



COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION

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ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARDS SDG 15

SECRETARIAT NOTE

I. Background

1. Forests are among the world's most productive land-based ecosystems and are essential to life on earth and sustainable development. They cover 30 percent of the globe's land area and provide essential goods and services, including timber, fibre, fuel, food, fodder and medicine. They conserve soil and water; prevent land degradation and desertification; reduce the risk of floods, landslides and avalanches, droughts, dust and sand storms, and other disasters; they support sustainable agriculture and are crucial to climate change mitigation and adaptation and conserving the world's biological diversity. Fifteen years ago, the World Bank estimated that 1.6 billion people depended on forests for subsistence, livelihood, employment and income generation. Today, that number may even have increased as 2.4 billion people rely on wood energy for cooking.

2. And still, the earth's total forest area continues to shrink. While global rates of deforestation have decreased in the recent past from a net annual forest area loss of 7.3 million ha in 2000 to 3.3 million ha in 2015, the decrease has not been even across regions and is still particularly high in the tropics and in low income countries. Many drivers of deforestation lie outside the forest sector and are rooted in wider social and economic issues, including challenges related to poverty, urbanization, and policies that favour land uses which produce higher and more rapid financial returns, including energy, mining, transportation, and especially agriculture. In addition, forest degradation is increasing globally.

3. Sustainable Development Goal 15 on Life on Land makes specific reference to sustainable forest management: "Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, **sustainably manage forests**, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss". Three of its targets address forests directly:

Target 15.1: By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements.

Target 15.2: By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally.

Target 15.B: Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation.

4. Targets 15.1 and 15.2 highlight the types of actions to be taken on forests: conservation, sustainable management, restoration, reforestation and afforestation. Priorities should be set by countries based on their situation as it relates to current forest resources and past and current trends. Updated and reliable information is required for evidence-based decision making and for monitoring progress on the identified priority actions. All of these depend on the mobilization of sufficient resources (Target 15.B), demonstrating the interlinkages between the different SDG Targets.

5. The SDG Targets are complemented by other global Goals and Targets of Forest Related processes, in particular the Global Forest Goals of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF). Target 1.1. calls for increasing forest area by 3 percent globally by 2030. The Aichi biodiversity targets and the climate change objectives under the Paris Agreement are of particular relevance as well.

II. Why should progress be accelerated?

6. While forests continue to be lost, the world's population keeps growing and many countries are experiencing rising per capita incomes. These trends are accelerating global demand for food and agricultural products as well as for forest products and services. They are also increasing the demand for food and agricultural products, which is the single greatest driver of deforestation globally. With global population projected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050, forests and their multiple benefits need to be safeguarded. The demand for wood alone is expected to triple to 10 billion cubic meters. This means finding ways to feed people while maintaining and expanding forests to meet other human needs.

7. Achieving the SDG 15 targets presents an enormous challenge. The time frame countries set for themselves in these targets is extremely ambitious as it implies halting and reversing deforestation globally by 2020 – 1.5 years from now. This will require strong political will and immediate, concerted action across all sectors at all levels.

8. In January 2018, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) held the *International Conference on Working across Sectors to Halt Deforestation and Increase Forests Cover - From Aspiration to Action* at FAO headquarters in Rome, as an input to the 2018 review of SDG 15 by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Through a constructive dialogue across sectors and stakeholder groups, the 300 participants considered ways to collectively achieve the globally agreed targets of halting deforestation and increasing forest cover, based on experiences and best practices. One of the key messages from the conference was a call for urgent action: **“Achieving SDG 15, especially halting deforestation and restoring degraded forests by 2020 requires urgent action now. Best practices and tools are available but their application must be upscaled and progress accelerated.”**

III. How can progress be accelerated?

9. Apart from the clear message about the urgency to take action, the conference provided a wide range of recommendations on what needs to be done to accelerate progress on achieving the forest-related targets of SDG 15. These were clustered under the following four themes: (1) Approaches to managing landscapes in an integrated way under a changing climate; (2) Sustainable commodities and value chains; (3) Forest-smart policies and governance; and (4) Innovative instruments to upscale

progress: financing, technologies and research. The most important recommendations are summarized under each theme below.

10. Approaches to managing landscapes in an integrated way under a changing climate: The fundamental link between climate change and forests should be recognized and communicated more clearly. The conference called for an all-inclusive approach that embraces the urgent need to halt deforestation, tackle forest degradation, restore degraded lands, increase forest area and promote the benefits of trees outside forests. This can be achieved by integrating landscape- and community-based approaches into national strategies and development priorities. Agroforestry is recognized as having significant potential, however, it needs to be upscaled with simultaneous technological, market and policy innovations that stimulate change in established agricultural practices, help overcome the time lag between investing in trees and returns from them, and provide secure land and tree tenure. Policy makers should set targets for the adoption of sustainable agricultural production systems and create effective incentives for producers to improve current practices. Upscaling successful approaches and practices requires strengthening forestry education at all levels.

