

Second Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on Forests and Forest Sector in the African Region

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The sixteenth session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF16) in April 2021 requested the Forum secretariat, in collaboration with members of the Forum, CPF member organizations and stakeholders, to conduct an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector, and to present it to the Forum at its seventeenth session in May 2022. To conduct this second assessment, the UNFF Secretariat commissioned a series of assessments in different regions and subregions.

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Challenges, strategies, recovery measures and best practice for reducing impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector

Africa Region Report

FINAL REPORT

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All opinions expressed, and any mistakes, remain the responsibility of the author.

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List of Acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
COMIFAC	Commission des Forêts d’Afrique Centrale
COVID-19	Corona Virus Diseases
CPF	Collaborative Partnership on Forests
DFS	Digital Financial Services
EAC	East African Community
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Product
OxCGRT	Oxford Coronavirus Government Response Tracker
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
REC	Regional Economic Communities
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprise
SPRP	COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness Response Plan
SSA	Sub Saharan Africa
TFCA	Trans Frontier Conservation Area
ToR	Terms of Reference
UAV	Unmanned Area Vehicles
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests

UNFFS	United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat
WHO	World Health Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WB	World Bank
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace

Executive Summary

Background

COVID-19 has demonstrated the cost of imbalances between people and nature. The impacts on human health and the global economy have been severe, creating a public health crisis and economic conditions that are shattering many businesses, particularly those in the informal sector who are dependent on daily incomes for their livelihoods. Millions of people have been put out of work, global supply chains disrupted and fiscal capacity and safety nets severely strained.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to create uncertainties on the economic recovery in the Africa region. Measures put in place by countries, regional organizations and multilateral bodies as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19 presents both challenges and opportunities for the forests and forest sector.

It is in the light of this that United Nations Forum on Forests at its sixteenth session (UNFF16) held in April 2021 requested the UNFF Secretariat collaborate with CPF members, inputs from members of the Forum, to conduct an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact on forests and to present the report to the forum at its seventeenth session (UNFF17). This builds on the earlier study on the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector undertaken in 2020.

Objective of report

This report is a synthesis of five-subregional reports, namely, Central Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa. The report identifies and elaborates on:

- a. An assessment of challenges faced by countries in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector.
- b. The strategies and recovery measures being adopted by countries in combatting the impacts of COVID -19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector.
- c. Best practises adopted by countries and other stakeholders for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector.

Key findings

Key Findings 1: Forests and COVID-19 Responses

Governments with the support of the private sector and civil society organizations have collaborated in their effort to mitigate challenges of COVID-19 and the resulting economic and social crises. Government responses have mainly been the travel restrictions and stimulus packages to mitigate the social cost of the lock downs/restrictions. Governments have also taken advantage of various stimulus packages offered by development partners and multilateral agencies.

Private sector technology and social media companies introduced various products to support the public sector interventions, including in forestry. Technology has been leveraged

to provide platforms for continuous cooperation, education, training, and communication. There are reports of wood-based companies shifted from their usual products into producing medical equipment, respirators and face masks for health care workers and sale to the public.

Civil society organizations were initially adversely affected by the restrictions on movements; however, some civil society organizations such as SODEIT Global Support Centre united 800 professionals and UN online volunteers from across the world to safeguard vulnerable communities in Cameroon during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Findings 2: Challenges faced by forest sector in addressing impacts of COVID-19

In 2020 there were some common challenges faced by the forest sector in the five sub-regions. These were travel restrictions, job losses, business closures, working from home and lower cash inflows. West Africa had shipping and logistics difficulties while weak forest governance and low market demand were common to East Africa and Southern Africa.

However, in 2021 the forest sector in the five sub-regions is facing financial challenges (i.e., budget reductions, fall in revenue, difficulties mobilising finance, etc). For example, in an online survey 72% of respondents in the forest sector in East Africa ranked financial challenges as their main challenge in addressing the negative impacts COVID-19. In West Africa financial challenge was also ranked first by 26% of respondents while in North Africa 38% of respondents ranked financial challenges first.

Many countries in the region have put in place social protection programmes to address increasing poverty and vulnerability. However, these mostly cover urban populations, and do not always extend to rural and forest dependent populations. Socially, the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted the forest and tree-based livelihood options for the forest dependent people. Covid 19 pandemic posed a major threat to local communities as well as critically and vulnerable indigenous people like the Batwa in Uganda.

Forest-based ecotourism was highly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in almost all the sub-regions in Africa, but particularly in East Africa and Southern Africa. The travel restrictions, curfews, and restrictions in gathering, social distancing measures etc. had an effect on visitor numbers to the forest nature-based tourist sites. It has caused closure of the ecotourism activities and hence resulting in loss of income jobs in the forest sector. This also impacted on hotels, and other hospitality businesses. The spill-over effect of loss in the local economy was experienced by adjacent communities living closer to the forests with high ecotourism potentials (Shoo et al., 2021).

Key Findings 3: Strategies and recovery measures for addressing challenges of COVID-19 impacts

Multilateral institutions have put in place stimulus packages that can be accessed by all African countries and covers loans, emergency response and debt relief.

Governments in the region have responded with different strategies to limit the spread of COVID-19 and implement measures to promote economic stability. Some countries in the sub-region such as Morocco have put in place longer term response strategies for recovery.

Although it has elements of UNFF16 suggestions reflected, these suggestions did not necessarily feed into Morocco's development of its forest strategy (Morocco Forest Strategy 2020-2030) that seeks to strengthen competitiveness and sustainability of the forest sector.

In Southern Africa the main strategy which accounted for 44% of the respondents employed in most countries in the sub-region to address economic impact challenges of COVID-19 was in accessing funding grants from bilateral donors. This was more visible in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Most of such funding was mainly for conservation and ecotourism related activities. Additionally, a key strategy instituted by the South African government and the private sector to address the impact and social challenges of COVID-19, was paid leave. Paid leave was the most common (41% of respondents) intervention in Southern Africa (Chirwa, unpublished).

In the East African Community (EAC) study 54% of respondents indicated forest sector plans are included in national development plans.

Morocco stands out as a country that has taken advantage of the COVID-19 crisis to launch an ambitious program of transformative reforms (Morocco Economic Report – WB – Spring 2021). These include: (i) the creation of a Strategic Investment Fund (the Mohammed VI Fund) to support the private sector; (ii) the overhaul of the social protection framework to boost human capital; (iii) the restructuring of the vast network of Moroccan public companies, including the Department in charge of forests

Best Practices

The early subregional collaboration and meetings between the health ministers (West Africa and East Africa) and support given by multilateral institutions is seen by many as a good initiative in adopting a multi-lateral approach in responding to the impact of COVID-19 and provides opportunities for sharing lessons learned.

West Africa drawing on lessons learned from the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak to continue building resilience and responsiveness in their health systems. There were benefits in using the sub-regional approach in addressing the challenges to COVID-19.

Use of e-platforms for digital financial services, training and education and creating awareness on COVID-19 as well as the processing of documentation for logging and the issue of export licenses

Conclusions and recommendations

As countries begin to emerge from the most acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, policy makers and citizens need tools to monitor efforts to revive economic activity, fulfil the shared commitment to build back better. Even more critical is the need to seize the opportunities presented by COVID-19 to drive development along a green pathway.

The following recommendations are made for consideration by the Forum:

- Promote and encourage strategies that boost legal and sustainable products and nature-based solutions to counter any short and longer-term shocks to livelihoods, particularly for more vulnerable people in rural societies who depend on income from land use
- Forest dependent communities should be supported through social protection, livelihood options as well as capital investments such as seeds and income generating activities.
- The most vulnerable and marginalized groups such as forest communities and indigenous people have specific challenges and needs, and these must be addressed in recovery plans and policies.
- Technological solutions are emerging as opportunities for the forest sector in terms of training, communication, and use of unmanned area vehicles (UAV) for forest monitoring.
- Need to build capacity to migrate to the digital age in monitoring and evaluation of forest resources and promoting investments in this area.
- Create a mechanism/platform for disseminating information. In this regard, the Forum may wish to consider conducting case studies on the extent to which countries take forward for implementation suggestions/recommendations made by the Forum

1.Introduction

1.1. Background

Since the declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic on 11th March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on human life and brought major disruption to economic activity across the world. COVID-19 virus spread rapidly across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and more recently there are reports of the case on the Omicron variant on the Africa continent and first reported by South Africa. The new variant ([SARS-CoV-2](#), B.1.1.529), was reported to the WHO on November 24, 2021. This new variant was first detected in specimens collected on November 11, 2021, in Botswana and on November 14, 2021, in South Africa (WHO).

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to create uncertainties on the economic recovery in the Africa region. The pandemic has created a public health crisis and economic conditions that are shattering significant number of businesses, particularly in the informal sector and the small, medium, sized forest enterprises (SMFE). Millions of people have been put out of work, global supply chains disrupted and severely strained fiscal capacity and safety nets. This has led to loss of livelihoods and well-being of people especially for rural/forest dependent communities, indigenous people, and small farm holders.

At the sixteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF16) held virtually in April 2021 and after discussions by the Forum on the first assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector in 2020¹, the UNFF Secretariat (UNFFS) was requested, by the Forum, collaborate with CPF members, inputs from members of the Forum, to conduct an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact on forests and to present the report to the forum at its next session.

To facilitate this process the UNFFS commissioned a series of subregional and regional studies. For the Africa region, five sub-regional studies were undertaken². This report is a synthesis of the five sub-regional reports.

1.2. Objectives of this report

The main objective of this study is to integrate five sub-regional reports on an assessment of challenges, strategies, recovery measures and best practices identified in the sub-regional reports. It looks at the extent to which the following elements have been identified in the reports for the different sub-regions of Africa:

¹ E/2020/42-E/CN.18/2020/9

² The five sub-regions in Africa are Central Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Southern Africa and West Africa.

- a. An assessment of challenges faced by countries in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector.
- b. The strategies and recovery measures being adopted by countries in combatting the impacts of COVID -19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector.
- c. Best practises adopted by countries and other stakeholders for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector.

1.3. Approach

This report on approach to the challenges faced by countries, strategies, recovery measures and best practices adopted by countries in the five sub-regions is based on a synthesise of the five sub-regional reports. This is supplemented with the review of published studies, reports, news items, webinars, blogs, policy briefs, grey literature, and popular literature.

An inception virtual meeting by the sub-regional consultants for Africa allowed the consultants to agree on the outline of the report to facilitate the synthesisation of the different sub-regional reports into an Africa Regional Report.

