

# **Preparations for the Midterm Review (MTR) of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF)**

## **Assessment on actions related to the implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030**

Kit Prins

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### **Assessment report prepared for the UN Forum on Forests**

Through its resolution 2022/17, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), based on the outcome of the seventeenth session of the UN Forum on Forests, decided that the Forum would undertake extensive intersessional activities in preparation for the Midterm Review (MTR) of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF). The resolution called for these actions to be implemented in a transparent and independent manner, and in close consultation with Members of the Forum, as well as the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) member organizations and other relevant stakeholders.

To facilitate this process, the Forum Secretariat hired consultants to assist in the preparation of background papers and assessments. These assessments and outcomes of preparatory intersessional work related to the midterm review, will be submitted to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group on the preparations for the IAF-MTR, which will be convened in late 2023.

The views and opinions expressed in the assessment reports are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations Secretariat. The designations and terminology employed may not conform to United Nations practice and do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Organization.

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## I Executive Summary

This report is one of 10 assessment reports prepared by consultants as part of preparations for the UNFF's midterm review in 2024 of the effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forest (IAF) in meeting its objectives. It assesses actions related to the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests (UNSPF) 2017-2030, as requested in Section F of annex to ECOSOC resolution 2022/17. It addresses progress towards the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and the process of voluntary reporting to the UNFF.

According to Global Forest Goals Report 2021, measures are being taken to achieve all of the goals and their associated targets. The GFG report is based on national reports submitted to UNFF15, as well as on data of the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2020. It contains information on the actions taken by the reporting countries to achieve the goals and targets, and on the outcomes so far. Despite its acknowledged shortcomings, the Global Forest Goals Report 2021 demonstrated clearly, to the UNFF and a wider audience, where, and to what extent, the world is on track to achieve the targets, and where there has been little progress. In so doing, the report was also able to identify the constraints and challenges faced by countries, and to present a number of success stories. The key findings of the report are summarised in Annex 4.

Assessment of outcomes resulting from these measures presents many challenges to the analysts. For some of the targets, quantified data confirm that the measures taken are leading to progress towards the targets. However, the lack of standardized and comparable statistical data remains a challenge for many of the targets. Summaries of progress towards each target are in Section IV.2

Countries identified many challenges in preparing the voluntary national reports. Most of the challenges were related to inter-ministerial communication, analytical capacity and the access to and availability of data. Some of these challenges were connected to the format for reporting and these were taken into consideration when preparing the revised format of the voluntary national reports for use during a pilot phase, which started in late 2022.

It is possible to improve the reporting process, and the various enquiries carried out have identified some major directions for improvement, notably:

- Increasing capacity at the national level, for instance through funding for data collection and processing and for improving coordination between relevant national agencies.
- Improving the reporting process at the international level, for instance by increasing its visibility, notably through the flagship publication and simplifying and streamlining the format of the voluntary national reports.

Countries also supported the proposal to establish a deadline for submission of voluntary national reports in the next cycle, 6-months after the data of FRA 2025 are made available, to ensure that the most recent comprehensive and comparable data are available to monitor progress towards the goals and targets, thereby reducing the reporting burden to a minimum.

On the basis of the analysis and conclusions presented above, the consultant puts forward for consideration the following recommendations:

1. Member states and the international community should continue to work to implement the UN strategic plan for forests and attach high priority to achieving all the Global Forest Goals and their associated targets.

2. Member states and the international community should continue to work together to monitor and report on progress in implementing the UNSPF and achieving the global forest goals and their associated targets.
3. Following the successful example of the Global Forest Goals Report 2021, similar flagship reports should be produced at approximately five-year intervals, culminating in a final report after 2030 assessing whether the GFGs, and their associated targets have in fact been achieved.
4. Should the Forum decide to produce the next global forest goals report, and establish an informal advisory group on reporting, work should start immediately following the decision, notably by simplifying and streamlining the format for the voluntary national reports, learning from the experience with the first flagship publication and seeking views from Members of the Forum, on how to improve the next report, as well as the relevant suggestions listed in this report.
5. UNFF and FAO with their partners should continue to work together to avoid duplication and minimise the reporting burden, notably by focusing their efforts on improving the indicators included in the Global Core Set of forest-related indicators, especially those in Tier 3, and helping countries to collect the relevant information.
6. As regards timing, the next round of voluntary national reporting to UNFF should be conducted 6 months after the completion of the next FAO Forest Resource Assessment.
7. Donors and the international community should continue to work together to increase member states' capacity to prepare voluntary national reports.
8. Efforts should continue to develop tools to monitor progress towards those goals for which, at present, no objective, transparent and comprehensive monitoring tools exist.
9. In the survey underlying this paper countries identified the main global and regional issues of concern to forests in the early 2020s (see section IV.5). In its future work, UNFF should take into account the results of this survey.

## II. Introduction

In its resolution 2015/33, ECOSOC decided to “strengthen the international arrangement on forests and extend it to 2030”. In the same resolution, it requested the UN Forum on Forests “to undertake in 2024 a midterm review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives, as well as a final review in 2030”. This report is one in a series of ten assessments carried out in preparation for the 2024 midterm review in accordance with the process and timelines agreed in ECOSOC resolution 2022/17, paragraphs 28-30 and the Annex to this resolution.

This report provides an assessment of actions related to the implementation of the UNSPF, as contained in Section F of Annex to ECOSOC resolution 2022/17 (Box.1). The report was prepared by Kit Prins (see Annex 1 for consultant’s biography) and includes the following sections:

- Section III briefly describes the method of work
- Section IV presents progress towards the Global Forest Goals, including actions taken, outcomes, challenges, and constraints
- Section V discusses how to improve reporting to the Forum
- Section VI contains conclusions
- Section VII presents recommendations

The UNSPF has five sections:

1. Introduction, including vision and mission, challenges and opportunities, and the international arrangement on forests
2. Global forest goals and targets, setting out the agreed 6 goals and 26 associated targets
3. Implementation framework, including roles and responsibilities and means of implementation
4. Review framework, including process for review of the international arrangement on forests, the implementation of the UNSPF and of forests’ contribution to the sustainable development agenda.
5. Communication and outreach strategy

Many of these topics are also included in other parts of the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests. Therefore, to avoid duplication, this report will focus exclusively on information regarding progress towards the Global Forest Goals and targets, alongside the specific topics identified in section F of the resolution: challenges and constraints in implementing the UNSPF, preparation of voluntary national reports, timing of the reporting process and major issues of concern in the 2020s. The remaining topics will be addressed in other reports.

### III. Assessment methodology

The following sources of information were used in the preparation of this report:

- Responses to a consolidated questionnaire, containing questions prepared by the consultants. This questionnaire was circulated on 10 August 2022 by the Chair of the UNFF Bureau to all UNFF member states, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), regional and subregional partners and major groups. Annex 2 contains an extract of the parts of the questionnaire that are relevant to this report, and the names of member states and organisations that responded to these parts of the questionnaire.
- Relevant UNFF documents, together with other relevant literature. For this report, the major source was the Global Forest Goals Report 2021, which addresses directly the question of implementation of the UNSPF. Annex 3 contains references.

The UNFF Secretariat facilitated the preparation of this report by providing administrative support for the consultants and commenting on structure and content. However, the views expressed in this report, including the conclusions and recommendations, are those of the consultant.

Throughout the process of preparing this report, there was consultation between the consultants engaged in preparing the reports, including circulation of drafts and joint (virtual) meetings. The aim of this consultation was to ensure a consistency of approach between the assessments.

### IV. Progress towards the Global Forest Goals: actions taken, outcomes, challenges and constraints

#### IV.1 Background and context

Since the early 1990s, the international forest dialogue has endeavoured to reach consensus on what constitutes sustainable forest management and how it should be achieved. Milestones included the Rio Forest Principles, agreement on the seven thematic elements and the UN Forest Instrument and its four Global Objectives, as well as numerous dialogues at the regional level. The formulation in 2017 of the UN strategic plan for forests 2030, and its approval by UNFF, ECOSOC and the General Assembly represented a major step forward, as the strategic plan is more specific and operational than earlier agreements, while still representing a true global consensus.

At the heart of the strategic plan are six global forest goals and 26 associated targets to be achieved by 2030. When formulating the Goals, the Forum decided to assess progress towards them. According to the UNSPF, the assessment of progress “should be based on internationally agreed indicators, including relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators, that are relevant to the global forest goals and targets.” Moreover, the assessment should take into account voluntary national reporting to the Forum, Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs) and the results of the most recent FAO/FRA as well as inputs from the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its member organizations and other partners within and outside the United Nations system, including regional and subregional organizations and relevant stakeholders.

A first step in the process was the preparation of the Global Forest Goals Report 2021, which provided an initial overview of progress towards achieving the six global forest goals and their 26 associated

targets. Each chapter of the report features actions taken by countries (as reported in their voluntary national reports), and an overview of progress towards each goal and the associated targets, as well as some success stories that illustrate best practices. It should be noted however that the Global Forests Goals Report 2021 originated from the voluntary national reports (VNRs) of 52 Member States and 19 voluntary national contributions (VNCs), submitted to the Forum. Although responding countries represented 75% of forests in the world, not all of the reports were complete, so the assessments in the Global Forest Goals Report 2021 of national actions cannot be considered fully comprehensive.

