United Nations Forum on Forests
Eleventh Session
New York, 4-15 May, 2015
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*
Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Summary

The participation of representatives of Major Groups, as identified in Agenda 21, during the sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests, has improved significantly over time. The United Nations Forum on Forests recognized the value of, and encourages the active participation of Major Groups to contribute to, and participate actively in the discussions of the Forum. Pursuant to Forum resolution 1/1 and 7/1, a multi-stakeholder dialogue is held as an ongoing component of every Forum session in accordance with the provisions of the Economic and Social Council and the relevant rules of procedure.

At the eleventh session of the Forum in May 2015, the multi-stakeholder dialogue will be held during the first week of the session. During the dialogue, representatives of the Major Groups will share their perspectives on issues related to forests: progress, challenges, and the way forward for the international arrangement on forests (IAF).

The present note gives an account of relevant developments since the tenth session of the Forum and offers a number of measures that the Forum may wish to consider in order to continue to enhance the substantive contributions of Major Groups to its discussions.
I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), according to resolution E/2000/35 that established it, is open to all Member States, and should operate in a transparent and participatory manner. The participation of a wide range of forest-related stakeholders is considered a key component of sustainable management of forests. For this reason, since its inception, the Forum welcomes the participation of the nine Major Groups as identified in Chapter 23 of Agenda 21, including: Business and Industry, Children and Youth, Farmers and Small Forest Landowners, Indigenous People, Local Authorities, Non-governmental Organizations, Scientific and Technological Communities, Women, and Workers and Trade Unions, in the implementation of sustainable forest management.

2. The Forum has made significant progress in enhancing stakeholder participation in its work. At its tenth session, the Forum adopted Resolution 10/1 on progress in the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, regional and subregional inputs, forests and economic development, and enhanced cooperation. The Forum encouraged Member States to enhance the role and full participation of all relevant stakeholders in the forest sector, including indigenous peoples and local communities, with regard to sustainable forest management (SFM), opportunities for employment and training, rural development, technology innovation and transfer, research and development and diversification of markets, goods and services. The Forum also encouraged Member States, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), regional and subregional organizations and relevant stakeholders to share experiences, lessons learned and best practices regarding sustainable forest management, including through demonstration sites and pilot projects; encouraged regional and subregional organizations and processes and Major Groups to continue to provide coordinated input to the Forum; and invited Member States, the donor community and member organizations
of the CPF to support those efforts. In addition, the Forum requested the Forum Secretariat to continue and strengthen its activities to effectively engage all Major Groups.

3. During this intersessional period, the Forum Secretariat has worked in close collaboration and cooperation with Major Group focal points to coordinate and plan for the multi-stakeholder dialogue and to enhance their participation in IAF-related activities, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. In order to fully integrate Major Group participation with the general discussion, Major Groups organized associations and networks that serve the dual purpose of promoting capacity building and the exchange of experiences among members, including developing a group perspective based on common concerns, which are transmitted to the Forum. While some Major Groups currently benefit from the existence of such networks, there is a constraint in engaging the local authorities and business and industry Major Groups, because of a lack of an appropriate network that could contribute on behalf of a range of members of these two groups.

4. The Forum Secretariat facilitated consultations among the focal points of each Major Group 1 to plan and prepare for the multi-stakeholder dialogue. The format and content of the dialogue are proposed by the focal points, in consultation with the Forum Secretariat, to the Bureau of the Forum for consideration.

5. The present note has been prepared to facilitate the multi-stakeholder dialogue at the eleventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests. One joint discussion paper, prepared by the focal points of Major Groups 2 in consultation with their networks, is contained in an addendum to the present note. The joint discussion paper presents their views on the achievements and weaknesses of the current international arrangement on forests (IAF), and the role played by the Major Groups, with particular emphasis on the roles that civil society can play in the planning, implementation and monitoring of SFM policies; and in strengthening awareness of the importance of cross-sectoral policy frameworks based on lived experience in and near forests. The joint paper also offers views on how the IAF can be improved, and how the contribution of Major Groups can be more effective.

6. The recommendations on enhancing stakeholder participation in the future international arrangement on forests are contained in the report of the Secretary-General (document E/CN.18/2015/2).

II. Enhancing stakeholder participation in the future work of the Forum

7. Civil society organizations are an integral part of the Forum, and their participation in the Forum process can ensure the success of the Forum in its pursuit of SFM, a greater sense of ownership of the outcomes, and more effective action on the ground. The active engagement of civil society organizations in the multi-stakeholder dialogue process is particularly important in ensuring that discussions at the eleventh session of the Forum encompass a wide range of perspectives and concerns on the review of the current IAF, and contribute to the future IAF.

1 A complete list of the focal points of Major Groups is available from www.un.org/esa/forests/contacts-major_groups.html.

