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Food and Agriculture
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Продовольственная и
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Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

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COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

TWENTY-SECOND SESSION

Rome, Italy, 23-27 June 2014

FORESTS AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio+20), Member States launched a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which should be action-oriented, limited in number, aspirational and easy to communicate. The goals should address in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental) and be coherent with and integrated into the UN development agenda beyond 2015. To this end, Member States resolved to establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals that would be open to all stakeholders, and to constitute an Open Working Group (OWG) to submit a proposal on SDGs to the 68th Session of the General Assembly in 2014.

2. The Group's work has been organized into two main phases. The first phase, from March 2013 to February 2014, focused on stock-taking and collecting the views of experts, Member States and other stakeholders. Members of the Group deliberated on the main themes, including those identified in the Rio+20 outcome document's Framework for action, and how they might be reflected in the SDGs. As part of the second phase, from February through September 2014, the Group has been preparing a report to the 68th session of the General Assembly containing a proposal for SDGs. From September 2014 onwards, the General Assembly will negotiate the SDGs in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

3. Even though the OWG discussions will draw to a close by mid-July 2014, they are only the first stage in negotiations that will continue into 2015. The direction the negotiations will take and the final outcomes are in the hands of Member States, while international organizations and other groups may provide technical inputs as requested.

4. Forests were first discussed by the OWG during its 8th Session in February 2014. In the progress report of the OWG after this Session it was noted that "Forests are key sources of wood and other forest products, water supplies, medicines, livelihoods, ecosystem stability, carbon storage and other vital services. They host most of the biodiversity on land. It was observed that governments have too seldom struck the proper balance between the livelihood and economic benefits of timber extraction and forest conversion, on the one hand, and the multiple benefits of forest conservation, on the other. Action was called for to make forests more valuable standing than cut."

5. At the present stage of compilation (i.e. after the 10th session of the OWG), forests are considered under the Focus Area "Ecosystems and Biodiversity", which focuses on protecting and

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restoring terrestrial ecosystems and halting all biodiversity loss. A number of countries have expressed concern that the broader benefits of forests including those from their sustainable management are not yet adequately reflected in this arrangement.

II. THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FORESTS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

5. In the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), forests featured only under MDG 7 as one of the indicators for reversing the loss of environmental resources, thereby drawing attention only to the negative consequences of losing forests. It was noted at various fora that the MDGs did not recognize the multi-functionality of forests and their full contributions to all three dimensions of sustainable development.

6. In fact, forests and trees contribute to most, if not all, of the MDGs. Wild foods from forests and trees outside forests contribute to food security by providing nutritious food supplements all year round, including during periods of hardship. In many parts of the world, woodfuel is the main source of energy for cooking. Forests generate employment in remote rural areas and are the basis of small enterprises, many of which are run by women and generate income that is invested in improving livelihoods, including the education of children. Wood is a renewable resource, and forests mitigate climate change, contributing to low carbon economies. Forests provide medicines and contribute to human health and a healthy environment. Their ecosystem services, including climate regulation, soil stabilization, regulation of water flows and biodiversity, as well as their role as a gene pool for agricultural crops and home of pollinators, play an important role in support of sustainable agriculture. Sustainable management of the world's forests aims at enhancing all these multiple forest functions and improving the provision of goods and services.

7. Sustainable development goals should reflect the full recognition of these positive contributions, rather than treating forests merely as a threatened natural resource that requires conservation. The ongoing process of developing such goals offers a tremendous opportunity for countries to demonstrate their commitment to realizing the full potential of forests' contributions to sustainable development.

III. TARGETS AND INDICATORS FOR FORESTS IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

8. Regardless of the architecture of the future SDGs, it is important to identify achievement targets with respect to the different contributions forests can make to a sustainable future. Each of these targets should be accompanied by a set of indicators, based on SMART¹ criteria, to ensure measurement of progress.

9. Forestry is a sector that benefits from extensive experience in multi-functional resource management and sustainability. Over the past decades a range of forest-related targets and indicators have been developed and agreed upon. In addition to forest-related instruments, there are a number of others of relevance to forests. All of these can be used as a basis for developing targets and indicators for forests as part of the SDGs:

Forest sector instruments

- the Global Objectives on Forests, the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (Forest Instrument) and the seven thematic elements of sustainable forest management (SFM) agreed by UNFF;
- the International Tropical Timber Agreement and the Criteria and Indicators (C&I) of SFM and Strategic Priorities of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO);
- the C&I of Forest Europe;

¹ Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound.

- the Montreal Process and its C&I;
- FAO's Zero Illegal Deforestation initiative.

UNCED and the Rio Conventions

- Agenda 21 including its Forest Principles;
- the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, including 5 Goals and 20 Aichi Targets;
- the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol, and decisions on REDD+;
- the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and its concept of a land-degradation neutral world, embraced at Rio+20.

