

**Background Paper**  
**UNFF Expert Group Meeting (Virtual)**  
**Preparations for the Midterm Review of the International Arrangement on Forests**  
**17-18 November 2021**

**I. Introduction**

1. In accordance with the programme of work of the Forum for the period of 2022-2024<sup>1</sup>, and its provisional agenda<sup>2</sup>, the seventeenth session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF17), to be held in May 2022, should consider, and decide on the preparations for the midterm review in 2024 of the effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) in achieving its objectives. It is important to note that the Forum will undertake the actual midterm review of the IAF during its nineteenth session (UNFF19) in 2024. Therefore, UNFF17 will only discuss and decide on the required actions, events, and outputs to be carried out/prepared during the period between UNFF17-UNFF19 to facilitate the IAF midterm review by UNFF19 in 2024.

2. This background paper is prepared by the UNFF Secretariat (UNFFS) to serve as the basis for discussion during the UNFF Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the preparations for the IAF midterm review. This meeting will be held virtually on 17-18 2021. The background paper contains information on the basis for the IAF midterm review, issues to be considered, brief overview of key developments related to the work of the IAF components, and proposals on the actions to be carried out and the outputs to be prepared in preparation for the IAF midterm review in 2024. In preparation of this background paper, the UNFFS has taken into account the suggestions and proposals in, and the responses<sup>3</sup> to the questionnaire that it circulated to Members and partners of the Forum on 28 July 2021<sup>4</sup>.

**II. Basis for the IAF Midterm Review**

3. Midterm review of the effectiveness of the IAF shall be guided by relevant provisions of the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, in particular, its Section I and Section XII, Section IV of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF), and ECOSOC resolution 2021/6.

**A. ECOSOC Resolution 2015/33**

4. In Section I of its resolution 2015/33, ECOSOC strengthened the IAF, and decided on the main components and objectives of the IAF. Accordingly, the IAF is composed of the UNFF and its Member States, UNFFS, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN), and the UNFF Trust Fund. The resolution identified interested international, regional, and subregional organizations and processes, major groups, and other stakeholders, as partners of the IAF.

5. The IAF objectives, as defined by the resolution 2015/33, are:

- a. To promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, in particular the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (UN Forest Instrument-UNFI).
- b. To enhance the contribution of all types of forests and trees outside forests to the post-2015 development agenda (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).

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<sup>1</sup> Annex I of the ECOSOC Resolution 2021/6

<sup>2</sup> ECOSOC Decision 2021/225

<sup>3</sup> A total of 20 responses were received, including 12 responses from Member States (Australia, Brazil, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, Peru, Ukraine, USA), one from the EU, 2 responses from CPF member organizations (FAO, IUFRO), 4 responses from regional entities (ACoFO, APFNet, Forest Europe, & UNECE) and 1 response from the major groups (Major Group Children and Youth)

<sup>4</sup> Please see the questionnaire at: <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html>

- c. To enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence, and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels.
- d. To foster international cooperation, including North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation, as well as public-private partnerships and cross-sectoral cooperation at all levels.
- e. To support efforts to strengthen forest governance frameworks and means of implementation, in accordance with the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (UNFI), in order to achieve sustainable forest management.

6. In accordance with Section XII of resolution 2015/33 and paragraph 66 of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF), the Forum should undertake in 2024 a midterm review of the effectiveness of the IAF in achieving its objectives, as well as a final review in 2030, and, on that basis, submit recommendations to the Council relating to the future course of the arrangement. In the context of the midterm review in 2024, the Forum could consider:

- a. A full range of options, including a legally binding instrument on all types of forests, the strengthening of the current arrangement and the continuation of the current arrangement.
- b. A full range of financing options, inter alia, the establishment of a voluntary global forest fund, in order to mobilize resources from all sources in support of the sustainable management of all types of forests.

7. According to the above-mentioned paragraphs in the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and the UNSPF, the establishment of a global forest fund could be further considered if there is a consensus to do so at a session of the Forum prior to 2024.

#### **B. United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests**

8. Section IV of the UNSPF includes two more issues for consideration during the IAF midterm review, namely, i) assessment of the progress in the implementation of the UNSPF and, ii) the contribution of the Forum to the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

- a. According to paragraphs 67 to 69 of the UNSPF, the assessment of the progress in implementation of the UNSPF should be based on the internationally agreed indicators, including relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators, that are relevant to the Global Forest Goals and targets. The assessment should take into account voluntary national reporting on the implementation of the UNSPF, the UNFI, Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs) and the results of the most recent Global Forest Resources Assessment of FAO, as well as inputs from the CPF and its member organizations and other partners within and outside of the UN system, including regional and subregional organizations and relevant stakeholders.
- b. According to paragraph 70 of the UNSPF, contribution of the Forum to the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be also reviewed during the midterm review of the IAF in 2024. As a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council, UNFF should contribute to the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, including through the work of the CPF on global forest indicators, as well as highlight the contribution of forests to the Sustainable Development Goals, to be reviewed in depth at the annual sessions of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development.

#### **C. ECOSOC Resolution 2021/6**

9. In accordance with Annex I to the ECOSOC resolution 2021/6, preparation for the IAF midterm review should also include the review of the effectiveness of the Communication and Outreach Strategy of the UNSPF.

### III. Preparations for the IAF Midterm Review

10. The Forum, in 2024, should undertake a midterm review of the effectiveness of the IAF in achieving its objectives, especially in respect to the main components of the IAF, namely, UNFF and its Members, UNFFS, CPF, GFFFN and the UNFF Trust Fund, as well as the involvement of regional and subregional organizations and processes, major groups and other stakeholders. To have a better understanding of the types of actions and scope of the work which have to be carried out in preparation for the IAF midterm review, it is necessary to have a brief overview of the key mandates/functions of the IAF components, key developments since the adoption of the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and the first session of UNFF with in its new method of work in 2017<sup>5</sup>.

#### A. UNFF and its Members

##### Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF

11. In section II of resolution 2015/33, the Council specified Forum's five core functions<sup>6</sup> and requested these functions to be carried out on the basis of a strategic plan for the period 2017–2030.

12. In paragraph 6 of resolution 2015/33, the Council requested that the Forum hold annual sessions for a period of five days (para. 6 (c)) and restructure its sessions and enhance its intersessional work to maximize the impact and relevance of its work, including by fostering an exchange of experiences and lessons learned among countries, regional, subregional, and non-governmental partners and the CPF (para. 6 (b)). Paragraph 6 (f) of the resolution provides specific guidance on restructuring the Forum's sessions into odd year sessions and even-year sessions.

13. In the odd-year sessions, the Forum's focus is on discussions on implementation and technical advice, including facilitating the sharing of knowledge and exchanging experiences among members of the Forum, member organizations of the CPF, regional and subregional organizations, major groups and other relevant stakeholders and the science-policy interface. At even-year sessions, the focus is on policy dialogue, development, and decision-making, taking into account the discussions and proposals of the previous session. In this regard, odd-year and even-year sessions for a given biennium are expected to be linked thematically.

14. In paragraph 6 (e) of the resolution, the Forum was requested to enhance the contributions of country-led and similar initiatives to its work by ensuring that they directly support the priorities of the Forum, and to update the guidelines for such initiatives.

15. In accordance with paragraph 28 and 35 of the UNSPF, the Forum is the responsible intergovernmental body for follow-up and review of the implementation of the strategic plan, including through providing guidance to the CPF and ensuring the smooth interplay between its odd- and even-year sessions.

