

UNFF13 Highlights: Wednesday, 9 May 2018

UNFF13 resumed on Wednesday, 9 May 2018, at UN Headquarters in New York. In the morning, delegates discussed the possible impact of UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) reform on the UNFF Secretariat and how the Forum is serviced, and then turned to monitoring, assessment and reporting. In the afternoon delegates discussed means of implementation, including the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN).

Information on UN DESA Reforms Pertaining to UNFF

UNFF13 Chair Muhammad Shahrul Ikram Yaakob opened this session. Haitian Lu, UN DESA, explained that the UN DESA reforms are part of the reforms to the overall UN development system to be proposed by the Secretary-General in response to UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 70/299. He said the Secretary-General is considering various options to strengthen UNFF while respecting its original mandate and function, and will offer a formal proposal once the UNGA adopts its resolution on the repositioning of the UN development system, after that, he said, the Secretary-General would follow the guidance of Member States as provided through the UNGA Fifth Committee for Programme and Coordination.

SWITZERLAND asked what would happen to the detailed plans set out in the 2018-2019 programme budget for UNFF. SOUTH AFRICA asked if the reforms would have a negative impact on recent work on translating UNFF policy debates into action. MEXICO inquired about the process for approving reform plans and whether ECOSOC would have input before reforms are finalized. JAMAICA asked how GFFFN would be affected. BRAZIL expressed concern about impacts on Forum outputs and Secretariat staff. The AFRICAN GROUP asked about possible impacts on voluntary contributions to the UNFF Trust Fund. CANADA inquired how reforms might impact the UNFF mandate. KENYA suggested a “concrete outcome” on this agenda item is needed to send a clear message from Member States that within the reform framework and arrangements the UNFF should remain as-is or strengthened and better resourced.

Lu assured Member States that the Secretary-General is committed to ensuring UNFF receives strengthened, integrated support from the rest of the UN system, synergized in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs, with no change of mandate or function to the Forum. He also pledged that all comments and concerns raised at UNFF13 would be conveyed to the Secretary-General, and he urged UNFF delegations also to convey their concerns to their delegates in the Fifth Committee.

Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting (MAR)

UNFF13 Vice-Chair Maureen Whelan (Canada) chaired this session. The Secretariat introduced its MAR note (E/CN.18/2018/4) and summarized intersessional work on MAR and the proposal for a “flagship study” to be prepared on progress towards achievement of the Global Forest Goals.

Davia Carty, Jamaica, summarized her country’s experience in pilot testing the format for national reporting. She said the template was useful and the questions clear, concise and relevant, but some terms and the reporting period could be clarified. She recommended providing countries a minimum of six month to prepare and submit the report so as to allow sufficient time for relevant national consultations.

Patrick Kariuki, Kenya, reported on Kenya’s pilot of the reporting format, lamenting scanty information and inadequate time for consultations or for compiling the national report.

Peter Csoka, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), presented on the Collaborative Partnership for Forests’ (CPF) initiative to streamline reporting through a Global Core Set (GCS) of 21 forest-related indicators based on seven elements of sustainable forest management (SFM). He said the document explains relationships between global goals and targets, and is harmonized with the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) where possible. He stressed continuing development and evolution of indicators, especially given difficult methodologies or limited data for some. He invited UNFF13 to consider a decision on the platform.

During the ensuing discussion, the PHILIPPINES asked for UNFF assistance to Member States on any gaps identified in reports. BRAZIL noted the need for support with capacity building to countries that need it and request it.

INDIA, with INDONESIA, the US and NEPAL, called for flexibility and acceptance of qualitative responses on some indicators, such as food security.

The EU, with ROMANIA, said MAR should consider all information sources and queried the added value of the flagship study. She said the GCS indicators should take account of additional costs and reporting burden.

The AFRICAN GROUP stressed an evolving, flexible and amendable reporting system. He called for more time and for further consideration of the flagship study.

GHANA requested indicators on net changes in forest health or condition.

MALAYSIA, with INDONESIA, proposed a five-year cycle for the flagship study and, opposed by the US, production of a manual on using the format.

INDONESIA asked to distinguish actions taken before and after 2015.

CONGO requested indicators on products and programmes being implemented, both qualitative and quantitative.

COLOMBIA, with NEPAL, requested capacity building on gathering information.

The US, with NEW ZEALAND, called for adoption of the reporting format “as is,” using available data, and for high-level, brief reports. She queried the purpose of the proposed GCS.

NEW ZEALAND called for ongoing work on the proposed indicators.

MEXICO underscored the need for integration of efforts on UNSPF monitoring with the FRA and MAR processes under climate change and other relevant international agreements.

CHINA called for capitalizing on the monitoring done under the FRA, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Convention on Combatting Desertification in order to minimize the reporting burden of countries. FAO highlighted ways in which the FRA can contribute to the UNSPF MAR. The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) said FAO and UNECE look forward to a reporting process harmonized and coherent with their ongoing processes.

