



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 February 2024
Advance Unedited Version
Original: English

United Nations Forum on Forests
Nineteenth session
New York, 6-10 May 2024
Item 3¹ of the provisional agenda

Policy discussions on the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030: Means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

In accordance with its Programme of Work for 2022-2024, the United Nations Forum on Forests at its nineteenth session should consider agenda item 3 Policy discussions on the implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030. Under this agenda item, means of implementation, including the operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network will also be considered. The present note provides the background information and key global developments regarding means of implementation and presents a summary of the intersessional activities undertaken by the Network since the eighteenth session of the Forum. It serves as the basis for discussion during the nineteenth session of the Forum on means of implementation, including the operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network.

¹ *E/CN.18/2024/1

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2021/6² and the programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2022 – 2024, the Forum, at its nineteenth session, will hold policy discussions on the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030. Under agenda item 3, the Forum will consider means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network.
2. The present note provides an overview of the results of intersessional activities, since the eighteenth session of the Forum, and includes information on key global developments related to forest finance, a progress report on the activities of the Network, an update on the development of phase II of the Network clearing house and an update on developments related to the establishment of the proposed office for the Network in China. The note also refers to relevant proposal contained in the UNFF18 Chair's summary³.

II. Background

3. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33⁴, supporting efforts to strengthen means of implementation for implementation of sustainable forest management, and forest governance frameworks is one of the objectives of the International Arrangement on Forests. In addition, in the same resolution, one of the core functions of the UN Forum on Forests is to promote, monitor and assess the implementation of sustainable forest management, and mobilize, catalyse and facilitate access to financial, technical and scientific resources. Through the same resolution, the Council established the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, as a component of the International Arrangement on Forests. In April 2017, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, in which the Network's priorities were set out as follows:
 - (i) To promote the design of national forest financing strategies to mobilize resources for sustainable forest management;
 - (ii) To assist countries in mobilizing, gaining access to and enhancing the effective use of existing financial resources from all sources for sustainable forest management;
 - (iii) To serve as a clearing house and database for existing, new and emerging financing opportunities and as a tool for sharing lessons learned and best practices from successful projects;
 - (iv) To serve to contribute to the achievement of the global forest goals and targets, as well as of the priorities contained in the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum.
4. On the basis of the technical discussions held at the eighteenth session of the Forum, the Chair⁵ submitted for further consideration at the 19th session the following proposals with respect to the means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network:
 - (i) Welcome the support provided by the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network to countries at the national and regional level in strengthening capacity to mobilize resources from all sources for sustainable forest management;
 - (ii) Invite members of the Forum, and others in a position to do so, to provide voluntary contributions to the Forum trust fund to scale up the activities of the Network.

III. New developments on forest finance

A. Global Environment Facility

² <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n21/149/30/pdf/n2114930.pdf?token=BICs3XNizt4gvzodI4&fe=true>

