

UNFF17 Highlights Tuesday, 10 May 2022

The second day of the 17th session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF17) concluded policy discussions on the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 (UNSPF), addressed preparations for the 2024 Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the UNSPF, and reviewed the status of the UNFF Trust Fund.

Policy discussions on the implementation of the UNSPF

Thematic priorities for 2021–2022 biennium and contributions of members of the Forum: Update on the activities of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and its member organizations: The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO) reported on recent CPF initiatives, including on improving the coverage, quality and transparency of forest-related data and information, further enhancements to the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2025, and advancing the global core set of forest-related indicators.

The EU suggested the CPF finalize work on indicators, improve interaction between CPF members in contributing to other forums such as the HLPF, provide more coherent communication and outreach, and increase its work on sustainable and legal supply chains. BRAZIL said sustainable supply chains should be addressed by the World Trade Organization (WTO). ARGENTINA cautioned deforestation-free supply chains is beyond the mandate of UNFF.

JAPAN opposed language in the Secretariat note on strengthening the CPF secretariat. GERMANY expressed support for CPF's role in advancing collaborative initiatives to halt forest loss. The US, with SWITZERLAND, urged timely updates on green finance, and policies on deforestation-free commodity chains, and further development of CPF joint initiatives. SWITZERLAND and GERMANY encouraged further exploration on sustainable use of forests aligned with Agenda 2030. The INTERNATIONAL UNION OF FOREST RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS noted its recent assessment of a decade of REDD+ and work on trade-offs between human health and trees and other land uses.

Update on the activities of regional and subregional organizations and processes: The EU encouraged the Forum to accelerate action to reverse loss of forest cover working with regional and subregional organizations, finance sector and other partners, including through cross-sectoral and landscape approaches.

Update on the activities of major groups and other relevant stakeholders: The EU urged more inclusion and participation of major groups and stakeholders in concrete actions on forests and noted the important role of the private sector and philanthropy.

NGOS highlighted work of the Forum and NGOs on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the forest sector. YOUTH AND

CHILDREN noted career development challenges for youth in the forest sector, calling on UNFF to ensure inclusive and equitable access to forest education for youth everywhere. WOMEN shared recent achievements including the African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests' commitment to plant 20 million trees for the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. MAJOR GROUPS stressed identifying and collecting best practices, and capacity building for Indigenous People, women, and other vulnerable groups.

Interlinkages between the global forest goals and targets and the SDGs under review by the HLPF in 2022 and international forest-related developments: FAO shared the outcomes of the XV World Forestry Congress. The EU called for the UNFF and other international processes to address forest-related issues coherently, noting the importance of forests for achieving the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the 2030 Agenda.

CHINA noted the important role of forests in post COVID-19 pandemic recovery and the achievement of the SDGs. CONGO called on UNFF to consider value chain developments to fight against youth unemployment and poverty. BRAZIL shared his country's proposal for a new dedicated global biodiversity fund under the CBD. ARGENTINA expressed caution around the framing of the UNSPF as an integrated framework for global forest action, requesting further discussion. UGANDA emphasized women as change agents in the forest sector, bemoaning challenges to women's land ownership.

Implementation of the UNSPF communication and outreach strategy and the International Day of Forests in 2022: The EU called for: an evaluation of the impact of the 2021 flagship publication; more work on risks to forest cover and benefits of SFM, including for human welfare; greater consistency in outreach efforts; and increased outreach to regional groups.

THE PHILIPPINES, KENYA, GABON, GHANA, INDIA and SAUDI ARABIA reported on International Day of Forests (IDF) national celebrations. MALAYSIA noted celebrations of all international forestry-related events. CHINA asked that IDF materials be provided to members earlier, for more effective campaigns.

AUSTRALIA expressed interest in targeting the communications and outreach strategy for wider reach and delivery. The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC) asked for assistance in its communications efforts on promoting the rational use of forests.

SWITZERLAND stressed modernizing the UNFF website and suggested developing a publication for the public explaining forests' role in the SDGs. MONGOLIA supported updating the UNFF website, with a section on innovative best practices for forest conservation, reforestation and reducing land degradation.

FAO noted it produced a video for the 2022 IDF and launched a publication on forest products in a global bio-economy.

Means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN): Director Koudenoukpo introduced the Secretariat's Note (E/CN.18/2022/3). GABON noted it is the first country receiving results-based payments for forest protection and management from the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI). SURINAME said it, Panama, and Guyana are the only three "carbon negative" countries, noting its work on a climate finance roadmap. The EU called for:

- UNFF Secretariat facilitation of private and philanthropic sector funding;
- an assessment of the GFFFN and areas for improvement; and
- a status report on establishing the Beijing GFFFN office.