1.4. Structure of the report

The rest of this report is structured in 4 sections as follows:

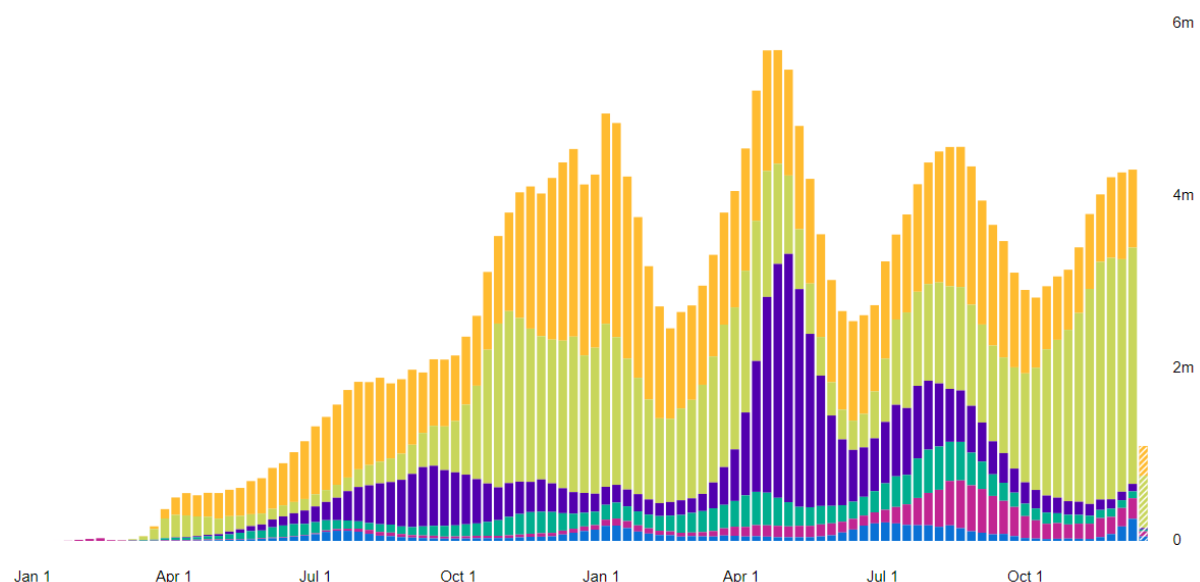
- **Section 2** provides an update of COVID-19 in Africa
- **Section 3** presents an overview of the forest sector in Africa, and the COVID-19 context in the region.
- **Section 4** presents the findings on the challenges faced by countries in addressing the impacts of COVID-19, the strategies, recovery measures of COVID-19
- **Section 5** highlights best practice on strategies/measures adopted by countries in the sub-region for reducing the impact COVID-19 on forests and forest sector
- **Section 6** provides the conclusions and recommendations for consideration by the Forum.

2. Status and trends of COVID-19 in Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have enormous disruptions to human lifestyles, livelihoods supply chains and economic systems around the world. It has resulted in massive public health crisis, short-term economic recession and forced many companies to close their operations or at best to work at reduced capacity. This has put millions of people out of work and strained fiscal capacity and safety nets (Hammoudi, 2021). Many countries lifted the restrictions on movement after the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines, and business environments improved marginally. The pandemic, as at the time of finalising this report had come through its 3rd phase bringing along new hardships.

Global trends in COVID 19 as of 20th December 2021 is shown in Figure 1. Global confirmed cases stand at 274,628,461.

Figure 1: Global trends of COVID19 cases by region

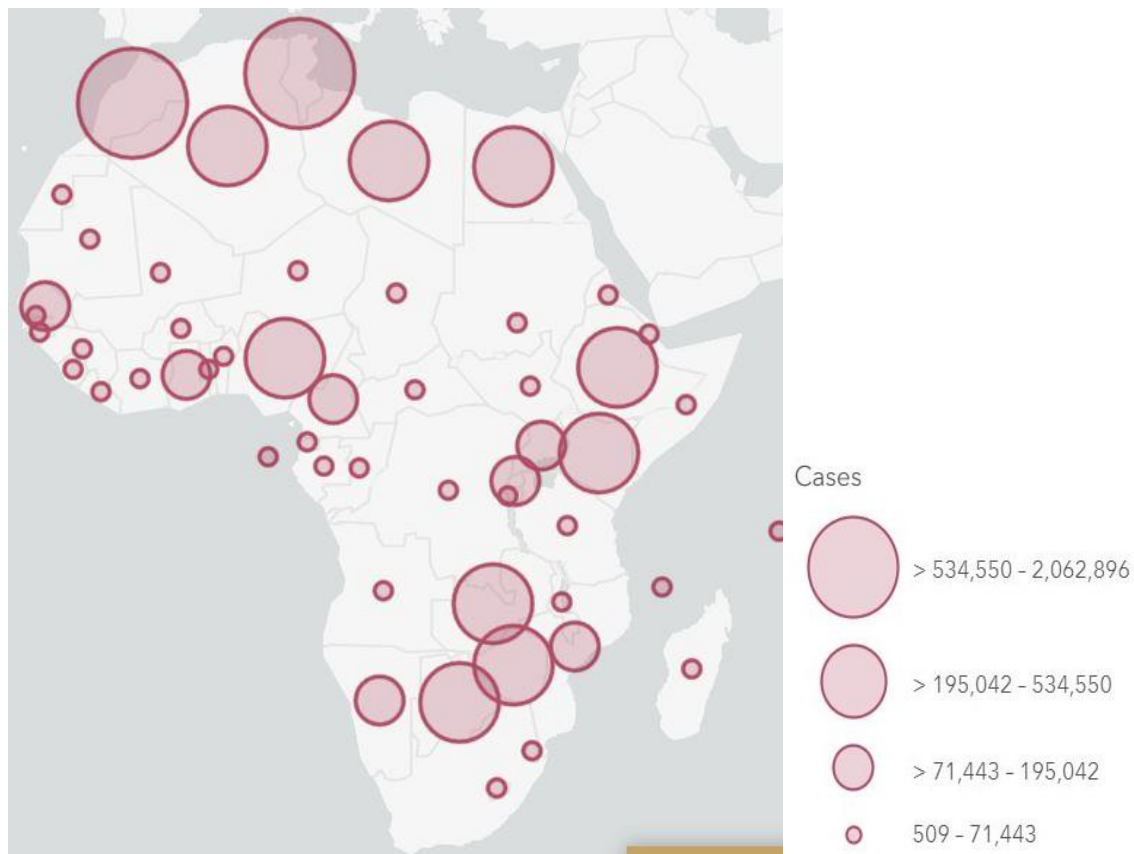


Source: World Health Organization, 2021

Key: ■ Americas ■ Europe ■ South-East Asia
■ Eastern Mediterranean ■ Western Pacific ■ Africa

As of 20th December 2021, confirmed cases in Africa stand at 6,830,309. It is important to mention here that figures for less developed economies are likely to be severely under-reported as COVID 19 was less likely to be broadly identified, and public health reporting is less sophisticated. A map of countries and their confirmed cases are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Africa



Source: Africa CDC, 2021

Countries in the region with the highest rate of daily infection (7-day average) are shown in Table 1.

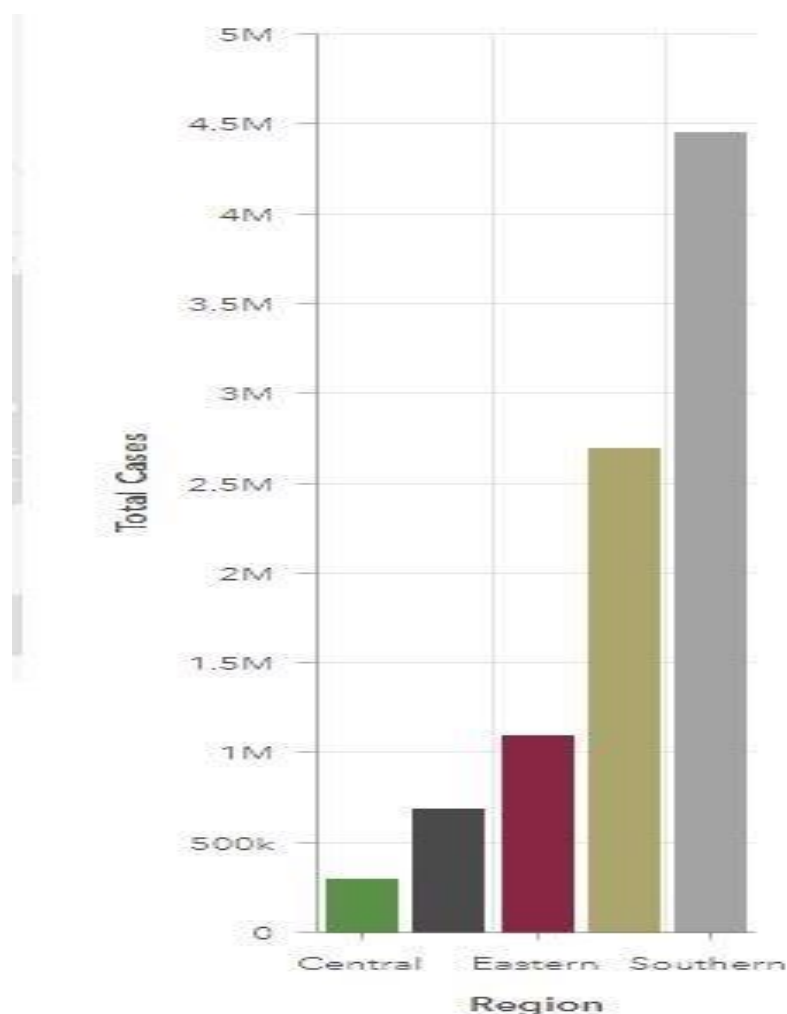
Table 1: Highest daily infections of COVID-19

Country	Number of reported daily infections (7-day average)
South Africa	19,299
Zimbabwe	3,295
Botswana	1,230
Kenya	1,178
Nigeria	1,111

Source: Reuters, 2021

Almost all of Africa is experiencing the third wave of the pandemic. The infections by sub-region in Africa is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: COVID-19 infections by sub-region



Legend: Central Africa (Green), West Africa (Dark Grey), East Africa (Red), North Africa (Olive), Southern Africa (Light Grey)

Source: Africa CDC, 2021

Northern and Southern Africa have the highest incidences of COVID-19 cases. The emergence of the new Omicron variant in Southern Africa, there is a growing concern that the end to the impact of COVID-19 is not near soon. However, there are reassurances from the African CDC that there are tools to fight against COVID-19 and all the different variants. The key is to "encourage the public to get vaccinated against the virus because it is the only way to protect yourself."³

With respect to the administration of COVID-19 Vaccines, Africa has the lowest total vaccine doses administered per 100 population. Africa has 14.27 doses administered per 100 population compared to Europe, South-East Asia and the Americas that have 139.2, 89.82 and 137.3 per 100 population respectively. With respect to persons fully vaccinated per 100

³ Dr John Nkengasong, the Director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Africa CDC, in an address to the media.

population, the global figure stands at 44.86 per 100 population while that of Africa stands at 6.12 persons per 100 population. South-East Asia has 35.01 persons fully vaccinated per 100 population with Europe at 54.7 persons/100 population.

Vaccine acceptance is higher than originally thought on the African continent. A recent study shows a 78%, vaccine acceptance was higher than survey fielded earlier this year⁴ (67%). This could imply the success of risk communication campaigns undertaken. In five surveyed countries—Guinea, Morocco, Mozambique, Tunisia and Zimbabwe—acceptance was 90% or higher. Vaccine acceptance was high among both those who trusted their government's pandemic response and those who felt COVID-19 posed a personal risk to them or to their country.

The pandemic generally impacted on countries in two ways:

- Direct impact due the infection and its rapid spread and deaths.
- Indirectly, arising from the measures put in place to minimize the spread of the disease.

The direct impact of COVID-19 was in the loss of labor because persons were either sick or died as a result of the infections. Either way there was the loss of man hours and income both to the firms (lost man hours at work) and families whose livelihoods were dependent on having a decent job.

The indirect impact was mainly due to the interventions that were introduced by governments in the various countries in the region. These measures were similar among the countries and regions and included social distancing measures, lock downs, closure of markets, schools, offices/factories, wearing of masks, hand washing/sanitizing of hands, use of personal protective clothing (PPEs), and the disruption of supply chains, etc. Some sectors of the economies in the countries were considered essential. In the region except for South Africa and Gabon (Mbolo 2020 and Chirwa 2021), the forest sector was not considered an essential service and were therefore impacted by COVID 19.