³ <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4015807?ln=en>

⁴ <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=E/RES/2015/33&Lang=E>

⁵ <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4015807?ln=en>

5. In its eighth replenishment period, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) continued to apply the integrated strategy to promote sustainable forest management (SFM), notably through three Integrated Programs (IP) promoting tropical forest conservation, ecosystems restoration, promoting regenerative agriculture to reduce pressure on natural forests, and taking deforestation out of food production systems and value chains⁶.
6. The Amazon, Congo and critical forest biomes IP was approved by the GEF Council on June 29, 2023, with a GEF support grant of \$291 million and approximately \$1.6 billion of expected co-financing⁷. It supports 25 countries covering an estimated 87% of the existing tropical forest biomes. This program addresses the growing urgency to safeguard intact forest landscapes that are irreplaceable in terms of biodiversity, absorb up to a third of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, and are critical for other ecosystem services (e.g. water), and well-being of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The Program is composed of five separate regional programs in the Amazon, Congo, Meso-America, Indo-Malay, and Guinean Forests of West Africa covering the globally significant biomes. It is expected that this IP will contribute to protecting and sustainably managing more than 44 million hectares of terrestrial protected areas, using improved practices in 23 million hectares of landscapes for biodiversity benefits, and mitigate the emission of 495 Mt CO₂e⁸ of GHG. During the reporting period, three additional countries applied to join the IP supported with a \$15 million GEF grant.
7. The Ecosystem Restoration IP⁹ has also been approved by the GEF Council on June 29, 2023, with a GEF support grant of \$205 million and approximately \$1.6 billion of expected co-financing. It includes 20 countries with national child projects across Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This Program addresses the immense potential to return hundreds of millions of hectares of degraded landscapes to functioning ecosystems, and the opportunity to drive synergistic benefits across multiple environmental dimensions while generating economic, ecological and livelihood benefits for an estimated 1.8 million people. This IP is expected to restore 2.2 million hectares, including forests and productive landscapes, improve sustainable management through improved practices in over 10 million hectares, and mitigate the emission of 133 Mt CO₂e of GHG.
8. The Food Systems IP¹⁰ has been designed and submitted to the GEF for a potential approval by GEF Council in February 2024, with a GEF support grant of \$282 million and approximately \$2.2 billion of expected co-financing. It includes 32 countries with national child projects across Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This IP will focus on transforming global food systems from farm to table, so that they are sustainable, regenerative, nature positive, resilient, inclusive and pollution-free. In most of the countries, it will contribute to combat forest loss and degradation by addressing the underlying drivers of unsustainability along the whole length of the food system, transforming and strengthening value chains, business models, incentive and finance frameworks, and policy and institutional conditions. This IP is expected to improve sustainable management through improved practices over 14 million hectares and mitigate the emission of 174 Mt CO₂e of GHG.
9. Eight forest-related stand-alone projects (outside the above-mentioned Programs) in seven countries were approved by the GEF Council during the reporting period. These projects are funded with \$62 million from GEF grants and are expected to leverage \$476 million of co-financing. In addition, new pledges have been announced totalling \$174.2 million for the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)¹¹, which are hosted by the Global Environment Facility, to support addressing climate resilience needs.

B. Green Climate Fund

10. Forest finance at the Green Climate Fund (GCF) falls primarily under the forest and land use result area, while additional forest-related finance is delivered indirectly through several adaptation result areas, namely ecosystems and ecosystem services; livelihoods of people and communities; and health and well-being; and food and water security. One of the comparative advantages of nature-related result areas such as forests and land use is that they contribute a wealth of non-climate co-benefits such as biodiversity, provision of clean water,

⁶ <https://www.thegef.org/what-we-do/topics/integrated-programs>

⁷ https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/GEF_IP_RainforestSystems_2023_05.pdf

⁸ Mt CO₂e is commonly referenced as metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

⁹ https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/GEF_IP_EcosystemRestoration_2023_05.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/GEF_IP_FoodSystems_2023_05.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/press-releases/good-news-adaptation-donors-boost-support-ldcf-and-sccf>

and livelihoods for local communities. As of December 2023, the GCF has approved a cumulative \$1.812 billion worth of projects in the forest and land use sector. This includes financing for REDD+ phases II (implementation, \$146 million); and phase III (results-based payments, \$496 million). An additional \$34 million has been approved to date for REDD+ readiness (phase I).

11. Since the last reporting period ending in December 2022, the GCF Board has approved 11 projects related to forests and land use, totalling \$572 million in GCF finance. Three projects are located in Africa, two in Latin America and the Caribbean, five in Asia-Pacific and one project is multi-regional. The multi-regional project covers eleven countries and has a budget of \$984.6 million, including \$189.35 million in grants and loans from the GCF. The GCF focuses on sustainable commodities by promoting higher productivity on agricultural land in countries with important tropical forest resources with the aim of decreasing the pressure to clear forests for agricultural purposes. This helps reduce emissions and increase the resilience of local communities by financing the transformation of tropical agricultural commodity supply chains from extractive to sustainable practices. The project achieves this through a blend of technical assistance and financial support to producers with conditions that necessitate the protection and restoration of existing forests by focusing on supply chains in sectors that drive deforestation such as livestock, palm oil, soy, rubber, cocoa, and forestry.
12. As of December 2023, the GCF pipeline contained at least a further USD 2.4 billion in forest and land use projects, with possible additional forest-related financing, including from the relevant adaptation result areas. Regarding REDD+ results-based payments, the GCF Board requested the Fund's Secretariat to prepare a new proposal on REDD+ results-based payments. This was presented at the Board's 37th meeting in October 2023, but the Board was unable to reach a decision, so the item remains open for discussion at future Board meetings.