16. Paragraphs 29 to 33 of the UNSPF dedicate to the roles and responsibilities of Members of the Forum. In paragraph 29, the UNSPF emphasizes that the individual and collective actions and commitments of members of the Forum are decisive for the successful implementation of the UNSPF and achievement of its GFGs and targets. Members may include in their Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs), as appropriate, the forest-related contributions they intend to make with regard to other international forest-related commitments and goals, such as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and actions to address climate change under the Paris Agreement.

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<sup>5</sup> 2017 is the year that the Forum agreed and adopted the UNSPF, and its first quadrennial programme of work for 2017-2020. It was the first year that the Forum operationalized its new method of work.

<sup>6</sup> The five core functions of the UNFF are: (a) To provide a coherent, open, transparent and participatory global platform for policy development, dialogue, cooperation and coordination on issues related to all types of forests, including emerging issues, in an integrated and holistic manner, including through cross-sectoral approaches; (b) To promote, monitor and assess the implementation of sustainable forest management, in particular the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and the achievement of its global objectives on forests, and mobilize, catalyse and facilitate access to financial, technical and scientific resources to this end; (c) To promote governance frameworks and enabling conditions at all levels to achieve sustainable forest management; (d) To promote coherent and collaborative international policy development on issues related to all types of forests; (e) To strengthen high-level political engagement, with the participation of major groups and other stakeholders, in support of sustainable forest management.

17. In paragraph 33 of the UNSPF, Members of the Forum, as members of the governing bodies of forest-related international, regional, and subregional organizations and processes are encouraged to promote the integration of the GFGs and targets into the strategies and programmes of these organizations, processes, and instruments, consistent with their mandates and priorities.

#### Key developments since 2015

18. Since the adoption of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, intensive work has been undertaken to implement the provisions of this resolution, involving the Forum, its Members and Secretariat, and various stakeholders. During this period, the Forum took several decisions to carry out its functions and other mandated tasks. The UNSPF and the quadrennial programme of work for 2017-2020 were developed, and adopted in a special session of the Forum, the Forum's sessions were restructured, the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests was renamed the "United Nations Forest Instrument", its Global Forest Objectives were extended until 2030, and the Forum agreed to update the UNFI to include reference to the 2030 Agenda. The Forum also adopted the GFFFN guidelines, and regularly contributed to the follow up, review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

19. The Forum played an important role in advancing global partnership and collaboration on forests, including by providing guidance to the CPF to develop its work plan and the Strategic Vision Towards 2030. The Forum also discussed the ways and means to promote a common understanding on sustainable forest management. The Forum annually discussed and considered progress in the implementation of UNSPF, the operation of the GFFFN, and enhanced involvement of stakeholders in its technical and policy sessions. The Forum promoted science-policy interface by receiving increased number of scientific studies and reports and interactions among experts.

20. The Forum adopted the updated guidelines for country-led and other initiatives and enhanced the contributions of these initiatives to the priorities of the Forum. Since the adoption of resolution 2015/33, there have been two organization-led initiative organized by the CPF in November 2016 on "Global Forest Indicators", and in February 2018 on "Working across Sectors to Halt Deforestation and Increase Forest Area – from Aspiration to Action". The UNFFS and major groups also co-organized a Major Group-Led Initiative on "Cross-sectoral collaboration for inclusive forest landscapes" in March 2020. These initiatives provided direct support to the priorities of the Forum, as reflected in its quadrennial programme of work.

21. One major milestone in the history of the Forum was its positive performance during the outbreak of the global pandemic of COVID-19 from April 2020 to May 2021. During this period, the Forum organized two substantive sessions, and was among the first intergovernmental bodies that reacted immediately to an emerging issue of global concern to forests and people. The Forum decided to assess the impacts of COVID-19 and based on this assessment, recommended valuable measures to reduce the negative impacts of the pandemic on forests and forest sector. The Forum, at its sixteenth session, also played a leading role in drawing the attention of high-level officials to major global forest related developments and the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and forest dependent people. During this period, the Forum set a high standard of efficiency and effectiveness by continuing its substantive work, adopting its new quadrennial programme of work for 2021-2024, and discussing the key concerns of its Members.

22. Members of the Forum have played the key and primary role in the success of the Forum in advancing its work. They supported the work of different components of the IAF and provided timely advice, guidance, and resources to their work. Their continued support is vital for the achievement of the IAF objectives. Forum has universal membership and comprises of 197 Members. During the initial reporting cycle in 2018, only 52 Members submitted voluntary national reports, and only 19 Members announced VNCs. The success of the strengthened IAF largely depends on the increased actions by Members for effective implementation of the UNSPF. In this respect and to accelerate implementation process, it is imperative to identify and address the constraints and impediments that countries are facing.

#### **B. UNFF Secretariat**

##### Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF

23. In its resolution 2015/33, the Council decided that the UNFFS should continue to implement its six original functions, namely: i) to service and support the Forum, its Bureau and related intersessional activities; ii) to

administer the trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests consistent with guidance provided by the Forum; iii) to manage the strengthened facilitative process; iv) to promote inter-agency collaboration, including by serving as a member of and providing secretariat services to the Collaborative Partnership on Forests; v) to provide, upon request, technical support to country-led initiatives and similar initiatives; and vi) to liaise with and facilitate the participation and involvement of countries and other stakeholders.

24. The Council added four new functions for the UNFFS: i) to service and support the working group of the Forum; ii) to manage the GFFFN and implement its activities; iii) to promote cooperation on forest-related issues; and iv) to work within the UN system to support countries in aligning forests and the IAF with their considerations on the post-2015 development agenda. In addition, the Council recommended to the GA that it consider strengthening the secretariat of the Forum, taking into account the provisions of the resolution.

25. In its paragraph 36, the UNSPF further stipulate that the UNFFS services and supports the Forum in all matters related to the Forum's quadrennial programmes of work and the strategic plan.

#### Key developments since 2015

26. Since the adoption of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, the UNFFS consistently delivered on its mandated functions, and played its essential supportive role. In accordance with resolution 2015/33, the Forum established an open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group and a working group to support updating the UNFI and developing the strategic plan for the period 2017-2030 as well as the quadrennial programme of work for the period 2017-2020. The UNFFS supported the work of these bodies by providing operational, logistical, and substantive support, including through preparing documentation.

27. The ad hoc expert group convened twice, first in April 2016 in New York and then in October 2016 in Bangkok. The outcomes of the meetings provided the basis for the working group meetings held in January 2017 in New York. The meetings led to the successful development of proposals for the strategic plan and the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum; and set the stage for their eventual adoption by the special session of the Forum, the ECOSOC, as well as the adoption of the UNSPF by the GA. The UNFFS also provided support for the adoption of two resolutions on the UNFI by the GA<sup>7</sup>.

28. The UNFFS followed up and operationalized the provisions of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 on restructuring the Forum's sessions. Within only two months after the adoption of the UNSPF and quadrennial programme of work, the UNFFS organized UNFF12. The UNFFS supported the work of the Forum, especially, during the challenging time of the global pandemic of COVID-19, organizing virtual consultations and sessions. During the period between 2015-2021, the UNFFS consistently advised the Bureaus of the Forum on the organization and conduct of the Forum's sessions. It prepared substantive documents, several analytical reports, background studies, including on the thematic priorities of the Forum and interlinkages of forests and SDGs, and enhanced engagement of stakeholders in intersessional activities and in Forum's sessions.

