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Food and Agriculture
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Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة
الغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

AFRICAN FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION

TWENTIETH SESSION

Nairobi, Kenya, 1-5 February 2016

FOREST AND LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

I. Background

1. Deforestation and land degradation are major causes of biodiversity loss and significantly reduce the productivity of the natural assets upon which the well-being of humanity relies. Global estimates suggest that one quarter of global soils are degraded (UNEP, 2014). This in turn negatively impacts the provision of ecosystem services, with approximately 60 percent (15 out of 24) of the ecosystem services examined under the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment being degraded or used unsustainably, including the provision of fresh water, food, fuel and fiber, air and water purification, and climate regulation (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005).
2. Until recently degradation and its potential economic impacts have been largely ignored. This means that there is no standardized framework by which governments can assess and report on ecosystem degradation. Nevertheless, even low-end conservative estimates reveal the significant scale and global reach of the problem. Evidence suggests that land degradation and conversion have led to the loss of between \$4.3-20.2 trillion/year in the value of ecosystem goods and services (Costanza, et al., 2014). This is equivalent to somewhere between 5 and 23 percent of the combined gross national product of all the world's countries combined.
3. Most indirect or direct drivers of forest and landscape degradation are human activities and actions that negatively impact lands and result in loss of carbon stocks. Agriculture (in particular commercial agriculture) is estimated to be the main driver of around 80 percent of deforestation worldwide. Mining, infrastructure and urban expansion are also important drivers of forest and landscape degradation. Findings on global patterns of forest degradation indicate that (commercial) timber extraction and logging activities account for more than 70 percent of total forest degradation in Latin America and (sub) tropical Asia. Fuel wood collection, charcoal production, subsistence agriculture, uncontrolled fire and livestock grazing in forested landscapes are also important drivers of

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forest and landscape degradation in several developing countries, particularly in Africa (G. Kissinger, M. Herold and V. De Sy. 2012).

4. Consequently, continued forest and land degradation pose serious obstacles to eliminating poverty, hunger and biodiversity loss in many parts of the world and to the ability of women and men, farmers and local communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change. This degradation process also increases competition for scarce resources with possible conflicts between users and could exacerbate inequalities for certain groups, such as women, in relation to the use and control over them. These processes threaten the livelihoods, well-being, food, water and energy security and the resilience capacity of millions of people (FAO, 2015). Furthermore, continued forest and land degradation means continued atmospheric emissions of carbon and reduced capacity to sequester carbon/it, and increased risk of catastrophic changes to the earth's climate system.

5. Given the right tools and incentives, much of the deforested and degraded lands can be restored – that is, ecological integrity enhanced and human well-being improved through introduction and/or better management of forests, woodlands, trees and other woody plants at the landscape level. The Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR) has identified more than 2 billion hectares of deforested and degraded landscapes worldwide – an area larger than South America – where opportunities for forest and landscape restoration may be found. This represents areas where ecosystem goods and services are or could be delivered through the presence of forests, trees and other forms of woody biomass.

6. There is a growing awareness of the importance of forest and landscape restoration thanks to several international processes. The Bonn Challenge has set a target of restoring at least 150 million hectares of degraded land by 2020. Additionally, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity have adopted the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in 2010 – Target 15 calls for countries to restore at least 15 percent of their degraded ecosystems by 2020. At the 21st session of COFO in September 2012, Member states recommended that FAO “identify its role in achieving the Bonn Challenge and strengthen its capacity in rural land-use planning in an interdisciplinary way through both normative work and project support to countries”. Member states also recommended that FAO seek support for its field programme to increase assistance to member countries' capacity development in intersectoral planning, institutional development and the application of integrated approaches, and to continue engagement with the GPFLR.

7. Responding to these challenges and recommendations, FAO launched the Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism (FLR Mechanism) at the 22nd session of COFO in 2014, helping countries to achieve their commitments towards the Bonn Challenge, the Aichi Targets and related goals, catalyzing the work of the Organization in close collaboration with key partners in the context of the GPFLR.

II. Role of the FLR Mechanism – support to action on the ground

8. The FLR Mechanism supports the implementation as well as monitoring and reporting of FLR, in particular at the country level. It has so far received extra-budgetary funding from the Governments of the Republic of Korea and Sweden. Based on a multi-criteria selection process that was endorsed by the FLR Mechanism Advisory Group, several countries were selected to receive financial and technical support from the FRL Mechanism from the currently available funding. Factors such as existing pledges and commitment to the Bonn Challenge and alignment with the FAO Country Programming Framework were among the criteria used to determine the most eligible candidates. Countries selected so far to receive support during the period 2015-17 include Cambodia, Guatemala, Lebanon, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda and Uganda. A second group of qualified countries will receive funding if additional financial resources can be mobilized.

