustainable forest management as an important component of our responses to global challenges.
- iii. Stress the importance of healthy forests for human health; forests are a vital source of food, nutrition and medicinal plants, they protect us from diseases, help mitigate threats of climate change to human health and boost our mental and physical health.
- iv. Emphasize the need for accelerated implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030, as an effective means to support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.
- v. Restate the commitment to take urgent and accelerated actions to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation and prevent land degradation by 2030, while achieving sustainable development⁵.
- vi. Enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels, to support implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, including the Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme, in line with their respective mandates.

⁵ Paragraph 2 (chapeau) in the UNFF19-High-Level-declaration-10May2024-330pm-adv-unedited.pdf.

- vii. Promote inclusive and participatory decision-making modalities at the national, and subnational levels to, inter alia, enable the effective engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and other stakeholders, and promote gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls and mainstream a gender perspective in the implementation of sustainable forest management to promote sustainable development.
- viii. Emphasize the significance of mobilizing increased financial resources from all sources, including through innovative financial mechanisms, enhancing effective use of existing resources and capacity building, mainstreaming forests and sustainable forests management in the national plans, policies and strategies, taking into account different national development plans, strategies and circumstances and strengthening collaboration across sectors to promote sustainable forest management to accelerate the contribution of forests and sustainable forest management to the achievement of SDG 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17;
- ix. Emphasize the importance of sustainable wood production and its role in the green economy, particularly in construction, furniture, MDF, pallets, and other sectors, and facilitate free trade of sustainably produced forest products and services to support market access and value chains.
- x. Recognize the role of forests in dry and semi-dry regions, particularly in afforestation for industrial wood production and combating land degradation, as well as their importance mitigating dust and sandstorms and enhancing ecosystem resilience in arid regions.