**AFRICAN FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION**

**TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION**

**Sustainable management of Africa’s Forests and Wildlife resources: boosting Food Security and Resilience to Climate Change for improved livelihoods**

Arusha - United Republic of Tanzania, 30 October - 03 November 2023

**Forest policy and governance in Africa**

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**Executive Summary**

Policy and governance are essential to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Forest Objectives established in the UN Strategic Plan on Forests. This document builds on findings from the State of the World Forests 2022 (SOFO 2022), Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2020, and FRA 2020 Remote Sensing Survey (RSS) to highlight the challenges represented by deforestation and forest degradation in Africa and the importance of advancing solution-oriented governance processes that can generate effective policies to align nature and people’s needs.

**Suggested Actions by the Commission**

*The Commission is invited to encourage Members to:*

- establish solution-oriented governance processes to address forest loss, forest and land degradation, and sustainable use of forest resources, based on a strengthened policy-science interface, use of evidence, and building on collaboration and partnerships to adapt and evolve with the changing environment.
- assess governance and policies for sustainable wood and non-wood production and use, including linkages to other sectors and the bioeconomy, to build national and regional capacities to increase the generation of socioeconomic benefits and accelerate the transition to carbon-neutral and resilient economies, zero hunger, poverty eradication, and higher equality.
- establish regional policy platforms and engage in regional policy dialogues to facilitate awareness-raising, cross-learning, and problem-solving to accelerate the pathways to...
deforestation reduction, landscape restoration, and the bioeconomy, for achieving inclusive, resilient, and sustainable economies.

The Commission is invited to recommend FAO to:

- support reviews and assessments of regional land-use based sector policies and their overall impact on the forest sector.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Forests and their ecosystem services support societies in manyfold ways and are critical for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, mitigate climate change, and support resilient economies and sustainable landscapes. In Africa, however, deforestation and forest degradation are still major concerns, and are depleting the region’s wealth (World Bank, 2021). FRA 2020 revealed that while Northern Africa has been able to keep forest area stable, Sub-saharan Africa has experienced significant forest cover loss, mainly attributed to forest conversion to cropland, resulting in a decline in forest as a proportion of total land from 30.4 percent in 2000 to 27.6 percent in 2020, with a total reduction of forest area between 2000 and 2020 of 10.4 percent, the largest in the world (FAO, 2020). Even though the FRA remote sensing survey (RSS) identified a decline of annual deforestation by 23 percent between 2000 and 2018 (FAO, 2022), the actual forest loss is still high with deforestation hotspots in Eastern and Southern Africa in the period. Land degradation is also a major concern in the African continent. The region responds for one-fifth of all human-induced degraded land in the (FAO, 2022). Such significant losses have severe implications for present and future region’s development and livelihoods.

2. There is a critical need for policies capable of aligning nature and people’s needs in the African continent. In Africa, 572 million people live outside urban areas and within one km of forests in 2019 (Newton et al., 2022). Trees outside forests also play an important role in the region. According to the RSS results, Africa has the largest proportion, 42.5 percent, of Other Area with Trees within all other areas. Whereas evidence shows that growing trees represents an important source of income for rural smallholder households (FAO, 2022a), demographic pressure remains a driver of both deforestation and degradation in the region (FAO, 2022).

3. Tenure and improvement of productivity of smallholder production are key policy and governance issues in Africa. Public ownership is dominant and access to forests and trees is still surrounded by uncertainties. In 2020, in the Western and Central Africa region, 93 percent of forests

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were publicly owned, and two percent were under private ownership, while in Northern Africa, 73 percent were publicly owned, and 27 percent were under private ownership (FAO 2022a).

4. Uncertainty affects also the management of private land. Estimations indicate that one-third of rural smallholder households grow trees in Africa, which contribute an estimated 17 percent of the total annual gross income to these households. Studies in agroforestry in sub-Saharan Africa concluded that, on average, agroforestry systems increased crop yield and contributed to maintaining the delivery of regulating/maintenance ecosystem services. However, tree use and management are still subject to heavy and changing regulation, which combined with other policies and subsidies favouring crop production, can result in incentives to convert the property to cropland (FAO 2022a).

5. The FAO’s State of the Forests 2022 outlined three pathways whereby forest and trees can deliver the means for recovery and promote inclusive, resilient, and sustainable economies. With a focus on reducing deforestation, accelerating forest and land restoration, and promoting the sustainable use of forests, these pathways need governance and policy processes capable of creating the right incentives to secure forest provision of ecosystem services and to eliminate the disruptive dynamics caused by deforestation, illegal logging, poaching, and other unsustainable practices.

II. FAO and other initiatives in the region

6. FAO’s Strategic Framework 2022–2031 recognizes the importance of policy and governance to achieve transformative sustainable agrifood systems. Participatory and transparent governance can deliver the understanding and collective mobilization to guide prioritization and effective implementation through policies. Early governance assessments, with identification of causal and power relations can accelerate implementation while providing for more accurate risk assessments and mitigation measures. The organization has supported governance as a problem-solving and an iterative collective learning process, while also being forward looking, practical and focused on developing coalitions of actors around implementable solutions (Bojic et al., 2022)6.

7. Governance and policies to support the transformation needed to engage with forest pathways need the support of evidence, as well as identification and analysis of the different stakeholder groups, the interlinkages, and relationships among them, as well as their ambitions. In 2022, FAO published the framework paper on “Focus on governance for more effective policy and technical work at all levels”, and the accompanying e-learning course. They can facilitate approaches based on a solid understanding of practical and political realities on the ground.