The DRC stressed that funding forest protection is a duty, not a development finance "handout." CHINA said COVID-19 reduced GFFFN funding but forest financing is integral to post-pandemic recovery. COLOMBIA urged public and private sector forest investments for addressing climate change and other environmental issues cost-effectively and improving local economies.

The US noted that long-term financing and staffing are issues and supported inviting CPF members' secondments of staff to enhance GFFFN capacity.

SOUTH AFRICA called for strengthening UNSPF implementation mechanisms for achieving the GFGs. ARGENTINA called for aligning private financing with internationally agreed forest objectives. BRAZIL indicated their intention to propose language on developed countries' resource obligations. GHANA sought clarification on how the UNFF works with global funding bodies. JAPAN emphasized transparency and accountability, and UN rules and procedures for establishing an office.

The FAO highlighted the recently released 2022 "State of World's Forests (SOFO)" report, underscoring that financing for the three "forest pathways" in the report needs to triple by 2030.

The Secretariat assured delegates of continuing updates on the establishment of the Beijing office, noting close collaboration with relevant UN departments. The Secretariat also provided clarifications on the second phase of the clearing house.

Monitoring, assessment and reporting: Director Koudenoukpo introduced the Secretariat's progress report (E/CN.18/2022/4).

Proposed refinements to the format for voluntary national reporting on progress in implementing the UNSPF, the UN Forest Instrument and VNCs: INDIA welcomed the proposals to establish an informal advisory group on reporting and a joint reporting workshop with FAO and the UNFF. CHINA noted potential for further simplification of the reporting process. The EU called for a pilot phase on using the refined format, with a report on progress to UNFF18.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA emphasized clear definition of terms and quantitative indicators for improving reporting. THE PHILIPPINES expressed support for future capacity building workshops on the revised reporting format.

CANADA supported establishing an informal advisory group. ARGENTINA added it should have clear terms of reference. The Secretariat said an informal group was proposed based on positive experience with previous informal groups and the no-cost implications of the virtual format.

BRAZIL favored further consideration of the proposal by Forum members. The US supported refining the reporting format and, with the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, scheduling the next round of reporting after the 2025 FRA, with which the FAO agreed.

AUSTRALIA, with ARGENTINA, stressed coordinating with other reporting processes to reduce duplication. COLOMBIA urged harmonization of reporting on forests across different forums. FAO offered to co-host a workshop on reporting, if UNFF endorses the idea.

JAPAN urged that a roadmap for the next cycle of reporting be presented to UNFF18.

Progress on the global core set of forest-related indicators:

The US cautioned further workshops cannot solve problems where data does not exist. MALAYSIA suggested indicators be based on the FRA. FAO suggested using the global core set of indicators as the basis for quantitative elements of the next national reports on GFGs. She suggested such work be completed by the end of June 2024.

Preparations for the midterm review in 2024 of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives

Director Koudenoukpo introduced the Secretariat's note (E/CN.18/2022/5). There was general support on preparations for an MTR. The EU noted the MTR offers an opportunity for the Forum to address existing gaps in progress on the GFGs and the 2030 Agenda and assess how the CPF can further support UNFF. He suggested that UNFF conduct an analysis of its impact, such as on deforestation and forest fires.

CHINA and INDIA offered help with facilitating the MTR. CHINA called for coordinating activities to improve efficiency and reduce costs. INDIA suggested assessment of reporting be based on internationally agreed indicators relevant to specific targets. ARGENTINA recommended postponing consideration of a legally binding IAF under ECOSOC Resolution 2015/33 until 2030.

The US, SWITZERLAND, and CANADA favored assessing current arrangements rather than considering a prospective global forest fund. CANADA urged assessment of UNFF's usefulness for the HLPF and its impact on forests globally. With AUSTRALIA and SWITZERLAND, she stressed ensuring objectivity given that the assessment will be internal. AUSTRALIA sought clarity on how to prioritize MTR actions. SWITZERLAND underscored the importance of neutrality and transparency in the evaluation and called for members to be more proactively engaged through questionnaires.

Forum Trust Fund

Director Koudenoukpo introduced the document (E/CN.18/2022/6). The US encouraged members to contribute to the Trust Fund so the UNFF can fulfill its mandate. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA noted financial support of members is crucial to efforts on the UNSPF and GFGs.

CHINA urged the Secretariat to make more effective use of member countries' contributions.

SWITZERLAND strongly requested that, in the spirit of transparency, the Secretariat send the program budget information (PBI) to all national UNFF focal points so members have a clear idea of the UNFF budget for the coming year.

In the Corridors

CPF members and Major Group delegates were startled to learn they would not be allowed to attend the in-person negotiations on the omnibus resolution on Wednesday and Thursday. "Parts of this resolution may affect our work with UNFF, so why does it make sense to exclude us from the discussion?" muttered one. "We keep stressing the importance of communication, outreach, and transparency – don't they see the irony in conducting closed-door negotiations?" remarked a government delegate, shaking her head.