29. The UNFFS led preparation of important studies e.g., impacts of COVID-19 on forests, Global Forest Goals Report (GFGR) 2021, and the training module for national forest financing strategies. The UNFFS played an important role in enhancing collaboration on forest related issues, including through the CPF. It played a leading role in preparation and adoption of the CPF Strategic Vision Towards 2030, discussions of the Forum on enhancing a common understanding on the SFM, and interdepartmental work on interlinkages of forests, climate change, biodiversity, etc. The UNFFS organized several events during international conferences and meetings and prepared many communication materials and briefs on issues of great concern to forests.

30. The UNFFS managed the GFFFN since its establishment in May 2015, and runed its activities through mobilizing resources for the operation of the GFFFN, and provided capacity development support to countries, in collaboration with CPF member organizations. As mandated, the UNFFS also developed and operationalized the GFFFN Clearing House.

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<sup>7</sup> Resolution A/RES/70/199 & Resolution A/RES/71/289

31. Further explanations on the activities of the UNFFS in performing its functions, as contained in ECOSOC 2015/33, are provided in section A, C, D, E, F, G, H and I.

### **C. Collaborative Partnership on Forests**

#### *Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF*

32. In accordance with Section VII of the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, the core functions of the CPF are: (a) to support the work of the Forum and its member countries; (b) to provide scientific and technical advice to the Forum, including on emerging issues; (c) to enhance coherence as well as policy and programme cooperation and coordination at all levels among its member organizations, including through joint programming and the submission of coordinated proposals to their respective governing bodies, consistent with their mandates; (d) to promote the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, including the achievement of its Global Forest Goals, and the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>8</sup>

33. Through resolution 2015/33, the Council also:

- a. Reaffirmed that the CPF should continue: (a) to receive guidance from the Forum and submit coordinated inputs and progress reports to sessions of the Forum; (b) to operate in an open, transparent, and flexible manner; (c) to undertake periodic reviews of its effectiveness.<sup>9</sup>
- b. Encouraged the CPF and its member organizations: (a) to strengthen the CPF by formalizing its working modalities, including through consideration of a multilateral memorandum of understanding, and by developing procedures for its effective functioning and operation; (b) to identify ways to stimulate broader participation by existing member organizations in its various activities; (c) to assess its membership and the potential added value of additional members with significant forest-related expertise; (d) to identify ways to actively involve major groups and other stakeholders in activities of the CPF; (e) to develop a workplan, aligned with the UNSPF, to identify priorities for collective actions by all of the members of the CPF or subsets of members and the resource implications of such actions; (f) to prepare periodic reports on the CPF activities, achievements and resource allocations suitable for a wide range of audiences, including potential donors; (g) to further develop and expand its thematic joint initiatives, taking into account the strengths and focuses of the CPF members.<sup>10</sup>
- c. Invited the governing bodies of member organizations of the CPF to include in their work programmes dedicated funding to support CPF activities, as well as budgeted activities supporting the priorities of the Forum as outlined in the UNSPF, consistent with their mandates, and called upon Member States, as well as other members of the governing bodies of member organizations of the CPF, to support the work of the CPF, including by considering dedicated funding for CPF activities consistent with the respective mandates of CPF members as an essential strategy for improving cooperation, synergies and coherence on forest issues at all levels.<sup>11</sup>

34. The UNSPF recognizes the important role of the CPF member organizations in implementing the UNSPF, and encourages them to integrate the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and targets into their forest-related plans and programmes, where appropriate and consistent with their respective mandates.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, the CPF is invited to support the Forum and its members in advancing the GFGs and targets, including through cooperation and CPF among its members, implementing a joint workplan with the CPF which is aligned with the Forum's quadrennial programmes of work and identifying collective actions by all or subsets of the CPF members, as well as associated resource needs.<sup>13</sup>

35. Furthermore, UNSPF encourages members of the Forum to support the CPF workplan as an essential strategy for improving cooperation, synergies and coherence among the CPF member organizations. Members of

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<sup>8</sup> Paragraph 20 of E/RES/2015/33

<sup>9</sup> Paragraph 21 of E/RES/2015/33

<sup>10</sup> Paragraph 22 of E/RES/2015/33

<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 23 and 24 of E/RES/2015/33

<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 38 of UNSPF as contained in E/RES/2017/4

<sup>13</sup> Paragraph 39 of UNSPF as contained in E/RES/2017/4

the Forum are also encouraged to provide voluntary financial contributions to support the activities of the CPF and its member organizations.<sup>14</sup>

### Key developments since UNFF12

36. In response to the provisions contained in paragraph 22 of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and the UNSPF, the CPF undertook several actions and measures to address them since UNFF12. These actions and measures include: (a) preparation of the new CPF Policy Document that outlines the mission, functions, membership, delivery mechanisms of the CPF, and the rules of procedure for the CPF<sup>15</sup>; (b) assessment of its membership and addition of the CITES secretariat as its new member organization; (c) development of the CPF workplan 2017-2020<sup>16</sup>; (d) development of its Strategic Vision towards 2030 that contains a vision statement and strategic priorities to be accomplished by 2030<sup>17</sup>; and (e) development of the CPF work plan 2021-2024<sup>18</sup>.

37. Furthermore, the CPF further developed and expanded its Joint Initiatives (JIs) and other joint activities since UNFF12, taking into account the strengths and focuses of the CPF member organizations. The JIs and other joint activities that have been developed and implemented include: (a) JI on Communicators' Network; (b) JI on Forest Landscape Restoration; (c) JI on Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network; (d) JI on Global Forest Expert Panel; (e) JI on Global Forest Information Service; (f) JI on Green Finance for Sustainable Landscapes; (g) JI on Streamlining global forest-related reporting; (h) JI on Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World; (i) JI on Wangari Maathai Forest Champion Award; (j) JI on Forest education; (k) JI on Policy learning initiative; (l) planned JI on Turning the Tide on Deforestation; (m) International Conference "Working across sectors to halt deforestation and increase forest area: from aspiration to action"; (n) joint statement on the COVID-19 pandemic "Towards sustainability: forest solutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic"; and (o) joint statement on "Challenges and Opportunities in Turning the Tide on Deforestation"<sup>19</sup>.

### **D. Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network**

#### Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF

38. In section IV of its resolution 2015/33, the Council reiterated that there was no single solution to address all needs in terms of forest financing and that a combination of actions is required at all levels, by all stakeholders and from all sources, public and private, domestic and international, bilateral and multilateral. The Council welcomed the positive work carried out by the facilitative process<sup>20</sup>, and decided to upgrade and rename it the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN). The Council also designated the UNFFS as the manager of the GFFFN<sup>21</sup>.

39. In addition to its guidance on the work of the GFFFN, the Council requested the Forum to define clear priorities for the GFFFN in the strategic plan. The priorities of the GFFFN were subsequently identified in the UNSPF, namely:

- a. Promote the design of national forest financing strategies to mobilize resources for sustainable forest management,
- b. Assist countries in mobilizing, accessing, and enhancing the effective use of existing financial resources from all sources for sustainable forest management,
- c. Serve as a clearing house and database on existing, new and emerging financing opportunities and as a tool for sharing lessons learned and best practices from successful projects,

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<sup>14</sup> Paragraph 40 of UNSPF as contained in E/RES/2017/4

<sup>15</sup> Available at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/cpf-policy-document/index.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Available at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/cpf-workplan-2017-2020/index.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Available at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/strategic-vision-2030/index.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Available at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/cpf-work-plan-2021-2024/index.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Further information on joint activities and their progress report are available in relevant UNFF documentations and the CPF website at <https://www.cpfweb.org/en/>.

