



NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION

TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION

19 – 21 October 2021

INTEGRATING FORESTRY IN FAO'S WORK ON FOOD SYSTEMS

Executive Summary

The FAO Council, at its 165th Session, held on 30 November – 4 December 2020, requested FAO to integrate forestry in its work on food systems, including, but not limited to, through COVID-19 pandemic recovery measures and in its Hand-in-Hand Initiative.

This document describes the link between forests, rangelands and the need to transform agri-food systems, highlighting five important areas to pursuing synergies and managing trade-offs between agriculture and forestry:

- Integrated policies and landscape approaches, including silvo-pastoral agroforestry systems;
- Strengthening governance and legality;
- Efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems;
- Science-based decisions - data, innovation, technology and the FAO “Hand-in-Hand” initiative; and
- Deploying the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus approach.

Key challenges are to:

- Reduce forest and rangeland degradation and deforestation without adversely affecting food security;
- Promote efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems that take into account sustainable forest and land management, water conservation, and safeguard biodiversity, livelihoods and local knowledge; and
- Restore and sustainably manage forests and rangelands to maximise their positive contributions to rural livelihoods, food security and agriculture systems.

Suggested action by the Commission

The Commission may wish to:

- Send a message to its Regional Conference emphasising the need to consider food security, agriculture, rangeland, forestry and other aspects of rural development in an integrated manner;
- Recommend that FAO – within the context of Programme Priority Area Better Life 5 (PPA BL5) on Resilient Agri-food Systems – strengthens action on halting desertification, land degradation and deforestation while greening agri-food systems, taking into consideration regionally-specific land degradation dynamics and drivers; and
- Request FAO to further strengthen its cross-sectoral work through activities aimed at halting land degradation and deforestation, and promoting sustainable agriculture, rangeland, and forest management in ways that lead to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems.

The Commission may wish to recommend that Members:

- Strengthen efforts to reduce forest and rangeland degradation and deforestation;
- Strengthen the institutional mechanisms for silvopastoral and agroforestry approaches in integrating livestock management in forest- and tree-based production systems to maximise synergies in terms of food and fibre provision, biomass circulation, carbon storage, wildfire prevention, restoration capacity, biodiversity conservation, soil fertility and water management;
- Address critical data gaps in the status of the region’s forests and rangelands to demonstrate and promote diversification of cropping systems and soil-crop-water-livestock-nutrient-pasture-tree management of rangeland and agrosilvopastoral systems in the region;
- Promote efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems that contribute to sustainable forest and land management, including through agricultural capacity building programmes and improved access to technologies and markets, especially for women and youth; and
- Mainstream the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus approach in ongoing and future programmes and projects that integrate conflict sensitivity and context specific analysis to avoid exacerbating further degradation.

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I. Introduction

1. At its 25th Session, held on 5-9 October 2020, the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) requested FAO *inter alia* to:

- Integrate forestry in FAO’s work on food systems;
- Promote synergies and address trade-offs between forestry and agriculture in initiatives and projects, including through COVID-19 pandemic recovery measures;

- Enhance FAO's cross-sectoral work to address impacts of certain agriculture production systems and related food systems on forests.¹

2. Subsequently, the FAO Council, at its 165th Session, held on 30 November – 4 December 2020, requested FAO to integrate forestry in its work on food systems, including, but not limited to, through COVID-19 pandemic recovery measures and in its Hand-in-Hand Initiative, and underlined in general the importance of FAO's participation in inter-governmental multilateral mechanisms recognized within the United Nations system.²

II. The urgent need to transform agri-food systems and the link with forests

3. Hunger and malnutrition in all its forms are on the rise. About one tenth of the global population – up to 811 million people – were undernourished in 2020. Billions more are malnourished, with no access to healthy diets. At the same time, the agri-food systems of the world are under tremendous stress from loss of biodiversity and climate change. In response to these challenges, there is an urgent need to transform agri-food systems to provide the world's growing population with healthy, affordable diets in a way that is economically profitable and environmentally friendly. It is no longer possible to continue with 'business as usual' and it is essential to recognize the interconnected economic, social, and environmental impacts of agri-food systems.