⁴<https://africacdc.org/download/responding-to-covid-19-in-africa-finding-the-balance-part-iv-and-calls-to-action/>

3. Covid-19 and the forest sector in Africa

3.1. Overview of forest sector in the Africa region

Forests cover about one third of the global land area and are home to most of the earth's terrestrial biodiversity. Over one billion people depend to some extent on food from forests, and 2.4 billion rely on wood fuel to meet their basic energy needs⁵. Forests provide many services that are often undervalued and their contributions to national GDPs not recognised. This limits the role forests can play in a green post COVID-19 recovery.

Africa has the largest annual rate of net forest loss in 2010–2020, at 3.9 million ha, followed by South America, at 2.6 million ha (FAO 2020). The rate of net forest loss has increased in Africa in each of the three decades since 1990. The annual rate of net forest loss over 3 decades is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Annual rate of net forest loss in the 3 decades 1990 – 2000, 2000-2010 & 2010-2020

Region/subregion	Forest area annual change					
	1990–2000		2000–2010		2010–2020	
	1 000 ha/yr	%	1 000 ha/yr	%	1 000 ha/yr	%
Eastern and Southern Africa	-1 345	-0.40	-1 773	-0.55	-1 907	-0.62
Northern Africa	-182	-0.47	-127	-0.34	-168	-0.47
Western and Central Africa	-1 748	-0.50	-1 503	-0.45	-1 862	-0.59
Total Africa	-3 275	-0.45	-3 403	-0.49	-3 938	-0.60
East Asia	1 917	0.88	2 332	0.97	1 901	0.73
South and Southeast Asia	-1 843	-0.58	-262	-0.09	-941	-0.31
Western and Central Asia	129	0.26	285	0.55	213	0.39
Total Asia	202	0.03	2 355	0.39	1 173	0.19
Europe excl. Russian Federation	763	0.40	585	0.30	330	0.16
Total Europe	795	0.08	1 171	0.12	348	0.03
Caribbean	85	1.34	69	0.97	39	0.51
Central America	-218	-0.81	-211	-0.85	-130	-0.56
North America	-160	-0.02	327	0.05	-57	-0.01
Total North and Central America	-293	-0.04	184	0.02	-148	-0.02
Total Oceania	-165	-0.09	-231	-0.13	423	0.23
Total South America	-5 102	-0.54	-5 249	-0.58	-2 597	-0.30
WORLD	-7 838	-0.19	-5 173	-0.13	-4 739	-0.12

Source: FAO, 2020

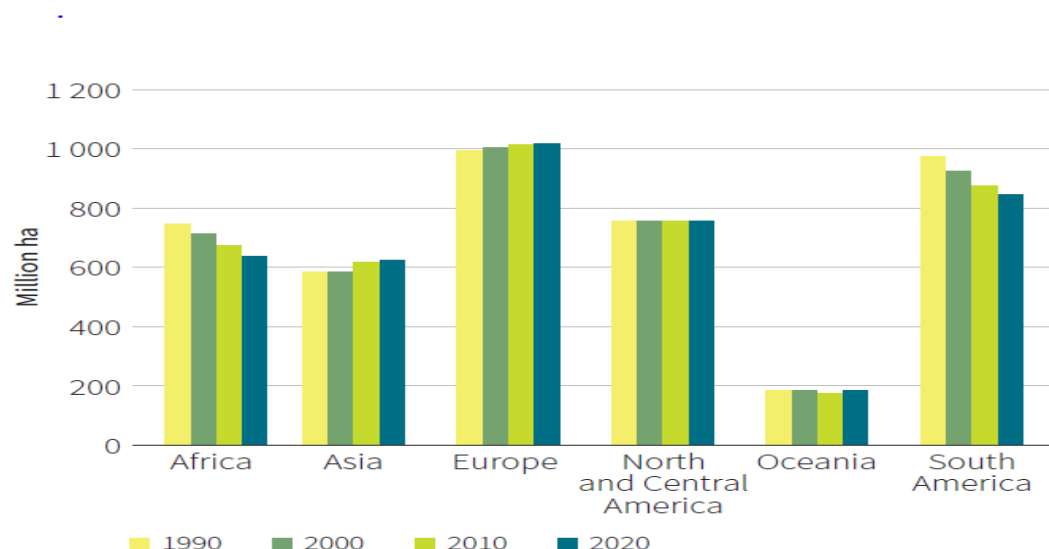
Trends in forest cover by region for the period 1990–2020 can be seen in Figure 4, which shows total forest area by decade and region. Africa and South America had the highest net loss of forest area in the most recent decade (2010–2020). Global forest area declined by about 178 million hectares in the period 1990 to 2020⁶. Annual net loss of forest has shown a decline from 5.17 million hectares in the period 1990–2000 to 4.74 million hectares in the period 2010–2020. Trends in forest cover by region for the period 1990–2020 can be seen in Figure 4, which

⁵ [UN/DESA Policy Brief #80: Forests at the heart of a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic | Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#)

⁶ [Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 \(fao.org\)](#)

shows total forest area by decade and region. Africa and South America had the highest net loss of forest area in the most recent decade (2010-2020).

Figure 4: Total Forest area by region and decade



Source: FAO 2020

An estimated 65% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa is rural and depends directly or indirectly on forests and woodlands for food, fuelwood, building materials, medicines, oils, gums, resins and fodder. So, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the dependence could be higher and provide many challenges that could limit the capacity of forests to provide meaningful and sustainable ecosystem services that could contribute to socio-economic development of the continent.

3.2. Forests and COVID-19 impacts

The impacts of COVID-19 on the forest sector are as follows:

- The restrictions on movement and social distancing that are still in place from 2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19 have had negative outcomes for sustainable forest management and forest protection efforts in all the sub-regions of Africa. The measures have resulted in the postponement, and in some cases outright cancellation, of forest management activities that could have short term rather than long term effects.
- The pandemic has resulted in funding challenges for the forest sector as more resources are diverted from forestry and other sectors to manage the health crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, National Forest institutions/administrations are likely to struggle maintaining their staff and undertaking forest protection activities. This will worsen the ability of forest sector institutions to function effectively.
- Ecotourism, especially in East and Southern Africa continues to be impacted by the domestic and international travel restrictions. With the emergence of the OMICRON variant visitor numbers will continue to be low and impact adversely on communities dependent on forest-based tourism for jobs and livelihoods.

- Supply chains continue to be adversely affected impacting on exports of timber and imports of forest products, spares and machinery due to COVID-19 measures.

3.3. Forests and COVID-19 responses

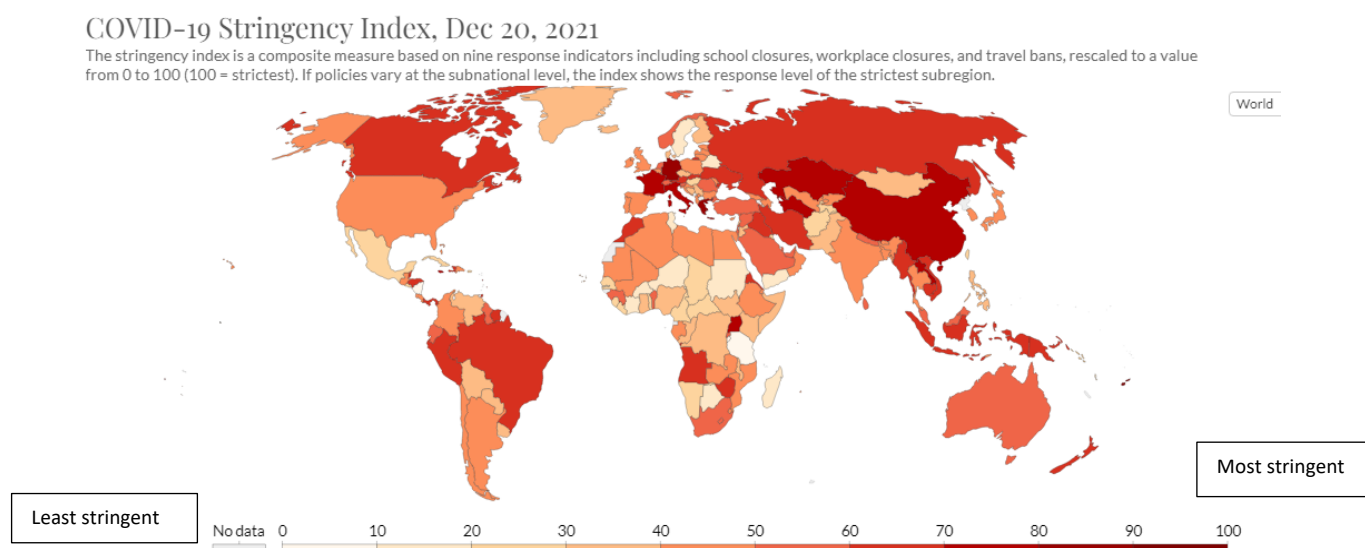
Governments with the support of the private sector and civil society organizations have collaborated in their effort to mitigate challenges of COVID-19 and the resulting economic and social crises. Governments and stakeholders have reacted either collectively or as independent groups in addressing the challenges, particularly to vulnerable groups and sectors that require support packages or stimulus measures to minimise the impact of the pandemic.

It is however worth noting that the support of Governments, private sector and civil society organisations were generally not targeted to the forest sector *per se*. The interventions have the potential to impact the wider measures which in turn could impact on forests, forest-dependent people, forest communities and forest-based industries.

- **Response by governments**

Responses by governments have included lock down measures such as workplace closures, school closures, cancellation of public events, restrictions on public gatherings/social distancing measures, closures of public transport; stay-at-home requirements; public information and awareness campaigns; restrictions on internal movements; and international travel controls. The Oxford Coronavirus Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) project uses these metrics to calculate a COVID-19 Stringency Index. The Government Stringency Index as of 20th December 2021 for African countries is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: COVID-19 Stringency Index



Source: University of Oxford, 2021

- **Response by private sector**

Technology and social media companies introduced various products to support the public sector interventions, including in forestry. Technology has been leveraged to provide

platforms for continuous cooperation, education, training, and communication. There are reports of wood-based companies shifted from their usual products into producing medical equipment, respirators and face masks for health care workers and sale to the public.

The private sector was very much involved in contributions for the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and awareness creation activities in the countries in the region. For instance, in Ghana (West Africa) the private sector recognised the challenge to government and stepped in to make contributions for the purchase of PPEs and fund a 100-bed infectious diseases centre that was built using mainly Ghanaian experts within a period of 12 weeks (Adam, 2020)

- **Response by civil society organizations**

Civil society organization were particularly affected by restricted working through lockdowns as many of them are directly related to field work and exchange with local communities and indigenous peoples. SODEIT Global Support Centre united 800 professionals and UN online volunteers from across the world to safeguard vulnerable communities in Cameroon during the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization is also fundraising money to supply PPEs and face masks for communities and providing credible COVID-19 information to keep them safe. The Black Coffee Network provided information assistance for people of Kenya by translating the announcements of the Ministry of Health into local languages. The sanitizers donated by the government were spread to vulnerable groups by volunteers.

With reports on the increase of gender-based and domestic violence in the region, for example in Nigeria due to the Covid-19 lockdown, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Nigeria has worked to support victims and families particularly vulnerable in these difficult times. Their work has been in raising awareness on domestic violence during the lockdown. A sensitization radio program has been run by the WILPF to address these issues. For more urgent support, a helpline has been created to help and support victims.