<sup>20</sup> At the special session of its ninth session, the Forum decided to establish a facilitative process to catalyse the implementation of sustainable forest management and the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (UNFI) and the achievement of the global objectives on forests. The facilitative process had ten functions. For further information, please see E/2009/118-E/CN.18/55/2009/2, para. 3, and E/2011/42-E/CN.18/2011/20, para.

<sup>21</sup> Paragraphs 13(f) and 17 (a)(iii) of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33.

d. Contribute to the achievement of the global forest goals and targets, as well as priorities contained in the quadrennial programmes of work.

40. In accordance with paragraph 63 of the UNSPF, the GFFFN should give special consideration to the special needs and circumstances of Africa, the least developed countries, countries with low forest cover, countries with high forest cover, countries with medium forest cover and low deforestation, and small island developing States, as well as countries with economies in transition, in gaining access to funds.

#### Key developments since 2015

41. Since the commencement its first quadrennial programme of work from 2017, the UNFFS, as the manager of the GFFFN, has regularly prepared and submitted annual report to the Forum on the activities of the GFFFN and availability of resources for its operation. For the period of 2017 to 2021, the UNFFS has submitted five reports on the performance of the GFFFN. This report, which has been presented under the agenda item on means of implementation for sustainable forest management (SFM), included information on major global developments related to financing SFM, proposed guidelines for, and measures to enhance the efficiency of the GFFFN, as well as updates on Secretariat's activities in carrying out different priorities of the GFFFN, including operationalization of the GFFFN Clearing House.

42. In light of the discussions during the UNFF14 in 2019, the UNFFS voluntarily conducted an internal assessment<sup>22</sup> of the work of the GFFFN and its impacts for consideration of UNFF15 in 2020. This assessment contains, among others, key challenges and opportunities facing the GFFFN. Due to the impacts of the global pandemic, UNFF15 could not have thorough deliberation on this assessment.

43. In response to ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, the GFFFN guidelines and measures to increase the effectiveness of the GFFFN considered and adopted by the Forum at its thirteenth session in May 2018<sup>23</sup>. At this session, the Forum also requested the UNFFS to initiate development of the Network's on-line Clearing House and to develop a generic guide and modular training package to assist countries in developing national forest financing strategies. The training package<sup>24</sup> was subsequently developed and made available to the Members of the Forum in 2019. The development of the Clearing House followed a stepwise approach and its Phase I was officially launched at UNFF16 in May 2021. Phase I includes a website and three databases, namely funding opportunities, information and learning materials for obtaining access to resources and lessons learned and best practices.

44. At UNFF13, the Forum noted with appreciation the offer of the Government of China to establish and make operational a Forum secretariat office for the Network in Beijing. By the end of 2020, four rounds of consultations between the United Nations and China have been conducted on the draft host country agreement and the draft memorandum of understanding. Further consultations are required to reach a common understanding, including on the nature and scope of the activities of the proposed office. In accordance with the Forum's requests, regular updates on this matter have been provided by the UNFFS to each annual session of the Forum.

45. In terms of the operation of the GFFFN, since its establishment in 2015, the UNFFS has received 35 country requests and 2 sub-regional requests for the GFFFN assistance in developing national forest financing strategies and/or project proposals for mobilizing finance for sustainable forest management. Almost all requests have been responded/are being responded by the UNFFS. As the result of the work of the GFFFN, 23 national forest financing strategies and/or project proposals have been developed. About one thousand experts from national and sub-regional level have also been trained with the skills of developing national forest financing strategies and project proposals.

46. The work of the GFFFN is funded mainly from extrabudgetary resources provided through the Forum's Trust Fund. From the inception of the Network in May 2015 to December 2020, the Forum secretariat had mobilized over \$4.8 million to carry out priorities of the GFFFN.

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<sup>22</sup> Contained in E/CN.18/2020/5, available at: <https://undocs.org/en/E/CN.18/2020/5>

<sup>23</sup> UNFF13 Report- E/2018/42

<sup>24</sup> Available at the UNFF website: <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/capacity-development/forest-financing/index.html>



## **E. UNFF Trust Fund**

### Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF

47. The UNFF Trust Fund was established in 2001 to finance activities in support of the Forum from voluntary extrabudgetary resources. Trust Fund resources have been critical for the implementation of core activities of the UNFFS in support of the Forum, including its capacity development activities, travel of representatives to Forum meetings, staff, and consultancy costs.

48. In section XIV of its resolution 2015/33, the ECOSOC urged donor Governments and organizations, including financial institutions, and others in a position to do so, to provide voluntary contributions to the UNFF Trust Fund. It called upon donor countries and international organizations, including financial institutions, and others in a position to do so, to provide financial support to the Forum Trust Fund in order to support the participation of developing countries, according to priority to least developed countries, African States, small island developing States and countries with economies in transition.

49. In accordance with paragraph 64 of the UNSPF, the Trust Fund can be used to support the activities of the GFFFN, and the Forum is to monitor and assess the work and performance of the GFFFN, including the availability of Trust Fund resources.

### Key developments since UNFF12

50. In accordance with the quadrennial programmes of work of the Forum for 2017-2020, and 2021-2024, UNFF Trust Fund is an standing item in the agenda of each session of the Forum. Accordingly, the Secretariat has provided a report to each session of the Forum from 2017 up to now. This annual report will continue to be submitted to future sessions of the Forum. Through these reports, the UNFFS has constantly kept informed Members of the Forum on the operation of the Trust Fund, including information on the amounts contributed during the year, the source of the contributions and a description of how the funds have been expended. The Forum has also provided regular guidance on the operation of the UNFF Trust Fund.

51. During the period between 2017 to 2020, an estimated \$4.6 million has been contributed to the UNFF Trust Fund, by ten donor countries as follows:

- a. In 2017, five donor countries (China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, and United States of America) contributed to the Trust Fund, with total contributions of approximately \$1.17 million, inclusive of programme support costs.
- b. In 2018, five donor countries (China, Finland, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, and United States of America) contributed to the Trust Fund, with total contributions amounting to \$685,133, inclusive of programme support costs.
- c. In 2019, seven donor countries (Australia, China, Germany, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Slovakia, and Switzerland) and one donor organization (International Union for Conservation of Nature – Global Environment Facility) contributed to the Trust Fund, with total contributions amounting to \$1,574,755, inclusive of programme support costs.
- d. In 2020, five donor countries (China, Germany, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation and United States of America) contributed to the Trust Fund, with total contributions amounting to \$1,173,635, inclusive of programme support costs.

52. The UN liquidity crisis during the last couple of years had great impacts on the financial situation of the Organization. It has resulted in several restriction and limitations on the post and non-post resources of the Organization. In addition, since the adoption of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, the mandates of the Forum, the volume of its activities and the outputs to be prepared for it have substantially increased. These developments are happening at the time that the budgetary resources allocated from the regular budget of the UN did not keep pace with these

developments. These developments have signified the critical importance of the UNFF Trust Fund and sufficiency of its resources for the continued smooth operation of the Secretariat in support of the Forum, especially, if the current trends in budgetary constraints continue.