4. Forests and trees have multiple linkages and relationships with agri-food systems. FAO's *Strategic Framework 2022-2031*^{3,4} was developed to support implementation of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Its strategic narrative is aimed at transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life*, leaving no one behind. The *FAO Director-General's Medium-Term Plan 2022-25 and Programme of Work and Budget 2022-23*⁵ contains a Results Framework with twenty Programme Priority Areas that will deliver these *four betters*.

5. Following the consultations at the 34th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) and in line with the new *FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2023*, four regional Programme Priorities were identified for transforming food systems, responding to COVID-19 and achieving the SDGs in the region. These are: i) Rural transformation for youth employment and income; ii) Developing food systems that promote food security and healthy diets for all; iii) Greening agriculture: addressing water scarcity, ensuring environmental sustainability and climate action; and iv) Building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations. The third priority focuses on addressing the sustainability of natural resources in broader sense, including in land, water, forestry, marine and aquatic resources and biodiversity and calls for a transformative shift in the agri-food system that brings the issues of sustainability and resource efficiency to the forefront.

6. Innovative approaches for sustainable forest management include development of silvo-pastoral agroforestry systems, which integrate livestock management in forest- and tree-based production systems. The 166th Session of the FAO Council, held in April 2021, endorsed the role of the Committee on Forestry Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems in the approved Revised 2021-23 Action Plan (Outcome 4. Core area 4) for the Implementation of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors.

¹ Paras 23a, 23b & 23d, C 2021/24

² Para 22k, CL 165/REP

³ The agri-food systems include systems producing food, fiber and other non-food agricultural commodities, including forest products. The term covers all activities related to the production, processing, distribution, sale, preparation and consumption of those products.

⁴ Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ne577en/ne577en.pdf>

⁵ Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ne576en/ne576en.pdf>

III. Pursuing synergies and managing trade-offs between agriculture and forests

7. Healthy forests and sustainable agriculture depend upon each other. Sustainably managed forest ecosystems can help minimize the likelihood of agricultural losses from drought, soil erosion, heat and land degradation and desertification. Forests play a key role in water security and water regulation, including for agricultural needs⁶. An estimated 75 percent of the 115 leading food crops globally – together representing 35 percent of global food production – benefit from pollination by animals,⁷ many of which live in forests. Nonetheless, objectives of increasing food production and forest conservation can be competing, and the current pace of conversion of forests and rangelands to agricultural land hampers the achievement of other global and local goals, including on climate change, land degradation, desertification and biodiversity. However, there are important opportunities to develop sustainable, complementary approaches that benefit both forests and food systems. FAO's *State of the World's Forests 2016*⁸ included seven case studies from countries that had increased food security and agricultural production without reducing their area of forest. They achieved this by adopting integrated policies for land use and rural development that recognised the full economic, social and environmental benefits of forests and rangelands and by using well-designed, targeted measures to implement these policies.

Integrated policies and landscape approaches

8. Decisions about land use and natural resource priorities need to be addressed in an integrated way, with cross-sectoral policies that reflect the important role of forests and trees in providing essential environmental services for agri-food systems and in contributing to rural livelihoods. Agricultural support, which accounts for significant shares of public spending in all regions, needs to be re-purposed to reduce land degradation and deforestation, catalyse climate action, protect biodiversity, conserve soil and water resources, and foster food security. Integrated planning at the landscape level is needed to promote synergies and address trade-offs between agriculture and forest goals. This requires collaboration between relevant public bodies and active engagement by stakeholders, including local communities, producer and civil society organizations and private sector interests, so that the plans are informed by the interests and needs of these different groups, as well as by technical considerations. The rights of stakeholders, including women and marginalised communities, to participate in the development of land use policies, programmes and plans should be respected, so that full account is taken of their needs. Clarifying and securing tenure is essential as a foundation for long-term sustainable investments and coordination at landscape level.

9. A multi-pronged approach is often needed to achieve multiple land-use and natural resource goals. Potential tools include regulatory measures, financial incentives and the provision of advice on best practice. The choice of the most appropriate measures must reflect local circumstances and challenges. For example, where commercial agriculture is the principal driver of land-use change, enhanced governance is needed, including social and environmental safeguards and due diligence, transparency and jurisdictional/landscape approaches. Where subsistence agriculture is the key driver, support to adopt more sustainable production practices needs to be complemented with broader poverty alleviation and rural development interventions, notably strengthening tenure. In addition, partnerships between the public sector, the private sector and civil society provide another tool for promoting sustainable land management through, for example, corporate social responsibility programmes, along with other mechanisms that recognize the value of ecosystem services.