Governments, private sector, and civil society and scientific organizations need to closely communicate and be equal partners in developing policies and interventions to optimize the effects of interventions and minimize the impact of COVID-19 on the forest sector.

4. Key Findings

4.1. Challenges faced by the forest sector in Africa in addressing impacts COVID-19

This section presents the challenges faced by countries in addressing the impact of COVID 19 on forests and the forest sector. In recapping from the first impact study in 2020 commissioned by the UNFFS⁷, key challenges identified in the five sub-regions of Africa are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Key challenges faced by the forest sector in the first assessment in Africa

Sub-region	Key challenges faced by forest sector companies in 2020
Central Africa	Job loses; business closures (25%) ⁸ ; low market demand; reduction in cash flows
East Africa	Mobilising domestic resources; weak forest governance; weak institutional capacities; low funding to forestry; weak regulation
North Africa	Job loses; business closure; decline in worker productivity; lack of cashflow
Southern Africa	Decline in markets for forest products; working from home; low use of technology; lower cash inflows;
West Africa	Higher production cost; Job losses; lower cash inflows; limited stakeholder engagements; Shipping and logistics difficulties

Source: Economic Commission for Africa, 2020

The challenges faced by forests and the forest sector also offered opportunities for the sector to be positioned to play a key role in effecting a transformative change for a green post COVID-19 recovery. These challenges alongside others emerging from the literature reviewed, survey of responses and key informant interviews are addressed in this section using the three pillars of sustainability (Economic, Social and Environmental) while finance, Institutions/human resource development are considered as cross-cutting issues.

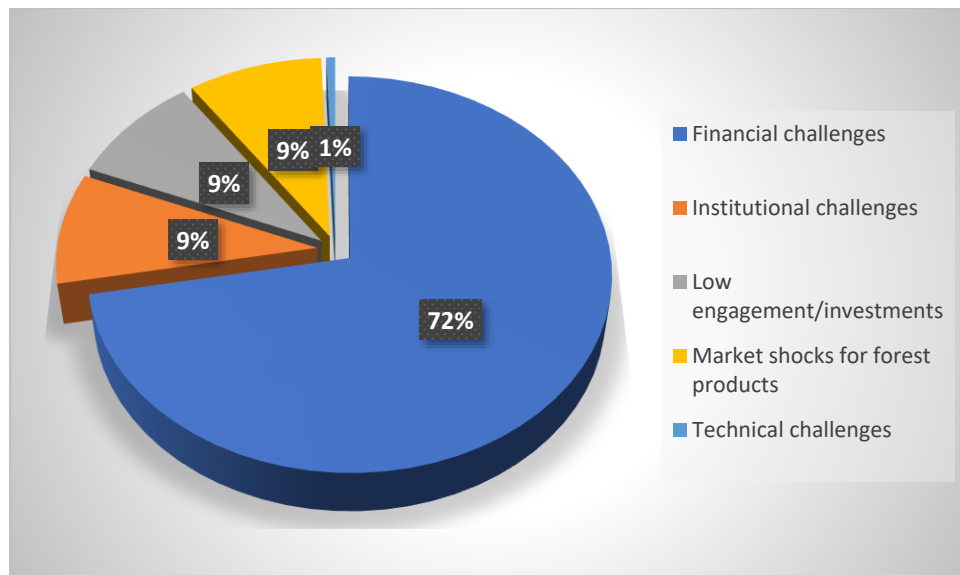
The East Africa Community (EAC) report shows that all sectors of the economy were impacted by the COVID-19 with the forest sector suffering mainly from financial challenges, that included budget cuts, fall in revenues, difficulties in mobilizing foreign finance etc. In an online survey of challenges faced by the forest sector, almost 72% of respondents in East Africa (Figure 6) indicated that financial challenges i.e., budget reductions, fall in revenues, difficulties in mobilizing funding were a major challenge. In West Africa responses were more evenly spread (Figure 7) with financial challenges

⁷ [Covid-19-SFM-impact-Africa.pdf \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2020/02/20200214.unffs.pdf)

⁸ Business closures in Central Africa mainly firms with Chinese capital (Mobolo, 2020: COMIFAC Report)

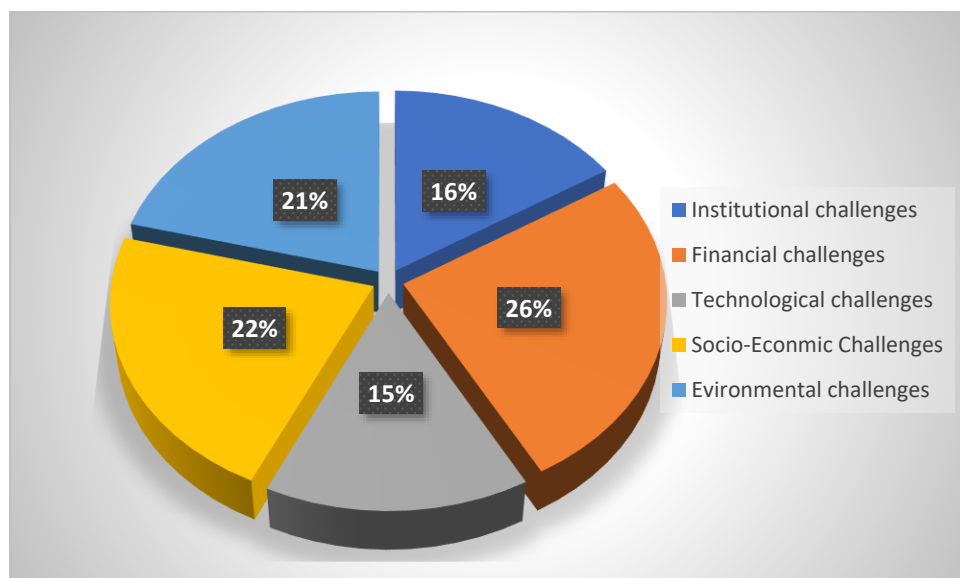
as the lead challenge at 26%, with socio-economic challenges at 22% and environmental challenges at 21%.

Figure 6: Challenges faced by forest sector due to impact of COVID in East Africa



Source : Malugu 2021

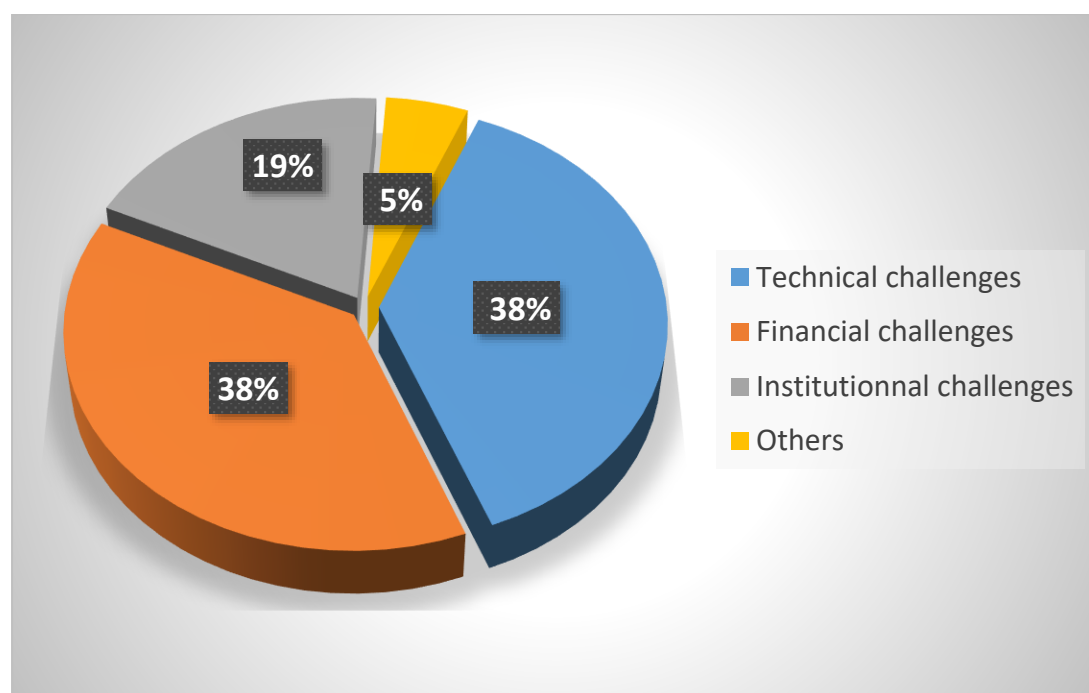
Figure 7: Challenges faced by the Forest sector in West Africa



Source: Attah, 2021

For North Africa finance and reductions in budgetary allocations came up first with technological challenges at 38% (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Challenges faced by the Forest sector in North Africa



Source: Hammoudi, 2021

It would therefore appear that finance and technological challenges are key challenges in the Africa region.

4.1.1. Social challenges

There is evidence that the pandemic has pushed many of the African population into poverty. The World Bank report (WB, 2021) estimates that about 40 million people on the continent, in particular women, youth and low skilled labour remain the most vulnerable groups.

In the Central African region and as exemplified in the Democratic Republic of Congo, addressing the impact of COVID-19 has had adverse effects on livelihoods, particularly those in the charcoal industry. More than 1.8million people rely on charcoal to meet their energy needs and thereby putting forests at risk (Silva, 2021). A key response strategy to the COVID-19 pandemic was the restriction on movements, which has affected transportation of the charcoal. Similarly, the evolving regulations/requirements under the COVID-19 protocols in the country has affected every level of the charcoal value chain. For households, entirely dependent on charcoal trade, the response measures by governments have pushed households to greater impoverishment of the communities.

Figure 9: Charcoal awaiting shipment from rural to urban areas in DRC



Source: CIFOR/Axel Fassio, 2021

In Southern Africa, the single most important social challenge (44% of respondents) is the inability to conduct field work due to travel restrictions (Chirwa, unpublished). The travel restrictions have resulted in job losses arising out of retrenchments in both the formal and informal sectors. These restrictions and stay at home measures/interventions prevented many employees from conducting their daily work activities and therefore adversely affecting their ability to earn decent incomes in the period.

Many countries in the region have put in place social protection programmes to address increasing poverty and vulnerability. However, these mostly cover urban populations, and do not always extend to rural and forest dependent populations. In North Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the need for countries in the region to have adaptive, inclusive and sustainable social protection systems, to avoid the continued erosion of the social contract with the state and, with all its repercussions on peace and socio-political stability. A challenge for many countries in the Northern Africa sub-region would be how they revive their economies and find solutions to rebuild the social contract and ensure equitable, transparent and sustainable social protection systems for all (Hammoudi, unpublished).

The time and duration of the social challenges were untimely in most of the East African Member States. Disaster preparedness and resource allocations in many of these countries were challenged because many of the national budgets were not in place at the beginning of the pandemic (Malugu, 2021) and may have impacted on the ability for governments to put in place effective social intervention measures.

Within the EAC region, forest operations especially in forest plantations that required a high number of casual labourers for silvicultural activities (tree nursery operations, tending operations), and logging, encountered difficulties due to travel restrictions and social distancing policies which resulted in the loss of jobs as fewer workers were required to undertake these operations.

