

## 165th Session of the Council

### Item 8.2 - Report of the 25th Session of the Committee on Forestry (5 – 9 October 2020)

The 25<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) was held from 5 to 9 October 2020 under the theme ‘Forests and the SDG Decade of Action: solutions for climate change, biodiversity and people’. It discussed the contributions that the forest sector can make to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Decade of Action as well as to recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, including on solutions for climate change, biodiversity and people.

Due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the Session was convened virtually and was attended by over 730 delegates from 112 countries and one Member Organization, as well as 18 UN agencies and observers.

The Report of the 25th Session of COFO is submitted to the Council in document C 2021/24.

COFO 25 had 14 items on its agenda. The agenda was developed on the basis of recommendations of the six Regional Forestry Commissions, the outcome of coordination with FAO Technical Committees. It included the biennial theme for 2020-21 and the requests of the 164th Council to Technical Committees.

The main agenda items reviewed reports on the World’s Forests in 2020 and examined a range of key global issues: climate change, biodiversity, health and the impacts of COVID-19 and how to respond. It discussed food systems transformation in relation to forests including halting deforestation and sustainable use, the UN Decades on Family Farming and Ecosystem Restoration and the role of forests in nutrition. COFO25 also discussed relations with Statutory Bodies, progress in implementation including FAO’s work in the context of the UN Strategic Plan on Forests, the World Forestry Congress (WFC) 2021, and FAO’s strategic directions, including forestry in the revised Strategic Framework.

With regard to reports on the World’s Forests, the Committee welcomed the related “State of the World’s Forests 2020 and the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2020. On the latter, COFO requested FAO to continue producing a global Forest Resources Assessment report every five years, to develop a flexible FRA process that allows Members’ voluntary update of key indicators, to further develop guidance and tools for consistent reporting, analyze restoration-related indicators, and further develop and analyze uptake of global core set indicators; and to promote new technologies and digital innovation.

On the agenda item on forests and biodiversity, the Committee noted progress made in implementing the FAO Strategy related to biodiversity and reviewed the draft Action Plan. It recommended a consultation process to finalize the draft Action plan and requested FAO to strengthen forestry in mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors. It requested FAO to conduct a review of biodiversity mainstreaming in forestry, share good practices, and report progress at COFO 26. It requested FAO to strengthen the promotion of sustainable management of wildlife along the whole wild meat value chain and the adoption of measures to better prevent zoonotic disease risk, including through the One Health approach, and to consider an initiative to mainstream biodiversity in food systems;

With regard to forests and climate change the Committee noted the need to intensify actions to halt deforestation and forest degradation and to enhance FAO’s work on afforestation, reforestation and forest restoration at all levels. It requested FAO to assist Members upon request on the multiple related issues and strengthen collaboration with the private sector and facilitate dialogue aimed at mobilizing climate finance for forests and enhancing the role of the private sector in efforts to address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation while contributing to jobs and livelihoods. It also requested FAO to increase understanding of impacts of deforestation and climate change, including on the risk of zoonotic diseases and strengthen plant health related standard setting activities;

On the agenda item related to transforming agriculture and food systems: halting deforestation and promoting sustainable production and consumption, the Committee requested FAO to integrate forestry in FAO's work on food systems, promoting synergies and addressing trade-offs between forestry and agriculture in initiatives and projects, including in contexts of Hand-in-Hand initiative and COVID-19 recovery measures. It requested FAO to enhance FAO's cross-sectoral work on afforestation, reforestation and forest restoration, contributing to the UN System-wide efforts on "Turning the tide on deforestation" and take into account forest-related issues in the preparation of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. It further requested FAO to engage with stakeholders and initiatives aiming at halting deforestation and promoting legal and sustainable value chains of forests and agricultural products and food systems as well as to strengthen coordination between COFO and COAG.

The Committee commended FAO on co-leading two UN Decades, on Family Farming and Ecosystem Restoration and requested FAO to ensure close coordination between these, to ensure adequate recognition of FAO's vital role in ecosystem restoration and to increase engagement of the private sector, and to scale up its related support through the Forest and Farm Facility.

The Committee addressed Members on the above agenda items, inviting them *inter alia* to:

- strengthen the mainstreaming of biodiversity, conservation and sustainable use in the forest sector and to submit country reports for the upcoming State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources;
- consider ways to strengthen the role of forests and the use of wood in their climate actions, including in Nationally determined contributions as well as to strengthen management systems to address issues such as forest fire, disaster risk, pests and diseases that may be exacerbated by climate change;
- promote policy coordination and align public incentives to halt deforestation, in accordance with their national legislation, and foster sustainable food systems, production and consumption;
- support the implementation of the UN Decades of Family Farming and on Ecosystem Restoration;
- integrate priorities in forestry in post COVID-19 recovery and support.

The Committee took note of the decisions and recommendations of FAO bodies of interest to COFO, and requested FAO to review the result and effect of the structural changes (Annex I to CL164/3) on FAO's activities in forestry for COFO 26, emphasizing the need for forestry issues to remain visible and capacity of FAO in forestry to remain strong and effective in light of these changes.

The Committee reviewed the Terms of Reference of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture and requested FAO to include issues related to the use of digital technology in land use planning, land use change and forestry, taking into account their impacts.

COFO welcomed the reports on progress on activities of FAO's major programmes in forestry as well as in the context of the forestry statutory bodies. It requested FAO to enhance cross-sectoral work, encouraging stronger linkages between programmes and main projects and to continue and strengthen leadership of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests in the context of the UN Strategic Plan on Forests.

On the dialogue with Statutory Bodies, COFO stressed the importance of Regional Forestry Commissions and requested FAO to consult with these to help facilitate policy dialogue and technical exchanges. It also invited FAO to explore ways to further linking the work of Statutory Bodies to its work.

The Committee took note of the draft Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition and provided guidance on the Strategy from the perspective of forestry.

COFO reviewed and adopted the Multi-Year Programme of Work 2020-2023, noting the need to adjust to new realities in a post-COVID-19 world, and to strengthen FAOs work on forests to achieve the SDGs.

COFO welcomed the report on preparations for the XV World Forestry Congress (WFC) and requested FAO to align the WFC discussions with COVID-19 and SDG agendas and report outcomes at COFO26;

On FAO's work in forestry under the reviewed Strategic Framework, COFO welcomed accomplishments and requested FAO to continue its priority to normative and technical work and put emphasis on data, supporting Members on halting deforestation, restoring forest ecosystems and promoting the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources. It requested FAO to ensure that FAO's new strategic framework adequately reflects forestry issues and FAO's leading role on forest matters in the UN system.

The Committee adopted the report of COFO 25 by consensus. The above summarizes some of the main outcomes of the COFO 25 report as contained in Council document C 2021/24.

*Mr León Jorge Castaños, Chairperson of the Committee on Forestry*