



COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION

Rome, 16 - 20 July 2018

STATE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS 2018 – KEY FINDINGS

SECRETARIAT NOTE

I. Introduction

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a commitment made by countries to tackle the complex challenges the world faces, from ending poverty and hunger, and responding to climate change to building resilient communities, achieving inclusive growth and sustainably managing the Earth's natural resources. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 169 targets and 230 indicators lay out specific objectives for countries to meet by a given timeframe with achievements monitored periodically to measure progress. Universally relevant, they call for comprehensive and participatory approaches that bring everybody together to 'leave no one behind'.

2. As governments determine how best to commit national efforts to achieve transformational change, the State of the World's Forests 2018 analyses the role that forests and trees – and the people who use and manage them – can play in helping countries achieve their objectives and bring about a brighter future. SOFO2018 sheds light on the profound interlinkages between forests and many other goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, enabling policymakers to strike the right balance in actions, investments and partnerships directed towards food security, poverty alleviation, conservation of natural resources and, ultimately, to find pathways for sustainable development.

II. Quantifying the contributions of forests to the Sustainable Development Goals

3. Focusing on capturing the contribution that forests and trees can make towards achieving 28 targets within ten SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, the analysis in SOFO 2018 demonstrates a clear link between an integrated forest policy and potential impact across multiple SDGs. Bringing together available evidence from a wide range of scientific sources, thematic metrics were fashioned to offer the potential of analysing evidence of the broader relationship between forests and trees and the 2030 Agenda beyond SDG15. The aim is to highlight interlinkages and opportunities to support more coherent policymaking across sectors and more effective implementation of the SDGs. Specific findings from the analysis are highlighted below.

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4. **Forests and trees make vital contributions to both people and the planet, bolstering livelihoods, providing clean air and water, conserving biodiversity and responding to climate change.** Forests act as a source of food, medicine and fuel for more than a billion people. In addition to helping to respond to climate change and protect soils and water, forests hold more than three-quarters of the world's terrestrial biodiversity, provide many products and services that contribute to socio-economic development, and are particularly important for hundreds of millions of people in rural areas, including many of the world's poorest.
5. Yet, the world's population is projected to increase from around 7.6 billion today to close to 10 billion people by 2050. The corresponding global demand for food, estimated to grow by 50 percent during this period, is placing enormous pressure on the way we use productive lands, particularly in developing countries where the overwhelming majority of the world's 800 million or more poor and hungry people are concentrated. Deforestation, chiefly caused by conversion of forest land to agriculture and livestock areas, threatens not only the livelihoods of foresters, forest communities and indigenous peoples but the variety of life on our planet. Land use changes result in a loss of valuable habitats, a decrease in clean water, land degradation, soil erosion and the release of carbon into the atmosphere. **How to increase agricultural production and improve food security without reducing forest area is one of the great challenges of our times.**
6. **Evidence is key to opening the forest path to sustainable development.** While the importance of forests and trees to a healthy, prosperous planet is universally recognised, the depth of those roots may be greater than imagined. Agreed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2016, the 2030 Agenda's 230 global indicators are designed to help countries measure the progress towards achieving objectives, learn from experiences and understand which areas to prioritise and allocate resources to. Several indicators under SDG15 focus on forests, specifically monitoring forest land and the share of forests under sustainable management. The Global Forest Resources Assessment, coordinated by FAO, found that the world's forest area decreased from 31.6 percent of the global land area to 30.6 percent between 1990 and 2015, but that the pace of loss has slowed in recent years.
7. **There is quantitative evidence to show that forests are being managed more sustainably and that forest and trees contribute towards achieving SDGs relating to livelihoods and food security for many rural poor, access to affordable energy, sustainable economic growth and employment (in the formal sector), sustainable consumption and production, and climate change mitigation.**
8. **The people left furthest behind are often located in and around forests.** The livelihoods and food security of many of the world's rural poor depend on healthy forests and trees. Evidence points to around 40 percent of the extreme rural poor - around 250 million people - living in forest and savannah areas. Access to forests' goods and services is vital for the livelihoods and resilience of the poorest households, acting as a safety net in difficult times. Some studies suggest that forests and trees may provide around 20 percent of income for rural households in developing countries, both through cash income and by meeting subsistence needs. Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFP) provide food, income, and nutritional diversity for an estimated 1 in 5 people around the world, notably women, children, landless farmers and others in vulnerable situations.
9. **Water quality, essential to health and life of both rural and urban populations, is directly related to forest management.** Changes in land cover, use and management have grave implications on a nation's water supply. While three-quarters of the globe's accessible freshwater comes from forested watersheds, research shows that 40 percent of the world's 230 major watersheds have lost more than half of their original tree cover. Despite this, the area of forests managed for soil and water conservation has increased globally, over the past 25 years, and, in 2015, a quarter of forests were managed with soil and/or water conservation as an objective.
10. **Modernizing the traditional wood energy sector has the power to improve livelihoods, create sustainable value chains and unlock resources for investments in sustainable forest**