AUSTRALIA supported the development of a flagship report by the Forum, based on the inputs received from Member States. SOUTH AFRICA supported the three-year proposed reporting cycle and publication of the flagship report. ARGENTINA suggested the flagship report be supplemented by information on GFFFN. NGOs called for the flagship report to take an analytical approach and for involving civil society organizations in the reporting process.

TURKEY said experts should focus on how the 21 GCS indicators can provide useful inputs to the SDGs. SENEGAL said the 21 proposed indicators should be integrated in the voluntary national reporting. ALGERIA observed that the reporting is currently focused too much on the qualitative aspects of monitoring. Noting the lack of agreed definitions of some of the issues included in the indicators, such as “protected areas” or “degraded forests,” SWITZERLAND emphasized that more work needs to be done. The INTERNATIONAL UNION OF FOREST RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS noted that there is a very strong scientific base for the proposed indicators and expressed willingness to work with FAO and other CPF partners in supporting the monitoring process.

Means of Implementation (MOI)

UNFF13 Vice-Chair Koki Muli Grignon (Kenya) chaired this session. The Secretariat introduced the MOI document (E/CN.18/2018/5) noting that, since UNFF12, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) provided US\$ 824 million for 46 national projects and five regional programmes. He added that the Green Climate Fund (GCF) provided US\$ 216 million for seven forestry and land use projects.

Hu Yuanhui, China, reported on the outcomes of the expert group meeting (EGM) on guidelines for the operation of the GFFFN. He said the EGM proposed measures to increase the effectiveness of the GFFFN around five key elements:

- national forest financing strategies;
- support to resource mobilization at programme and project level;
- clearinghouse functions and sharing lessons learnt and best practices;
- collaboration and partnerships; and
- potential actions by the Forum.

UKRAINE expressed appreciation for the work of GFFFN. MALAYSIA called for simplifying the guidelines and criteria for access to finance through the GCF and supported the proposal to appoint GCF officers as liaisons with UNFF to facilitate that.

The AFRICAN GROUP recommended strengthening the mobilization of resources in support of GFFFN’s activities, explaining that the Network contributes to realizing the principle of “leaving no one behind” promoted by the 2030 Agenda.

The EU emphasized the facilitating role of the GFFFN, noting that there should be no expectations for it to function as a development agency.

CONGO said UNFF should strengthen its work in supporting countries to implement the UNSPF.

NIGER and SENEGAL called for support for strengthening the Network to discharge its mandates. SAINT LUCIA said small island states should be eligible for support to help them achieve Global Forest Goals and forest-related SDGs. IRAN called for language on funding of the GFFFN to ensure it includes not just sufficient, but also predictable, financing. INDIA urged for simplification of funding procedures.

MEXICO emphasized that capacity building to achieve SFM and Global Forest Goals is important and should be provided within UNFF.

Many including JAPAN, SWITZERLAND and AUSTRALIA also emphasized transparency and accountability.

Several countries cautioned that the GFFFN mandate should not be changed to make it a funding mechanism (US), implementing agency (Japan), or project management body (Australia). SWITZERLAND said the GFFFN should play a facilitative, not capacity building, role.

AFRICAN FOREST FORUM said the Network has raised the profile of the UNFF from policy dialogue to one that facilitates policy implementation, making UNFF more efficient and effective in catalyzing SFM actions on the ground. They suggested that the Network reach out more to private sector and civil society. Scientific and Technological Community, on behalf of MAJOR GROUPS, said the Network should include funding mechanisms involving major groups.

UNFF Director Manoel Sobral Filho assured UNFF that the Secretariat is not equipped to be a funding or implementation agency. He emphasized that while there is growing demand for funding from GFFFN, there is no increase in funding to the Trust Fund. He reported that the Secretariat is following all UN rules in exploring all possibilities for additional fund raising.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan

General Country Statements on Implementation of the UNSPF: JAPAN stressed the need to address illegal logging. He highlighted that UNFF is not the appropriate forum to address trade and called for eliminating mentions of tariffs reduction. CHINA presented its proposal to host an office for GFFFN in China, which was welcomed by AUSTRALIA. NIGERIA expressed support for the proposed communication and outreach strategy.

In the Corridors

The conversation on UN reform on Wednesday morning was beginning to become underwhelming in spite of reassurances from the UN DESA that the process would leave UNFF mandates and functions intact. Numerous delegates expressed concern about the opacity of the process, seemingly unconvinced that the repositioning of UNFF would be flawless. One delegate said, “there are bound to be some casualties from the process, we just don’t yet understand the extent to which this will affect ongoing work.”

While delegates somewhat fear the UNFF may be weakened, the GFFFN’s role appears to be strengthening. As afternoon discussions on MOI began, the GFFFN received quite a diversity of responses on what its strengthening entails. On one hand “beneficiaries,” as some referred to them, showed strong preference for an increased GFFFN role in capacity building and implementation. On the other hand, “contributors” differed, stressing that the Network, if not restricted to its original mandate would morph into a quasi-development or funding agency. The Secretariat insisted that this was not their intention, but as tension between both nodes tightened, one delegate noted that, “unless the Network’s funding is increased, then all the guidance we are providing is for nothing.”