C. World Bank

13. The World Bank Group announced that it will raise its climate target, aiming for 45% of its annual financing to go to climate-related projects for the fiscal year July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025¹². This increased ambition will add more than \$40 billion, around \$9 billion more than previously programmed.
14. The World Bank has announced ambitious plans for the growth of high-integrity global carbon markets, with 15 countries set to earn income from the sale of carbon credits generated from preserving their forests¹³. The 15 countries—Chile, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, Republic of Congo, and Viet Nam—are part of the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), which has supported pilot programs since 2018 to establish efficient systems for carbon-crediting initiatives. Supporting five countries in 2024, the World Bank will work with governments and local communities to access carbon markets. By 2028, it is expected all 15 FCPF countries will be in a position to interact with carbon markets.
15. By next year, these countries will have produced over 24 million credits, and as many as 126 million by 2028. These credits could earn up to \$2.5 billion in the right market conditions, with much of that going back to communities and countries¹⁴. Thriving carbon markets have the potential to do the same for other countries in the long-term. The Bank's ambition is to work collaboratively to deliver solutions to expand liquid and transparent carbon markets. This includes working with private and public sector partners to implement integrity principles for buyers and sellers of credits and introducing common frameworks for organizations validating and verifying credits, such as independent credit rating agencies.

D. Adaptation Fund

¹² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/12/01/world-bank-group-doubles-down-on-financial-ambition-to-drive-climate-action-and-build-resilience>

¹³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/12/01/world-bank-carbon-credits-to-boost-international-carbon-markets>

¹⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/12/01/world-bank-carbon-credits-to-boost-international-carbon-markets>

16. Established under the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2010 and serving the Paris Agreement on Climate Change since January 2019, the Adaptation Fund has provided a total of \$ 1.1 billion to more than 100 countries¹⁵. It has increased support as needs have risen, offering countries flexible and innovative grant funding windows centred on scaling up support and accelerating action, innovation, learning and sharing in adaptation. The Fund's portfolio has a total of 164 climate change adaptation-specific projects in vulnerable communities of developing countries around the world, including eight small innovation grants. The approved projects are expected to benefit a total of 41 million people and protect or rehabilitate 635,296 hectares of natural habitats, among other results. Since 2010, the Fund has allocated more than \$165 million (or approximately 20% of the portfolio) under the impact area of increased ecosystem resilience in response to climate change- and variability-induced stress, which includes projects in the forestry sector and nature-based solutions.
17. Implementing entities can apply for funding of up to \$20 million per country for single-country adaptation projects or programmes, for a maximum amount of \$10 million per project, or for a maximum of \$14 million for a regional project/ programme (they are not mutually exclusive). In addition, national implementing entities can gain access to funding outside their country's cap for enhanced direct projects of up to \$5 million per project. Access to large innovation grants of up to \$5 million can be obtained by all implementing entities, and access to small innovation grants of up to \$250,000, learning grants of \$150,000 and project scale-up grants of \$100,000, respectively, can be obtained by national implementing entities only.
18. The Fund has been providing financial assistance also to non-accredited entities through the Adaptation Fund Climate Innovation Accelerator (AFCIA)¹⁶. Two of the Adaptation Fund's accredited Multilateral Implementing Entities (MIEs), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), have been administering the first phase of this programme. The Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), which is the operational arm of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Technology Mechanism, works in conjunction with UNEP as an executing entity in the AFCIA. Grantees can access funds up to \$ 250,000 per project, aiming to address adaptation challenges in various thematic areas including innovative nature-based solutions.
19. In addition, under the current medium-term strategy for 2023-2027¹⁷, the Fund aims to establish a locally led adaptation facility to provide grant funding to all the IEs as well as to non-accredited entities. The Adaptation Fund's medium-term strategy continues to increase the ambition under the strategic areas of action, innovation and learning and sharing, and introduces a crosscutting strategic emphasis on promoting locally based and locally led adaptation as well as on scaling up funded activities and results, while building on the Sustainable Development Goals and serving the Paris Agreement to help to meet the challenge of climate change. Currently the Fund has over \$425 million in project proposals in the pipeline and a steady stream of demand for its work supporting the most climate-vulnerable through tangible adaptation projects and accessible innovative financing.

E. Twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

20. COP28 has provided renewed impetus on the need for global unity to increase financing to forests with several pledges and initiatives for financing forests being announced. During COP 28, the Brazilian government proposed the establishment of Tropical Forests Forever Fund¹⁸, with an initial fundraising target of USD 250 billion, which aims to mobilise large-scale financial resources to protect tropical forests, their biodiversity and the people who live in, protect and depend on these forests. The fund is a financial instrument for payment for standing forests, with contributions from countries with sovereign wealth funds, among other investors. The fund aims to encourage conservation and strongly discourage deforestation and forest degradation. Brazil highlighted the urgent need for the creation of an innovative global instrument to remunerate the maintenance

¹⁵ <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/>

¹⁶ <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/apply-funding/innovation-grants/adaptation-fund-climate-innovation-accelerator-afcia/>

¹⁷ <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/document/medium-term-strategy-2023-2027/>

¹⁸ <https://www.wri.org/news/statement-new-tropical-forest-fund-needs-boost-just-transition>

and restoration of tropical forests. The ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility¹⁹ at the Green Climate Fund announced the Nature Finance Hub, a new initiative committing to mobilize USD \$1 billion from development partners, with the intention of mobilizing a further USD \$2 billion in additional private finance capital by 2030 into nature-focused climate projects. The Inter-American Development Bank Group (IDB Group) is planning to triple direct and mobilized climate financing for Latin America and the Caribbean to \$150 billion over the next decade with the support of its member countries²⁰, including through the anticipated recapitalization of its private-sector arm, IDB Invest. By reaching this goal, the IDB Group would become one of the first multilateral development banks to fulfil the G20's recommendation to triple climate financing.

F. Loss and Damage Fund

21. The Conference of the Parties (COP) and the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA), at its twenty-eighth and fifth sessions, operationalized the Loss and Damage Fund²¹ as an entity entrusted with the operation of the Financial Mechanism of the Convention, which would also serve the Paris Agreement. The Fund will be accountable to and function under the guidance of the COP and the CMA. More than \$700 million had been pledged to the fund by end of December 2023²². However, in 2022 the quantifiable economic cost in developing countries of extreme events like cyclones and floods was greater than \$100 billion²³.

G. Global Biodiversity Framework Fund

22. The new Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) was ratified and launched in August 2023 at the GEF Assembly in Vancouver, Canada²⁴. Initial contributions totalling more than \$200 million from Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany allowed for the operationalization of the GBF Fund. Subsequently, Japan announced a contribution during the COP28 climate talks. Spain pledged further funding during the 66th GEF Council meeting. The GBFF has been designed to mobilize and accelerate investment in the conservation and sustainability of wild species and ecosystems, whose health is under threat from wildfires, flooding, extreme weather, and human activity including urban sprawl. The new fund will mobilize and disburse new and additional resources from public, private, and philanthropic sources, with a focus on the sustainability of biodiversity and ecosystems. As much as 20 percent of its resources will support Indigenous-led initiatives to protect and conserve biodiversity. It will also prioritize support for Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries, which will receive more than a third of the fund's resources. The GBFF Council met for the first time in February 2024 in Washington, DC and reached agreement on how donor resources will be allocated, and how projects will be designed and approved. The GBFF is expected to start funding projects related to nature loss and restoration by the end of 2024.

IV. Developments related to the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network since the eighteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

A. Preparations for the Midterm Review of the International Arrangement on Forests in relation to the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network

In its resolution 2015/33²⁵, the Economic and Social Council requested the United Nations Forum on Forests to undertake a midterm, and final review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives in 2024, and 2030. In accordance with resolution 2015/33 and the programme of work

¹⁹ <https://www.adb.org/what-we-do/funds/asean-catalytic-green-finance-facility/overview>

²⁰ <https://www.iadb.org/en/news/idb-group-aims-triple-climate-financing-over-next-decade>

²¹ <https://unfccc.int/loss-and-damage-fund-joint-interim-secretariat>

²² <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/bodies/funds-and-financial-entities/loss-and-damage-fund-joint-interim-secretariat/pledges-to-the-loss-and-damage-fund>

²³ <https://www.lossanddamagecollaboration.org/publication/the-loss-and-damage-finance-landscape>

²⁴ <https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/press-releases/new-global-biodiversity-fund-launched-vancouver>