## IV.2 Progress towards the global forest goals

The main conclusions of the Global Forest Goals Report 2021 report are briefly summarised below, with a more detailed overview in Annex 4. For many of the targets, there are problems with measuring and reporting progress. These issues are particularly concerning for targets 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 4.2.

### Global Forest Goal 1

- Many regions are on track to achieve Target 1.1 of increasing forest area by three percent worldwide, although some regions are still losing forest area.
- Many regions are on track to achieve Target 1.2 of maintaining or enhancing carbon stocks., although these stocks are still falling in Africa and South America.
- The world is largely on track to achieve Target 1.3 of promoting sustainable forest management, although the picture varies according to region and dimension of SFM.
- There have been significant disturbances to forests in all regions due to fire, insects, disease and severe weather events, many attributed to climate change, but monitoring is at present not adequate for objective measurement of progress towards Target 1.4 on resilience and adaptive capacity of forests.

### Global Forest Goal 2

- Many countries are taking steps to move towards Target 2.1, to eradicate extreme poverty for all forest dependent people, for instance through community-based forestry, but much work remains to be done to measure this progress.
- Many countries have put mechanisms and programmes in place to facilitate access to financial services of small-scale forest enterprises (Target 2.2) but there is no specific indicator to measure progress towards this target.
- Forests make a significant contribution to food security (Target 2.3), which is often undervalued, through lack of monitoring and valuation.
- Forests and forest industries provide millions of jobs, generate revenue and contribute to development (Target 2.4), but trends are not measured.
- All regions are on track to achieve Target 2.5 on enhancing the contribution of forests to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation. In particular Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 has already been exceeded for forests at the global level and for most regions.

### Global Forest Goal 3

- Many regions are on track to achieve Target 3.1, on increasing the area of protected forest: Africa, Asia and South America have already exceeded Aichi Biodiversity Target 11.
- Most regions are on track to achieve Target 3.2 on increasing area under long term management plans.



- The area of certified forest expanded, as did the supply of wood from certified and other sustainably managed forests: all regions are on track to increase the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests (Target 3.3).

#### Global Forest Goal 4

- The majority of countries reporting to UNFF shared that they were able to mobilize increased financial resources for the implementation of sustainable forest management, in accordance with Target 4.1
- Despite unsatisfactory protocols for reporting information on forest financing, countries launched numerous initiatives to increase financing in order to achieve their objectives for forests (Target 4.2).
- Countries reporting to UNFF shared that they used international cooperation to promote sustainable forest management, in accordance with Target 4.3.
- Most countries reporting to UNFF shared that they had developed or implemented forest financing strategies in accordance with Target 4.4.
- Countries reported a wide range of initiatives to improve collection, availability and accessibility of forest-related information (Target 4.5).

#### Global Forest Goal 5

- Nearly all reporting countries shared that they had integrated forests into their national sustainable development plans and/or poverty reduction strategies (Target 5.1)
- Countries enacted many complementary but varied measures to reach Target 5.2, with the intention of significantly strengthening national and subnational forest authorities and combatting illegal logging and related trade.
- Almost all countries in the world had policies and legal frameworks in place to promote sustainable forest management (Target 5.3). Countries reported a wide range of measures meant to improve policy coherence and involve stakeholders, local communities, and indigenous peoples in these policies and frameworks.
- Most reporting countries had land use planning systems in place that integrated forest issues (Target 5.4).

#### Global Forest Goal 6

- The UN System put in place a wide range of general coordination measures that had bearing on its forest-related programmes (Target 6.1).
- Forest-related programmes are being coordinated across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to ensure that they are coherent and complementary (Target 6.2).
- Nearly all reporting countries took action to enhance cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation and to promote forests and sustainable forest management (Target 6.3).
- Most countries reported using criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. Reporting countries described an array of communication initiatives, notably the International Day of Forests, progressing towards Target 6.4.
- Reporting countries highlighted how they are involving Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of UNSPF and in planning forest activities, in accordance with Target 6.5.

### IV.3 Significant actions taken since 2020 by countries and organisations to implement the UNSPF

Information was received in response to the questionnaire from thirteen countries and one international organization on actions towards the GFGs taken since the preparation of the Voluntary National Reports which were submitted to UNFF in 2015, and therefore not covered in the Global Forest Goals Report 2021. These replies are summarised in Annex 5.

Measures reported in response to the questionnaire, included revised or new forest strategies and programmes, including those linked to climate change and the SDGs, and broader strengthening of governance structures, financial support to forest measures, linkage of forest policy to climate change actions, increased certification, expanded social forestry, measures against illegal logging and large scale greening of land and tree planting.

Countries also reported actions specifically in the context of the UNSPF, including Voluntary National Contributions, and contributions of resources to the Global Forest Goals report and other activities.

#### IV.4 Challenges and constraints faced by countries and organisations in implementing the UNSPF

In their voluntary national reports, countries were invited to identify challenges and constraints affecting progress towards the global forest goals. Their responses were synthesized in the Global Forest Goals Report 2021 and are summarised below<sup>1</sup>.

- Inadequate resources, especially financial, and increased competition for those resources which are available.
- Climate change: fire, drought and biodiversity loss attributed to climate change are the main challenges, compounded by the challenge of dealing with rising uncertainty.
- Increasing competition for land use. Infrastructure, urbanization and mining are seen as the leading competitors for land.
- Weak institutions and the lack of high-level policy frameworks.
- Social and economic challenges, notably pressure from growing populations, rural poverty, political instability and insufficient awareness of sustainable forest management.
- Governance, notably the need to improve cross sectoral coordination and integrated forest management, constraints resulting from political instability and corruption, unresolved land tenure issues and illegal logging.
- Insufficient capacity, including the lack of the capacity required to develop “bankable” project proposals.
- The weakness of domestic forest industries.
- Access to markets, whether domestic or international.
- Achieving consensus on objectives: implementing policies taking into account the interests of local communities and indigenous peoples was also seen as a challenge.
- Managing trade-offs, for instance between the interests of downstream producers and the consumers of forest products, as well as those of other stakeholders.
- Certification.
- Insufficient Information.
- Private sector Incentives to invest in activities that would support the achievement of the global forest goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Challenges and constraints identified through the consolidated questionnaire were similar to those identified in the voluntary national reports and have been incorporated into the summary below.

- The lengthy time frames for returns on investment in forestry.
- Cumbersome criteria and procedural requirements from donors.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has certainly slowed or halted progress towards the GFGs in many ways all over the world. However, this was not mentioned in the last round of VNRs, since that cycle of reporting took place before the outbreak of the pandemic.

## IV. 5 Forest related issues of concern in the early 2020s

Countries were asked in the consolidated questionnaire to identify the main “regional and global issues of concern with regard to forests” in the early 2020s. One respondent noted that forest-related issues in general are increasing in visibility, urgency and complexity as they come to the forefront of the national and international policy discussion. The issues identified included both issues which have been identified and addressed for many years, and emerging issues which may have to be addressed by UNFF in the near future.

A summary of countries’ responses is in Annex 6. The main issues, all identified by many countries, were:

- Forest loss and degradation
- The consequences of climate change, notably changing weather and increased extreme events, such as fires and droughts, and forest damage
- Increased role of forest management in mitigating climate change
- Threats to forest biodiversity
- Role of forests for livelihoods, including balancing sustainable forest management with social and economic development:
- Land use pressures, notably from population, agriculture energy and development, as well as illegal activities
- Sustainably using forests and building green value chains.
- Recovery of the forest sector, global forest products industries and legal trade post-COVID-19 pandemic

This list provides a comprehensive and ambitious foundation for possible future actions.

## V Improving reporting to the Forum

### V.1 Lessons learned from the first round of voluntary national reports

Voluntary national reports are a vital source of information for assessing progress towards implementation of the UNSPF. 52 countries participated in the first cycle of UNSPF voluntary national reporting in 2019-2020.

In early 2022, after the publication of the Global Forest Goals Report 2021, the secretariat of the Forum conducted a survey to gather feedback on the opportunities and challenges in the context of the national reports to the Forum and on the possible reasons for not submitting the report. Twenty-eight responses were received, which are summarised below<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> More information was provided to UNFF 17 in E/CN.18/2022/4, from para. 19

Among the identified **benefits** of preparing a voluntary national report were:

- The opportunity to meet and communicate with various stakeholders, agencies and organizations across government.
- “Self-assessment”: compiling the information needed for the national report enabled countries to assess gaps and progress in sustainable forest management and the state of forests at the national level and to identify areas of weakness as well as of strength.
- Demonstrating a commitment to sustainable forest management.
- Promotion of forest monitoring and long-term research.
- Production of internal communications products.
- Easing the burden of reporting to other international bodies.
- Improving institutional memory.

