

UNFF18 Highlights Tuesday, 9 May 2023

The second day of the 18th session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF18) featured two panel discussions, one on transformative actions needed to ensure achievement of the UNFF thematic priorities for 2023-2024, the other featuring private companies on how regenerative agriculture can contribute to the achievement of the Global Forest Goals (GFGs). The Forum also heard presentations about the activities of the Collaborative Partnership for Forests (CPF), the linkages between the GFGs and the new Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and key findings from analytical reports on progress in meeting two GFGs.

Technical discussions on the implementation of the UNSPF

New Announcements of Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs) and Updates on VNCs: UZBEKISTAN highlighted its efforts to increase forest cover by 2030 to 18%. MALAYSIA noted its Central Forest Spine Master Plan to connect “forest islands.” COSTA RICA highlighted its work with indigenous territories in management of forests and forest ecosystem services. NEW ZEALAND discussed its tree planting efforts, forest research priorities, and efforts to ensure procurement of only legally-harvested timber.

Implementation of the UNSPF Communication and Outreach Strategy and the International Day of Forests (IDF) in 2023: KENYA, UZBEKISTAN, MALAYSIA, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, JAPAN, and the FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) detailed how they celebrated IDF 2023.

FAO also discussed its forest communications and outreach activities with the CPF, FAO regional forestry commissions, and the Forest Communicators’ Network in Europe. The INTERNATIONAL UNION OF FOREST RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS said it released its global assessment report “Forests and Trees for Human Health” on IDF 2023, and plans to use it as the basis for communications to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) and the Climate COP.

Responding to Monday’s questions on revamping the UNFF website, Director Biao provided reasons for the state of the website and detailed a short-term solution by funding of USD 498,592 from Germany that would allow for appointment of a communications officer until 2024. She noted that a long-term solution beyond 2024 remains elusive.

Thematic Priorities for 2023–2024 Biennium and Contributions of Forum Members: Consultants introduced the analytical background studies on the [first](#) and [second](#) thematic priorities, namely: enhancing forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits; and increasing significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests. Léonce Konguem reported key findings on the interlinkages between Global Forest Goal (GFG) 2 (enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Highlighting at least 10 SDGs will be impacted through GFG 2 achievement, he recommended that UNFF:

- assist developing countries in their efforts to secure funding;
- improve accuracy of measuring GFG targets 2.2 (access of small-scale forest enterprises to financial resources) and 2.5 (contribution to biodiversity and climate change mitigation and adaptation);
- improve the valuation of forest ecosystem services;

- strengthen national forest regulation and combat illegal activities; and
- highlight during the SDG Summit in September 2023 the role of forests in recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mahendra Joshi presented key findings on GFG 3 (increasing protected and sustainably managed forest area), captured in national reports between 2020 and 2021, suggesting that the UNFF encourage countries to include details on progress made in GFG 3, explore ways to measure progress of target 3.3 (increasing the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests) more realistically, launch consumer awareness programmes for forest products from sustainably managed forests, and undertake in-depth case studies and impact assessments.

The EU, with CANADA, urged UNFF-CPF-FAO engagement on GFG 1 (reversing deforestation). INDIA reported increasing human-wildlife conflict and, with BRAZIL, deplored assessing sustainability solely through certification.

The US suggested the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) is UNFF’s unique contribution among CPF organizations, and, with CANADA, emphasized nature-based solutions and natural capital accounting. INDONESIA highlighted: strengthening forest law enforcement; increasing agricultural income; protecting peat lands; and increasing trees in urban areas. BRAZIL underscored natural capital and environmental services accounting, bemoaned overemphasis on mitigation, and suggested UNFF studies on achieving GFG 2.

URUGUAY highlighted conserving native forests while promoting forest plantations through tax rebates for carbon stocks. COSTA RICA noted its fossil fuel taxes pay for environmental services, national parks, and protected areas, urging that prices reflect all costs. ISRAEL highlighted regeneration of degraded lands, expanding diverse vegetation, and an upcoming seminar on Mediterranean cooperation. MALAYSIA reported improved forestry policies, including increased penalties for forest offenses, urging recognition of its forest and chain-of-custody certification.