²⁵ <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=E/RES/2015/33&Lang=E>

of the Forum for 2022-2024²⁶, the seventeenth session of the Forum, which took place in May 2022, considered, and decided on the activities to be carried out in preparation for the midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests in 2024. These activities are contained in ten sections in the annex to Economic and Social Council resolution 2022/17²⁷. Section D of the annex to this resolution set out the preparatory work to be taken for assessing the work of the GFFFN. Two assessment reports prepared by the consultants regarding Section D on the GFFFN, namely, i) an assessment on the status of existing resources for forests available from all sources, including private funding, as well as the gaps and constraints in gaining access to such funds²⁸, and ii) an assessment of the performance, effectiveness, resource sufficiency and longevity of the GFFFN, and other measures to strengthen its work²⁹. These assessments were reviewed in an expert group meeting, which was convened in June 2023 at the UN Office in Nairobi, Kenya. The meeting brought together experts from members of the Forum, CPF member organizations, regional and subregional partners as well as major groups and other relevant stakeholders. The suggestions and proposals emanating from the expert group meeting were compiled in the Co-Chairs' summary³⁰.

23. The assessments and proposals from the Nairobi meeting were further considered at the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Expert Group (AHEG) on the preparations for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests convened from 10 to 13 October 2023 at the UN Office in Vienna, Austria³¹. Detailed information on progress in the implementation of intersessional activities in preparation for the midterm review, including actions related to the Network, are contained in document E/CN.18/2024/5.
24. In the meantime, in response to some of the recommendations to address the issues raised, the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Forum Secretariat) has been taking steps improve the GFFFN's efficiency in supporting countries and facilitating mobilization and access to increased financial resources for sustainable forest management. Particular attention is being paid to addressing the persistent challenges countries continue to face in accessing finance that include investment risks, different expectations among funding recipients and funding providers, insufficient coordination, lack of expertise to mobilize financing, complex and costly project development processes, insufficient cross-sectoral engagement and lack of knowledge and data gaps. The strategy adopted also includes identifying potential high impact areas that the GFFFN could focus on to accelerate implementation of the Network's priorities and achievement of the Global Forest Goals.

B. GFFFN support to members of the Forum

25. Since its establishment in 2015, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) has provided support to 39 countries and 3 subregional partners in designing national and regional forest financing strategies, respectively, and building capacity to access financial resources from existing multilateral finance entities and other sources. Since the eighteenth session of the Forum, the GFFFN has continued to provide support to 15 countries and 1 subregion in collaboration with the accredited agencies selected by the countries. A summary of the key activities is provided below.

1. Algeria, Benin, Liberia, Togo and Zimbabwe

26. The Forum Secretariat completed the design of the national forest financing strategies for Algeria, Benin, Liberia, Togo and Zimbabwe during the reporting period. Validation workshops were organized in all five countries, providing stakeholders with the opportunity to review and make final inputs into the national forest financing strategies. The final strategy documents were handed over to the respective lead agencies for formal adoption by their governments. In all the strategies, emphasis was placed on enhanced domestic resource mobilization from both the public and private sectors. Four of the countries (Algeria, Benin, Liberia and Togo) also completed the preparation of project concept notes for mobilization of funding from multilateral sources

²⁶ <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=E/CN.18/2021/L.3&Lang=E>

²⁷ https://documents.un.org/symbol-explorer?s=E/RES/2022/17&i=E/RES/2022/17_9815911

²⁸ <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/MTR-D-Study-Existing-Resources-for-Forests-rev.pdf>

²⁹ <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/MTR-Assessment-D-GFFFN-revMay2023.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Co-Chairs-Summary-NairobiEGM-06072023.pdf>

³¹ <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/AHEG-Co-Chairs-Summary-021123-Final.pdf>

(one to GEF and three to GCF) for some of the priority areas identified in the national forest financing strategies. The concept notes were prepared in collaboration with the accredited entities (FAO, UNDP, OSS and FNEC) selected by the countries.