The **challenges** in preparation of voluntary national reports identified by responding countries included:

- Difficulties in inter-ministerial communication: data and information were scattered across various agencies and departments, often beyond the traditional forestry institutions.
- Data availability.
- Insufficient resources.
- Complexity of the reporting format.
- The broad nature of some of the questions in the reporting format.
- Assigning a given action to specific UNSPF goals.
- Problems in mobilising responses from the sub-national level.
- Lack of time.

Countries that had not submitted a national report were also contacted for this survey. They indicated that lack of resources and capacity were the main reasons for not submitting a report. Equally challenging was the unavailability of data, followed by lack of inter-ministerial and interagency communication and coordination.

Another lesson learned was that the Global Core Set of forest-related indicators (GCS) provide a framework for assessing progress towards most of the goals. The GCS advances a common understanding of sustainable forest management by identifying key factors that need to be measured to assess global progress and trends toward sustainable forest management and is increasingly incorporated into reporting formats. Essentially, by offering a core set with a limited number of forest-related indicators that address key policy topics, the GCS helps to focus data collection efforts and avoid duplication in reporting. Annex 3 of the Global Forest Goals Report 2021 details the contribution of the GCS to monitoring progress. As the forest monitoring community becomes more familiar with the GCS, it is expected that data quality will improve further.

## V.2 Improving the reporting process

In the same survey, the secretariat received suggestions regarding the future reporting process, which are provided below. The summary of suggestions is in two parts: i) enhancing the capacity of countries to generate voluntary national reports, and ii) improving the reporting process itself.

- Enhancing capacity at the national level

- Provide funding for data collection and coordination and consultative meetings to the various government agencies and institutions whose assistance is needed to prepare the national reports;
- Continue to build the capacity of countries and provide assistance to member States in preparing national reports;
- Strengthen the technical and financial capacities of member States for the collection and processing of forest-related data;
- Improving the reporting process at the international level
  - Increase the visibility of the reporting process by better communicating its purpose, objectives and importance, including through the flagship publication.
  - Use the additional official channel when transmitting a formal request to the Forum members, and send letters to ministries of foreign affairs to support the focal point;
  - Undertake case studies to share experiences and lessons for member States, for use as references;
  - Reverse-engineer the country reporting template by determining the specific elements that must be extracted from country reports to produce the flagship report, building on existing international reporting;
  - Consider every potential option for easing the administrative burdens on countries, such as the possibility of incorporating an online reporting system similar to the Global Forest Resources Assessment platform.
- It should be noted that through ECOSOC resolution 2022/17, the Forum agreed to consider establishing an informal advisory group, taking into account the experience gained and lessons learned from having an informal advisory group involved with the 2021 flagship publication, and requested the UNFF Secretariat to propose terms of reference, including the suggested composition for consideration by UNFF18.

### V.3 Timing of the reporting process

A specific issue to be decided is the timing of the reporting to the Forum. The UNSPF itself lays down some guidance for the timing of the reporting cycle to monitor the progress:

*“69. To reduce the reporting burden, the Forum is to establish a cycle and format for voluntary national reporting by its members, taking into account the cycle of the Global Forest Resources Assessments and the Sustainable Development Goal review cycle at the global level.”*

In accordance with section F of the annex to ECOSOC resolution 2022/17, the Council “decides, *inter alia*, to consider the suitability of setting a 6- to 12-month timeline from the publication of the Global Forest Resources Assessment for the submission of voluntary national reports”. The consolidated questionnaire included a specific question on the timing of the reporting process.

The Global Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) provides the quantitative data both for the relevant SDGs and for monitoring progress towards the global forest goals. It is a project working through national correspondents, with detailed rules for converting national inventory results to the globally agreed terms and definitions, through a dialogue between the FRA team and national correspondents. The FRA process is continuing, with major outputs at approximately 5-year intervals. The most recent was in 2020, and the next is expected in 2025. The latest FRA was structured according to the Global Core Set of forest related indicators, defined with monitoring progress towards the Global Forest Goals in mind.

The SDG data set is updated annually, although for some indicators, including those which are most directly forest focused (15.2.1 and 15.2.2), annual updates are usually not possible. FAO/FRA is responsible for data on 15.2.1 and 15.2.2, so there is no risk of duplication or inconsistency between FRA and SDG data.

The Global Forest Goals Report 2021 combined data from countries on their actions to implement the UNSPF (the voluntary national reports) with quantitative data on outcomes mostly provided by the FRA. The voluntary national reports were requested shortly after the issue of FRA 2020, so that the data used in the Global Forest Goals Report should be recent and the reporting burden should be minimised. The Global Forest Goals Report 2021 was published about a year after the launch of FRA 2020. This timing seems to have been appropriate and made it possible to produce a comprehensive report, without an excessive reporting burden or the need for major new input, or data collection and analysis.

Responses received to the consolidated questionnaire stressed the importance of avoiding duplication of effort and of coordinating with the FRA data cycle, and overwhelmingly favoured the suggestion that, in future, voluntary national reports for UNFF should be requested 6-12 months after completion of the latest FRA.

## VI. Conclusions

### VI.1 Conclusions on progress towards the Global Forest Goals

Since the UNSPF was approved, member countries have been applying a wide range of measures to move towards the Global Forest Goals and their associated targets. These actions and their outcomes are being reported to UNFF, most recently through the synthesis in the Global Forest Goals Report 2021.

According to the reporting from 52 countries, measures are being taken to achieve nearly all of the goals and targets. For some of the targets, quantified outcomes confirm that the measures taken are leading to progress towards the targets. Summaries of progress towards each target are in Section IV.2. However, reporting and measuring progress towards targets for which there is no comprehensive and comparable monitoring system in place, constitute a major challenge.

The main challenges and constraints faced by countries and organizations in implementing the UNSPF were inadequate resources, climate change, competition for land use, inadequate institutional frameworks, social and economic challenges, governance, insufficient capacity, weaknesses of forest industries, problems with access to markets, difficulty achieving consensus on objectives, managing trade-offs, implementing forest certification systems, insufficient information, lack of incentives for the private sector, attracting long term investment and satisfying donor requirements. The COVID-19 pandemic, which started after the voluntary national reports were prepared, has also acted as a constraint on implementing the UNSPF.

### VI.2 Conclusions on the reporting process

Despite its acknowledged shortcomings, the Global Forest Goals Report 2021 demonstrated clearly, to the UNFF and a wider audience, where and to what extent the world is on track to achieve the targets, and where there has been little progress. On the basis of this experience, it appears reasonable to expect that the future rounds of monitoring progress towards the Global Forest Goals

and associated targets can also provide UNFF with a practical tool for the objective measurement of the extent to which the Goals and targets have been achieved.

The reporting process brought benefits not only to UNFF and the international community, but also to the reporting countries themselves, as it gave them the opportunity to collect and organise data, establish networks, for instance between ministries, and to carry out an objective and structured self-assessment, as a foundation for evidence-based policy making.

It is possible to improve the reporting process, and the various enquiries carried out have identified some major directions for improvement, notably by increasing capacity at the national level, (for instance through funding for data collection and processing and for improving coordination between relevant national agencies) and by improving the reporting process at the international level, for instance by increasing its visibility, and simplifying and streamlining the format of the voluntary national reports. Improving the Global Core Set of forest-related indicators, widening its use and strengthening the capacity of countries to provide the relevant data would also improve the reporting process.

It appears that there is overwhelming support among countries to request voluntary national reports in the next cycle 6-12 months after the appearance of FRA 2025. This timing ensures that recent comprehensive and comparable data are available to monitor progress towards the goals and targets, and to keep the reporting burden to a minimum.

To improve the quality and quantity of voluntary national reports for the next reporting round, it is imperative to:

1. Continue and develop the programme of capacity building and workshops which prepared the last round of reporting;
2. Improve the reporting process, as regards timing and communication, and in particular the template of the national voluntary report, making it easier to fill in, with fewer repetitions and duplication, and more suited to regional and global synthesis.

With regard to the second suggestion, the secretariat has prepared an amended version of the reporting template for the voluntary national reports, taking account of the above comments and experience over the first reporting cycle, and with the guidance of an informal advisory group. A pilot phase for the use of the format has started in late 2022 and the results will be shared at the UNFF/FAO workshop, in spring 2023. In this way, the reporting template will be fully revised, taking account of the experience of the first round of reporting, and of opinions expressed during the “lessons learned” process.

## VII Recommendations

On the basis of the analysis and conclusions presented above, the consultant puts forward for consideration the following recommendations:

1. Member states and the international community should continue to work to implement the UN strategic plan for forests and attach high priority to achieving the global forest goals and associated targets.
2. Member states and the international community should continue to work together to monitor and report on progress in implementing the UNSPF and achieving the global forest goals and their associated targets.