Socially, the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted the forest and tree-based livelihood options for the forest dependent people. COVID-19 pandemic posed a major threat to local communities as well as critically and vulnerable indigenous people like the Batwa in Uganda. Environmental disasters and climate change effects, drove the poor to extreme poverty and food insecurity in the East Africa sub region. This also led to impacts on illegal activities such as hunting for bushmeat, fuel wood and timber (Malugu, 2020, Attah 2020). The World Bank in 2020 projected that about 1 million people in Tanzania could slip into poverty due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic⁹.

Generally, in West Africa, the COVID-19 physical restrictions obstructed most of forestry and ecotourism businesses including research and monitoring activities; halted capacity development and extension services; impacted forest development work; and increased incidences of illegal logging, poaching and trafficking of wildlife. Due to the demand for daily protein requirements forest communities may undertake hunting of wildlife for household consumption and also for the bush meat trade to enhance incomes of households in these trying times of the pandemic. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) indicates that COVID-19 pandemic continues to increase the risk of food insecurity and malnutrition for 50 million people in the sub-regional block (Gbadegesin and Olajire-Ajayi, 2020).

The most significant socio-economic challenges already experienced by forest sector businesses and forestry departments a year after COVID-19 pandemic relates to disruptions to employment, the return of the urban population to rural areas, poverty, inequality gaps, and food insecurity. In this regard women and the youth are most impacted on. For instance, in Senegal, women running small business saw their incomes fall due to lower sales of products such as NTFPs that they sold in the markets and the closure of some markets did impact on the women adversely. For some of the women in Senegal repayment of loans were a challenge and overtime resulting in the loss of their capital thereby driving many more in the country into poverty.

The increased poverty and food insecurity in the deforestation frontiers of West Africa could lead to greater bushmeat consumption in meeting their protein requirements and increased chances of new zoonotic diseases (Brancalion et al., 2020).

Due to social distancing measures required to be implemented by timber processing factories in the West Africa sub-region, production volumes will be lower and resulting in higher cost per unit volume with the possibility of making timber uncompetitive in both the domestic and export markets. Although, many firms in the forest sector continue to hold on to their work force, particularly for those located near forests, the evolving nature of COVID-19 is making it difficult for companies and they may begin to lay off their workforce and that would have the potential to create social problems. The workers on the other hand have started to make demands for increment in their salaries since the cost of living in some countries have increased. This has the potential of labour unrests in some countries in the West African sub-region.

⁹ <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2021/213/article-A001-en.xml>

4.1.2. Economic challenges

Forest-based ecotourism was highly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in almost all the sub-regions in Africa, but particularly in East Africa and Southern Africa. The travel restrictions, curfews, and restrictions in gathering, social distancing measures etc. had an effect on visitor numbers to the forest nature-based tourist sites. It has caused closure of the ecotourism activities and hence resulting in loss of income and jobs in the forest sector. This also impacted on hotels, and other hospitality businesses. The spill-over effect of loss in the local economy was experienced by adjacent communities living closer to the forests with high ecotourism potentials (Shoo et al., 2021).

The travel restrictions also affected the movement of goods and services within the Southern Africa sub-region and internationally at border posts and seaports, respectively. In many occasions this resulted in heavy traffic and delays at the border crossings (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Border crossing between South Africa and Zimbabwe



Source: Chirwa, 2021

Chirwa, 2021 cites Julius et al., (2020), highlight the challenges faced by the Namibian government in addressing the impact of COVID-19. The Namibian government-imposed restrictions on non-essential travel to countries affected by COVID-19, indefinitely suspending tourism travel, work visas and immigrant visas. According to the findings, the impact of the lockdown measures on the various sectors in the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries resulted in a loss of GDP of between 5 and 7.5 billion Namibia dollars (USD314million to USD472million).

The economic challenges arising from addressing the impacts of COVID 19 were noted and these were significant to all countries and were felt differently across the sub region. Balance of trade for exports and imports related to forest produce were highly affected as well as the domestic forest-related trade in the EAC member states. As diminishing export was realized by mid-2020, it decelerated the domestic business environment due to decline in export demands caused by restrictions in travel and transportation at regional and international routes. Restrictions in movement of cargo vessels caused stockpiling of timber and processed and semi-processed wood products in ports.

In the East Africa subregion, the trade in timber and timber products was affected by the travel restrictions and social distancing measures. The restrictions and social distancing measures introduced in the sub-region caused a crash, particularly in businesses that entirely depended on imports from within and outside the sub-region. The measures and the reduction in import levels created a loss of a substantial amount of foreign currency, and also placed employment within forest industries, forest plantations, government forest administration and those self-employed in forest-related activities at risk (Attah, 2020; Malugu, 2020). Within the EAC region, forest operations especially in forest plantations that depended on a high number of casual labourers for activities such as silvicultural activities (tree nursery operations, tending operations), and logging, encountered difficulties due to the restrictions on travel and social gathering. This resulted in job loss and financial challenges to family's dependent on the forest sector.

The travel restrictions have also meant that the price of food items have been on the increase in the different sub-regions in Africa.

The containment measures that were rolled out very quickly in the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region saved lives. They however impacted adversely on economic activities in the region¹⁰. COVID-19 is estimated to have pushed close to 18 million people into poverty in the MENA region. There has been the loss of livelihoods, jobs, closures of schools and markets and weakened communities and businesses (Belhaj, 2021).

Harvesting operations for cork, a non-timber forest products were of great importance in the countries of the western Mediterranean, who have experienced disturbances, particularly in Morocco, due to the attack of a defoliating insect (*Limantria dispar*). Exports of cork and cork products have also been affected by the pandemic.

Trade in wood products continue to be impacted by low demand and disruptions in the supply chains as well as high freight rates driven by the unavailability of shipping containers. The cost of shipping containers is estimated to be up ten times the pre-pandemic levels¹¹. For instance, a key informant did indicate that several of the shipping companies no longer provide services to Ghana due to the COVID-19 measures and their impact on the supply chain. Freight rates are high and moved from USD 4,000 to USD 15,000 per 40ft container to the Far East. Freight rates are expected to remain high due to evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will continue being a challenge for firms in the timber supply regions in Africa. This will adversely impact on the cost of timber and timber products for both the export and domestic markets.

Countries in the Central Africa region are extremely dependent on international trade. Lessons from the economic crisis in 2008 in the region led to a shift towards meeting the demand in China. However, with the pandemic there is a decline in exports of round timber to China, and some European markets, namely Austria, Germany, France, Italy and Spain (Mbolo, unpublished)

4.1.3. Environmental challenges

The importance of tropical forest conservation has gained new contours with the COVID-19 outbreak, as tropical deforestation increases the risks of emerging zoonotic diseases with

¹⁰ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/fr/arabvoices/social-protection-for-all-lessons-from-covid-19-response-mena>

¹¹ <https://www.itto.int/ittc-57/day2/>

pandemic potential (Bloomfield, 2020; Brancalion et al., 2020). Studies focusing on various parts of Africa such as Côte d'Ivoire in the West African subregion, have investigated, and underscored how the loss of tropical forests had elevated the risk of physical interactions between people and wild primates and the viruses they carry (Mossoun et al., 2015; Bloomfield et al., 2020). However, many governments including those in the West African subregion responded to the COVID-19 pandemic first with health measures to reduce the spread of the virus, and second with measures to reduce its socio-economic impact. Addressing Environmental challenges appears not to have been the focus of governments or the subregional bodies. Indeed, there is an upsurge in deforestation across various regions of the globe during the pandemic (Daly, 2020).

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the use of wild plants and other herbal-based medicinal products around the West Africa sub-region is anticipated to increase. There are reports of disruptions to employment (the third most significant impact already experienced by businesses), and the return of the urban population to rural areas, are expected to put increasing pressure on forest resources (FAO, 2020).

By 2020, the East Africa sub-region had observed increased direct environmental impacts, which have been accelerated because of the pandemic (Malugu, 2020), with limited collaboration between forest agencies and inadequate border patrols that were conducted during the pandemic. There were several negative forces to the environment that preceded Covid-19 such as climate-induced extreme weather events like floods and swarms of locusts that invaded Kenya and large parts of Uganda and Southern Sudan, increased incidents of forest fires, and damage by pests and diseases. The environmental impacts were huge due to low adaptation capabilities of the EAC Member State governments and similarly at local community levels.

Forest protection and management in Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in the East Africa Sub-region were adversely affected as a result of lockdown and travel restriction measures that were introduced. This affected forest governance, including surveillance activities that were conducted at lower levels by forest staff and guards in state managed reserves. Silvicultural operations such as nursery tending, thinning and pruning in plantations were suspended and deprioritized due to social distancing measures introduced. As a result of the reduced oversight on forest in the sub-region there are reports of increase in forest illegalities and increased incidence of fire and illegal logging in natural forests is estimated to have risen by 27% (Malugu, unpublished). The illegal logging activities in the sub-region has also affected mangrove forests in the coastal belt of the EAC region while extraction of poles and production of charcoal in protected mangrove forests is reported to have escalated (Malugu, unpublished).

As at the time of this regional assessment reports from the East Africa sub-region indicated that NGOs involved in forest conservation are affected by dwindling financial resources and the travel/social distancing measures that were introduced. This has resulted in the decline of community engagement in forest management, and reduced support to the forest authorities in extension services thereby impacting negatively on forest protection (Malugu, unpublished). The limitation in funding of the NGOs further affected delivery of alternative income generating activities to communities and hence impacting on their effective contribution to forest management in the sub-region. As COVID-19 resonated as a health emergency, many development partners and donors would divert conservation support to other health priorities

remain high. This will affect the ability of NGOs to provide support to the forest and conservation sectors (Kideghesho et al., 2021) and also addressing the livelihood related issues.

In Southern Africa, the main challenge that impacted on the environment was the low availability of labour leading to reduced field operations as a result of the social distancing measures that were in place. The reduction in labour numbers resulted in job losses and persons who lost their jobs during the pandemic returned to their villages and this may have increased the pressure on the ecosystem and the environmental products and services. For instance, in Namibia, reductions in labour numbers resulted in reduced field operations. In Malawi illegal activities increased by 60% and implied that the forests were more vulnerable to unregulated exploitation (Chirwa, unpublished).

4.1.4. Cross-cutting issues: Financial, Technical, and Institutional and challenges

The pandemic disrupted both administrative and financial institutions in the East Africa sub-region. For example, because of the demand from the health sector in addressing the challenges of the pandemic, particularly high shortages of labour resulted in countries adjusting resource requirements to meet labour and financial requirements of the health sector (Malugu, unpublished).

In Kenya, with a sharp decline in tax revenues due to the weakening in economic activity and an increase in COVID-related spending needs, the fiscal deficit has widened, and debt vulnerabilities have risen. According to the UNDP in Kenya, the fiscal deficit widened to 8.2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), up from the pre-COVID budgeted target of 6.0 percent of GDP.

In terms of technical exchanges and collaboration in forest management, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused disruptions in institutional capacity building efforts. As more trainings and fora resorted to online interactions, this has limited use in the forest sector. However, it is generally emerging from experiences and lessons learned on the need to leveraging technology for the forest sector, particularly in areas of forest monitoring remotely, data capture, communication/awareness creation, traceability, and education.

In Tanzania alone, revenue registered by state institutions managing forests and wildlife resources for tourism shrank by a range of 21 and 80 per cent (Kideghesho et al., 2021). Reductions in financial resources and poor government revenues have caused reduction in government subvention to support protected areas and forest sector projects or activities. This has resulted in reduced capacity by the forest and wildlife authorities in East Africa to conduct surveillance and law enforcement, and the inability to combat illegal trade in forest and wildlife products.