2. Burundi, Chad, Mozambique, Peru, Suriname and Uzbekistan

27. The Forum Secretariat commenced support to Burundi, Mozambique, Peru, Suriname and Uzbekistan in 2023. Analytical studies focusing on the status of forests, forest management and utilization, forest financing and the contribution of forests to food security, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation were completed in each of these countries. The studies provide detailed baseline information required for the design and formulation of the national forest financing strategies that are aligned to national sustainable development strategies, the national forest programmes and responsive to priority issues identified through stakeholder consultations. The studies also provide the basis for integration and coordination of forest-related commitments linked to multilateral environmental agreements, relevant sustainable development goals (SDGs), nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, Global Forest Goals, Global Biodiversity Framework and Land degradation neutrality targets as well as from relevant international and regional policy processes.
28. Inception meetings and capacity building workshops on the design of national forest financing strategies and accessing finance for sustainable forest management from all available sources at domestic and international levels were conducted in Mozambique, Peru and Uzbekistan. In total, 293 national experts drawn from the relevant government agencies, private sector, civil society organisations, academia and research were trained. Emphasis was also placed on ensuring gender equity and youth participation. Following the workshops, each country established a multi-disciplinary task force to develop their draft national forest financing strategy with technical guidance from the GFFFN. The teams are also receiving technical guidance from the GFFFN and their selected accredited entities in the design and formulation of project concept notes for accessing funding from existing multilateral and other sources. Similar support will be provided to Burundi, Chad and Suriname during the first half of 2024.

3. Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO)

29. The Forum Secretariat in partnership with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) secretariat is currently supporting the development of the regional forest financing strategy aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Amazon sub-region to mobilize resources from all possible sources for sustainable forest management. A capacity building workshop on the design of regional forest financing strategies and mobilization was held and attended by experts from all ACTO member states. The situation analysis and stakeholder consultations are underway. The design of the regional financing strategy will also take into account the forest financing priorities highlighted in the Belem declaration³² that was adopted by members of ACTO in August 2023.

C. New and outstanding requests for GFFFN support

30. Since the eighteenth session, the Forum Secretariat received three new requests for GFFFN support from Burkina Faso, Mali and Morocco, while support to Comoros and Republic of Congo is still outstanding. Four of the countries requested support in the design of national forest financing strategies, and one requested capacity building in accessing financial resources from all sources for sustainable forest management. Support to these countries is expected to commence during the second half of 2024, subject to the availability of resources.

D. Partnerships and joint activities

31. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, represented by the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests, participated in several partnerships and joint initiatives with international, regional and subregional organizations and governments, as the manager of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, some of

³² <https://otca.org/en/get-to-know-the-belem-declaration-signed-by-the-amazon-countries-at-the-summit/>

which are discussed above. Some of the key partnerships and joint initiatives in which the Network has participated since the eighteenth session of the Forum are summarized below.

1. Interagency Task Force on Financing for Development

32. The Forum Secretariat continued to participate in the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development activities and meetings. The main activities included participation in the preparations of financing for sustainable development report 2023 (FSDR 2023)³³ and in reviewing additional Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) guidance notes³⁴, especially the one on climate finance and disaster risk reduction. The purpose of these notes is to complement the initial guidance prepared on the INFF building blocks³⁵ and to provide insights for countries prioritizing related issues.

2. United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

33. The Forum Secretariat continued to participate in the FAO-led taskforce on best practices regarding the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, in collaboration with other partners. The main focus of the taskforce's work during the reporting period has been on the development of some of the capacity development and knowledge sharing initiatives which include the Global Restoration Economics and Finance Facility³⁶. The aim is to develop an international restoration finance facility across multiple sectors to build capacity and enable the development of restoration investment returns, bankable business plans and economic models to achieve desired benefits aligned with restoration activities and approaches. It aims to address the bottlenecks in project development and funding which are reducing the scale and reach of restoration around the world. It is envisaged that the finance facility will operate at the global level and across different ecosystem types but will also have regional approach. It aims to take advantage of opportunities where restoration can be scaled up, financed and made sustainable through the promotion of sustainable and inclusive value chains. FAO and the Network have initiated discussions on the joint development of e-learning courses on restoration including some modules on the main stages of the Standards of Practice for Ecosystem Restoration³⁷.

3. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

34. The Forum secretariat in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) renewed their mutual collaboration in 2023 to develop and implement targeted joint activities relating to sustainable land and forest management to improve the conditions of affected ecosystems, including for the achievement of land degradation neutrality (Goal 15, target 3). In this context, the Forum Secretariat and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD continued to collaborate in supporting Algeria, Malawi, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe, where both partners were requested to provide support. The support includes capacity-building and technical assistance in the design of concept notes focusing on achieving forest landscape restoration and addressing desertification, land degradation and drought.
35. The Network continued to collaborate with UNCCD in supporting the Southern African Development Community (SADC) secretariat, the African Union Commission and partners in the implementation of the SADC Strategy for the implementation of the Great Green Wall Initiative³⁸ through project preparation, resource mobilization, political advocacy and engagement. Projects under the SADC Great Green Wall Initiative aim to draw financing for projects under six investment pillars, tackling the key environmental, social and economic challenges in the SADC region: 1. Water for all, 2. Access to renewable energy, 3. Productive and resilient ecosystems, 4. Climate resilient green infrastructure, 5. Strengthened agricultural productivity and resilient food systems, and 6. Transformative economic and business development. The Network is also collaborating with the Global Mechanism in resource mobilization and related assessments for implementation.