#### **F. Implementation of the UNSPF**

##### Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF

53. Section III of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 devotes to “monitoring, assessment and reporting” function of the IAF beyond 2015. Through this Section, the Council invited Members of the Forum to continue to monitor and assess progress towards implementing SFM, including the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (UNFI) and the global objectives on forests. The Council also invited Members to submit on a voluntary basis national progress reports to the Forum.

54. The Council requested the UNFFS, in consultation with Members of the Forum, the CPF and its members and other relevant entities and processes, as well as criteria and indicators’ processes to propose a cycle and format for voluntary national reporting for consideration by UNFF12. This request was embedded in paragraph 69 of the UNSPF. Accordingly, in establishing the cycle and format for voluntary national reporting by its members, the Forum should take into account the cycle of the Global Forest Resources Assessments (FRA) and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) review cycle at the global level.

55. In accordance with paragraph 67 of the UNSPF, the Forum should assess progress in implementing the UNSPF in the context of its midterm and final reviews of the IAF effectiveness, in 2024 and 2030. The assessment should be based on internationally agreed indicators, including relevant SDGs indicators, that are relevant to the GFGs and targets. Paragraph 68 of the UNSPF further explains that the assessment should take into account voluntary national reporting on the implementation of the UNSPF, UNFI, VNCs and the results of the most recent FRA of FAO, as well as inputs from the CPF and its member organizations and other partners within and outside of the UN system, including regional and subregional organizations and relevant stakeholders.

##### Key developments since UNFF12

56. In response to these requests, the UNFFS organized an expert meeting on reporting in Brasilia in February 2017, with participation of experts from Members of the Forum, CPF member organizations, regional partners, and major groups. As its outcome, the expert group meeting proposed a draft reporting format for consideration of UNFF12. The Forum reviewed the draft, provided further feedback and requested the UNFFS to pilot it with interested members of the Forum from the five regional groups.

57. In June 2017, the secretariat invited Members to take part in a pilot testing exercise, and subsequently, organized the second expert group meeting on reporting in Nairobi in November 2017, which further revised the draft. At UNFF13, Members considered this draft and adopted it as the format for first voluntary national reporting to the Forum. UNFF13 also decided that it would consider the results of the first round of voluntary national reporting at UNFF15. Following UNFF13 resolution, 52 voluntary national reports were submitted to UNFF15 in 2020.

58. Pursuant to UNFF13 discussions on the importance of developing explanatory notes on reporting to avoid inconsistent interpretation of certain questions and terms, an intersessional workshop was organized by the UNFFS in Rome in November 2018. Participants in the workshop provided valuable inputs, and the explanatory notes were submitted to UNFF14 in 2019.

59. During the period between April 2017 to May 2021, 19 Members of the Forum have submitted VNCs, as their contribution to advancing implementation of the UNSPF. In response to UNFF13 resolution, the UNFFS established the VNCs Repository on its website<sup>25</sup>.

60. Through UNFF13 resolution, Members of the Forum requested the UNFFS to prepare a concise “flagship” publication on progress towards achieving the GFGs for release by the end of 2021, using the information contained in the first round of national reports, and in consultation with members of the Forum, CPF members and relevant

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/documents/un-strategic-plan-for-forests-2030/vncs/index.html>

stakeholders. Additionally, through ECOSOC resolution 2020/14 (agreed upon by UNFF15), the UNFFS was requested to launch the flagship publication at UNFF16 in 2021. After two-and-a-half-year extensive work, the flagship publication entitled: “Global Forest Goals Report 2021” (GFGR2021) was finalized, as planned, and launched on 26 April 2021 during the opening day of UNFF16.

61. Through ECOSOC resolution 2020/14, the Council requested the UNFFS to propose refinements to the format for voluntary national reporting based on lessons learned during the current reporting cycle and in developing the flagship publication, for consideration by UNFF17 in 2022. The Council also invited the Forum to synchronize future voluntary national reporting with the five-year global forest resources assessment process, beginning with the next forest resources assessment cycle.

### **G. Contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

#### ***Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF***

62. Through its resolution 2015/33, the Council decided that the Forum should offer to contribute to the implementation, follow-up and review of the forest-related aspects of the post 2015 development agenda (2030 Agenda), including its forest-related goals and targets<sup>26</sup> and affirmed that the Forum should also offer to contribute to the work of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development<sup>27</sup>.

63. UNSPF recognizes that the Forum, as a functional commission of the ECOSOC, should contribute to the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and highlight the contribution of forests to the SDGs to be reviewed in depth at the annual sessions of the HLPF.<sup>28</sup>

64. UNSPF provides a framework for forest-related contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, among other international forest-related instruments, processes, commitments and goals.<sup>29</sup> The UN shared mission contained in the UNSPF is to promote sustainable forest management and the contribution of forests and trees outside forests to the 2030 Agenda, including by strengthening cooperation, coordination, coherence, synergies and political commitment and action at all levels.<sup>30</sup> GFG 5 of the UNSPF and its targets also aim at promoting governance frameworks to implement sustainable forest management, including through the UNFI, and enhance the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda.<sup>31</sup>

#### ***Key developments since UNFF12***

65. Since operationalization of its new method and organization of work in 2017, the Forum, its members and the UNFFS have been actively engaged in enhancing the contribution of forests to and their interlinkages with the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

66. In response to the provisions contained in ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and the UNSPF, the Forum provided, including the following inputs to the annual sessions of the HLPF since UNFF12 in 2017: input by the UNFF12 Bureau to the HLPF in 2016; the relevant part of the UNFF12 Chair’s summary to the HLPF in 2017; the relevant part of the UNFF13 Chair’s summary and resolution to the HLPF in 2018; input by the UNFF14 Bureau and the relevant part of the UNFF14 Chair’s summary to the HLPF in 2019; input by the UNFF15 Bureau to the HLPF in 2020; and input by the UNFF16 Bureau and the relevant part of the UNFF16 Chair’s summary to the HLPF in 2021<sup>32</sup>.

67. The UNFFS organized an event on 8 July 2018 in conjunction with the 2018 session of the HLPF. The event was entitled “Forest-based transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies: lessons learned and success

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<sup>26</sup> Paragraph 35 of E/RES/2015/33

<sup>27</sup> Paragraph 36 of E/RES/2015/33

<sup>28</sup> Paragraph 70 of UNSPF as contained in E/RES/2017/4

<sup>29</sup> Paragraph 1 of UNSPF as contained in E/RES/2017/4

<sup>30</sup> Paragraph 4 of UNSPF as contained in E/RES/2017/4

<sup>31</sup> Paragraph 27 of UNSPF as contained in E/RES/2017/4

<sup>32</sup> The Forum’s annual inputs to the high-level political forum on sustainable development are available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/inputs>.

stories”, aiming at bringing together representatives of the delegations to the HLPF at the time of its consideration of the SDG6 and SDG15.

68. In 2019, UNFF14 Chair participated in the Ministerial Segment of the HLPF, convened on 16 July, and delivered key messages highlighting the Forum’s input to the HLPF. In 2020, UNFF15 Chair participated in the session of the HLPF “Building back better after COVID-19 and acting where we will have the greatest impact on the SDGs: Protecting the planet and building resilience”, convened on 8 July, and delivered key messages of the Forum to the HLPF.