management. The potential of forests is perhaps no better illustrated than in the fact that wood grows back. Around a third of the world's population, or about 2.4 billion people, make use of wood to provide basic energy services such as cooking, boiling water and heating. Overall, forests supply about 40 percent of global renewable energy in the form of woodfuel, as much as solar, hydroelectric and wind power combined. Emphasis must now be to produce woodfuel more sustainably to reduce forest degradation; as well as making it cleaner and its use more efficient to improve the health of millions of people, particularly women and children.

11. **The world's response to climate change – adaptation, mitigation and resilience – must focus more on forests.** As was underscored at the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, forests and trees play a crucial role in determining the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Acting as carbon sinks, they absorb the equivalent of roughly 2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. However, deforestation is the second-leading cause of climate change after burning fossil fuels and accounts for nearly 20 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions — more than the world's entire transport sector. Effective forest management can strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related natural disasters, underscoring the importance of integrating forest-based measures into national disaster-risk reduction strategies. Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (known as REDD+) will be vital for global efforts to combat climate change. The 25 countries with the highest forest cover have all included forest-related mitigation measures — reduced deforestation and forest degradation, afforestation, enhancement of forest carbon stock, forest conservation and agroforestry — in their Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

12. **Qualitative evidence suggests that forests and trees also make significant contributions to SDGs through the informal sector, agroforestry, opportunities to empower women, sustainable water management, tourism, sustainable cities, climate change adaptation, and tackling land degradation and biodiversity loss.** Nature-based tourism, for example, is growing three times faster than the tourism industry as a whole, now accounting for approximately 20 percent of the global market. The integration of green space and tree cover in urban planning is also on the rise with studies showing links to a reduction in levels of both obesity and crime, though measuring and valuing such benefits remain challenging. In view of growing urbanization and climate change, the design, planning and management of urban green space, including forests and trees, should be integrated into urban planning at an early stage. The role of forests and trees should be reflected in climate mitigation and adaptation policies.

III. What it takes to achieve the SDGs – country case studies

13. **Many countries have already successfully integrated forests and landscape approaches that link multiple SDGs into wider sustainable development programmes.** Eight country case studies show how forest potential is optimised through a cross-sectoral approach in countries that vary in geography, climate, political systems, income level and social and cultural traditions.

14. From Burkina Faso to Italy to Tanzania, landscape approaches help integrate the management of forests and trees with agricultural land, the urban and rural environment and the cultural heritage, ensuring, for example, that the economic value of forest-related tourism is recognised and the benefits that forests and trees for urban populations are understood. Landscape approaches protect vital ecosystem services, sustain livelihoods and tackle food security challenges while adapting to the impacts of climate change.

15. The studies demonstrate the value of multi-stakeholder partnerships that bring governments, the private sector, civil society and individuals together in seeking to find new ways to realise their common goals and aspirations.

IV. Pathways to sustainable development

16. The findings from SOFO 2018 have important policy implications, which include highlighting the need to raise awareness and market the benefits of forests and trees to policy-makers and beyond; engaging the private sector; forest integration with the broader sustainable development agenda; investing in transforming the informal sector to unlock missed development opportunities and improve employment conditions; undertaking national and sub-national analytical studies and improving data availability. More specifically, the following points are considered to be key to achieve the potential of “forest pathways to sustainable development”.

17. **Addressing agriculture and forests together in developing national development policies is critical to achieving the SDGs.** Sustainable agriculture needs healthy and productive forests. Forests and trees support sustainable agriculture by, for example, stabilizing soils and climate, regulating water flows, giving shade and shelter, and providing a habitat for pollinators and the natural predators of agricultural pests. When integrated into agricultural landscapes, forests and trees can increase agricultural productivity. They also help provide food security for hundreds of millions of people, for whom they are important sources of food, energy and income during hard times. Recognising and balancing these trade-offs, including between short-term benefits and long-term benefits, local and global public goods and communities and sectors, will allow policymakers to better direct resources that can accelerate achievement across the 2030 Agenda.