³³ <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/financing-sustainable-development-report-2023>

³⁴ <https://inff.org/resource/inff-technical-guidance-documents>

³⁵ <https://inff.org/inff-building-blocks>

³⁶ <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en?details=cc6592en>

³⁷ <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/publications/standards-practice-guide-ecosystem-restoration-summary-report>

³⁸ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/SADC_GGWI_Presentation.pdf

4. African Forest Forum

36. The African Forest Forum (AFF) is a pan-African non-governmental organization committed to the sustainable management, use and conservation of the forest and tree resources of Africa for the socio-economic wellbeing of its people and for the stability and improvement of its environment. The AFF and the Forum Secretariat in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2023 launched joint initiative at developing and implementing targeted joint activities relating to sustainable land and forest management in Africa. A major area of focus is the mobilization of resources to facilitate effective and efficient integration of forests and trees in Africa's sustainable development and in efforts to enhance building resilience for both people and terrestrial ecosystems. In August 2023 the Forum Secretariat worked with counterparts in AFF to provide capacity-building to SADC national experts on financing opportunities and challenges for REDD+ Initiatives.

5. State Academy of Forestry and Grassland Administration of China: capacity-building in the implementation of the United Nations Forest Instrument and the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030

37. In July 2023, upon the request of the State Academy of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration of China, the Forum Secretariat facilitated the participation of the GFFFN in a hybrid seminar on implementing the United Nations Forest Instrument and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017-2030. The Forum Secretariat provided three days of training to 38 participants from Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. The training was focused on sustainable forest management, the international arrangement on forests, the UN forest instrument and the UN strategic plan for forests, and forest financing opportunities.

E. Resources leveraged for supporting the operation of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network

38. The work of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network is funded mainly from extrabudgetary resources provided through the trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests by donor countries. Since the eighteenth session the Department of Economic Affairs has received \$287,410.00 from the Government of China, \$47,200.00 from the Government of Switzerland for the GFFFN activities managed by the Forum Secretariat. Given the limited availability of resources within the regular programme plan, the Department has historically leveraged the Regular Programme of Technical cooperation to shore up the activities of the GFFFN and continues to explore the most effective way to leverage this source of funding in support of the Network. Since July 2023, the secretariat has mobilized \$376,000 for GFFFN activities from the UN's regular programme of technical cooperation (RPTC) for capacity-building.

F. Update on the development of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network clearing house

39. Phase I of the Network clearing house³⁹ was launched in 2021 with a website and three databases namely, financing opportunities, learning materials related to mobilizing financial resources for forests, and good practices and lessons learned. Since the eighteenth session of the Forum, the secretariat has continued to expand and improve the entries contained in the three databases. Over sixty entries on financing opportunities were updated with the latest information, and new entries were added to all three databases. As of January 2024, the number of entries in the three databases had reached 315, of which 163 were financing opportunities. The secretariat also continued to publish the quarterly highlight on forest financing, a communication product that was initiated in 2022 to disseminate information on forest financing and attract new users to the clearing house. By the end of 2023, seven quarterly highlight issues had been published.
40. Phase II of the Clearing House will be launched at the UNFF19 featuring the fourth database on the flow of financial resources to forests, with a view to providing data for assessing progress on target 15.b of the Sustainable Development Goals and Global Forest Goal 4, as stipulated in the guidelines of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network. The database is being developed using the Unite Web platform hosted by the United Nations, as guided by the cost-effective approach. It will comprise a downloadable dataset, an

³⁹ <https://forest-finance.un.org/>

accompanying analysis of the data and a dashboard visualizing the data and analytical results. The data are collected from credible existing sources based on consultation with the member states, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests joint initiative on forest finance facilitation and other experts in the field. All data relevant to member states used only official data or data acquired with permission for use from the respective country. Due to the existing data gap, especially on domestic and private finance, the database will continue to be expanded and updated as more data becomes available.