11. Sustainable commodities and value chains: Recognizing that agriculture is the main driver of deforestation, commodity production should be intensified in place rather than expanding to new areas at the expense of forests. This will require a coherent public policy framework for sustainable production and better government communication with the private sector. It also means stimulating the sustainable production and consumption of forest products as opposed to other non-renewable materials while educating and raising awareness of consumers so that buying decisions reward sustainably produced products. Small scale producers will need secure tenure and should receive better access to finance, technical assistance, training and markets and Forest and Farm Producer organizations should be strengthened. Sustainable value chains should be complemented by the development of systems for payments for ecosystem services of forests that are simple to apply, provide direct benefits to land owners and other service providers, and are designed to create momentum on the ground.

12. Forest-smart policies and governance: Governments should articulate the economic and social value of forests in development planning and funding allocations and bring planning and finance ministries to the table in the process of cross-sectoral policy coordination on land use. Non-governmental stakeholders, especially civil society and youth have an important role to play in achieving transformational change as they can act as powerful agents of change. Clear, consistent and diversified land tenure arrangements will facilitate private sector operations and in this context, secure tenure to forests for local communities is key. Regulation of land-use change, transparency in land deals, protection of local and customary rights, enforcement of safeguards, and monitoring will help create positive social and environmental impacts of investments. This also includes removing perverse incentives to clear forests, and providing economic incentives to smallholders and communities to manage trees on forest lands.

13. Innovative instruments to upscale progress - financing, technologies and research: Financing is required at all levels to achieve the SDG 15 targets and a number of financing instruments are available, both internationally and domestically. International banks with agricultural commodity client bases should issue loans that benefit sustainable land use practices at scale, with eligible projects incorporating forest benefits in the form of forest protection, reforestation and/or integrated crop-livestock-forestry systems. Integrated approaches to domestic finance are needed at jurisdictional and/or landscape scale, working with several investment partners, including corporate private sector and small-scale producers, combining forest protection and conservation with commodity production.

Innovative remote sensing technologies are available for land-use monitoring and should be used to present powerful messages to decision makers about the nature and scale of deforestation and land degradation, and for monitoring progress against green indicators.

Research priorities should be aligned with needs and to develop evidence-based policies and implementation frameworks related to forests. This can be achieved by bringing scientists together with policy makers, the private sector and other key stakeholders.

IV. Measuring progress

14. Under the 2030 Agenda, countries provide voluntary reports on progress achieved on the SDGs, based on the SDG indicator framework. FAO is the custodian for the two forest-related indicators of SDG Targets 15.1 and 15.2 and the data is collected through the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) process. However, countries are not only reporting on the SDGs, but also under several other international processes, e.g. the Paris Agreement, the UN Strategic Plan for Forests and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, among others. In order to help reduce the reporting burden on countries, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests has developed a Global Core Set of forest related indicators (see Annex 1).

15. The Global Core Set consists of a limited number of indicators, which address efficiently and comprehensively the topics identified in high level political commitments on forests and helps focus data collection efforts on the questions of the highest policy importance. More specifically, it is intended to support measuring progress towards:

- sustainable forest management (including monitoring SDG 15.2);
- implementation of the UN Forest Instrument and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, notably the Global Forest Goals, and their associated targets;
- SDG targets other than 15.1 and 15.2; and
- other internationally agreed goals on forests in other instruments, in particular forest-related commitments of the Rio conventions.

16. The Global Core Set should be seen as an evolving concept and its continued development is needed in light of the evolution of information needs and abilities to satisfy those needs. Four indicators are classified as “Tier 3” (i.e. they require urgent work on concepts and/or definitions before they are usable), but have been included in the Global Core Set because they represent areas of strong policy commitment and monitoring need. These include:

- Area of degraded forest (7). The main challenge is to classify different types of forest degradation and determine how to measure these. As a preliminary step, will start collecting information on existing forest degradation definitions and related monitoring systems.
- Number of forest dependent people in extreme poverty (13). Key challenges are the definition of “forest-dependent” and the difficulty and cost of collecting data on people in remote forest areas.
- Contribution of forests to food security (14). While methods exist to monitor food security¹, which is addressed by SDG 2 Zero Hunger, it is difficult to separate out the contribution of forests, as food insecurity typically has multiple causes.
- Financial resources from all sources for the implementation of SFM (15). The challenge is to identify the types of financing to be covered², and how to define and monitor each of these. It is also challenging to distinguish financing “for the implementation of SFM” from other financing of forest related activities.

17. Inclusion in the Global Core Set could also serve as a stimulus to improve concepts, definitions and data availability, to enable countries to monitor progress towards the relevant goals and targets. Furthermore, to support the evolution of the Global Core Set a “candidate list” could be

¹ For instance the Food Insecurity Experience Scale.

² Target 4.2 specifies “public (national, bilateral, multilateral and triangular), private and philanthropic financing”

created for future consideration. One area where substantive further work could bring improvements in the medium term is: “Contribution of forest ecosystem services to social, economic, and environmental development” (target 2.4 of the UNSPF).