3. Following the successful example of the Global Forest Goals Report 2021, similar flagship reports should be produced at approximately five-year intervals, culminating in a final report after 2030 assessing whether the global forest goals and their associated targets have in fact been achieved.
4. Should the Forum decide to produce the next global forest goals report, and establish an informal advisory group on reporting, work should start immediately following the decision, notably by simplifying and streamlining the format for the voluntary national reports, learning from the experience with the first flagship publication and seeking views from Members of the Forum, on how to improve the next report, as well as the relevant suggestions listed in this report.
5. UNFF and FAO with their partners should continue to work together to avoid duplication and minimise the reporting burden, notably by focusing their efforts on improving the indicators included in the Global Core Set of forest-related indicators, especially those in Tier 3, and helping countries to collect the relevant information.
6. As regards timing, the next round of voluntary national reporting to UNFF should be launched 6-12 months after the completion of the next FAO Forest Resource Assessment.
7. Donors and the international community should continue to work together to increase member states' capacity to prepare voluntary national reports.
8. Efforts should continue to develop tools to monitor progress towards those Goals for which, at present, no objective, transparent and comprehensive monitoring tools exist.
9. In the survey underlying this paper, countries identified the main global and regional issues of concern to forests in the early 2020s (see section IV.5). In its future work, it is suggested that UNFF take into account the results of this survey.

## List of Acronyms

CPF	Collaborative Partnership on Forests
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FRA	Forest Resource Assessment
GFG	Global Forest Goal
IAF	International Arrangement on Forests
MTR	Midterm review
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests
UNFI	United Nations Forest Instrument
UNSPF	United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030



## Annex 1 Brief biography of consultant

Kit Prins worked in the UNECE/FAO Timber Division, later the UNECE/FAO Forest and Timber Section, serving as Section Chief from 1993 to his retirement in 2009. Since then, he has been an independent consultant, working for UNFF, UNECE/FAO, FAO, Forest Europe and the European Forest Institute, and publishing articles in academic journals, most recently on potential consequences for the forest sector of the war in Ukraine and of significant forest damage in Europe. His main fields of interest have been forest resource assessment, monitoring progress towards sustainable forest management, especially through the use of criteria and indicators and the Global Core Set of forest related indicators, as well as long term forest sector outlook studies. He tries to make analysis of forest policies and trends more evidence based.

## Annex 2 Extracts of consolidated questionnaire relevant to Section F

### **The consolidated questionnaire contained the following questions in its Section F:**

**Question F-1:** What significant actions has your country or organisation undertaken since 2020 to implement the UNSPF?<sup>3</sup> What are the main challenges and constraints your country or organisation is facing in implementing the UNSPF?

**Question F-2:** What challenges and constraints did your country face in the preparation of its voluntary national report? If it did not prepare a report, what were the reasons?

**Question F-3:** Do you agree with the submission of voluntary national reports to UNFF, 6 to 12 months after the publication of the next Global Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) in order to reduce reporting burdens and take full advantage of FAO's data?

**Question F-4:** What, in your view, are the main "regional and global issues of concern with regard to forests" in the early 2020s?

As of 11 January 2023, responses for Section F had been received from the following nineteen countries and four international organisations:

Countries: Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, El Salvador, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, Malaysia, Malawi, Nigeria, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Switzerland, USA.

International organisations : FAO, Forest Europe, ITTO, IUFRO.

These responses have been incorporated into this report, notably sections IV.2, IV.3, IV.4, IV.5, and V, with more detail in annexes 5 (question F-2) and 6 (question F-4)

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<sup>3</sup> There is no need to repeat information which has already been supplied to UNFF, notably in your country's voluntary national report.

## Annex 3 Documents used to compile this report

The United Nations strategic plan for forests 2030 provides a global framework for action at all levels to sustainably manage all types of forests and trees outside forests, and to halt deforestation and forest degradation. For evidence-based monitoring of the implementation of the UNSPF, it is necessary to collect a huge amount of qualitative and quantitative information, from a wide variety of sources, which must be synthesized at the global level.

The first UNFF flagship publication, Global Forest Goals Report 2021, delivered a synthesis of this information, based on the voluntary national reports and the results of the FAO Forest Resource Assessment (FRA 2020).

This recent global synthesis is the basis of much of the analysis in this report. It has been supplemented by the responses received to the consolidated questionnaire circulated to member states and relevant international organisations in summer 2022.

### References:

FAO. 2022. The State of the World's Forests 2022. Forest pathways for green recovery and building inclusive, resilient and sustainable economies. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9360en>

FAO. 2020. Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020: Main report. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9825en>

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat (2021). The Global Forest Goals Report 2021

## Annex 4 Summary of actions taken to implement the UNSPF and of recorded outcomes

This annex summarises the main results of the Global Forest Goals report 2021 in more detail than was possible in Section IV.2.

### Progress towards Global Forest Goal 1

*Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation and contribute to the global effort of addressing climate change.*

Forests currently cover 31% of the global land area. Between 2010 and 2020, global forest area fell by 1.2%, with declines concentrated in Africa and South America. However, within this global trend, and since 1990, Asia, Europe, and Oceania saw net increases in forest area: the forest area of this group of regions increased by 1.1% between 2010 and 2020. Further, according to FRA 2020, “The rate of net forest loss decreased substantially over the period 1990–2020 due to a reduction in deforestation in some countries, plus increases in forest area in others through afforestation and the natural expansion of forests.”

Between 2015 and 2020, deforestation, which measures the conversion of forest to other land use, stood at 10.2 million hectares (ha) per year. This was rather less than in earlier periods. Within this same five-year window, total forest expansion by afforestation or natural expansion was 4.7 million ha per year, with Asia registering the largest expansion. Forest ecosystems are the largest terrestrial carbon sink, absorbing roughly 2 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> each year. Between 1990 and 2010, the total global forest carbon stock fell from 668 gigatonnes (Gt) in 1990 to 662 Gt in 2010, mainly due to a loss of forest area. In 2020, it stayed at 662 Gt, with Europe, North and Central America, and South America housing two thirds of this total. The global carbon stock comprised approximately 300 Gt of soil organic matter, 295 Gt of living biomass, and 68 Gt of dead wood and litter.

#### ***Target 1.1: Forest area is increased by three percent worldwide***

Countries developed strategies and plans to maintain or increase their forest area, often with quantified targets, as well as detailed objectives, methods, and resources. Sometimes these strategies covered only the forest sector, such as national forest programmes. However, in other instances, plans were part of broader national strategies, such as for mitigating climate change or addressing national development and poverty reduction goals. Some countries increased the availability of resources to expand forest area or reduce deforestation.

#### *Overview of progress towards target 1.1:*

Many regions are on track to achieve target 1.1.

- ✓ Countries developed strategies to achieve Target 1.1.
- ✓ Countries made resources available to achieve the target, often in the context of programmes for climate change mitigation or for national development.
- ✓ Asia, Europe and Oceania appear to be on track, based on net gains in forest area seen in these regions during 2010 to 2020.
- ✓ Africa and South America are not on track and are still losing forest area, although at a slower rate than in the past, despite the strategies and measures reported

#### ***Target 1.2: The world's forest carbon stocks are maintained or enhanced***

The inclusion of forest-related actions in national climate strategies and programmes impacted favourably on the achievement of GFG target 1.2 by raising public visibility of and political will for maintaining and enhancing carbon stocks. Incorporating forest and climate action also opened access to resources and promoted intersectoral approaches to achieving forest related goals and objectives. International programmes, notably REDD+, as well as core work under the UNFCCC, played a major role in this regard. Monitoring and reporting of carbon stocks improved.

Finally, research helped deepen understanding of forest-climate links, and set the stage for the continued and additional integration of forest and climate objectives, and the maintenance, if not enhancement, of global forest carbon stocks.

#### *Overview of progress towards target 1.2:*

Many regions are on track to achieve target.

- ✓ Countries integrated action on forest carbon into broader climate action and funding to achieve target 1.2.
- ✓ In Africa and South America, where deforestation was significant, the carbon stock decreased, and these regions are not on track to maintain their forest carbon stock.

#### ***Target 1.3: By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally***

Many countries revised and modified forest laws, codes, and institutions to enhance progress towards sustainable forest management. Policy instruments often explicitly stated the principles underlying sustainable forest management. Overall, a number of countries put in place measures to protect forests, halt deforestation, and expand the forest area legally protected with a view to preserving biodiversity, native forests, and forest ecosystem functions.

Countries widely recognized the importance of improved knowledge and data as a basis for sustainable forest management, notably through modern forest inventories and other monitoring tools like biodiversity surveys and improved mapping. Improved land registers and the development of national systems of criteria and indicators also helped bolster sustainable forest management. Further, many countries promoted long-term forest management plans and other forward-looking management tools to advance their sustainable forest management priorities

Countries also addressed sustainable forest management on both the supply and demand sides of markets for forest-related products, for instance, by implementing measures to reduce illegal logging and to strengthen legal trade. At the other end of the value chain, some reporting countries regulated the placement of illegal timber and wood products on domestic markets, or by introducing an electronic timber tracking system. Some countries worked to maintain programmes to promote the competitiveness of their national forest sectors and the value-added of forest-related products.