41. In August 2023, a questionnaire was disseminated to UNFF national focal points, partners and major groups with the aim of gathering feedback and suggestions for improvement of the clearing house phase I website, its databases and the quarterly highlight. The questionnaire was made available in English, Spanish and French. As of December 2023, a total of 17 responses had been received. Most respondents (15) assessed the Clearing House as either 'very useful' or 'somewhat useful'. Three respondents indicated that they had managed to mobilize resources using the information available on the Clearing House.
42. Among the barriers encountered when using the Clearing House, respondents listed problems with internet connectivity, difficulties using the filters to search the databases, and a lack of awareness of the resources available on the website. Most of the suggestions for improvement revolved around the need for greater visibility and promotion of the resources available on the Clearing House, including through the use of social media, workshops, seminars and other avenues for sharing successful case studies, good practices and lessons learned on mobilizing finance for forests. More regular updates to the website were recommended, and an expansion of the information on financing opportunities for non-governmental and civil society organizations.
43. Based on the feedback to the questionnaire, a series of improvements to the website are contemplated as part of phase II of the clearing house. These will include a refreshed 'Home' page that clearly showcases the latest updates to the website and databases, as well as ongoing efforts to update the database and include more financing opportunities for non-governmental and civil society organizations.
44. By 31 December 2023, the cumulative number of users of the clearing house website had reached nearly 22,000 in 190 countries, and the total page views has exceeded 37,000.

G. Update on the proposed Forum secretariat office for the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network in China

45. At its thirteenth session, the Forum noted with appreciation the offer of the Government of China to establish and make operational an office in Beijing for the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network and requested the Forum Secretariat to regularly report on the possible arrangements for and operation of the proposed office. From its fourteenth to eighteenth sessions, the Forum Secretariat has been informing the Forum of progress on the matter. Four rounds of consultations between the United Nations and China had been held before the eighteenth session. Since then, informal discussions took place, and common understanding was reached regarding the nature of the proposed office, scope and functions of the proposed office. Building on this common understanding, the draft MoU and draft HCA were further reviewed by both sides to reflect the new developments. The fifth round of consultation is expected to be held prior to UNFF19. An update on the results of this round of consultation will be presented during UNFF19.

V. Conclusion

46. Despite the significant increase in forestry official development assistance to about \$1.5 billion annually by 2021, funding from all sources still falls far short of the requirements to achieve sustainable forest management, which is estimated at anywhere between triple the current levels to \$400 billion annually by 2030. It is therefore critically important to maintain the momentum of mobilizing resources from all sources to forests to reach the desired levels. At the same time, significant challenges persist for developing countries and countries with economies in transition trying to access existing and available funding at the national and international levels. These include lack of information on available and emerging sources; how to access funding pledged by various initiatives; lack of resources; limited technology and capacity to mobilize resources from potential domestic and international sources and lack of enabling environment for attracting private and public investment in sustainable forest management. In this regard, there is need for increased financial and human resources to the

GFFFN to enable the Network to adequately provide the required support to countries to improve access to financial and other resources for sustainable forest management.

47. Global financing sources for forests, in particular multilateral sources, have been programmed to address comprehensive global challenges humanity is facing through forests, rather than directly funding forests. This ongoing trend for the last decade is more predominant now than ever before, as demonstrated through the programming of the recent GEF cycles and other multilateral funds, as well as the emergence of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund and the Loss and Damage fund. This has meant that accessing funding for forests is increasingly through inter-sectoral approaches which are more complex and require effective coordination mechanisms and enabling institutional frameworks that are not readily available in most developing countries.
48. The resources available to the GFFFN have decreased compared to previous years while the demand for GFFFN support has been increasing. To address these challenges, the Forum Secretariat has revised the strategic approach of the GFFFN improve its efficiency and maximize its impact. The new strategy considers recommendations made following the assessment of the GFFFN in the context of the IAF mid-term review, the common challenges countries continue to face in accessing finance and potential high impact areas that the GFFFN should focus on to accelerate achievement of the Global Forest Goals and the contribution of forests to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
49. The nineteenth session of the Forum provides an excellent opportunity for Members of the Forum and stakeholders to foster implementation of the commitments made in the UNSPF and strengthen the efforts to mobilize resources from all sources for forests. This will also provide a unique occasion for the Forum to take effective steps to strengthen the GFFFN to continue to provide support to Members of the Forum to advance implementation of sustainable forest management.