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb6473en/>

⁷ Klein, A.-M., Vaissière, B.E., Cane, J.H., Steffan-Dewenter, I., Cunningham, S.A., Kremen, C. & Tscharntke, T. 2007. Importance of pollinators in changing landscapes for world crops. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 274(1608): 303–313. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2006.3721>

⁸ Available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ffed061b-82e0-4c74-af43-1a999a443fbf/>

Strengthening governance and legality

10. The legal framework should be consistent with policy objectives and provide certainty regarding land tenure and rights to use land and forest products.

11. While not measured with certainty, a significant share of deforestation can be considered as illegal according to national laws, including in the context of the NENA region where national laws impose heavy restrictions on tree cutting. Strengthening governance, supporting law enforcement and accountability processes can be key elements in reducing negative trade-off between agriculture and forests. In many rural areas, the stakeholders are forest-based or agrosilvopastoral farmers working in forestry, agriculture and livestock sectors. Then, efforts should be made to address sustainability of forest and agricultural commodities that are a major source of livelihoods in producer countries.

Efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems

12. As part of the Decade of Action to Deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Secretary General convened a high-level Food Systems Summit in September 2021. One of the Summit's five action tracks focused on nature-positive food production systems, including protecting natural ecosystems from conversion, sustainably managing existing production systems, and restoring degraded ecosystems. The position paper for this action track recognises that it is possible to reduce the environmental impact of food production by developing new and emerging approaches, including through agroforestry and transformation of livestock grazing regimes, while also making use of traditional knowledge. Specific forest-related topics within this action track include: deforestation-free and conversion-free supply chains; transformation through agroecology and regenerative agriculture; and traditional food production systems.⁹

13. Current FAO initiatives relevant to these issues in the region include:

- Promotion of a global restoration movement under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, led by FAO and UNEP. The scaling up of work on forest and landscape restoration on the ground will build on the existing work of the Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism, the Action Against Desertification project and GEF-funded The Restoration Initiative with projects in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco and Sudan.
- Collaboration between the FAO Forestry Division and the Animal Production and Health Division on a new dryland initiative *Grazing with trees*. Restoring dryland forests and woodlands can bring benefits for the livelihoods of local communities as well as providing ecosystem services, and this assessment will identify innovative solutions for improving the interconnection between sustainable livestock management and the conservation of these agrosilvopastoral ecosystems with special focus on the Near East context.
- *Forest Foods*, a new initiative, which will promote plant-based food products from forests and trees has the potential to include the NENA region where forest-based food, such as honey, nuts, fruits, and mushrooms are among the most important non-wood forest products with recorded economic values (FAO, 2016).¹⁰
- The *Sustainable Wildlife Management Programme* (SWM) seeks to develop innovative, collaborative, and scalable new models to conserve wildlife and improve food security. The SWM programme is supporting Egypt and Sudan to strengthen the institutional and legal framework for the sustainable harvest and offtake of waterbirds in major wetlands in the two countries. As part of the waterbird monitoring programme, SWM is developing an Open Online Course to share waterbird identification, census and wetlands management best practices and lessons learnt.
- Improvement of the Sustainable Forest Management Toolbox, which is a knowledge platform that includes modules on agroforestry, drylands forests and agrosilvopastoral systems.¹¹

⁹ Available at https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/unfss-at3-discussion_starter-dec2020.pdf

¹⁰ FAO. 2016. Non wood forest products value chains in Lebanon. <http://www.fao.org/3/i6506e/i6506e.pdf>

¹¹ Available at <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-forest-management/toolbox/modules/en/>

14. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and “building back better” countries can promote forest and trees towards realizing opportunities for the forest and rangeland sectors to generate green jobs and additional livelihoods while at the same time helping to conserve soil and water, biodiversity, and address the challenges of climate change. Looking ahead, action will focus on mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of forest and rangeland-dependent people and providing recovery support to enhance their resilience. This includes supporting community-led conservation initiatives (e.g., Himas), adopting and scaling up sustainable agroecological production practices, restoring the productivity of degraded agricultural lands, investing in neglected and underutilized species and non-timber forest products to support healthier diets, and promoting sustainable value chains.