69. To assist the Forum in providing its inputs to the HLPF, the UNFFS commissioned seven analytical studies on the interlinkages between forests and various SDGs.<sup>33</sup> The studies generated interactive exchanges among members of the Forum and contributed to a better understanding of the important role of forests, as well as the GFGs, in achieving the SDGs. In addition, the UNFFS provided its contribution to the relevant reports and documents in the context of the HLPF through participation in the inter-departmental activities and related expert group meetings. It also provided substantive support to the UNFF Bureaus for participation in the relevant meetings and events.

#### **H. Communication and outreach strategy of the UNSPF**

##### Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF

70. In accordance with paragraph 39 of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, the UNSPF should outline a communication strategy to raise awareness of the work of the IAF. The UNSPF, in its paragraph 73 to 75 further stipulated that a communication and outreach strategy should be developed to raise awareness, within and outside the forest sector, of the vital contribution of all types of forests and trees to life on Earth and human well-being. The communication and outreach strategy should draw on the strategic plan, synchronize with the quadrennial programmes of work and consider relevant themes, including those which are relevant to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Actors at all levels are encouraged to contribute to these efforts.

##### Key developments since UNFF12

71. In response to paragraph 39 of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, and paragraph 73 of the UNSPF, the Communication and Outreach Strategy (COS) of the UNSPF was adopted by UNFF13 in 2018.

72. Since the adoption of UNSPF in 2017, there have been many developments related to communication and outreach. In addition to the adoption of the COS, through UNFF13 resolution, Members of the Forum requested the UNFFS to produce a concise print and online publication on the global forest goals and targets, featuring infographics, to be used in outreach to a range of audiences within and outside the forest community. This concise publication was presented to UNFF14. As an important communication product, the UNFFS also produced Global Forest Goals Report 2021 and launched it during UNFF16 in 2021<sup>34</sup>. As reflected in Chair’s summary of UNFF16, delegations welcomed the Secretariat’s work on promoting awareness of the role of forests during the COVID-19 pandemic through UNDESA policy briefs and social media, and encouraged additional advocacy related to the UNSPF. These discussions also highlighted the need for greater engagement with cross-sectoral audiences, further use of online and social media, virtual events, engagement of well-known persons in advocating for forests and implementation of the UNSPF. Promotion and dissemination of the GFGR 2021 was encouraged, including through the fifteenth World Forestry Congress, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and other global events, as well as through communication materials aimed at non-technical audiences.

73. Celebration of the International Day of Forests (IDF) has also been an important communication tool for the Secretariat and countries to raise awareness on multiple benefits of forests. The UNFFS collaborates with other members of the CPF to propose a central theme for the annual celebration of the IDF. The themes are intended to highlight the wide range of contributions forests make to global sustainable development, including implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the GFGs of the UNSPF. From 2017 to date, the IDF themes

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<sup>33</sup> The studies are available at [www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/background-analytical-studies/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/background-analytical-studies/index.html).

<sup>34</sup> Additional explanations on the GFGR2021 is provided in Section “F” on the Implementation of the UNSPF.

have been: the IDF 2017 theme was forests and energy, the IDF 2018 theme was forests and sustainable cities, the IDF 2019 theme was forests and education, the IDF 2020 theme was forests and biodiversity, the IDF 2021 theme was forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being, and the upcoming IDF 2022 theme is forests and sustainable production and consumption.

#### **I. Regional and subregional involvement**

##### Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF

74. Section VIII of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 is dedicated to regional and subregional involvement in the IAF beyond 2015, as is section III, A, 6 of the UNSPF<sup>35</sup>. These provisions call for enhancing collaboration between relevant regional and subregional partners and the Forum, including regarding the implementation of the UNSPF and the Forum's quadrennial programmes of work. Further, relevant regional and subregional partners were invited to build and strengthen synergies between the UNSPF and their policies and programmes, as well as to provide coordinated inputs and recommendations to sessions of the Forum. Members of the Forum were also invited to consider strengthening regional and subregional forest policy development, dialogue, and coordination to avoid fragmentation and to advance the strategic plan.

##### Key developments since UNFF12

75. Since UNFF12, the role of regional and subregional entities has been enhanced. The Forum engaged additional regional and subregional partners, and the UNFFS organized several expert meetings to enhance regional/subregional cooperation and coordination, as well as dedicated panels during UNFF sessions.

76. Through its quadrennial programmes of work for 2017-2020, and 2021-2024, the Forum dedicated a specific agenda item on collaboration with regional and subregional partners. This is aimed at providing the opportunity for these partners to share the challenges that they are facing at the regional levels, as well as the opportunities and lessons learned with the broader global forest community.

77. In addition, regional, and subregional partners consistently contributed to the work of the Forum through providing inputs on the thematic focus of different sessions of the Forum, and through answering to questionnaires prepared by the Secretariat before UNFF meetings. Such interactions between the Forum and these partners have contributed to making the work of these bodies supportive of the implementation of UNSPF, and more aligned with the GFGs.

78. These inputs were included in the official documents for discussions and decisions during each session of the Forum. All resolutions adopted by the Forum during the period of 2017-2021, also contain provisions in relation to enhancing regional and subregional collaborations.

#### **J. Involvement of major groups and other relevant stakeholders**

##### Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF

79. Through Section IX of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, the Council invited major groups and other stakeholders to enhance their contributions to the work of the IAF beyond 2015. It also invited Members of the Forum to consider enhancing the participation and contributions of representatives of major groups and other stakeholders in country-led initiatives. The Council further requested the UNFFS to promote the involvement of major groups and other stakeholders in the work of the Forum, in particular leaders from the private and non-governmental sectors, including forest industries, local communities, and philanthropic organizations, and to enhance the interaction of the Forum with such stakeholders.

80. In its paragraph 49, the UNSPF emphasized that the effective implementation of SFM depends on the contributions of all relevant stakeholders, including forest owners, indigenous peoples, local communities, local authorities, the private sector (including small, medium and large forest-based enterprises), non-governmental organizations, women, children, youth, and scientific, academic and philanthropic organizations at all levels.

81. In paragraph 50, the UNSPF endeavors the Forum to work with major groups and other relevant stakeholders to identify ways to enhance their contributions to the achievement of the GFGs and targets at all levels and their interactions with the Forum and the CPF, including through networks, advisory groups and other mechanisms, to raise awareness, foster information exchange and dissemination and facilitate coordinated inputs.

82. In paragraph 51, the UNSPF encourages major groups and other relevant stakeholders such as private philanthropic organizations, educational and academic entities, volunteer groups and others to autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms at all levels for interaction and participation in the Forum and other forest-related UN bodies.

#### Key developments since UNFF12

83. Since UNFF12, the role of major groups and other stakeholders has been enhanced in the substantive preparation for, and participation in the annual sessions of the Forum. Representatives of UNFF major groups have been consistently engaged in the work of the Forum, including in the intersessional activities, and events, as well as during Forum's sessions.

84. More specifically, participation of private sector major group in the work of the Forum has been enhanced. Representatives of private sector have been actively participating in the technical discussions of the Forum, and high-level panels and roundtables during UNFF sessions. The UNFFS also collaborated with representatives of major groups, including in organizing expert meetings and Major Group-Led Initiative, dedicating specific seats to them in various panels, and providing travel assistance for their participation in the Forum's sessions.

85. In an important development, Members of the Forum through paragraph 17 of UNFF12 resolution (E/2017/42) encouraged major groups and other relevant stakeholders to continue their involvement in the work of the Forum, including by elaborating proposals or workplans on how they can contribute to the implementation of the UNSPF and the Forum's quadrennial programme of work, and to present such proposals or plans to UNFF13.