9. During the period 2015 to 2020, the FLR Mechanism will focus mainly on:

- 1) Facilitating a multi-stakeholder process in selected countries to define needs and opportunities for FLR, resulting, as needed, in a national FLR plan that includes a) areas targeted for restoration; b) the potential roles and responsibilities of all actors; c) capacity development needs; d) financial resources and technical support required and an indication of how to mobilize such support.
 - 2) Developing, compiling and disseminating tools and best practices related to FLR, taking into account existing related efforts (e.g., on land use planning, participation, genetic resources, biodiversity protection from pests and disease, fire management, water and soil conservation, landscape values, etc.).
 - 3) Supporting the establishment of pilot projects and helping broker new large-scale projects and programmes with national, bilateral and multilateral donors and the private sector.
 - 4) Supporting adequate quality control of well-established FLR efforts, to ensure compliance with accepted guidelines, norms and standards.
10. The FLR Mechanism is also working at the global level in:
- 5) Developing, in collaboration with other partners, guidelines and standards for the establishment of baselines and the monitoring, measurement, reporting and verification of successful restoration efforts.
 - 6) Providing a financial intelligence function, identifying and making available to countries and implementing agencies information about sources of funding for FLR, as well as informing financial and donor institutions about the needs and opportunities for funding FLR.
 - 7) Contributing to the more effective embedding and reporting on FLR actions in global and regional commitments and processes.
 - 8) Helping to build and support operational partnerships on FLR, striving for increased intersectoral collaboration.
11. The FLR Mechanism works closely and in full complementarity with other FAO-hosted arrangements and programmes that have been set up to support related objectives, such as the UN-REDD programme, the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF), the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) initiative, the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) programme, the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) and others.
12. The work of the FLR Mechanism is already embedded in the FAO's Strategic Framework, in particular the Strategic Objectives focusing on "increasing and improving the provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner" (SO2) and "increasing the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises" (SO5). Under Strategic Objective 2, work of the FLR Mechanism is linked in particular to Output 20103, "Organizational and institutional capacities strengthened to support innovation and the transition toward more sustainable production systems". It contributes to the delivery of the Major Area of Work on Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity, as well as to the Regional Water Scarcity Initiative in the Near East region.

III. Funding/support

13. The FLR Mechanism is currently funded through extra-budgetary resources from external donors/partners - to date, these include the Republic of Korea and Sweden. It was established as an umbrella programme under which a variety of bilateral, multilateral and other types of support can be accommodated, mainly to support action at country level.
14. The FLR Mechanism is fully supportive of and synergistic with all efforts towards the achievement of the Bonn Challenge carried out by other GPFLR partners. Several GPFLR members are also members of the FLR Mechanism Advisory Group in order to ensure complementarity, mutual support and avoid overlapping or duplication in support to FLR globally.

IV. Points for consideration

15. The Committee may wish to invite countries to:
- Develop or strengthen mechanisms to ensure greater inter-sectoral cooperation amongst various land management agencies responsible for agriculture, forestry, fisheries and livestock management through a more integrated landscape approach;
 - Consider making pledges or commitments toward the Bonn Challenge, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets related to ecosystem restoration and other related goals and targets, and to support actions towards their achievement;
 - Consider strengthening the mobilization of innovative and enhanced levels of financing for the restoration of degraded lands, including through the GEF, the Green Climate Fund and the private sector, for which more favourable enabling conditions that promote investment may be required;
 - Provide financial and/or in-kind contributions to support the umbrella programme of the FLR Mechanism at FAO.
16. The Committee may wish to recommend FAO to:
- Support country efforts to plan and implement activities related to the restoration of forests and other degraded lands, in particular through activities of the FRL Mechanism;
 - Seek further cooperation with partners to promote the restoration of degraded lands, in particular through direct involvement in global partnerships and initiatives, including the GPFLR, International Model Forest Network, and the Landscapes for People, Food and Nature initiative, as well as with the members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests;
 - Engage in more cross-cutting and inter-departmental work, in particular through the relevant Major Areas of Work and/or Regional Initiatives defined under the FAO Strategic Framework, to support landscape approaches to achieve greater food security, poverty alleviation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources;
 - Pursue active engagement with multilateral, bilateral and private sector resource partners, including the GEF, Green Climate Fund and multilateral and regional development banks, to enable FAO to increase its support to member countries for capacity development in inter-sectoral planning, institutional development and application of landscape approaches on the ground.