#### *Overview of progress towards target 1.3:*

The world is largely on track to achieve this target.

- ✓ Countries undertook many actions to achieve target 1.3, addressing all dimensions of sustainable forest management.
- ✓ Most of the subregions, and most of the five sub-indicators used to monitor SDG 15.2.1, showed positive change into 2020, with only some regions and sub-indicators showing little or negative change.

***Target 1.4: The resilience and adaptive capacity of all types of forests to natural disasters and the impact of climate change is significantly strengthened worldwide***

The impacts of climate change threatened progress towards the Global Forest Goals. Many countries attributed forest disturbances to a variety of causes related to and intensified by climate change, such as insect infestations, fires, storms, and droughts. Countries worked intensely to understand how to build resilience into their planning and strategic approaches to forest management. Towards this end, they established specialized units and institutes to carry out research and to provide guidance to forest managers. They also advanced knowledge on the analysis of disturbance and risk in a changing climate as well as how to take decisions in the face of incomplete information.

Finally, the broad monitoring of forest ecosystem services played an important role in identifying emerging issues and tracking progress made with alternative strategies focused on resilience.

It should be noted, however, that the Global Forest Goals Report was published in 2021, and for the most part is based on data collected between 2018 and 2020. Since then there have been many reports of significant disturbances in forests, notably from fire and insects, in many parts of the world, which could not be incorporated into the FRA database before publication. These very recent reports could not, unfortunately be included in this overview and synthesis.

*Overview of progress towards target 1.4:*

There are insufficient data to determine progress towards this target

- ✓ Disturbances due to fire, insects, disease, and severe weather events significantly impacted forests, and the services and products they provided.
- ✓ Monitoring at the global level of disturbances remained unsatisfactory.
- ✓ Some of these disturbances were attributed to climate change.
- ✓ Conscious of this threat, countries began taking steps to increase the resilience of their forests and to adapt their management to the changing situation, notably by improving knowledge and risk evaluation.

Progress towards Global Forest Goal 2

*Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people.*

It is estimated that 252 million people living in forests and savannas currently earn less than US\$1.25 per day, which was the World Bank's poverty line measure through 2015. Of these, 63% are in Africa, 34% are in Asia and three percent are in Latin America. The physical and social divides often characterizing forest landscapes, peoples, and enterprises contribute to these poverty levels. Forest landscapes, often remote and poorly connected to markets, make it difficult to build businesses and earn livelihoods. In addition, many forest populations are also socially marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples. In addition to being physically distanced, these communities find themselves and their enterprises socially sidelined, further complicating efforts to reduce their poverty levels.

As part of its focus on enhancing livelihoods, GFG2 aims to increase market access and finance for small-scale forest enterprises.

GFG2 also focuses on improving forests' contributions to food security. However, forest contributions to food security are often poorly reflected in national development and food security

strategies. Coupled with poor cross-sectoral coordination, the result is that forests are, at present, frequently not considered in policy decisions related to food security, hunger, and nutrition.

The one exception to this trend is agroforestry, which developing countries are increasingly using to improve their food security, especially in the face of climate change. With climate-related warming and severe droughts and storms seriously impacting agricultural production, countries are expanding climate-resilient agroforestry.

Forests provide an array of ecosystem services that help meet the basic needs of humanity. Three-quarters of the world's accessible freshwater comes from forested watersheds. Forests managed for the protection of soil and water increased worldwide from 271.5 million hectares in 1990 to 390.5 million hectares in 2020, an increase of over 40% in thirty years.

About 1.15 billion ha of forests worldwide are managed primarily for the production of wood and non-wood forest products. The global surface area of production forests remained relatively constant from 1990 to 2020. Two measures of forest productivity are roundwood and woodfuel production. Global wood removals increased by 385 million m<sup>3</sup> from 2010 to 2018, with industrial roundwood and woodfuel accounting for 79% and 21%, respectively of this increase.

Total employment in the forest sector was estimated at 12.5 million people (fulltime equivalent of formal labour force) in 2015. Of this, almost 90% was in Asia and Africa. However, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), global figures for employment in the forest sector are likely to underestimate the true level of employment in forestry, as they do not capture informal workers who probably dominate the landscape.

All regions reporting to the FRA 2020 steadily increased the area of their forests managed for biodiversity conservation over the last thirty years. While the decade between 2000 and 2010 saw the largest upsurge, the area of forests managed primarily for conservation increased globally by nearly six percent over the most recent decade, between 2010 and 2020.

### ***Target 2.1: Extreme poverty for all forest-dependent people is eradicated***

Many countries took steps to reduce poverty through community-based forestry, for instance through financial support, developing forest community plans, engaging local communities in supporting forest plantations, increasing employment in forestry for local communities, engaging NGOs and other stakeholders in promoting community-based, non-timber forest products, integrating local communities and indigenous peoples into forestry production, and promoting forest stewardship contracting for achieving shared land management goals to meet local and rural community needs.

#### *Overview of progress towards Target 2.1*

- ✓ National reporting provided evidence that forests could meet subsistence needs and serve as a safety net in times of stress.
- ✓ More research is needed to understand how different types of forest-related practices, programs, and policies, can support or amplify the subsistence, safety net, and asset accumulation functions of forests.
- ✓ Much work remains to effectively measure progress towards the eradication of poverty in the highly vulnerable and diverse group of forest dependent people

***Target 2.2: Increase the access of small-scale forest enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets.***

Countries reported on actions to stimulate progress towards target 2.2 and to increase the access of small-scale forest enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services. Governments took steps to establish institutions and networks, and implemented measures that revised laws, regulations, and policies; strengthened forest business enterprises; and created processes and or institutional bodies.

*Overview of progress towards Target 2.2*

- ✓ Countries developed and listed many actions and measures for supporting small-scale forest enterprises, capacity building measures, and governance structures.
- ✓ Various countries discussed how they promoted and strengthened mechanisms and programmes to facilitate financing to small producers and enterprises.
- ✓ At present, there is no specific indicator to measure progress towards this target.

***Target 2.3: The contribution of forests and trees to food security is significantly increased.***

A number of countries have developed and implemented national policies, strategies, and plans that leveraged forests for the achievement of greater food security. Examples of policies include the promotion of agroforestry and the use of forest plantations to achieve food security objectives, strengthening national capacities for food production, supply, and resilience in the face of food crises and disasters and working with the private sector to improve the processing and marketing of non-timber forest products. In general, efforts to increase food security contributed to forest restoration, as did shelterbelts, which offered another means to protect agricultural lands from soil erosion, as well as to enhance freshwater management and augment biodiversity conservation.

*Overview of progress towards Target 2.3*

Countries reported many actions to increase the contributions of forests, trees, and agroforestry to food security.

- ✓ Coherent data remained a challenge as these contributions were not included in forest inventories or national statistics, despite being well known and described at the local level.
- ✓ While ecosystem services provided by forests, trees, and agroforestry supported agricultural production, there were multiple dimensions, each involving complex interactions that made measurement extremely difficult.
- ✓ The full scope of contributions from forests to food security was often undervalued, and the socio-economic benefits were particularly difficult to measure, leading often to underestimation of the role of sustainable forest management in meeting broader development goals.

***Target 2.4: The contribution of forest industry, other forest-based enterprises and forest ecosystem services to social, economic, and environmental development, among others, is significantly increased.***

Countries undertook a range of initiatives towards this target. These included mechanisms for payment for forest ecosystem services, promoting the marketing of forest products, both timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs), including certification of the sustainability of forest management, expanding their forest productivity to include bio-energy, as well as timber, NTFPs,



and eco-tourism, stimulating employment by the forest sector, investing in forest productivity, and promoting partnerships between public institutions and small and family farmers, and traditional peoples and communities to support their participation in the economy and promote the sustainable use of forest biodiversity resources and their associated social benefits.

#### *Overview of progress towards Target 2.4*

Countries reported many actions, however it was difficult to measure whether these contributions of the forest industry, other forest-based enterprises, and forest ecosystem services to social, economic, and environmental development were significantly increased.

- ✓ Forest sector employment was greatly underestimated due its informal nature. For instance, although the woodfuel industry created jobs for tens of millions of households in developing countries, due to its informal nature, its value remained largely unreported.
- ✓ Developed countries provided many examples of increasing productivity, diversifying the products generated and producing them more efficiently through environmental and management practices, and increasing the economic benefits generated.
- ✓ While timber products were easiest to quantify in economic terms, valuing and calculating the revenue from the social and environmental benefits of forests remained a challenge.

#### ***Target 2.5: The contribution of all types of forests to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation is enhanced, taking into account the mandates and on-going work of relevant conventions and instruments.***

Nearly two-thirds of the reported contributions to target 2.5 supported the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and, more specifically, the Aichi Targets. Many of these initiatives, but not all, fell under three types of generic action: (1) improvement and/or expansion of protected area systems; (2) the development and implementation of evaluative biodiversity management tools; and (3) policies and plans to conserve and sustainably use forest biodiversity. Overall, countries reported notable, wide-ranging, and innovative actions on the contribution of forests to biodiversity conservation.

