UNFF18 Highlights
Wednesday, 10 May 2023

The third day of 18th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF18) addressed the always tricky issue of financial and technical resources for forests, including the possibility of greater tapping of the carbon market. The session also discussed advances in monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR), including the refinement of a global core set (GCS) of forest indicators.

Technical Discussions on the Implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSF)

Methods of Implementation (MOI): UNFF Secretariat Director Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo introduced the Secretariat Note on MOI (E/CN.18/2023/4), noting ongoing Global Forest Financing Facility Network (GFFFN) activities and the clearinghouse’s initiation, although challenges regarding technological cooperation continue. She also reported on informal discussions on establishment of the proposed GFFFN office in Beijing, China.

In general discussion, CHINA contrasted current limited GFFFN capacity with increasing requests for assistance and confirmed ongoing pursuit of an early conclusion on the Beijing office. COLOMBIA invited everyone to join the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP) Accelerator Partnership launched at CBD COP 15.

GUYANA urged GFFFN to prioritize capacity building for developing projects in alternative forestry options such as agroforestry and payments for environmental services, noting that GFFFN-accommodated South-South cooperation has assisted Guyana.

The EU, US, JAPAN, AUSTRALIA, and SWITZERLAND raised questions about the transparency of the process of setting up a Beijing office, the delegation of tasks and operations between the UNFF Secretariat and the office, its funding sources and its name. The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO asked for clarification about regional representation on the board for the office.

Biao confirmed the Beijing office will: be a project office under the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA); support GFFFN capacity-building activities; be timebound; and be funded by host country voluntary contributions. She said the contract is bilateral so it cannot be publicly shared, but it will be evaluated regularly.

SWITZERLAND, SOUTH AFRICA, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, and others requested capturing the Director’s responses in writing. SWITZERLAND queried complementarity with the GFFFN on current and potential tasks. The US and EU asked for more specifics on the office’s mandate and how it would be sustained long-term. The EU called for annexing the Director’s statement to the Chair’s summary of UNFF18.

SOUTH AFRICA, with the RUSSIAN FEDERATION and others, suggested countries submit their questions on issues for clarification in writing.

Director Biao said these clarifications will be provided in the Chair’s summary, noting much has not yet been finalized and that delineation of tasks still needs to be concluded to ensure the two offices complement each other.

Several developing countries spoke in favor of the idea in the Secretariat Note that the UNFF provide a technology facilitation function, but the AUSTRALIA, SWITZERLAND and GERMANY said this goes beyond UNFF’s mandate and suggested perhaps asking the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) to examine existing technology transfer mechanisms relevant for forests and explore whether an additional mechanism is required.

PERU, with many others, reminded everyone that only a fraction of the finance necessary to achieve the forest cover goal of 3.2 million hectares by 2030 flows to forestry. BRAZIL mentioned that its National Plan for Native Vegetation Restoration to restore 12 million hectares by 2030 requires about USD 1.2 billion annually.

On the carbon market, MEXICO warned against resource distribution that benefits only a few and INDIA recommended including local private sector partners in leveraging the opportunities provided by the carbon market.

SOUTH AFRICA expressed concern that no one has offered to second staff to the UNFF Secretariat and called for the Forum to explore the possibility of a dedicated global fund to cover gaps in current resources.

COSTA RICA commented that no matter what amount of domestic forest funding developing countries develop, it will never suffice, which is why exploration of external alternatives is needed, including private sector initiatives such as those explored in Tuesday’s panel. BOTSWANA noted its aim to use various funding streams for forest work, including those on land degradation and drought management.

GERMANY pointed to many already-existing potential sources for forest financing, saying the Global Environment Facility (GEF) noted during Tuesday’s panel that forest funding is at an all-time high. MOROCCO said existing financing for forests does not align with the urgent action needed under the Global Forest Goals (GFGs), even including the GEF and Green Climate Fund (GCF), and a meaningful global strategy to mobilize financing for forests is needed. PAPUA NEW GUINEA noted that GCF forest funding has not reached the Pacific region and urged greater attention to the needs of small island developing states (SIDS).

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introducing coercive methods for compliance, and ensuring the market actually supports the projects it is intended to benefit.

**Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting:** Director Biao introduced the Secretariat’s Note (E/CN.18/2023/5) on international activities on MAR since UNFF17, including: amendments to the UNFF reporting format; pilot testing and a global workshop; and evaluation of the impact of UNFF’s flagship publication, *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021*. 

**Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators:** Gerfried Gruber (Austria) and Clement Ng’oriarang (Kenya), Co-Chairs of the Global Workshop on Reporting on Progress towards the GFGs held 22-24 March 2023 in Rome, Italy, presented their summary of the Workshop, which addressed the GCS and the amended format for voluntary national reporting. Gruber noted recommendations to, *inter alia*: update information on wood/charcoal production; further streamline reporting; include information on emerging topics; update the methodology for estimating employment in the forestry sector; and identify data needs.

Ng’oriarang reported that outcomes of the workshop included a template of an amended format for reporting and feedback from the pilot-testing countries and others, including on: improving accuracy and consistency of forest-related data; support to countries preparing their voluntary national reports for UNFF; and briefings on issues related to data collection. He predicted the amended format will enable more countries to submit progress reports on implementing the UNSPF.

**Preparations for the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2025:** The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), reported on preparations for the FRA and on the FAO-UNFF Secretariat joint initiative on streamlining global forest reporting which has improved consistency of data for monitoring progress. She noted FAO’s recommendation that UNFF reporting use quantitative data from the FRA to minimize duplication and ensure consistency. On refinement of the GCS, the FAO noted a six-month gap after UNFF reporting for a survey to assess members’ satisfaction with the GCS.

**Informal Advisory Group on Reporting:** The Secretariat briefed delegates on the terms of reference (ToR) for this group. He noted the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) had asked the Secretariat to consider establishing the advisory group and to draft its ToR. He said the draft ToR are annexed to the Secretariat’s Note, which he summarized.

**General Discussion:** CHINA stressed the importance of the FRA, welcomed the results of the national reporting pilot, and expressed hope the Secretariat will further improve the reporting format and suggested that further work in this regard be done virtually. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA welcomed progress on the GCS and welcomed recent changes, while suggesting the indicators in tier 2 and 3 require further work.