15. Private sector engagement in the Land Degradation Neutrality approach can help restore the productivity of degraded agricultural lands and contribute to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Finance is needed to reverse current trends of forest and rangeland degradation and promote sustainable agriculture in drylands, including through the promotion of silvopastoral and agroforestry systems.

16. FAO supports the design and implementation of agricultural production systems that enhance the presence of trees and foster forest restoration through supporting community initiatives, which can generate additional income and livelihoods support.

17. Examples include FAO support for: Lebanon through the Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism and the “Smart Adaptation of Forest Landscapes in Mountain Areas (SALMA)” project; and for Mauritania and Sudan under the framework of the Great Green Wall Initiative, through the Turkey funded project “Boosting Restoration, Income, Development, Generating Ecosystem Services (BRIDGES)” project.

Science-based decisions - Data, innovation, technology and the “Hand-in- Hand” initiative

18. Optimizing the nexus between agriculture and forests requires robust and comprehensive information on the dynamics that condition these linkages. Different studies on underlying and direct drivers of land use change and forest loss have been launched at global, regional and national levels to facilitate science-based decisions when addressing the challenge of producing more and better food without further encroachment on strategic ecosystems. Those studies build on the global remote sensing survey realized as a part of the Global Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) process and on production and trade statistics on agricultural and forests products collected by FAO (FAOSTAT). Some are part of regional projects on sustainable forest and land management.

19. FAO conducted a regional study to examine the impact of conflicts on natural resources in the NENA region for the time period 2010-2018. The study developed an Earth Observation based approach that can be used in multiple contexts. The tool provides cost-efficient, unbiased and objective information and is applicable globally. Moreover, the study considered the methodology set by the 2017 UNCCD report on “Good Practice Guidance – SDG Indicator 15.3.1” to derive and report on the proportion of degraded land.

20. The FAO “Hand-in-Hand Initiative” is an evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development and is supported by the Hand-in-Hand geospatial platform. The initiative adopts a robust match-making approach that proactively brings together target countries with donors, the private sector, international financial institutions, academia and civil society to mobilize means of implementation that support accelerated actions. Through the design and implementation of ambitious investment plans that combine actions on agriculture, forestry and other areas, the Initiative aims to reduce inefficiencies and increase sustainability by promoting integration, horizontal coordination and arrangements involving local communities, households and farmers, producer organizations, rural entrepreneurs, service providers and all other relevant stakeholders. The Initiative uses integrated geospatial, bio-physical and socio-economic data to identify subnational territories where agricultural and rural transformation can have transformative impacts.

Deploying the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus approach

21. A 2020 evaluation of FAO's role and work on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus highlighted the relevance of the HDP approach to FAO in its drive to end hunger, recognizing that development is not a purely technical process, and that common drivers of conflict and risk relate directly to FAO's mandate, particularly around natural resource management, land, and water¹², since conflicts often lead to natural resource degradation¹³. FAO has an important role to play in promoting a rights-based approach to development, including through rights-based legal instruments (such as the voluntary guidelines on tenure), Farmer Field Schools, Dimitra Clubs, and participatory area-based approaches. At the global and regional level, FAO has broadened its partnerships in ways that contribute to the HDP nexus, through multi-stakeholder initiatives, and with other UN agencies, for example, the Global Network Against Food Crises. The evaluation concluded that the HDP nexus must be 'institutionally anchored' in FAO so that it becomes a well understood and used approach at the corporate level in all locations, both fragile states, disaster risk, conflict, and crises settings, and more stable contexts. Moreover, connected HDP nexus programming could play a transformational role in delivering gender equality and empowerment, especially if a sufficiently long-term perspective is adopted.

¹² <http://www.fao.org/evaluation/highlights/highlights-detail/en/c/1334372/>

¹³ FAO. 2020. Effect of conflicts on forests and rangelands in the NENA region. FAO regional Office for the Near East. Under publication