MEXICO expressed support for the idea of UNFF members sharing best practice on access to financing through a clearinghouse. JAPAN noted the adoption of her country’s new National Biodiversity Strategy in March 2023 and its stress on the importance of forests ecosystems.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION discussed her country’s protected areas and regional natural reserves, prohibition of commercial industry in forests along rivers and lakes, and its promotion of green belts in and around cities and towns.

ARGENTINA highlighted the importance of forests to its climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, and its work to sustainably manage both native and planted forests. MALI urged the Forum to form partnerships working on finance access issues.

The PHILIPPINES stressed that reporting detailed progress on meeting GFG 2 and 3 targets should be reflected in the amended format for national reporting, given the limitations of the current format. NEW ZEALAND suggested adapting the Montreal Process framework of criteria and indicators for the conservation and sustainable management of temperate and boreal forests so that it could be applied to all types of forests.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH emphasized the importance of recognizing the rights and needs of local communities and Indigenous Peoples who utilize the forest, since they are crucial to achieving GFG 2 and can collaborate on GFGs 3, 4, 5, and 6.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES raised SDG 17 on partnership and called for improved UNFF participation by Indigenous Peoples as caretakers of Mother Earth.

Responding to questions and comments, Konguem proposed promoting R&D on bioenergy and advised Brazil and India to share their expertise in accounting practices of forest ecosystem

services. Joshi acknowledged that simplistic approaches to a carbon market will lead to incorrect practices and urged engaging large corporations to mobilize funding for R&D of an appropriate forest carbon framework.

Director Biao outlined the dual responsibility of the Secretariat of supporting the Forum on substantive issues, while facilitating implementation through strategic partnerships, mobilizing funding and accessing these through the GFFFN.

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 2023, the Work towards Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and Other International Forest-related Developments: Ji Hyun Lee, Convention on Biological Diversity, provided an update on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and discussed its linkages with the GFGs, including to facilitate national implementation of ecosystem protective actions, acknowledge the role of indigenous peoples, and respect traditional knowledge systems. She said this will require a whole-of-systems approach.

A panel moderated by Sheam Satkuru, Executive Director, International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), discussed transformative actions needed to ensure achievement of the thematic priorities. Ulrich Apel, Global Environment Facility (GEF), emphasized: protecting primary forests, through strategically targeting investment and innovative financing; restoring degraded forest ecosystems; and investing in integrated work on deforestation drivers in food systems.

Mikko Ollikainen, Manager, Adaptation Fund, said this UN Framework Convention on Climate Change-mandated Fund accelerates access to finance for adaptation with co-benefits. He highlighted action, innovation, and learning for accelerating and scaling financing for developing countries' priorities, including locally-led adaptation, while increasing food security and biodiversity conservation.

Vanessa Ushie, African Development Bank (AfDB), lamented challenges from: weak capacity, governance, and forest law enforcement; outflows of capital; conflict; and competition for resources. She urged strengthening institutions, capacities, political will, and regional cooperation, alongside increasing forestry investments to 5% of regional banks' portfolios.

Qingfeng Zhang, Asian Development Bank (ADB), highlighted the ADB's Innovative Natural Capital Financing Facility, which co-finances and supports projects with significant natural capital components that contribute to SDGs in developing member countries, with a focus on sustainable food value chains, climate-resilient agriculture and natural resource management.

Contributions of and enhanced cooperation with partners to achieving the thematic priorities: Director Biao introduced the Secretariat Note ([E/CN.18/2023/3](#)) on contributions of and enhanced cooperation with partners.

Update on the Activities of the CPF and its Member Organizations: Zhimin Wu, FAO and CPF Chair, acknowledged there is still room for improvement in joint programming among CPF members. Wu reported the CPF has already conducted its effectiveness assessment for the Mid-term Review, which recommended clarifying CPF focus and alignment, and sharpening work plans with a focus on more concrete action. He said the CPF will have a retreat in Nairobi in June 2023 to discuss ideas about how to improve support to UNFF, such as through: staff secondment; regular reviews of CPF work; enhanced joint advocacy on specific themes; webinars; and improved CPF working modalities such as task forces or joint programming committees. Wu announced that the proposed theme for the 2024 International Day of Forests will be "forests and innovation."

Update on the Activities of Regional and Subregional Organizations and Processes: The AMAZON COOPERATION TREATY ORGANIZATION (ACTO) said achievements are more visible at regional level, such as the Amazon Observatory.