8. A critical challenge for forest policy and governance in Africa is the active inclusion of livelihoods in the planned forest interventions to contribute to the reduction of deforestation and degradation as well as to achieve the Global Forest Goals stated in the UN Strategic Plan on Forests. FAO has delivered support at sub-regional and national levels to strengthen capacities for more effective policy formulation.

9. The Hand in Hand Initiative (HIH)7 provides an integrative, holistic approach to support investment and accelerate market-based transformation of agrifood systems in target countries and territories. HIH is supporting 37 countries in Africa. Several Governments engaged in HIH included agroforestry as a priority investment area for advancing food systems transformation. FAO is facilitating negotiations between a number of Governments for agroforestry-related investments including carbon credits to improve smallholder farmers livelihoods.

10. In response to the recommendations of the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission (AFWC) at its 23rd Session with regard to the engagement with stakeholders to collect, assess, and disseminate good practices promoting the sustainable production and trade of charcoal and other forms of wood energy in Africa, FAO conducted an assessment on the conduciveness of national policies and strategies to interventions in the charcoal sector of 31 African countries and published the study findings “Are policies in Africa conducive to sustainability interventions in the charcoal sector?” (Mwampamba, T.H. et al., 2023). At national level, a comprehensive review of the regulatory framework of the charcoal value chains across districts at sub-national level was concluded in Uganda (June 2023) with recommendations to government and other stakeholders.

11. FAO has technically supported the development of “Forest Landscape Management Plan for the Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Yumbe District, Uganda: 2023–2028”, in close collaboration with national and local government agencies and international partners, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE). So far (by September 2023), the plan has guided the restoration of 100 ha of degraded forests in the Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, and the sensitization of the refugee and hosting communities have been carried out.

12. Collaboration with other initiatives is critical for acceleration robust policy response to address forest challenges. In this context, FAO mobilized a funding of EUR1.2 million from the DG ECHO of the EU to support the project, “Greening the Humanitarian Response in Displacement Settings: Sustainable Forest Management and Ecosystem Restoration for Enhanced Energy Access and Livelihood Resilience”. This project is currently under implementation in Djibouti, Somalia, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania. FAO has also updated the assessment methodology and developed an online assessment tool (Open Foris Arena) to collect data and conduct analysis on the environmental impacts in displacement settings as a support to the project “Greening the humanitarian response”.

13. The project, “Global Transformation of Forests for People and Climate: a focus on West Africa” (2019-2024) implemented in partnership with ECOWAS, with financial support from Sida, focuses on accompanying the implementation of the ECOWAS Forest Convergence Plan (2013), including the related key objectives of the West Africa Strategy on Combatting Wildlife Crime (WASCWC). Particularly, it aims to strengthen decision-making on forests and land management across West Africa by improving knowledge of forest dynamics, strengthening legal forestry frameworks, and demonstrating and sharing good and effective the best community-based forest practices across the region. The legal component of the project has engaged ECOWAS member states, local communities and other relevant stakeholders on topics such as deforestation trends, illegal wildlife/forest management and transboundary challenges, with a focus on gender and tenure aspects. As a result, seven country legal reports analyzing deforestation trends, forest trade and transboundary challenges have been produced, shared and validated by national authorities (Ivory Coast, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Gambia, Senegal and Ghana). A comparative analysis highlighting the regional trends linked to deforestation and the common legal solutions that aiming to harmonize forest legal framework is currently under development. In addition, a training of trainers module focusing on combating illegal timber/trade of forest products and a document focusing on forest governance and decentralized instruments will be presented to ECOWAS member countries to contribute in developing capacities and sharing knowledge among the members.

14. In the context of the UN REDD Programme, FAO is writing a series of briefs to call attention to the need of ensuring that the Indigenous peoples and local communities have access to REDD+ climate finance. These briefs analyse the relevant legal and policy frameworks including

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consideration of safeguards, gender, tenure issues, and benefit sharing, while identifying several key recommendations. To date, briefs for the Republic of Congo and Cote d’Ivoire have been produced, while a third brief for the Democratic Republic of Congo is in development.

15. FAO has also supported countries to increase sustainable forest production and benefits to livelihoods in alignment with other forest interventions through national value chain assessments, policy dialogues, and prioritization of areas to move towards inclusive, efficient and sustainable forest value chains within a bioeconomy approach. Following the Ministerial Call for Sustainable Wood Use, FAO is collaborating with COMIFAC to advance discussions on sustainable wood value chain as part of the work plan of the organization’s governance working group. In Cameroon, FAO supported a national “Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World” Dialogue in 2022, generating a roadmap to improve the sustainability and efficiency of wood production oriented toward the domestic and regional markets. In Ghana, a comprehensive assessment of the “Economic Contribution and Sectoral Linkages of the Forest Sector to National Economy of Ghana” provided policymakers with reliable data and analysis of the economic contributions and sectoral linkages of the forest sector, allowing for more informed and effective decision-making processes. A national policy dialogue to further discuss the assessment’s findings is scheduled in Accra from 22 to 23 November 2023.

16. Recognizing the importance of socioeconomic benefits in Africa, FAO is also supporting the region to take advantage of market opportunities to support forest restoration and sustainable use of forests, by creating enabling environments for coalitions and partnerships, including with the private sector. In March 2023, in Nairobi, Kenya, a regional forest finance exchange mobilized governments, producer associations, the private sector, and investors to support sustainable wood production and to strengthen wood value chains. The conclusions of this event led to the organization of a new regional finance exchange scheduled in November 2023 in Nairobi, focusing on the opportunities for restoration and afforestation in the construction value chain. Furthermore, FAO is collaborating with IUFRO on the project “Wood for Globe”, funded by the Austrian Forest Fund, to establish platforms for regional policy exchanges to facilitate awareness-raising, cross-learning, and problem-solving to accelerate sustainable wood production and the bioeconomy.