4.2. Strategies and recovery measures for addressing impact of COVID-19 forest sector

UNFF16 deliberated on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on forests and Member States agreed on the way forward. Box 1 highlights the key elements in the Co-Chairs summary on suggestions for the way forward and the section will explore the extent to which these suggestions were taken forward by countries/regional bodies in developing strategies and recovery measures for addressing impact of COVID-19 on forests. Governments in the region have responded with different strategies to limit the spread of COVID-19 and implement measures to promote economic stability. The reports from the different sub-regions in Africa reflect a focus on fiscal policy responses and strategies to address the health and economic challenges. Measures/strategies were not targeted specifically at forests and the forest sector *per se*. So, although the elements in Box 1 would have been a good starting point to consider in the development of strategies and response measures for the forest sector in the Africa, the survey and Key Informant Interviews did not reflect this. Due to the emergency situation in health and economy caused by the pandemic, member countries in the region coordinated their implementation of recovery measures and responses with public health and the economy being the main focus.

Box 1: Suggestions on the way forward in mitigating the impact of COVID-19¹²

UNFF16: Key points and suggestions raised during discussion on the way forward

The extent and scope of the impacts, differ from country to country, and region to region. Countries are taking various measures to protect their people and economies from the negative impacts of the pandemic, based on their national conditions and capabilities. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to confront this situation, however, there are huge opportunities for countries to work together collaboratively to minimize the impacts of the pandemic. The assessment carried out by the consultants in various regions is just an initial step to identify the immediate and most visible impacts of the pandemic on sustainable forest management. As we are still being impacted by the pandemic, additional assessments and studies are needed to provide a better understanding of the short, medium, and long-term impacts of the pandemic on sustainable forest management. The following is a Co-Chairs summary of key points and suggestions raised during the discussions on the way forward:

1. **Integrate sustainable forest management in COVID-19 pandemic recovery plans.** Sustainable forest management can make significant contributions to offset many of the social, economic and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic
2. **Renew commitment to the international agreed forest-related goals and targets.** Healthy forests are vital to addressing many pandemic-induced challenges, including through creating new jobs in afforestation, reforestation and agroforestry.
3. **Promote one-health approach.** The current pandemic has highlighted the close interrelationship between the health of ecosystems, people and species.
4. **Build momentum to halt deforestation and unsustainable forest practices.** To mitigate the impact of COVID 19 and future zoonotic diseases, minimize their impacts on global trade and supply chains of forest products.
5. **Include the value of ecosystem services in recovery plans.** The contribution of ecosystem services is not accounted for in the GDP calculation in many countries, preventing forestry to be seen as a priority in national development planning.
6. **Integrate investment in forests in the recovery plans.** Countries should integrate forestry investment into their national recovery strategies, taking into account their national conditions and priorities.
7. **Strengthen institutions and policies.** In the long-term, countries, depending on their national conditions and priorities, may consider taking additional steps to adopt optimal land-use planning to utilize the full potential of forests; address policy barriers; promote SFM;
8. **Increase resources from all sources for forests.** It is important to increase resources from all sources for forests at all levels in the post-pandemic era
9. **Seize the opportunities provided by the pandemic.** The pandemic has created opportunities to build back better, create jobs in a more inclusive, sustainable and environmentally friendly economy, while continuing forest restoration and sustainable utilization.
10. **Invite UNFF to carry out the second assessment:** The COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving situation. Regular assessments have to be carried out to identify the broad range and long-term impacts of the pandemic on sustainable forest management, as well as potential solutions and recovery measures

Source: UNFF, 2021

¹² [Microsoft Word - Co_Chairs Summary UNFF EGM Impacts of COVID19 On SFM 5pm 28 Jan 2021 Final](#)

In Africa while there have been some short term COVID-19 response strategies, some progress is being made in putting in place longer term response strategies for recovery. However, these strategies have targeted the health sector rather than the forest sector or drawing on the suggestions of UNFF 16 policy recommendations. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) Director General requested all countries to adopt a “Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society” approach built around a comprehensive strategy to prevent infections, save lives and minimize the impact of COVID-19¹³. All facets of the society – health, security, political, economic and social - continue to be negatively impacted by the pandemic¹⁴. The WHO Africa has put in place a “COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) for AFR¹⁵”. The African Union COVID-19 Response Fund is set up and aims to raise resources to strengthen the continental response to COVID-19 by e.g., supporting pool procurement of diagnostics and other medical commodities by Africa CDC for distribution to the Member States, and mitigating the pandemic’s socio economic and humanitarian impact on African populations.

There have been sub-regional responses to COVID-19 and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) continue to play a key role in the post COVID-19 recovery. Also, the development banks have worked with regional and sub-regional bodies in providing financial support to address the impacts and challenges of COVID-19. For example, the World Bank Group has mounted the largest crisis response in its history to help developing countries strengthen their pandemic response and undertake projects to minimise the social impact. Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the World Bank Group has committed over [\\$157 billion](#) to fight the impacts of the pandemic. This amount includes [over \\$50 billion of IDA resources](#) on grant and highly concessional terms. The bank’s support is tailored to address the health, economic, and social shocks that countries are facing¹⁶. The bank’s funding will support the poor and vulnerable, support businesses (particularly SMEs and those in the informal sector), create jobs and jump start a greener Africa, the primary strategy for COVID-19 will be to limit transmission and minimize harm which very much leans towards addressing the health challenges.

The FAO has developed an East Africa Resilience Strategy that will run for one year (FAO, 2021) to respond to the impacts of Covid-19 and other long-term impacts that are related to food and climate change. The strategy centres on several targets, among others that are related to forest sector include:

- Climate information and adaptation.
- The link between resilient food systems and humanitarian food security needs
- Curb the spread of Desert Locust and protect livelihoods of affected communities and
- Boosting the resilience of smallholders for COVID–19 recovery.

¹³ [WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020](https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020)
<https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

¹⁴ Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Africa’s economic development https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/aldcmisc2020d3_en.pdf.

¹⁵ AFR – World Health Organization in the Africa Region

¹⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2020/02/11/how-the-world-bank-group-is-helping-countries-with-covid-19-coronavirus>

Morocco stands out as a country that has taken advantage of the COVID-19 crisis to launch an ambitious program of transformative reforms (Morocco Economic Report – WB – Spring 2021). These include: (i) the creation of a Strategic Investment Fund (the Mohammed VI Fund) to support the private sector; (ii) the overhaul of the social protection framework to boost human capital; (iii) the restructuring of the vast network of Moroccan public companies, including the Department in charge of forests

4.2.1. Strategies and recovery measures for addressing social challenges

In the Southern Africa sub-region, a key strategy instituted by governments and the private sector to address the impact and social challenges of COVID-19, was paid leave. Paid leave was the most common intervention (41% of respondents) in Southern Africa (Chirwa, unpublished). Were feasible a strategy adopted by both the private sector and governments was working remotely. Working remotely was however limited to office-based work and not field work or outdoor activities that required travel/movement. This strategy was prevalent at the peak of the pandemic. However, as the daily infections declined then some field work was allowed to be undertaken. However, with the recent situation on the emergence of the Omicron virus infections in November 2021, it is expected that the social distancing and lock down measures could be reinstated in the Southern Africa sub-region to curb its spread. This would most likely impact on employment levels, livelihoods and incomes in the Southern Africa sub-region.

It is however worth stating that in addition to paid leave, other strategies used in the Southern Africa sub-region was the establishment of a temporary employment fund, reductions in working hours and working virtually to decongest buildings. Other measures adopted include the financial assistance to support households and firms. Countries with better fiscal space have increased their social protection expenditure to cushion the poorest households during the lockdowns. For example, South Africa set aside US\$ 160 million to support vulnerable businesses, US\$8.4billion for unemployment and insurance fund, tax subsidies for at least 75,000 SMEs with turnover of less than US\$2.7million. Senegal also established a Euro 2.1million response and solidarity fund¹⁷.

The use of these strategies in the different countries in the Southern Africa sub-region that were surveyed are contained in Table 4. Respondents to the online survey rated paid leave and working virtually as the most popular strategies adopted by countries in the Southern Africa sub-region

¹⁷ [Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on Africa's Economic Development \(unctad.org\)](https://unctad.org/publication/assessing-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-africa%E2%80%99s-economic-development)

Table 4: Strategies for addressing Social Impacts in Southern Africa

Name of Country	Strategies for addressing Social Impacts of Covid-19			
	Paid leave	Temporary employment fund	Reduction in working hours in public institutions	Working virtually to de-congest buildings
Malawi	4	0	2	4
South Africa	5	5	1	3
Zimbabwe	4	0	0	0
Namibia	3	1	3	1
Mozambique	0	0	0	1
Zambia	6	0	2	6
ESwatini	0	1	1	1
Total	22	7	9	16
%	41	13	17	30

Source: Chirwa, 2021

Clearly, there were no recovery strategies specific to the forest sector or the suggestions made for consideration by member states from discussions at UNFF16. For instance, Tanzania had an IMF approved loan of USD 567.25 million to support COVID-19 recovery. The loan will be used to revamping mostly hit sectors of the national economy like Education, Tourism

Countries in the East Africa sub-region are working towards putting in place recovery plans and developing strategies to address the challenges arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives are geared towards revamping sectors that will stimulate the country's economy. However, the forest sectors in the sub region are in the transition of developing strategies that will revitalize the pre-pandemic plans towards green pathways in the post pandemic era. From a survey of respondents 54% indicated that the forest sector plans were included in the national development plans in the East Africa sub-region.

With most of the government offices working at a reduced human capacity, the EAC countries accelerated the use of e-services in licensing and payment of dues including in the forest sector. This has improved service delivery and reduced unnecessary congestion in public offices. E-payment has been designed to help individual customers and companies as well as the banks to eliminate or reduce some of the problems inherent in the settlement and payment process. In the forest sector the application of the e-payment is in taxation, permit fees, license fees, parking fees and other revenue sources.

The forest agency in Tanzania for example, launched digital platforms (i.e. e-payments) that provided all services, such as online auction, harvesting licenses, including log tracking systems. There are several online models that are under development that resulted from the course of Covid 19 disruptions.

4.2.2. Strategies and recovery measures for addressing Economic challenges

Multilateral institutions have also put in place stimulus packages that can be accessed by all African countries and covers loans, emergency response and debt relief. Table 5 is a summary

of the measures by the World Bank, European Union (EU), African Development Bank (AfDB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Table 5: COVID-19 Multilateral Stimulus packages that benefits African Countries

Institution	Policy Response
World Bank	The World Bank (2020a) announced the availability of US\$160 billion which will be available to countries until late 2021. The package is set to enhance the ability of the beneficiary economies in easing the effects of COVID-19 on small businesses and the vulnerable populations.
African Development Bank (AfDB)	The AfDB has a US\$10 billion COVID-19 response package in the pipeline of which US\$5.5 billion is set for its sovereign operations in the AfDB countries and US\$3.1 billion is operations under the African Development Fund. The Bank also launched a US\$3 billion fight COVID-19 social bond which was allocated to central banks and official institutions (53%), Bank treasuries (27%) and asset managers (20%). Notably, 8% of this social bond is set aside for African countries
IMF	The IMF approved US\$2.7 billion for COVID-19 related emergency responses in African countries
European Union	The EU announced Euro 3.25 billion COVID-19 toolkit for African countries
Afrieximbank	The Afreximbank announced a US\$3 billion Pandemic Trade Impact Mitigation Facility (PATIMFA) to enhance the capacity of African countries in dealing with COVID-19 related health and economic impacts. ¹² In addition, the bank set aside US\$200 million to finance the production of COVID-19 equipment and supplies within Africa

Source: UNCTAD, 2020

In Southern Africa the main strategy which accounted for 44% of the respondents employed in most countries in the sub-region to address economic impact challenges of COVID-19 was in accessing funding grants from bilateral donors. This was more visible in in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Most of the funding was mainly for conservation and ecotourism related activities. Chirwa et al, 2021 reports, that a significant amount of this funding was mostly for conservation and ecotourism. For example, the Peace Parks Foundation (<https://www.peaceparks.org/eur-4-million-COVID-19-relief-efforts-in-kaza/>), the German Government provided EUR 4 million to the world's largest trans-frontier conservation area (TFCA), the Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) TFCA, to mitigate the devastating repercussions of COVID-19 in four of the Partner States –Angola, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Other strategies used in addressing economic challenges were:

- Declaration of forests as an essential service and enabling the sector to undertake forest monitoring and management activities.
- Tax relief mechanism and extension of tax compliance windows
- Funding grants from bilateral donors.

