I. INTRODUCTION

1. With the successes of the International Year of Forests and the increased attention to communications, FAO followed COFO’s guidance in implementing the communications strategy and outlined the key communication priorities of the Forestry Department over the biennium. Two of the strategy’s indictors in particular, ‘FAO forestry project and programme outcomes and publications are showcased more frequently at large international events’ and ‘negative perceptions of forest use and management are reversed’, have been the focus of work on communications and outreach.

2. In the coming years, strong focus will be placed on improving the intersectoral visibility of forests and their essential role in sustainable development. This is essential, not only to fulfill FAO’s corporate work in the new Strategic Objectives, but also to build partnerships and raise the visibility of forests in the international and national policy arena, including in the negotiation of the post-2015 development agenda and the review of the international arrangement on forests. In light of this, greater visibility for FAO products in forestry is needed, to maximize exposure of these products and forest issues.

3. This paper explains progress made on the work of five regional forest communicators networks, promotes the International Day of Forests since its inception in 2013, and future plans to strengthen these efforts.

II. ENHANCING FOREST COMMUNICATIONS

Regional Forest Communicators Networks

4. Policymakers, governments and international organizations have increasingly recognized the urgent need for the forestry community to increase its communication capacity and activity across countries and regions to better promote and explain topical forests and cross-sectorial forestry issues. Building on the success of the European network of forest communicators, the need to build on this experience was recognized. Since 2011, FAO, with the financial support of Finland and Austria, has been assisting the creation of self-sustaining regional forest communicators networks in Asia, Africa and Latin America. A pilot workshop in Peru, in 2011, was followed by workshops in East Africa and Central America in 2012, West Africa and Asia in 2013, and the Mediterranean and the Near East in 2014. These new networks encourage and support forest communication experts to:
Share best practices and tools to implement effective communication campaigns, programmes and forestry projects in the region;

Promote learning through participation and interaction and generate new contacts and alliances; and

Exchange up-to-date information on topical forest issues.

5. Capacity building, sharing best practices and learning including through providing facilitation and promoting collaboration among networks will continue to be the focus of the work in the 2014-2015 biennium. At several of recent meetings, participants determined a number of benefits accruing from a better coordination and experience exchange including at a global level; and that regional networks would benefit from an exchange of experiences and lessons learned and suggested support by a group of experts from different regions to facilitate such work. On this basis, FAO, has established a group of experts to advise on global and regional communication issues and to advance further the exchange of experience and best practices including on capacity building in these networks.

6. In addition, successful convening of further training workshops and support to the creation of other regional networks to have a complete global network are important elements of sustaining global and inter/intra-regional forest communication work. Once built, these networks can provide the basis for stronger global level coordination of communication efforts.

7. A forest communication toolkit is being developed in order to take full advantage of and provide support for these new networks. The Toolkit is a communication resource that will provide the global forestry community free and easy access to the huge array of material, information and data on FAO’s programmes in forestry, activities and products. It has been designed to be an integral part of our support to member countries’ capacity building and communication activities as well as a channel for reinforcing knowledge and information-sharing with our partners.

**International Day of Forests**

8. In December 2012, the UN General Assembly through Resolution A/RES/67/200 proclaimed 21 March the International Day of Forests (IDF). In the resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretariat of the UN Forum on Forests, in collaboration with FAO, and in partnership with governments, international, regional and sub-regional organizations and major groups to facilitate the implementation of the Day. On each Day, countries are encouraged to undertake local, national and international efforts to organize activities involving forests and trees, such as tree planting campaigns.

9. In response, FAO initiated coordination through the CPF Communicators Group, created a dedicated IDF website, launched an IDF logo, and provided a platform for the public to post their photos of IDF-related events, forests and tree planting on the FAO IDF website.

10. On the first International Day of Forests 2013, FAO held both an international event at FAO headquarters to inaugurate the Day and a regional event in Algeria, which was the key sponsor of the IDF resolution in the UNGA. In addition, a spot promoting the IDF was produced and shown on all regional CNN channels, on two global broadcasters (Deutsche Welle in Spanish, Arabic, German and Chinese and Euronews), as well as, among others, on Sky, Somalia TV, Polish TV and promoted through many zoos worldwide including the New York and the Berliner Zoo.

11. In 2014, a video spot to promote the IDF was also produced and aired on a similarly extensive range of international media channels including this time also Al Jazeera. FAO held an international event on forest monitoring at UN headquarters, which was webcast live to the public (www.fao.org/webcast), and relayed updated findings of the FAO remote sensing survey, provided an opportunity for donors to express their key priorities for forests, and launched the Forest Communicators Toolkit. It provides a range of key messages, videos, graphics and photos that members of the international forestry community can use to promote forest work and future IDFs.

12. Ahead of the upcoming 2015 IDF, FAO will work in conjunction with other Collaborative Partnership on Forests members to create joint events and products that are expected to contextualize
the IDF in the post-2015 development agenda. Further plans for this work will likely be discussed at forthcoming CPF meetings.

13. Communication and outreach to promote forestry work is a complex, time-consuming and sometimes expensive exercise, but the return on investment can be very high. For instance, media and outreach during the International Day of Forests yielded over a 1:150 return on investment, with hundreds of millions of people, including FAO stakeholders reached. Feedback from the public in the form of pictures and emails has verified the extent of public participation in the International Day of Forests. Based on these experiences, FAO will continue to support the celebration of the International Day of Forests, to promote forest information worldwide.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

14. The Committee may wish to:

- invite members to take note of the role of communication in promoting forests issues and enhance communication capacities, including through supporting the work of the regional forest communicators networks, active participation in their work, and to enhance information dissemination on forest issues.
- undertake future actions to raise the profile of forests including through the celebration of 21 March, the International Day of Forests.

15. The Committee may wish to request FAO to:

- continue supporting the regional forest communicators networks, including through providing coordination for the global and regional levels;
- recognize the networks’ value-for-money and benefit from their contribution to future global forest-related events, including the World Forestry Congress;
- dedicate funding in projects and programmes to facilitate communication of progress and results.

i http://www.youtube.com/v/WpF_5pp6zJY