Countries reported on initiatives that increased both the mitigation and adaptation functions of forests. The actions each pertain to the implementation of national forest strategies and, in the case of developing countries, their REDD+ strategies.

Some countries reported on actions underway to protect land from soil erosion and freshwater resources from deterioration, under the UNCCD

#### *Overview of progress towards Target 2.5*

All regions were on track to achieve target.

- ✓ The majority of reported country actions supported the achievement of other international forest-related commitments, in particular those under the CBD.
- ✓ As of 2020, CBD Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 (to protect at least 17% of the world's terrestrial area by 2020) was exceeded for forest ecosystems at the global level and for most regions.
- ✓ According to FRA 2020, since the 1990s, all regions of the world steadily increased the area of forest managed for biodiversity conservation.

#### *Progress towards Global Forest Goal 3*

*Increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests.*

In 2020, nearly 18% of the world's forests stood in legally established protected areas, compared to just over 14% in 2000, although the share of protected forests varied significantly between regions. The area of protected forests grew worldwide at nearly three million ha per year between 2010 and 2020 (10 million ha/year between 2000 and 2010), with increases in every region. Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 (to protect at least 17% of terrestrial area globally by 2020), was exceeded for forests at the global level, and for most regions.

According to FRA 2020, 54% of the world's forests were under long-term management plans. The area of forest under long-term management plans increased by 135 million ha between 2010 and 2020. Some regions recorded fast growth from relatively low levels. In other regions, notably Europe, but also Asia and North and Central America, most forests were already under such plans, meaning there was little room for significant increase.

In many cases, national and subnational institutional structures were adapted with revised definitions of the roles of forest services to aid forest management and protection. Sometimes the relations between the national and subnational levels were modified. Local (community) commissions, community forests, and other mechanisms for increased participation of stakeholders were put in place. Further, institutions with environmental mandates were increasingly involved in policy discussions on forests. For instance, action on land tenure – namely mechanisms such as conservation easements and land purchased by the state – spurred progress towards GFG3.

***Target 3.1: The area of forests worldwide designated as protected areas or conserved through other effective area-based conservation measures is significantly increased***

The area of protected forests grew globally by approximately three million ha per year between 2010 and 2020, with increases in every region. As countries created new protected areas, they put in place legal and institutional measures to protect them, actions that were also in accordance with international commitments, notably the Aichi Targets, but also other international goals and commitments, such as the EU NATURA 2000 directive and REDD+. Countries built capacity, for instance to implement the provisions of CITES, and in this vein, some pursued stronger measures against illegal logging, including better enforcement.

Many countries are taking legal and institutional measures to identify protected areas and pursue the necessary measures, such as mapping, gazetting, and management plans, to protect them. For most countries, these initiatives focused on native forests and habitat.

*Overview of progress towards target 3.1*

Many regions are on track to achieve target.

- ✓ Most regions were on track to significantly increase the area of protected forest between 2015 and 2030.
- ✓ Africa, Asia, and South America have already exceeded Aichi Biodiversity Target 11.

***Target 3.2: The area of forests under long-term forest management plans is significantly increased***

Many countries encouraged or legally required long-term forest management plans, which were often required for certification programmes. The area of certified forest increased very rapidly between 2000 and 2010 but slowed thereafter. Other developments also supported progress towards longer-term and sustainable management: countries used spatial development plans to address forest issues alongside those of other sectors; and national systems of criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management were developed.

Further, a wide range of planning approaches were applied. Such approaches included improved classification of protected areas, manuals for providing conservation services, research into wildlife habitat, designation of trans-frontier conservation areas and targets for biodiversity conservation and Red Lists. Systems and protocols included wood tracing systems, legality assurance systems, transboundary wildlife management protocols, and verification protocols. Research related tools included research and development on wood buildings, sustainability reporting and resource assessment, improved mapping, the use of remote sensing, global information systems (GIS), and socio-economic surveys.

#### *Overview of progress towards target 3.2*

Most regions are on track to achieve target.

- ✓ Between 2015 and 2030, most regions were on track to significantly increase or maintain the area of forest under long-term management plans

#### ***Target 3.3: The proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests is significantly increased***

Overall, the volume of wood harvested from certified forests was estimated at nearly 700 million m<sup>3</sup> or 38% of global industrial roundwood production; and 97 countries and territories (84% of world forest area) had traceability systems for wood products at the national or subnational levels. Further, several countries implemented significant plantation programmes. On the demand side, countries promoted the consumption of sustainably produced wood, encouraged the certification of public and private forests, and promoted the use of certified products.

#### *Overview of progress towards target 3.3*

All regions are on track to achieve target.

- ✓ The area of certified forest expanded, as did the supply of wood from certified and other sustainably managed forests.
- ✓ All regions were on track to significantly increase the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests.

#### Progress towards Global Forest Goal 4

*Mobilize significantly increased, new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management and strengthen scientific and technical cooperation and partnerships.*

Forestry ODA gradually increased in gross disbursements from less than US\$400 million in 2002 to almost US\$800 million in 2014. The increase from 2007 was largely due to the emergence of climate financing, part of which was labelled as forestry ODA. Forestry ODA gross disbursements increased by 12% for the period 2014-2018. However, this growth was slower than that of the economy, and the share of forestry in total ODA also declined. Private investment is also essential. According to an FAO working paper, private financing for sustainable forest management (SFM) is a fast-growing trend with a positive outlook, and in recent years, institutional investors have grown to be the main market participants in developing countries with over 1,000 pension funds, endowments, foundations, amongst others.

The Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) of the UNFF and the UNFF Trust Fund helped upscale sustainable forest management by facilitating country access to the resources needed to implement the UN strategic plan for forests 2030. However, the GFFFN and the Trust Fund are the subject of other reports for the mid-term review and will not be addressed here.

***Target 4.1: Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation***

Voluntary country reporting showcased country efforts to advance and diversify finance and to promote cooperation and partnerships across all levels of governance in support of forestry objectives. Countries marshalled financial resources for sustainable forest management, with most indicating that they had mobilized more public funds from national and international sources than from private sources.

Many countries reported setting up financing mechanisms, such as trust funds, to support sustainable forest management. In addition to trust fund initiatives, countries allocated money to their forestry initiatives and some reported committing substantial funds for SFM in their national public budgets. Sometimes investments towards forests were coupled with other environmental objectives like the rehabilitation of lands, addressing climate change, and community development.

*Overview of Progress towards Target 4.1*

- ✓ In their voluntary reporting to UNFF, countries demonstrated their growing commitment to increasing, accessing, and mobilizing forest financing at national and international levels.
- ✓ The majority of countries reporting to UNFF shared that they were able to mobilize increased financial resources for the implementation of SFM.

***Target 4.2: Forest-related financing from all sources at all levels, including public (national, bilateral, multilateral and triangular), private and philanthropic financing, is significantly increased***

The GFG Report provides much detailed information on forest-related financing, as reported by donor and developing countries, including many positive projects. However, the information is not comprehensive or comparable enough to make possible a synthesis on trends in forest related financing flows.

*Overview of Progress towards target 4.2*

- ✓ Countries reporting to UNFF launched numerous initiatives to increase finance for SFM and their forestry objectives, indicating progress on this target.
- ✓ Assessing the full scale of global forest financing was difficult because information was dispersed over a wide range and a large number of public institutions, private sector entities, multilateral development organizations, international NGOs, and foundations.
- ✓ Further, protocols for providing information on forest finance had yet to be developed.

***Target 4.3: North-South, South-South, North-North and triangular co-operation and public-private partnerships on science, technology and innovation in the forest sector are significantly enhanced and increased***

All respondent countries pursued international cooperation as a way to foster innovation and partnerships in technology and science. Countries provided technical assistance, pursued innovation, shared information with the public through digital platforms, and strengthened forest governance. Despite these positive signs and outcomes, financing for forests remained well below what was needed to achieve the Global Forest Goals, especially in developing countries.

Forty-four countries reported that they cooperated directly with other governments, and a similar number noted working through intergovernmental organizations and processes. On international cooperation for SFM, a little over 40% of responding countries said that they engaged with the private sector. Thirty-two countries discussed their international cooperation with non-governmental organizations. North-South cooperation was the most common form of regional cooperation. These collaborations were both financial and technical. Twenty-five countries, with a little over half on the African continent, discussed their experiences with south-south cooperation.

#### *Overview of progress towards target 4.3*

- ✓ Countries reporting to UNFF shared that they used international cooperation to promote sustainable forest management.
- ✓ Initiatives highlighted engagement with other governments, the private sector, communities, and civil society organizations.
- ✓ Countries emphasized sharing lessons learned in SFM.
- ✓ The exchange of data and information supported progress towards the entire suite of GFGs under the UNSPF.

#### ***Target 4.4: The number of countries that have developed and implemented forest financing strategies and have access to financing from these sources is significantly increased***

Almost all developing countries identified a lack of resources, especially financial resources, as a major obstacle to reaching GFG1, and more than 25% of developing countries submitting national reports, reported that inadequate funding hindered their progress towards achieving GFG 2.