- Moratorium on bank loan payments

However, it is worth emphasising that funding grants from bilateral donors were to a large extent used in the health care sector. It also worth stating that to a large extent the informal forest or woodworking sector did not benefit from these economic reliefs.

Regarding Central Africa, April 2020, the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife proposed to the Prime Minister's office a specific strategy for the COVID-19 recovery of the forests and forest sector. Considering the cross-cutting nature of objectives and measures proposed by draft strategy document, the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife is lobbying for the integration of these in the national strategy for the COVID-19 Recovery (Mbolo, 2021). There was also the cancellation of a 1% customs duty on semi-finished products.

In the West Africa sub-region strategies implemented were with respect to cash payments/grants, food allowances and subsidies, loans (particularly with SMEs), subsidies for electricity and water and tax rebates (Table 6). These strategies were however not specific to the forest sector.

Table 6: Overview of COVID-19 recovery measures/strategies – West Africa

	<i>CASH PAYMENTS OR GRANTS</i>	<i>FOOD ALLOWANCES AND SUBSIDIES</i>	<i>LOANS</i>	<i>SUBSIDIES FOR ELECTRICITY/ WATER BILLS</i>	<i>TAX REBATES</i>
BENIN	✓		✓	✓	✓
BURKINA FASO	✓			✓	✓
CABO VERDE	✓			✓	✓
CAMEROON	✓				✓
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC			✓		✓
CHAD				✓	✓
CÔTE D'IVOIRE	✓		✓		✓
GABON	✓			✓	✓
GAMBIA	✓	✓			✓
GHANA	✓		✓	✓	✓
GUINEA	✓		✓	✓	✓
GUINEA-BISSAU		✓			
LIBERIA		✓	✓		✓
MALI	✓			✓	✓
MAURITANIA	✓			✓	✓
NIGER			✓	✓	✓
NIGERIA	✓	✓	✓		✓
SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE	✓		✓	✓	
SENEGAL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
SIERRA LEONE	✓	✓	✓		✓
TOGO	✓			✓	✓

Source UNDOC, 2021

Apparently, none of the interventions directly took in account the UNFF16 suggestions as the basis for country actions on the ground. The primary focus of countries was on health and economic sectors. Hence the inability for countries to factor these into their recovery strategies. Alternatively, it could be possible that the recommendations/suggestion from UNFF16 were not well communicated beyond the forestry community - globally and locally.

In the West African report, the following were identified as effective strategic interventions and worth replicating in other countries:

- Remote working and the use of mobile phone communication were the most common strategies adopted by both public and private forest sector to face the immediate impacts of the pandemic. This leapfrogged the use mobile telecommunication and the hosting of events virtually.
- The use of mobile phones for monitoring and surveillance by local communities. The adoption of digital technologies and advocacy is reported by a respondent to be the most relevant measures that could be used broadly in the sector, particularly in promoting post-pandemic recovery and effective monitoring of the forest resources.
- COVID-19 may have improved health standards along timber value chains, as monitoring and compliance with health and safety guidelines from national health authorities seems to be one of the effective measures adopted by the forestry sector to face the immediate impacts of the pandemic.

The sub-regional report for East Africa indicates that the countries in the sub-region are working towards recovery plans and developing strategies. The intention is to revamp sectors that can make an impact on or stimulate the economy. The report however indicates that the forestry sector was still in the process of developing its strategies and push the sector towards green growth pathways. Kenya for example is implementing an economic stimulus package that was approved in 2021 and included measures to mitigate the social and economic impacts of the pandemic (Malugu,2021). Kenya also expanded the health insurance scheme to the county level health workers and provided cash and food aid to the needy. Tanzania is attracting investments by providing incentives for key strategic sectors and is being promoted in member states of the sub-region into Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya.

4.2.3. Strategies and recovery measures for addressing Environmental challenges

With respect to environmental strategies on the environmental impacts, most countries in Southern Africa sub-region felt use of law enforcement agents (38%) and remote monitoring (37%) using satellites, drones etc, and the use of other mobile devices was ideal. Most respondents also felt that declaration of forestry operations as an essential service may have helped on the environmental integrity of the forests (25%).

Most respondents also felt that declaration of forestry operations as an essential service may have helped on the environmental integrity of the forests (25%). In Namibia, it was felt that the use of law enforcement agencies still has a long way to be a feasible strategy due to budgetary constraints. Indeed, in many parts of Africa, corruption has also compromised the

effectiveness of the law enforcement agencies, a commonly cited factor in forest law and governance (Alemagi and Kozak, 2010; Cerutti and Tacconi, 2006). In South Africa and many countries with commercial plantations, forestry was declared an essential service. So some main strategies to address the environmental impacts are:

- Declaration of forestry as an essential service
- Remote monitoring and use of mobile devices
- Use of law enforcement agencies.

5. Best Practices

In the context of this report a best practice can be defined as an accepted **method**, that is the most **optimal and efficient way of doing a task**, in a way that yields **superior results** and where the activity becomes the **standard way** of achieving certain objectives. Best practices are established by bench marking a set of known activities – in this case COVID 19 response measures and strategies – against some agreed and relevant criteria. Best practices equip countries and stakeholders opportunities to learn from their own, and the experiences of others.

In the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, it is difficult to objectively assess the acceptability, efficiency, and outcomes of responses, measures and strategies given that these take a long time (medium to long term) to emerge, but also require robust monitoring and evaluation processes. To overcome this limitation, through literature review and key informant interviews, we identified practices in two ways:

1. Looking beyond the forest sector into other sectors and industry in identifying best practice that can be attributed to the COVID-19 response measures.
2. Eliciting stakeholders' subjective perspectives on what worked and what could have been done differently in developing responses to addressing the impact of the pandemic.

The two-year period of COVID-19 is rather short to establish best practice. As such the study drew on stakeholder's subjective perspectives on what worked, what did not work and what could have been done differently in developing responses to addressing the impact of the pandemic.

In the Africa region the use of remote monitoring devices of activities that may impact on the environment included the use of drones, satellites and mobile devices in the health and agriculture sectors.

"Best practices"/lessons learned worth considering are:

1. COVID-19 has outlined the high importance of digital transformation that is also transforming the forest sector. The information, communication and technology (ICT) with e-commerce and digital remain a gap in many Member States and varies between countries. However, the pandemic has accelerated some meaningful transformational

benefits of e-commerce and digital trade than can improve forest governance. For an example, the forest agency in Tanzania launched digital platforms (i.e. e-payments) that provided all services, such as online auction, harvesting licenses, including log tracking systems. There are several online models that are under development that resulted from the course of Covid 19 pandemic.

2. Use of e-platforms for digital financial services, training and education and creating awareness on COVID-19 as well as the processing of documentation for logging and the issue of export licenses. Additionally, leveraging the use of ICT and social media tools to sustain institutional functions as well as the need for continued forest resource monitoring using better suited technologies was positive and reflects best practice in industry that would benefit the forest sector.
3. Large number and high penetration rate of mobile telephones with a wide customer base allows mobile telecommunication to be an effective way to deal with the pandemic and effect social interventions including payments through direct cash transfers. Use of mobile telephones and its penetration to local areas also allows for the provision of information in real time on COVID-19 and allows for contact tracing as an effective tool for limiting its spread. Additional, information to mobile phone were a means of creating awareness on COV-I9 and providing alerts to mitigate the impact and spread of COVID-19 in the region. Digitization is a means to strengthening data collection, its analysis and communication.
4. The early subregional collaboration and meetings between the health ministers (West Africa and East Africa) is seen by many as a good initiative in adopting a multi-lateral approach in responding to the impact of COVID-19 and provides opportunities for sharing lessons learned. It allowed the different subregions to raise resources and harmonise their actions given the ease of movement between the countries with a potential of spreading the virus. This approach also allowed the countries in the subregions to share their experiences. The fact that Guinea, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal had contained the Ebola pandemic (2014-2016) allowed for lessons learned from the Ebola pandemic to impact on how West Africa should address the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. During the 2014-2016 Ebola virus disease outbreak, West African countries continue to build resilience and responsiveness into their health systems. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage on, and there are fears of a third wave, West Africa's early response strategies may be paying off in many ways already. For example, whereas the region had only two laboratories for the diagnosis of COVID-19 at the outset of the pandemic in January 2020, by September 2020, all countries had established several equipped laboratories and bringing the total for the region to 236. This

was mainly as a result of the use of the sub-regional approach in addressing the challenges to the subregion.

Other areas of best practice/lessons learned include:

- The listing of the forest sector as an essential service sector saved the sector from collapse in Southern Africa. Early interventions from governments and multilateral agencies during such disasters in future has the potential of attracting resources to address key challenges.
- Lockdown and movement restrictions and the ability to vary the restrictions depending on the intensity of the infection levels and getting the balance right given the huge social and economic impact of possible lockdowns in most African countries. Government and social welfare systems in most African countries are too weak to effectively support COVID-19 related lockdowns (Gondwe, 2020).
- Economic stimulation through the use of tax break incentives or social cash transfers, although not sustainable in the long term was a good short-term measure in kick starting the economy.
- Community based participatory forest management which has been used extensively over the years in West Africa and should provide an opportunity for addressing the challenges to implementing post-COVID-19 recovery strategies and measures. Community based participatory forest management have been tried and tested in the region and we should continue to draw on lessons learned.
- Ghana is using drones in delivery medicines and other health related items to rural areas and where there is urgent demand for medication. This is working well in the health sector, and it should be possible to use unmanned area vehicles (UAV) such as drones for monitoring activities in the forest sector in countries in the subregion to promote rapid response and curb illegal logging and poaching activities in the forests.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

As countries begin to emerge from the most acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, policy makers and citizens need tools to monitor efforts to revive economic activity, fulfil the shared commitment to build back better. This would imply addressing structural inequalities, accelerating the green transition, and strengthening resilience in the face of future challenges. A robust recovery would provide forests the opportunity to play a key role in the post COVID-19 recovery.

There is an urgent need on the continent to implement timely policy responses to mitigate the challenges faced by countries in reducing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the forest sector. Even more critical is the need to seize the opportunities presented by COVID-19 to drive development along a green pathway. The era of social distancing presents a unique opportunity to drive forward the sub-region's financial inclusion effort, with digital financial services (DFS) at its core and leveraging ICT for the benefit of the forest sector.