Food, agriculture and land

- the UN Zero Hunger Challenge;
- FAO's Global Goals and Strategic Objectives;
- the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration (GPFLR) and related Bonn Challenge to restore degraded and deforested land.

Trade and economic development

- the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES);
- Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) of the European Union and the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) initiative;
- the UNEP Green Economy Initiative;
- the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production adopted at Rio+20.

10. On the basis of these instruments and targets, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, under the leadership of FAO, have identified nine forest-related targets for consideration, as a technical input to the discussion on forests, by the OWG during its 8th Session. While the targets are still general, i.e. not time-bound or quantifiable, they nevertheless reflect the range of contributions of forests to sustainable development. The first and second target focus on the forest resources themselves, their management and improvements in quantity and quality. The other targets refer either to the environmental or socioeconomic benefits from forests.

Targets for forests in the SDGs proposed by CPF members

Target 1: All the world's forests managed sustainably. This target focuses on the long-term sustainability of forest resources and landscapes. It is a positive, aspirational, action-oriented, forward-looking and easy-to-communicate concept that addresses, in a balanced way, all the pillars of sustainable development. It is applicable to all countries. The Member States of the United Nations have already made a political commitment to achieving SFM in the Forest Instrument. Parties to the CBD have also committed to functions of SFM, in line with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity.

Target 2: The world's forests and tree resources improved. The value of forests and trees outside forests as natural assets is determined by both their quantity (area and volume) and quality (e.g. their composition and health). The extent and quality of forests and trees outside forests are easy concepts to communicate. This target underpins biodiversity, climate, and all the other multiple benefits of forests.

Target 3: Climate change mitigation benefits from forests increased. Deforestation and forest degradation are a major cause of global carbon dioxide emissions, but sustainably managed forests are important carbon sinks. Protecting forests, improving forest management and establishing new forests all increase the climate-mitigation benefits of forests. Carbon stocks in harvested wood products in use can also be increased.

Target 4: Direct and indirect contributions of forests and trees to food security and nutrition increased. Forests and trees are major sources of nutritious foods, such as fruits, nuts, leaves, oils, honey, wild meat and insects, and 2.4 billion people rely on fuelwood for cooking. Forests boost agricultural productivity and benefit agriculture by, for example, regulating the climate, providing fresh water, and providing a habitat for pollinators.

Target 5: Poverty reduced through increased income and employment from forests. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide obtain income and employment from forests, especially in developing countries. Empowering women in the forest sector creates significant employment and business opportunities for them and has important spillover benefits for households and communities in terms of food security, health and education.

Target 6: Forest-related biodiversity conserved and improved. Forests hold up to 80 percent of all terrestrial biodiversity. Biodiversity underpins forest productivity, resilience and adaptive capacity, and is essential for maintaining ecological processes such as carbon sequestration, pollination, seed dispersal and decomposition. Biodiversity is fundamental for food security.

Target 7: Fresh water supply from forest areas improved. Forests are natural filtration and storage systems that supply an estimated 75 percent of usable water globally. Forests promote the infiltration of rainwater into soil and then into groundwater, providing water supplies in dry periods and helping reduce flood peaks.

Target 8: Resilience of people and forests against slow-onset and extreme events increased. Forests and trees increase the resilience of food-production systems and therefore the resilience of households to shocks and slow-onset changes. SFM increases resilience through approaches that value and apply local knowledge and in which management is adapted over time, based on monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Target 9: Contributions of forests to a green economy increased. Forests and trees will play a crucial role in the move to a green economy, providing, for example, a sustainable source of bioenergy and biomaterials, recreation opportunities, and diverse genetic materials for foods and medicines.

Target 10: Increased financial resources from all sources to sustainably manage forests. The current level of resources allocated to SFM is insufficient. Action is needed at all levels to mobilize sufficient financing from all sources to manage the world's forests sustainably.

11. The targets will have to be further refined for their inclusion in the SDGs. For some of the targets, well defined indicators already exist and are being measured, for example, through FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment or the FAO Yearbook on Forest Products. Others, especially those concerning poverty reduction and contributions to food security and nutrition, are more difficult to measure. *SOFO 2014* has identified data sources for some indicators, but overall there will be a need to develop new indicators and explore new means of measurement.

IV. POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

12. The Committee may wish to recommend countries to:

- increase efforts, including national coordination related to the OWG and the UN General Assembly, to ensure adequate consideration and visibility of forests and their contributions to the three pillars of sustainable development in the post-2015 development agenda;
- actively contribute to the development of the SDGs through the Open Working Group and the UN General Assembly, by promoting the inclusion of targets and indicators that recognize the multi-functionality of forests and their full contribution to the three pillars of sustainable development.

13. The Committee may wish to recommend FAO to:
- support the development of appropriate targets and indicators on forests in the SDGs based on existing forest-related targets and Criteria and Indicator processes, in collaboration with CPF members;
 - work with partners to develop improved indicators for the socioeconomic benefits of forests, especially as they relate to poverty reduction and food security.