FOREST EUROPE said its 45 signatories significantly contribute to the UNSPF, including through green jobs and forest education to create work opportunities along the whole forest sector value chain.

The UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (UNECE) highlighted their capacity building work on urban forestry and mentioned the release of a series of podcasts on urban forestry.

General Discussion: The ITTO outlined their work, such as guidelines for forest restoration, including biodiversity and species protection.

MALAYSIA requested increased technical assistance and continued prioritization of forests as natural habitats. GABON noted high-forest-coverage/low-deforestation countries' cruciality

on greenhouse gas emissions, advocating robust developed/developing country partnerships, incentives for conservation and restoration, and strengthened monitoring.

JAPAN requested CPF membership criteria information. TANZANIA urged initiatives to address interlinked challenges, stressing existing funding. The US requested briefings on CPF workplans and on GFFFN-regional development bank engagement. SWITZERLAND suggested modeling the CPF on UN Water and ensuring that all follow UNFF policy decisions.

TURKIYE urged assessment of SFM's impacts on the ground. COSTA RICA called for technical studies/training to identify species and products that can be commercialized. MALAWI discussed synergies between projects to utilize scarce financing and leverage other resources.

AUSTRALIA praised CPF initiatives on streamlining forest reporting and sustainable wood but recalled CPF members' individual mandates. EL SALVADOR described transforming old-fashioned practices to sustainable agriculture, noting land ownership's implications for restoring degraded land.

The CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA (CITES) highlighted projects with the FAO and jointly with the ITTO and EU.

The FARMERS MAJOR GROUP called on UNFF to host regular dialogues with Major Groups as they did previously.

Panel on Regenerative Agriculture: A panel moderated by Catherine Grenier, President and CEO, NATURE CONSERVANCY CANADA, discussed how regenerative agriculture can contribute to the achievement of the Global Forest Goals (GFGs). Grenier noted the area required to achieve the GFGs by 2030 is twice the size of France, said: "We cannot achieve these goals without the private sector."

Alexander Gillett, CEO, HOWGOOD, suggested the best way of achieving the 1.5 degrees climate target is through forest regeneration, and noted due to the time frame of farming, the targets "become harder and more expensive." Emphasizing the shift to regenerative agriculture requires capacity building of farmers and related funding, he suggested leveraging funds through engaging with private companies who buy agricultural and forestry products to utilize opportunities presented by the carbon market.

On drivers of deforestation and how NESTLÉ addresses these, Michèle Zollinger said the biggest impacts come from the ingredients sourced for the company's products, thereby driving land degradation. She described the company's positive strategy launched in 2021 when they decided to take proactive action by focusing on restoration, including through: allowing no deforestation in their supply chain, taking long-term action on restoring forests, and considering landscape approaches.

Stéphane Hallaire, CEO, REFOREST'ACTION, presented on sharing carbon market revenues with regenerative agriculture using principles of: high carbon prices; benefit-sharing; risk acceptance; adding other revenues; and long-term monitoring. He said Reforest'Action codesigns projects with local community representatives and local governments, sharing understandings on goals and revenues of the projects.

During discussion, Zollinger said Nestlé supports regenerative practices, urging governments to: help scale up; drive and enforce forest legislation; and reduce supply-chain traceability barriers.

Gillet noted five agreed actions for common metrics on regenerative agriculture and called for supporting farmers until regenerative agriculture brings them higher yields.

Hallaire advocated combining carbon funding with agroforestry for higher co-benefits.

Moderator Grenier noted take-aways that: progress is already happening; these community-based projects require partnerships, co-development, and collaboration across sectors; the bioeconomy creates opportunities to leverage market incentives; and more learning will accelerate implementation.

In the Corridors

Delegates were enthusiastic about the panel on regenerative agriculture, and not just for its subject matter and ideas presented, which sparked many to go to the podium to seek follow-up with the speakers. "It's refreshing to hear how engaged some parts of the private sector are on our issues, particularly a company as huge as Nestlé," said one delegate. Another noted that industry had been interested in UNFF during the early years, but that interest had waned and in recent years many members had wondered aloud how to rekindle interaction. "Hopefully this is a sign that things are changing," he suggested hopefully.