6.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for consideration by countries but should be guided by what is feasible and can be tailored to the local context and peculiarities of each country's forest sector:

- Promote and encourage strategies that boost legal and sustainable products and nature-based solutions to counter any short and longer-term shocks to livelihoods, particularly for more vulnerable people in rural societies who depend on income from land use. Nature-based solutions will offer cross-cutting answers that can positively affect every sector of the economy. Additionally, promoting livelihood in the forestry sector especially in rural communities and indigenous lands and the rights of such communities in reducing their vulnerability to the economic impacts of COVID-19 will be instrumental.
- Integrating resilience and green recovery principles through protection, restoration, and sustainable use of forests. National governments need to work with a range of cross-sectoral and multiple stakeholders in participatory processes that will help enhance the knowledge of the risks associated with diseases like COVID-19 and how forests and the forest sector could support mitigation and offset risks and "build back better" both at social and ecological resilience for the people in the region.
- The estimated 22.6 million people in Sub Saharan Africa, who may have been pushed to poverty, need to be reduced. Forest dependent communities should be supported through social protections, livelihood options as well as capital investments such as seeds and income generating activities. Forest-dependent communities should also be supported in conserving ecosystem services and biodiversity. These are the assets that contribute to increased food production and income security, tourism as well as

strengthening their coping capacities in response to the pandemic and other future socioeconomic disruptions.

- The most vulnerable and marginalized groups such as forest communities and indigenous people, have specific challenges and needs, which are often not addressed in recovery plans and policies. Measures would include developing specific plans that set out priorities for indigenous people and minority groups to participate and be engaged in “building back better” for forest protection and management while maintaining their rights over tenure and access to the forest resources.
- There appears to be a general understanding emerging from literature reviewed and the interviews that a unified health approach in addressing COVID-19 and future pandemics related to forests, people and wildlife would provide opportunities for the forest sector. There is therefore growing interest by researchers in obtaining more precise information on the linkages between forests, wildlife and human health. There is the need to promote and strengthen interdisciplinary research and synergies between foresters, forest environmentalists and experts in human and wildlife infectious diseases to better understand the role and impact of forest use and forest land management on Emerging Infectious Diseases.
- Leverage support from the private sector and the international development community for a post-COVID recovery and align policies, in particular those related to forestry and climate change, to commitments made at the international level/agreements and have a process for reviewing these policies to make them consistent/aligned with the international agreements that countries are a party to.
- Leverage technology to facilitate the capture of real-time data on the status of the forests, forest monitoring and forest production activities and trade to improve decision making in the sector. Technological advancements present an opportunity to incentivize retention or re-absorption of trained or skilled community members with otherwise no opportunities to contribute to resource management efforts outside of demands for unskilled labour.
- Need to build capacity in order to migrate to the digital age in monitoring and evaluation of forest resources and promoting investments in this area. Building partnerships and triggering better organization, cooperation, and coordination of forest value chains for poverty reduction is crucial. The COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity to help stakeholders to organize and promote more inclusive, integrated, diversified and shock-resilient value chains. An effective approach is the integration of smallholders, communities and SMFEs in sustainable supply chains.
- Create a mechanism/platform for disseminating information. In this regard, the Forum may wish to consider conducting case studies on the extent to which countries take forward for implementation suggestions/recommendations/resolutions made by Forum.
- At the international, national and sub-national levels the forest sector should consider making a business case to improve funding to the sector. Improved data on the

number of jobs and level of economic activity including forest goods and services that the forest sector generates could make the case for the sector to access both domestic and international support and financing as a part of the response to COVID-19. In this regard, strong political commitment in support of the forest sector will be a requirement.

- Recovery measures should be preceded by a strong education and awareness creation programme on the responses to pandemics. A subregional or regional approach will serve the process well and limit misinformation, particularly in this era with the growth of social media.
- An effective approach is the integration of smallholders, communities and SMFEs in sustainable supply chains. Building strong partnerships and triggering better organization, cooperation, and coordination of forest value chains for poverty reduction is crucial. The COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity to help stakeholders to organize and promote more inclusive, integrated, diversified and shock-resilient value chains.
- The post COVID-19 period will require financial and technical assistance to “build back better”. Given the budget limitations and restricted travel during COVID-19, these early indications of forest management challenges, especially major hikes in forest loss and illicit activities can enable law enforcement officers to allocate resources to the right locations in a timely manner.

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Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for Consultancy

UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS SECRETARIAT, DESA

Assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector (West Africa)

I. BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an enormous disruption to human lives, livelihoods and economic systems worldwide. It is the worst global crisis humanity has faced since the second world war with its impacts being felt in all aspects of social and economic spheres. The on-going pandemic has precipitated a massive public health crisis and short-term economic contraction, shuttered countless businesses whether big or small, thrown tens of millions out of work, disrupted global supply chains, severely strained fiscal capacity and safety nets, and continues to test global solidarity and multilateralism at a time when they are needed to address its impacts. The pandemic has created turmoil in global economies, leading to the sudden loss of livelihoods, extreme poverty, income inequality and food insecurity in some of the most vulnerable segments of society. Due to broad range of vital services that forests provide for economic functioning and human wellbeing, as well as their roles in providing income, livelihoods, and well-being of people, specially rural communities, indigenous peoples, small farms holders, and other forest-dependent communities, it was important to assess the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and forest-dependent people.

Through UNFF15 resolution, Members of the Forum requested the UNFF Secretariat to carry out an assessment of the impacts of COVID19 on forests and forest sector¹⁸. In doing so, the Secretariat conducted and engaged in several activities including commissioning studies in different regions. In addition, the Secretariat engaged in various initiatives and analytical work related to the impacts of COVID-19 on forests, including within the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, participating in several relevant meetings and webinars, and organizing webinars, and an expert group meeting.

As part of the initial global assessment, the Forum Secretariat commissioned six studies in different regions to collect information and relevant data from different countries and regions on the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic on the areas identified in UNFF15 resolution. Upon finalization of these studies, the Forum secretariat organized a virtual expert group meeting on the “Impact of COVID-19 on Sustainable Forest Management”, held from 19 to 21 January 2021. The meeting provided an opportunity for experts from Member States, international forest-related organizations, regional and sub-regional partners and civil society to discuss and share their views on the impact of the global pandemic on: forests and the forest sector, including risks, threats and challenges; potential responses and measures for forests and forest sector recovery; role of forests in the post COVID-19 recovery; and potential opportunities that COVID-19 has brought to the fore to enhance the contribution of forests to inclusive and long-term sustainable development. The outcome of the meeting was a Co-Chairs summary of the discussions and the suggestions on the way forward. A synthesis of

¹⁸ E/2020/42-E/CN.18/9

the potential responses and measures for the recovery of the forest sector and enhanced contribution of forests to inclusive SFM was presented and to Forum members at the sixteenth session of the Forum¹⁹.

II. Mandate

During the high level round table at the sixteenth session of the UNFF (UNFF16) in April 2021, senior official from Members of the Forum and the United Nations welcomed the proposals contained in the note by the Secretariat on the impact of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector (E/CN.18/2021/7), the content of which had been derived from the studies on the initial assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on sustainable forest management. The participants in the high-level round table encouraged the implementation of the proposals at the national, regional and international levels²⁰. Based on the UNFF16 discussions, the Forum secretariat was requested, in collaboration with members of the Forum, Partnership member organizations and stakeholders, to conduct an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector, and to present it to the Forum at its seventeenth session²¹.

In light of the above, the UNFF Secretariat plans to conduct a global assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector, through commissioning several regional assessments. In this context, the UNFF Secretariat seeks to engage a highly qualified consultant to conduct a regional assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector in each of the following five UN regions, namely; Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin American and Caribbean, and Western Europe and Others Group and to present it to the Forum at its seventeenth session. The results of the assessments will be discussed at a virtual UNFF global expert group meeting, with participation of experts from Members of the Forum, CPF member organizations, regional partners and major group representatives in January 2022. The key findings of these assessments and the outcome of expert group meeting will be incorporated in the official documents for consideration of UNFF17.

III. WORK ASSIGNMENT

The specific responsibilities/tasks are:

1. Conducting an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, including strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector in West Africa region, building on existing published studies and reports, news items, policy briefs, supplemented by consultations with relevant stakeholders. The assessment should identify and elaborate on, *inter alia*:
 - a. the challenges faced by countries in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector

¹⁹ E/CN.18/2021/7

²⁰ Paragraph 6k, page 18-19, UNFF16 official report, document E/2021/42 E/CN.18/2021/8

²¹ Ibid. Paragraph 22g(ii), page 30

- b. the strategies and recovery measures being adopted by countries in combatting the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector and
 - c. best practices adopted by countries and other stakeholders for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector,
- 2. Presenting the draft assessment to experts and stakeholders in the respective region for review and finalization through virtual or electronic means and revise the draft assessment based on the results of these consultations.
- 3. Sharing the revised draft assessment for review and comments by the UNFFS and produce a final assessment, incorporating comments from UNFFS.
- 4. Presenting the findings of the study at the global expert meeting to be held virtually before the end of 2021.

IV. Methodology

In conducting the assessment and performing the above-mentioned work assignments, the consultant shall solicit information from UNFF national focal points in the region, including e.g. through a short questionnaire, to ensure their inputs are incorporated into the finding of the assessment. Building on existing published studies and reports, news items, policy briefs, the consultant will also consult and solicit information from relevant stakeholders, including civil society, local community and forest associations, private sector, academia and research practitioners, development partners, intergovernmental and other regional/sub-regional organisations, relevant international organisations including members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) which are operational in the region. Where and when possible, the consultant shall conduct face to face consultations. In the event of impracticality of in-person consultations, the consultant shall conduct the consultations virtually.

V. CONTRACT DURATION

The contract will be for 35 working days within the period 1 September 31 December 2021.

VI. DUTY STATION AND LOCATION OF ASSIGNMENT

The consultant will work off-site.

VII. EXPECTED OUTPUT AND DELIVERY DATES

The consultant will produce the following outputs and work along the following deadlines:

- A workplan and proposed outline of the report by 20 September 2021

- The first draft of the assessment of the challenges faced by countries, including strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector by 15 October 2021.
- Virtual consultation with experts and stakeholders in different regions workshop report by 30 November 2021
- A final analytical study (not exceeding 40 pages excluding annexes) with an executive summary, clear conclusions and recommendations, by 31 December 2021

VIII. TRAVEL

This consultancy will not involve any travel. All work and consultations related to this consultancy shall be carried out through virtual and electronic means. The consultant shall also join the global expert meeting to be held virtually before the end of the year through virtual means.

IX. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The consultant's performance will be based upon the following indicators:

- Timeliness and quality written output submissions
- Demonstrated understanding of the working methods of the Organization
- Receptiveness/responsiveness to inputs from UNFF national focal points, other stakeholders and feed-back from UNFFS staff members

X. QUALIFICATIONS

The consultant shall have the following competencies and qualifications:

- At least an advanced university degree (Master's degree or higher) in forestry, environment or related area. A first-level university degree in combination with fifteen additional years of qualifying experience may be accepted in lieu of the advanced university degree.
- At least 20 years of experience in areas directly related to sustainable forest management and international cooperation, with broad knowledge of the interrelated nature of natural resource management and the cross-sectoral and inter-institutional nature of forests;
- Experience in governments, intergovernmental negotiations which create policies and laws and oversee enforcement of more than two areas of economic, social and environmental matters related to forests and trees;
- Excellent policy, analytical, technical, interpersonal and drafting skills, including experience in facilitating expert meetings and discussions;
- No conflicts of interest;
- Oral and written fluency in English;
- Participation in UNFF activities is an advantage; and
- Willingness to work collaboratively on a team.