86. In paragraph 26 of UNFF13 resolution, the Forum welcomed the joint workplan developed by major groups to accelerate achievement of the GFGs and the complementary workplan developed by the children and youth major group and invited them to inform UNFF14 on the progress made in implementing their workplans.

87. To ensure their continued active engagement, a specific agenda item on the contributions of major groups and other relevant stakeholders is included for each session of the Forum in the quadrennial programme of work for 2021-2024. Major groups and other relevant stakeholders are also engaged in the preparation for the IAF midterm review. They have also received the UNFFS questionnaire sent on 28 July and provided some responses.

#### **K. Paragraph 42 of the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and paragraph 66 of the UNSPF**

##### Relevant provisions from ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and UNSPF

88. In accordance with paragraph 42 of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and paragraph 66 of UNSPF, in the context of the midterm review of the IAF in 2024, the Forum could consider:

- (a) A full range of options, including a legally binding instrument on all types of forests, the strengthening of the current arrangement and the continuation of the current arrangement; and
- (b) A full range of financing options, inter alia, the establishment of a voluntary global forest fund, in order to mobilize resources from all sources in support of the sustainable management of all types of forests.

89. Paragraph 43 of the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 provides that should there be a consensus to do so, the establishment of a global forest fund could be further considered at a Forum's session prior to 2024. It should be noted that the programmes of work of the Forum for 2017-2020 and for 2021-2024 did not include consideration of this matter by the Forum.

##### Brief history of the discussions on a legally binding instrument on all types of forests, and a global forest fund

90. The discussions on a legally binding instrument/convention on forests, and a global forest fund date back to the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992. At this Conference, countries did not reach

consensus on these two issues and only agreed on the “Non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests”. They also agreed that the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to follow up and review implementation of forest-related provisions of Agenda 21, as part of its programme of work. In 1995, ECOSOC, based on the recommendation of the CSD established the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), and later, in 1997, established the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) under the auspices of the CSD, to pursue consensus and coordinated proposals for action to support the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests. IPF and IFF developed over 270 proposals for action on a wide range of issues related to forests but had no success in reaching consensus on a forest convention/legally binding instrument, and a global forest fund.

91. By the establishment of the UNFF in 2000, as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC with universal membership, the status of global policy debate on forests was significantly elevated. Several analytical papers prepared, and many meetings and events organized on issues related to a legally binding instrument on forests, and/or global forest fund. Despite intensive work of the Forum, the discussions of the Forum only led to the adoption of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests by the Forum, and subsequently by the UNGA in 2007. In 2016, the NLBI was renamed UN Forest Instrument by the UNGA.

92. In a parallel track, UNFF held intensive discussions and negotiations on the issue of funding SFM, which included considering, among other possibilities, the establishment of a global forest fund. Following lengthy and intensive negotiations, Members agreed on the establishment of the UNFF Facilitative Process during the Special Session of UNFF9 in 2009. The key task of the Facilitative Process was to enhance access of countries to resources of multilateral funds for forests, and to catalyze mobilization of funding from all sources for forests. A major global study on the state of financing for forests was carried out by the CPF in 2012. The findings of this study were fed into the discussions of the Forum on means of implementation for sustainable development.

93. In preparations for the review of the effectiveness of the IAF in 2015, a major and thorough assessment was carried on by a group of independent consultants on various issues related to the IAF, including issues related to a legally binding instrument and funding for SFM. This report was presented to UNFF11 in 2015, which agreed on the milestone resolution 2015/33 regarding the IAF beyond 2015. Through this resolution, the IAF was significantly strengthened, extended until 2030, its components were defined, and several key decisions were taken to enhance its effectiveness.

94. During UNFF11 in 2015, there was still no consensus on the issue of a legally binding instrument on forests, and a global forest fund. However, the Forum took several decisions to strengthen the development of a global framework of actions on forests, as well as funding for SFM. The most important decision of the Forum was its decision to develop a strategic plan for the period 2017-2030. In addition, the NLBI was renamed UN Forest Instrument and the timeline for its Global Objectives on Forests was extended from 2015 to 2030. To partially respond to the concerns about lack of resources for SFM, Members of the Forum also agreed to strengthen the UNFF Facilitative Process by expanding its functions and renaming it as the GFFFN. Members also agreed to postpone consideration of establishment of a global fund on forests to a later stage if there is a consensus to do so (paragraph 43 of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33). Through resolution 2015/33, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) was invited to consider establishing a focal area on SFM in its next replenishment cycle<sup>36</sup>.

95. There is no indication that the global political landscape regarding development of a legally binding instrument on forests and establishment of a global forest fund has changed since 2015, or there is now a better chance for having a consensus for consideration of these issues by the Forum in the context of the IAF midterm review in 2024. As a matter of fact, recent developments regarding the negotiation of regional legally binding instruments on forests do not make it clear if the international community is ready to consider a global one. The

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<sup>36</sup> No new focal area on sustainable forest management was established, however, in support of decision of the ECOSOC, the GEF continued to implement its comprehensive sustainable forest management program launched in mid-2014 and mobilized and allocated significant resources to SFM.

divergent responses to the questionnaire also indicate that the time may not yet be right to reach a consensus regarding consideration of a legally binding instrument on all types of forests and a global fund for forests.

96. In this respect, it might be wiser in the context of IAF midterm review to focus on identifying measures to strengthen the existing framework, structure, and resources, e.g., the implementation of the UNFI, the UNSPF and its GFGs, as well as enhancing the capacity, ability, and resources of the GFFFN, its operation and Clearing House to respond more effectively to the needs of countries in mobilizing and accessing to resources from all sources for forests. Given the impacts of the global pandemic of COVID-19, it is important more than ever before, to identify additional measures to enable Members of the Forum to benefit from resources of multilateral financial institutions and funds, like GEF and Green Climate Fund, and to mobilize funding for forests.

#### **IV. Proposed actions in preparation for the IAF midterm review**

97. Based on the information provided in this background document and the responses to the UNFFS questionnaire, experts may wish to consider the following actions to be carried out in preparations for the IAF midterm review:

##### **A. Actions related to UNFF and its Members:**

- i. Assessing the progress made by the Forum and its members towards the IAF objectives, as defined in ECOSOC resolution 2015/33.
- ii. Analyzing the performance of the Forum in carrying out its functions as defined in paragraph 3a to 3e of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, identifying the impacts of its work on global forest policy landscape and the work of the HLPF, and means to enable the Forum to broaden its impacts.
- iii. Exploring additional measures to improve the use of annual sessions of the Forum to foster achievement of the GFGs.
- iv. Identifying further means to encourage submission of more voluntary national reports and announcements of VNCs by Members of the Forum.
- v. To carry out the above-mentioned tasks, the UNFFS, in consultation with Members of the Forum and stakeholders, conduct an analytical study and submit it to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper.

##### **B. Actions related to the UNFFS:**

- i. Assessing the progress made by the UNFFS towards the IAF objectives, as defined in the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33.
- ii. Improving the efficiency and strengthening the capacity of the UNFFS, including human and financial resources, and amplifying the impact of the UNFFS activities.
- iii. Identifying additional measures to enhance collaboration and synergy on forest related issues at the global level.
- iv. To carry out the above-mentioned tasks, the UNFFS, in consultation with Members of the Forum and stakeholders, conduct an analytical study and submit it to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper.

##### **C. Actions related to CPF:**

- i. Assessing the progress made by the CPF in carrying out its functions towards the IAF objectives, as defined in the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33.