V. Points for Consideration

18. The Committee may wish to:

- Invite countries to:
 - Recognize the urgency of taking decisive action on halting deforestation and promote the role of civil society and youth as agents of change;
 - Promote sustainable value chains in agriculture and forestry that prevent deforestation and forest degradation;
 - Ensure policy coherence across sectors, provide an enabling framework and facilitate investment and finance for SFM and sustainable agriculture;
 - Strengthen forestry education at all levels and educate consumers of forest products about sustainability;
- Request FAO to:
 - Disseminate and promote the key messages on halting deforestation and increasing forest cover on actions to be taken to achieve SDG Target 15.2;
 - Support countries in promoting and developing policies and measures that lead to sustainable value chains for forest products;
 - Support countries in developing technical and business skills of small forest and farm producers and their organizations.
 - Support the capacity development for relevant country stakeholders to collect and analyse data for the Global Core Set of Forest Related Indicators.
 - Continue working with CPF members on further development of the “Tier 3” and “candidate” indicators of the Global Core Set.
- Endorse the Global Core Set of Forest Related Indicators and invite UNFF and the governing bodies of CPF member organizations to consider their use in their reporting processes.

Annex 1

Draft Global Core Set of Forest Related Indicators

	Indicator	Thematic element	Unit	Tier ³	Data supplier	Linkages to globally agreed goals and targets
1	Forest area as a proportion of total land area	1. Extent of forest resources	%	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards SDG target 15.1 and GFG 1. SDG indicator 15.1.1
2	Forest area annual net change rate	1.Extent of forest resources	%	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards SDG target 15.2 and target 1.1 of the UNSPF. Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1.
3	Net GHG emissions (source)/removals (sink) of forests, and carbon balance of harvested wood products	1.Extent of forest resources 4.Productive functions of forest resources	ktCO ₂ e/year	2	UNFCCC	Measures progress towards targets 1.2 and 2.5 of the UNSPF. Linkages with SDG goal 13 and measuring, reporting and verifying (MRV) requirements under UNFCCC.
4	Proportion of forest area located within legally established protected areas	2.Forest biological diversity	%	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards SDG 15.2 and targets 2.5 and 3.1 of the UNSPF and Aichi target 11. Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1.
5	Change in area of primary forests	2.Forest biological diversity	ha	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards target 1.3 of the UNSPF and Aichi Target 5. Linkages with SDG goal 15.
6	Proportion of forest area disturbed	3.Forest health and vitality	% of forest area	2	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards target 1.4 of UNSPF
7	Area of degraded forest	3.Forest health and vitality	ha	3	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards target 1.3 of UNSPF. Linkages with SDG target 15.3 as well as Aichi target 15. Linkages to UNCCD SO 1 and UNFCCC
8	Above-ground biomass stock in forest	4.Productive function of forest resources	Tonnes/ha	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards SDG 15.2 and targets 1.2 and 2.5 of the UNSPF as well as Aichi target 7. Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1.
9	Volume of wood removals	4.Productive function of forest resources	m ³	1	JFSQ	Measures progress towards target 2.4 of UNSPF
10	Wood based energy share of total final energy consumption	4.Productive function of forest resources	%	2	FAO, UNECE/FAO	Linked to SDG target 7.2

³ Tier 1: Methodology and data in place. Tier 2: Methodology in place, data challenges. Tier 3: Methodology and data both present challenges

11	Forest area with a designated management objective to maintain and enhance its protective functions	5.Protective function of forest resources	ha	1	FAO/FRA	Linked to target 1.4 of the UNSPF
12	Employment related to the forest sector	6.Socio-economic functions of forest resources	Number FTE	2	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards target 2.4 of the UNSPF
13	Number of forest dependent people in extreme poverty	6.Socio-economic functions of forest resources	Number	3	FAO and UNFF	Measures progress towards GFG 2 and its target 2.1 of UNSPF
14	Contribution of forests to food security	6.Socio-economic functions of forest resources	?	3	FAO and UNFF	Measures progress towards GFG 2 and its target 2.3 of UNSPF
15	Financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management	6.Socio-economic functions of forest resources	\$	3	OECD, WB	Measures progress towards GFG 4 and its targets 4,1 and 4.2 of UNSPF. Linkages with SDG target 15a and 15b
16	Existence of national or subnational policies, strategies, legislations, regulations and institutions which explicitly encourage SFM	7.Legal, policy and institutional framework	References	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards GFG 5 of the UNSPF
17	Existence of national or sub-national forest assessment process	7.Legal, policy and institutional framework	References	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards target 4.5 of the UNSPF
18	Existence of national or sub-national stakeholder platform for participation in forest policy development	7.Legal, policy and institutional framework	References	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards target 4.5 of the UNSPF
19	Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan	7.Legal, policy and institutional framework	%	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards SDG 15.2 and targets 1.3 and 3.2 of UNSPF, Aichi target 7. Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1.
20	Forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme	7.Legal, policy and institutional framework	ha	1	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards SDG 15.2 and targets 1.3 and 3.3 of UNSPF. Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1.
21	Existence of traceability system(s) for wood products	7.Legal, policy and institutional framework	References	2	FAO/FRA	Measures progress towards target 3.3 and 5.2 of UNSPF