18. **The world’s prime objectives of ending poverty and achieving sustainability will be greatly enhanced by strengthening legal frameworks that recognize and secure community rights of local communities and smallholders to access forests and trees.** Globally, 1.5 billion local and indigenous people have secured rights over forest resources through community-based tenure. Benefits can come from giving local people, with traditional knowledge, the ability to influence decision-making in ways that contribute to SDG targets. With clear and secure rights, people are more likely to take a longer-term approach to forest management as they know that they or their successors will benefit from this. An example is Nepal’s long history of community forest management, an approach adopted by many other countries, especially in Asia and Latin America. Where insecure tenure is a critical problem, frameworks like the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forest, can help provide certainty. Looking ahead, there is a need to learn from successful experience in community forest management, recognising the importance of scientific and technical support, training, capacity building and access to markets, market information and adequate financial resources, as well as the need for clarity in setting out the rights and responsibilities of different parties. All these measures will need to be in place if forest pathways to sustainable development are to be strengthened.

19. **Access to land, resources and investments in and around forests can propel women, youth and other rural entrepreneurs to be agents of change in the transformation to a sustainable world.** Strengthening tenure rights presents an opportunity to enhance gender equitable access to forests and trees, as well as encouraging a long-term, sustainable approach to forest management. Studies highlight the entrepreneurial role that women play, especially in the informal sector, and their leadership role in community and participatory forest management. The enterprise and energy of youth is just as vital for the future of the sector. Investment in training, capacity building and the development of producer organizations can help persuade young people to see the value of making a living by the forest and resist uncertain migration. Investing in the informal sector by increasing economic activity, improving employment conditions and fostering a more sustainable approach to forest management can have a positive impact stretching from forest to farm to town to city. Providing economic incentives to smallholders and communities to manage trees on their lands is likely to prove rewarding.

20. **A positive enabling environment is fundamental to attracting the private sector to pro-sustainability activities.** Both the formal and informal forest sector include large numbers of small or micro-businesses, while at the other end of the scale there are some very large companies. At the

small-scale, priorities often include training to improve land management practices, the promotion of agroforestry, the development of producer organizations, better access to markets and the availability of suitable financing arrangements. At the larger-scale, there may be a need to address potential barriers to investment, often financial or infrastructure related. Policy interventions are likely to include a mix of regulatory approaches and incentives to engage in activities such as payments for ecosystem services and sustainable forest management. At the same time, it will be important to address potential barriers to investment and remove incentives to clear forests. Partnerships with the private sector will be crucial in developing private governance initiatives, such as voluntary certification schemes and commitments to 'zero-deforestation' supply chains.

21. **Stakeholder engagement and a commitment to good governance are fundamental to effective policy implementation.** The right of stakeholders to be consulted during the development and implementation of forest-related policies, programmes and plans should be formalized so that these take into account the needs of forest users and other stakeholders. Along with a sound policy and legal framework, effective institutions are key to good governance. The institutional framework should encompass local communities, civil society organizations and responsible private sector interests, as well as government departments and agencies. This may require building the capacity of organizations that support indigenous peoples, local communities and smallholders as well as strengthening public sector organizations.

22. **To accomplish the historic ambition of ending hunger and poverty and transforming to a sustainable world, the 2030 Agenda expects sectoral ministries to change the way they work, and coordinate policies across government.** Actions on forests, agriculture, food, land use, rural development and national development must be synchronized in the future if sustainable development is to be realised. Although drivers vary significantly between countries and regions, policymakers must recognize the need to manage trade-offs, and set out concrete measures for better aligning multiple objectives and incentive structures. This integrated approach is critical for progress towards the SDG targets. Establishing SDG implementation platforms composed of key sectors in natural resource use and management is one way of managing cross-sectoral coordination and overcoming difficulties in governments that have sector-based ministries and agencies, with their own resource allocations and accountability arrangements. SDG implementation platforms would bring together different ministries and government agencies with other key stakeholders working in dialogue and coordinated action, with a focus on achieving the SDGs and benefitting from inter-linkages, as well as implementation – identifying and addressing barriers to change and monitoring progress.

23. **Investing in effective monitoring at national and sub-national levels will offer countries vital information on which groups of people or areas of the country to focus on.** This will allow policymakers to calculate incentives, manage sector trade-offs, design and roll out forest and food security initiatives, measure out social safety nets, and determine the level of support to different sectors of the economy.

V. Points for Consideration

24. The Committee may wish to invite countries to:

- improve recognition that food security, agriculture and forests are closely linked and that forests contribute to multiple SDGs;
- promote integrated approaches to national development policies and strategies to harmonize sector policies and ensure policy coherence;
- consider ways to improve evidence to assess forests' current and potential contribution to the 2030 Agenda.

25. The Committee may wish to request FAO to:

- disseminate and promote the key messages of SOFO in appropriate fora, including relevant governing and statutory bodies of the organization, as well as in other forest-relevant processes including the United Nations Forum on Forests;
- assist countries in strengthening the role of forests and trees in achieving multiple SDGs and in accelerating progress in this regard;
- support countries with tools and methodologies for generating better evidence of forests' contribution to the SDGs and to monitor progress.