#### *Overview of progress towards target 4.4*

- ✓ Most countries reporting to UNFF shared that they had developed or implemented forest financing strategies for SFM and the UN Forest Instrument.

#### ***Target 4.5: The collection, availability and accessibility of forest-related information is improved through, for example, multidisciplinary scientific assessments***

Countries discussed a range of interventions to improve the accessibility of and the diversity of actors contributing to forest related information and data. Generally, country actions fell within five categories that described (1) platform development; (2) domestic research; (3) international network formation; (4) collaborative research; and (5) education

#### *Overview of progress towards target 4.5*

- ✓ Countries reported a wide range of initiatives for generating and disseminating technical and scientific information to strengthen sustainable forest management.
- ✓ Much more needed to be undertaken in developing countries to grow the development and use of science for SFM

## Progress towards Global Forest Goal 5

*Promote governance frameworks to implement sustainable forest management, including through the United Nations forest instrument, and enhance the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

Forest ownership, access, and management rights are crucial elements in how forest resources are managed. While the world's forests are largely publicly owned, (73%), the share of publicly owned forests has decreased and the area of forest under private ownership has increased since 1990. Further, it is estimated that 1.5 billion local and indigenous peoples have secured rights over forest resources through community-based tenure. Some 142 countries reporting to FRA 2020 reported they had platforms in place to enable stakeholder participation in forest policy development.

Nearly all countries reporting to FRA 2020 indicated that they had national forest policies, and that they had forest legislation. The ability of countries to enforce their laws and policies impacts forest outcomes. A 2013 World Bank brief estimated the annual market value of losses from illegal logging globally to be over US\$10 billion. 94 countries and territories said they had traceability systems – mechanisms that provided the ability to trace the origin, location, and movement of wood products by means of recorded identifications - at the national level. Such systems help combat illegal logging.

Countries increasingly recognized the contribution of forests to national sustainable development strategies, with all reporting countries making strides towards improved cross-sectoral coordination and expanded stakeholder engagement. National forest programmes, or their equivalents, helped articulate this cross-sectoral collaboration.

### ***Target 5.1: Number of countries that have integrated forests into their national sustainable development plans and/or poverty reduction strategies is significantly increased***

The majority of countries reporting to UNFF informed that they had integrated forests into their broader development or poverty reduction plans and strategies. Countries also increasingly recognized forests' contributions to national strategies to achieve the SDGs – an outcome that helped open up resources for forests and improve the overall visibility of forest issues across the governance spectrum.

#### *Overview of progress towards Target 5.1*

- ✓ Nearly all reporting countries shared that they had integrated forests into their national sustainable development plans and/or poverty reduction strategies.

### ***Target 5.2 Forest law enforcement and governance are enhanced, including through significantly strengthening national and subnational forest authorities, and illegal logging and associated trade are significantly reduced worldwide***

All countries reporting to the UNFF noted steps they had taken to prevent or reduce trafficking and illicit activities with regard to forests. Actions included improved enforcement, export controls, import controls; and new legislation or bilateral agreements.

#### *Overview of progress towards target 5.2:*

- ✓ Countries enacted many complementary but varied measures to reach target 5.2, with the intention of significantly strengthening national and subnational forest authorities and combatting illegal logging and related trade.

- ✓ The absence of international standards or definitions made it difficult to compare and assess the effectiveness of measures meant to reduce illegal logging and related trade worldwide.

***Target 5.3 National and subnational forest-related policies and programmes are coherent, coordinated and complementary across ministries, departments and authorities, consistent with national laws, and engage relevant stakeholders, local communities and indigenous peoples, fully recognizing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples***

All countries reporting to the UNFF described having mechanisms in place for cross-sectoral coordination between agencies. The form of these varied widely in accordance with the administrative culture of each country. Despite these mechanisms, coordination was not always successful.

All countries also reported having mechanisms in place to involve stakeholders in the policy formulation, planning, and implementation processes. While these also varied as widely as the reporting countries themselves, there were a few common approaches, including multi-sectoral platforms on forest issues, regular high-level forums, structured dialogues, often in the context of a national forest programme, stakeholder inclusion in policy advisory bodies, public consultations on planning processes, including for forests and significant stakeholder participation in forest management at the local level.

Many countries promoted community forest management, with several reporting that national legislation had set out the basic rules for community management of land and resources (not only forests and trees), addressing issues such as land rights, management, and administration.

On the engagement of indigenous peoples in sustainable forest management, countries often referred to their international commitments, notably under ILO Convention 169, and described related processes that provided a framework for engaging indigenous peoples in forest issues.

*Overview of progress towards target 5.3:*

- ✓ Almost all countries in the world had policies and legal frameworks to promote sustainable forest management.
- ✓ Countries reported a wide range of measures meant to improve policy coherence and involve stakeholders, local communities, and indigenous peoples in these policies and frameworks.
- ✓ Further analysis was needed to determine the full impact of these policies, frameworks, and measures.

***Target 5.4: Forest-related issues and the forest sector are fully integrated into decision-making processes concerning land use planning and development***

Many countries reported on national land use planning processes that incorporated forest considerations and issues.

*Overview of progress towards target 5.4:*

- ✓ Most reporting countries had land use planning systems in place that integrated forest issues.
- ✓ Further analysis was needed to ascertain the effectiveness of these land use planning systems and whether forestry issues/measures were successfully incorporated.

## Progress towards Global Forest Goal 6

*Enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels, including within the United Nations system and across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, as well as across sectors and relevant stakeholders.*

The adoption of the UNSPF in 2017 by the UN General Assembly was a major step towards advancing collaboration and coherence on forest-related issues at the global level. The Plan provides a framework to support the forest-related work of the UN system and to foster greater cohesion among UN bodies and their partners on forest-related matters. One of the main goals of the International Arrangement on Forests is to enhance the cooperation, coordination, coherence, and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels, which is also the main objective of Global Forest Goal 6 (GFG 6). Coordination of the activities of the various actors of the IAF is a major concern of the mid-term review and the subject of separate assessments, so this aspect will not be addressed here. This section will only briefly summarise progress towards GFG 6, focusing on countries' actions, rather than coordination at the international level.

Within this multilateral, intergovernmental, and cross-sectoral fabric, countries and territories made progress towards the achievement of GFG 6.

### ***Target 6.1: Forest-related programmes within the United Nations system are coherent and complementary and integrate the global forest goals and targets, where appropriate***

The UN System put in place a wide range of general coordination measures that had bearing on its forest-related programmes. These will be the focus of assessments under sections A, B and C of the mid-term review.

### ***Target 6.2: Forest-related programmes across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests are coherent and complementary and together encompass the multiple contributions of forests and the forest sector to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development***

Progress towards this target will be the focus of the assessments under sections C and G of the mid-term review, addressing respectively the CPF and the contribution of UNFF to the 2030 Agenda.

### ***Target 6.3: Cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation to promote sustainable forest management and halt deforestation and forest degradation are significantly enhanced at all levels.***

Countries reported on the steps they took towards implementing Target 6.3. Often these measures were attended to by the highest levels of governance and touched on efforts to address climate change. The exact form of the coordination and cooperation varied widely in accordance with the administrative and policy framework of each country.

#### *Overview of progress towards Target 6.3*

- ✓ Nearly all reporting countries took action at the national and international levels to enhance cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation and to promote forests and sustainable forest management.
- ✓ Many countries provided numerous examples of existing cross-sectoral mechanisms for forest-related issues and cited the involvement of a variety of stakeholders.

### ***Target 6.4: A greater common understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management is achieved and an associated set of indicators is identified.***



National contributions towards the achievement of GFG target 6.4 fell into two categories: (1) criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management and (2) the promotion of sustainable forest management through public awareness building, special outreach events, and youth education.

In particular, The International Day of Forests (21 March) has become a major event for promoting sustainable forest management worldwide, through tree planting campaigns educational activities, such as workshops, symposiums, and field trips, and traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio, and television). Social media activities and internet promotions also featured prominently. There were also cultural activities such as art, music, film, and theatre festivals to elevate celebrations of the International Day.

#### *Overview of progress towards Target 6.4*

- ✓ Reporting countries described an array of communication initiatives focused on outreach to the general public, special events, and youth education to improve understanding and awareness of sustainable forest management.
- ✓ Forest authorities were actively involved in creating educational and environmental programmes and developing entire suites of communication products showcasing the benefits of forests to society and the planet.
- ✓ Forest agencies provided open access to online data, which supplied details related to forest operations and standards for plantations as well as explanations of emissions-trading schemes for forestry and forest funding.
- ✓ Most countries reported using criteria and indicators (C&I) for sustainable forest management.