2 Children and Youth, Indigenous People, Science and Technology Community, Farmers and Small Land Owners, Women, Workers and Trade Unions Major Groups. NGOs withdraw their participation citing lack of time for their group to engage in full consultations.
8. From 2013 to 2015, the Forum made significant progress in enhancing the contributions of Major Groups, as identified in Agenda 21, to its work. Representatives of Major Groups have contributed significantly to intersessional work on the IAF. Representatives of Major Groups participated in the Facilitative Dialogue workshop on the IAF held in Vienna (October 2013), the first meeting of the ad hoc expert group on the IAF held in Nairobi (February 2014), and the second meeting of the ad hoc expert group on the IAF held in New York (January 2015). In response to a call by the Forum Secretariat for submission of views on the IAF, the Major Group focal points submitted two inputs to the ad hoc expert group on the IAF: the first, a joint submission from all Major Groups, and the second, a submission by the Children and Youth Major Group. Their proposals and comments on various issues under consideration were submitted for discussion in an open and participatory manner alongside those of other experts. Such a practice should be continued in the future IAF, and any associated intersessional activities.

9. Major Groups convened one very successful Major Group-led initiative in March 2015, entitled: “Sustainable Forest Management: Designing the Vehicles for Securing the Means of Implementation”. This initiative provided an opportunity for representatives of Major Groups to contribute substantively to discussions on the review of the IAF. The main objective of the meeting was to enhance the implementation of Forum decisions toward sustainable forest management within the framework of establishing a successor institution with the means for future policy development and implementation; and to develop concrete recommendations for consideration by the eleventh session of the Forum. The outcomes of the Major Group-led Initiative will also be presented at the eleventh session of the Forum.

III. Multi-stakeholder dialogue at the eleventh session of the Forum

10. The Forum has consistently encouraged the participation of forest-related organizations belonging to Major Groups in the multi-stakeholder dialogue of the Forum; and, where appropriate, in relevant regional and subregional discussions, with a view to providing their perspectives and input to the Forum’s programme of work and engaging in an exchange of views and experiences with other Forum participants. In this regard, active involvement of Major Groups in the multi-stakeholder dialogue is important, in ensuring that discussions at the eleventh session reflect a diverse range of views on the current review of the IAF and recommendations for a future IAF. The dialogue process encourages the balanced participation of stakeholders from Major Groups and the different regions of the world. It has proved to be a unique opportunity for forest-related stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the discussions on the Forum’s main themes, enriching the international arrangement on forests through a diversity of views on issues related to sustainable forest management, and the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on forests and its four global objectives on forests.

11. Preparation for the multi-stakeholder dialogue has been made in cooperation with network organizations of seven Major Groups: Children and Youth; Non-governmental Organizations; Indigenous Peoples; Scientific and Technical Communities; Women; Farmers and Small Forest Landowners; and Forest Workers and Trade Unions. Unfortunately, two Major Groups, namely, Business and Industry and Local Authorities, will not be represented in this dialogue.

12. The focal points of the participating Major Groups have decided to produce a single joint discussion paper entitled “The Future of the International Arrangement on Forests”. Preparation of this paper was facilitated by the Major Groups Partnership on Forests (MGPoF), the coordinating organization of Major Groups of the Forum. The joint paper will form the basis of the dialogue during the current session.
13. The multi-stakeholder dialogue will be held during the first week of the session on the morning of Tuesday, 5 May. During the dialogue, representatives of Major Groups will present the findings set out in their joint discussion paper, including the priority areas and recommendations set out in the joint discussion paper on the future IAF. The presentation will be followed by an interactive policy discussion with representatives of Member States and the CPF member organizations. Senior representatives of Major Groups will also be invited to present their views and comments during the High Level Segment: High Level Dialogue with the Heads of the Regional Organizations and Senior Representatives of Major Groups on the afternoon of Thursday, 14 May. Throughout the session, they will be invited to present their views and comments at the discretion of the Chair and presiding Vice-Chairs.

IV. Conclusion

14. The Forum has a tradition of openness and transparency in its working modalities that provide opportunities for active stakeholders to participate and present their views on all aspects of sustainable forest management policy and practices. Through the multi-stakeholder dialogue, the close collaboration and consultation between the Forum Secretariat and the focal points of Major Groups, and the participation of representatives of Major Groups in Forum inter-sessional activities and meetings, are all critical vehicles for the active and meaningful engagement of civil society. Maintaining the multi-stakeholder nature of the Forum, and strengthening the broad and active participation of all stakeholders is fundamental for the successful promotion of SFM in the period beyond 2015. As the Forum in its eleventh session will decide on the future of the international arrangement on forests, it is important that Member States lay the foundation for a strong and participatory arrangement which not only involve the traditional participating Major Group representatives in its work, but also broader participation of other key stakeholders.