- ii. Effectiveness, impact, and added value of CPF's activities as outlined in its Work Plan, including its resources, output delivery, Joint Initiatives, and recurrent activities to foster the implementation of the UNSPF and the achievement of the GFGs, and the SDGs.
- iii. The criteria for CPF membership.
- iv. Assessing how the CPF could provide greater support to the policy development work of the Forum, and in assisting countries to strengthen implementation of the UNSPF and UNFF resolutions and decisions on the ground, including the means to further benefit from the potential of other international and regional stakeholders and partners.
- v. Assessment of efficacy of CPF communications and outreach.
- vi. To carry out the above-mentioned tasks, an independent study could be carried out, in consultation with the CPF and Forum members. The result of this study should be presented to an intersessional meeting to be organized by the CPF (CPF Organization-Led Initiative) for discussions, with the view to make proposals in relation to the CPF to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper, for consideration of UNFF19 in 2024.

#### **D. Actions related to the GFFFN**

- i. Assessing the progress made by the GFFFN towards the IAF objectives, as defined in ECOSOC resolution 2015/33,
- ii. Reviewing the performance of the GFFFN and the impacts of its activities, sufficiency of its resources, and the challenges and constraints in its work of the Network,
- iii. Proposing: i) measures to increase efficiency and added value of the GFFFN and strengthen its capacity to facilitate and enhance access of eligible countries to resources from all sources for forests, and ii) adjustment to the GFFFN guidelines.
- vi. To carry out the above-mentioned tasks, the UNFFS, in consultation with Members of the Forum and partners, should conduct an assessment of the performance, impacts, and resource sufficiency of the GFFFN and other measures to strengthen its work. This assessment should be presented to an intersessional meeting/country-led initiative for discussions. The outcome of this meeting should be submitted to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper.

#### **E. Actions related to the UNFF Trust Fund**

- i. Assessing the impact of voluntary contributions to the UNFF Trust Fund in supporting the core activities of the Forum.
- ii. Exploring options to encourage sustained and adequate contributions to the Trust Fund.
- iii. Identifying the key challenges and constraints in mobilizing adequate resources for the UNFF Trust Fund.
- iv. The UNFFS, in consultation with Members of the Forum, should undertake the above-mentioned tasks and present the findings and suggestion in a background note for submission to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper.

#### **F. Actions related to the implementation of the UNSPF**

- i. Gathering new information to be provided by Member States on their actions in implementing the UNSPF since UNFF15 (2020), in response to a concise UNFFS questionnaire and use this information, as well as information gathered in 2019-2020 and submitted by Member States to UNFF15, along with VNCs and the most recent global publications/reports on forests.

- ii. Inviting the UNFFS to collect the above-mentioned information in one background note for discussion during an intersessional expert group meeting prior to UNFF19 and submit its key outcome to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper.

**G. Actions related to the contributions of the Forum to 2030 Agenda**

- i. Assessing the contribution of UNFF to the HLPF on the interlinkages of forests and SDGs since the adoption of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33.
- ii. Identifying additional opportunities for enhanced and direct contribution by UNFF, UNFFS and the CPF on issues related to forests to the HLPF sessions, in particular, when it reviews forest-related SDGs.
- iii. Proposing measures to attract greater visibility for forests at the HLPF sessions to raise the political relevance of forests to broader sustainable development agenda, including through the impact of other sectors on global forests, and the wide range of benefits of SFM for the SDGs.
- iv. To perform the above-mentioned tasks, the UNFFS, in consultation with Members of the Forum and UNFF partners, should conduct an analytical study and present its findings to an intersessional meeting for discussions and submit the outcome of this meeting to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper.

**H. Actions related to the Communication and Outreach Strategy of the UNSPF**

- i. Assessing progress in implementation of the COS by Members, UNFFS, CPF, regional organizations and relevant stakeholders, and identifying means to address the challenges in furthering its implementation,
- ii. Monitoring the impact of communication and outreach activities carried out to promote the UNFFS and the GFGs, including the IDFs and the usefulness of its themes to raise awareness on its multiple benefits,
- iii. Identifying additional communication platforms and channels that have come into prominence in recent years to better reach target audiences with greater impacts,
- iv. Exploring ways to use the potential of all players and partners at the global, regional, and national levels to strengthen advocacy on the implementation of the UNSPF,
- v. To perform the above-mentioned tasks, the UNFFS, in consultation with Members of the Forum and UNFF partners, should conduct an analytical study and present its findings to submit it to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper.

**I. Actions related to the regional and subregional involvement**

- i. Assessing the involvement of regional & subregional entities in the Forum's sessions since UNFF 12.
- ii. Identifying options for further involvement of regional and subregional partners in the work of the Forum and its future quadrennial programmes of work.
- iii. Reviewing developments regarding the establishment or strengthening of "regional and subregional processes or platforms for forest policy development, dialogue and coordination to promote sustainable forest management, while seeking to avoid fragmentation", as per paragraph 28 of the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33.
- iv. To perform the above-mentioned tasks, the UNFFS, in consultation with regional and subregional partners should conduct the assessments and present it to an intersessional meeting for discussions and submit the outcome of the meeting to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper.

**J. Actions related to the involvement of major groups and other relevant stakeholders**

- i. Assessing major groups' engagement in the Forum's work including major groups' contributions to the achievement of the GFGs and targets at all levels and their interactions with the Forum and the CPF,

including through networks, advisory groups and other mechanisms, to raise awareness, foster information exchange and dissemination and facilitate coordinated inputs.

- ii. Assessing major groups' efforts to autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms at all levels for interaction and participation in the Forum and other forest-related UN bodies.
- iii. Assessing the ability of stakeholder groups to deliver effective representation through appropriate and representative membership and focal points, and effective consultation processes within their constituencies.
- iv. Identifying potential financial resources that could facilitate the development and implementation of Major Group-led Initiative meetings every four years.
- v. To perform the above-mentioned tasks, the UNFFS, in consultation with major groups and other relevant stakeholders should conduct the assessments and present it to an intersessional meeting for discussions and submit the outcome of the meeting to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 98 of this background paper.

**K. Actions related to paragraph 42a and 42 b of the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33**

- i. In light of the explanations provided in Section III. K of this background paper defer consideration of paragraph 42a and 42b of ECOSOC resolution to the final review of the effectiveness of the IAF in 2030.

98. To make sure that Members of the Forum have a comprehensive view of the outcome of various preparatory intersessional works related to the IAF midterm review in advance of UNFF19, it is recommended that the results of all studies, analytical documents, assessments, and intersessional meetings mentioned in paragraph 97 A through 97 K be presented to an open-ended ad hoc intergovernmental ad hoc expert group expert group (AHEG), to be convened by the UNFFS towards the end of 2023. The AHEG will be open to all Members of the Forum, CPF member organizations, regional partners and UNFF major groups representatives. The AHEG will be organized within existing resources, including the extrabudgetary contributions. Considering all the analytical works carried out in preparation for the IAF midterm review, the AHEG will make proposals to UNFF19 on the actions regarding the midterm review of the effectiveness of the IAF, including the future steps beyond 2024.

99. To facilitate the discussions during UNFF19 on the IAF midterm review, the Bureau of UNFF19, taking into account the analytical works and the outcome of AHEG, will conduct informal consultations with Members of the Forum, and prepare and submit the zero-draft resolution on the IAF beyond 2024 to UNFF19.