#### ***Target 6.5: The input and involvement of Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the strategic plan and in the work of the Forum, including intersessional work, is strengthened***

Progress towards this target will be the focus of the assessment under section J of the mid-term review, addressing the Involvement of major groups and other relevant stakeholders with the work of the Forum, including their contributions to the achievement of the global forest goals and targets at all levels and their interactions with the Forum and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

In their voluntary national reports, many countries reported on mechanisms to expand the role of Major Groups in multilateral, regional, and national platforms, for instance by creating national multi-stakeholder dialogues and other advisory mechanisms to engage stakeholders more effectively in consultations on how to implement the UNSPF and pursue SFM. These entities often involved representatives from the forestry industry, labour, consumer groups, academia, local authorities, civil society, indigenous peoples, youth, and women. Further, a number of countries directly engaged the private sector to play a larger role in sustainably managing forests, especially in the agricultural and forest industrial sectors

#### *Overview of progress towards Target 6.5*

- ✓ Reporting countries highlighted how they were involving Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the UNSPF 2017-2030 and in their sustainable forest management initiatives.
- ✓ Almost all countries reported planning forest activities in close collaboration with, and with the participation of, Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders

## Annex 5 Significant actions taken by countries and organisations to implement the UNSPF since 2020

Information on recent actions towards the Global Forest Goals (question F-1 of the consolidated questionnaire) was received from thirteen countries and four international organizations<sup>4</sup>.

Measures reported by countries<sup>5</sup> included:

- Many new or revised strategies and programmes, including those linked to climate change and the SDGs, and broader strengthening of governance structures (Australia, Malawi, Malaysia, Philippines, Nigeria, New Zealand, USA). One country (Switzerland) developed a long term strategy for forests based on the UNSPF.
- Financial support to forest measures (Australia, Mexico, New Zealand, Romania, USA)
- Linkage of forest policy to climate change actions, such as emissions reduction strategies, carbon trading and carbon accounting (Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, USA)
- Measures against illegal logging, such as strengthening legal protection for forest guards, increased penalties and wood tracing systems (Romania) and forest management plans (Malaysia)
- Forest certification (Malaysia)
- Objective identification of virgin/quasi virgin forests (Romania)
- Increased involvement of stakeholders. (Malawi, Malaysia)
- Large scale greening of land and tree planting (China, Nigeria)
- Improved protection and management of forest resources (China)
- Seeking to find win-win solutions between ecological improvement and human well-being (China)
- Improved inventory (Kenya)
- Annual celebration of the International Day of Forests (Kenya)

In addition to the above domestic actions, many countries reported their participation in or support of a wide range of international efforts to promote sustainable forest management. Countries reported their contribution to specific activities and programmes in support of the UNSPF.

International organisations contribute to the implementation of UNSPF in a different way than member states. The organisations reported cooperation and mutual participation in meetings, including joint sponsorship of items in the UNFF work programme. Many of their activities contribute to the implementation of UNSPF. FAO reported that data from the Global Forest Resource Assessment (FRA 2020) contribute to the monitoring of the progress towards the Global Forest Goals. FAO provided the latest quantitative data from FRA 2020 and peer reviewing to the Global Forest Goals Report 2021. The FAO report on the State of the World's Forests 2022 (SOFO 2022) is also a major contribution to the UNSPF. Furthermore, through the network of its regional offices, FAO seeks to support the implementation of the UNSPF at all levels. For its part IUFRO reported that it has been leading the Global Forest Expert Panels (GFEP) initiative, which is aimed at supporting UNFF and other forest-related intergovernmental processes by assessing available scientific information and producing reports on forest-related issues of global concern.

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<sup>4</sup> Australia, China, El Salvador, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Malawi, Mexico, New Zealand, Panama, Philippines, Romania, USA FAO, Forest Europe, ITTO, IUFRO.

<sup>5</sup> Country names in brackets refer to those countries which specifically mentioned the action cited. Of course, these actions may well be undertaken also by other countries.

## Annex 6 Issues of concern in the early 2020s

The Annex to the UNFF17 resolution, in its Section F, asks the secretariat to “Gather new information from member States on ... regional and global issues of concern with regard to forests in response to a concise questionnaire ... and the most recent global publications and reports on forests”.

A question on issues of concern (question F-4) was therefore included in the consolidated questionnaire. Sixteen countries and four international organisations<sup>6</sup> identified the main “regional and global issues of concern with regard to forests” in the early 2020s. One respondent noted that forest-related issues in general are increasing in visibility, urgency and complexity as they come to the forefront of the national and international policy discussion.

The responses with respect to the issues of concern in the early 2020s are summarised below, with no order of priority. They overlap because of the complexity and interaction of the processes:

- The consequences of climate change, notably changing weather and increased extreme events, such as fires and droughts, and forest damage (Canada, China, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Philippines, Romania, Switzerland, USA, Forest Europe, IUFRO, ITTO)
- Increased role of forest management to mitigate climate change through growing voluntary market and emerging regulatory carbon market (Switzerland)
- Forest loss and degradation (Canada, Malaysia, Switzerland, USA, IUFRO, ITTO)
- Threats to forest biodiversity (Canada, China, Romania, USA, Forest Europe, IUFRO)
- Forest health, damage and degradation, including to protective functions and forest fragmentation/habitat loss (China, El Salvador, Malaysia)
- Restoration of degraded lands for critical ecosystem services (USA)
- Role of forests for livelihoods (IUFRO)
- Trade in forest products, and the use of trade measures to address deforestation, which may intensify land use pressures in developing countries (Australia, China, New Zealand, ITTO)
- Growing global demand for sustainable timber and the need for forest products to play a role in displacing less sustainable materials (Australia)
- Balancing sustainable forest development with social and economic development (Australia, Nigeria)
- Changes in land use, and the conversion of forests to agriculture: balancing land use pressures from population, agriculture energy and development, as well as illegal activities, better return on investment from non-forest land uses (Australia, Colombia, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, New Zealand, Panama, Forest Europe, IUFRO)
- Financial constraints (Canada, Colombia, Kenya, Malawi, Romania)
- Insufficient support for local communities seeking to base development on sustainable principles (Colombia)
- Sustainable production and consumption of forest products (Canada, IUFRO)
- Unregulated marketing of forest products (Malawi)
- Weak and conflicting policies (Malawi)
- Lack of capacity (Malawi)
- Inadequate research (Malawi)

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<sup>6</sup> Australia, Canada, China, El Salvador, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Malawi, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Panama, Philippines, Romania, Switzerland, USA. FAO, Forest Europe, ITTO, IUFRO.

- Inclusion of all stakeholders into policy making (Mexico, Romania)
- Conflicting cross-sectoral policies (Nigeria)
- Lack or inadequacy of reliable up-to-date data and information on forests (Nigeria)
- Weakness of global definitions (New Zealand)
- Need for diversity of approaches, and to avoid “one-size-fits-all” approach (New Zealand)
- Increasing the visibility of forest issues and of their contribution to national development (El Salvador)
- Forests’ contribution to food security (El Salvador)
- Forest monitoring and reporting (Kenya)
- Inaccurate forest valuation (Nigeria)
- Impact of pandemic (governance and supply chains, interruption of capacity building) (Switzerland)
- High demand for wood products due to missing global transport capacity, impact of Ukraine war, etc. resulting in overexploitation in some regions (Switzerland)
- Institutional and diplomatic crisis in the UN due to war in Ukraine (Switzerland).
- Increasing interest in topics addressing trees out the forests, including recreation, urban forestry, agroforestry (Switzerland)
- Forest carbon management in conjunction with other ecosystem objectives (USA)
- Engage major commodity-importing and commodity-producing countries to advance common interests in addressing commodity-driven deforestation (USA)
- Recovery of global forest products industries and legal trade post-COVID-19 pandemic (USA)
- The need to improve forest education at all levels to be able to fulfil local, national and global needs (IUFRO)
- The need to add both structure and function to international coordination efforts is higher than ever before (IUFRO)

The FAO publication on the State of the World’s Forests 2022 (SOFO 2022) also identifies some major issues. It describes the crucial role of forests and trees in addressing the major challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and the emergence of new diseases. SOFO 2022 identifies three interrelated pathways through which forests and trees can support economic and environmental recovery:

- Halting deforestation and maintaining forests;
- Restoring degraded lands and expanding agroforestry; and
- Sustainably using forests and building green value chains.

Other key messages of SOFO 2022 are:

- The world will need more renewable materials because of a growing population and the need to reduce environmental impacts. The forest sector can and must drive a transition to the more efficient and circular use of biomaterials with higher value added.
- Forest and farm producers need more incentive to scale up green recovery. They must derive substantial tangible benefits from restoring and sustainably managing forest and tree resources.
- The forest pathways can contribute to building inclusive, resilient and sustainable economies. Doing so optimally will require shifts in policies to maximize synergies among the pathways and between agriculture and forestry across agrifood systems and to encourage private sector investments.

Taken together, countries' responses and the conclusions of SOFO 2020 provide a comprehensive and ambitious foundation for a list of issues of concern with regard to forests. Such a list could include both issues, such as deforestation and climate change, which have been identified and addressed for many years, and emerging issues, which may have to be addressed by UNFF in the near future.