

Brussels, 15 September 2016

Submission by the European Union and its Member States
on
initial proposals of the Co-Chairs of the United Nations Forum on Forests Ad Hoc
Expert Group established pursuant to paragraph 48 of the Economic and Social Council
resolution 2015/33

This submission by the European Union (EU) and its Member States is a response to the invitation by the Co-Chairs of the United Nations Forum on Forests Ad Hoc Expert Group established pursuant to paragraph 48 of the Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 (UNFF AHEG) to provide views/comments on their initial proposals on (i) Building Blocks / Options for the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030, and (ii) Quadrennial Programme of Work 2017-2020.

The EU and its Member States find both proposals from the Co-chairs as a good basis for further work towards the twelfth Session of the UNFF that will be held in New York in May 2017. The proposals are particularly helpful for preparations for the incoming expert discussions on the substance of the strategic plan and first quadrennial programme of work at AHEG 2 meeting. Our experts' work will hopefully contribute to finding a constructive approach that will facilitate the work of the working group in January 2017 in New York. We underline that there is no negotiated outcome expected from AHEG meeting. On the other hand, we found the proposals also relevant to reiterate and elaborate more on some of our ideas which have already been communicated in our submission of 23 October 2015.

1 General views

The EU and its Member States wish to reiterate their earlier position that the Strategic Plan (SP) needs to provide a concise common strategic framework for all the components of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) and other actors involved in it. It should provide clear priorities and guidance for the IAF's future work. Most notably, it should outline where Members aim to get by 2030 and how they intend to get there.

We are of the view that the SP should operationalize the UNFF 11 resolution and articulate how forests are strategically important to global sustainable development, thereby making forests relevant to the whole UN system and act as an agent of change at other levels too, most notably at a national level.

The SP should be simple, focused and concrete and avoid just listing or even repeating various commitments and actions from existing resolutions. It should be consistent in relation to forest related commitments that already exist at an international level as well as in terms of its "internal" structure. The extent of the SP should be limited; e. g. 12-15 pages at maximum, since it should be also used to increase the visibility and communication of forest-related issues at a global level. The link between the SP and quadrennial programmes should be clearly set.

Generally, the strategic approach should comprise objectives, targets, some concrete deliverables and an implementation framework with clear roles and responsibilities and a strong review framework. Vision, mission, strategic approach, targets and actions should be brought together into a concise and logical framework. When identifying global targets, the existing forest/forest-related targets should be used as far as possible. We do believe that clustering these goals and targets into action areas under one common frame will add value to SP and will foster cross-sectoral cooperation and coherence within UN on forests.

Also as stated by the EU at AHEG1, we find it important that the overarching principles such as human rights and partnerships as well as the cross cutting issues of the 2030 Agenda, for example climate change, human rights, gender equality, empowerment of women and girls and the fight against poverty are taken into account in the SP and the 4POWs as well.

2 Specific views / comments on substance of the building blocks

2.1 Introduction

Taking into consideration the proposal to set the SP as "the UN SP for Forests", we do not see the need to list the Global Objectives on Forests (GOFs) in the introduction. Text on the IAF components is also redundant.

We believe that the section on the **importance of forests to people and the planet** is important to set the scene in the introduction. It is important to highlight the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda in the beginning of the introduction. We suggest including here a reference on contribution of forests to green economy and decent work as well as gender

equality. We appreciate that a reference to the importance of forests and the role of SFM in climate change mitigation and adaptation is included. Nevertheless, in addition to this, the role of forests and other wooded lands in conserving biodiversity and combating desertification, should be referred to as well. We would like to see relevant issues related to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples addressed in the SP.

We are not convinced that a separate section on **trend and challenges** is needed. Some valuable elements from this section could be included in a general introductory part. Further, references regarding trend and challenges should highlight that deforestation and forest degradation are important factors driving global biodiversity loss and global climate change and that drivers of deforestation mainly lie outside the forest sector. Reference should be made to the recent FAO data on direct causes of deforestation (such as agricultural expansion, etc.), fragmentation of the international forest regime and the lack of integrated land use approaches .

We see the section on **opportunities for enhanced action** as important to highlight the link between forests and the milestone agreements achieved in 2015. The 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement create opportunities for promoting SFM and tackling deforestation and forest degradation, and at the same time this is a chance to communicate to other sectors and the public about the significant contribution that forests can make for a successful and integrated implementation of these agreements.

2.2 IAF vision and mission statements – options

The EU and its Member States reiterate their earlier position that SP shall have both a vision and mission statement. Options proposed by the Co-chairs provide good basis for further discussions.

The mission statement should adequately describe the distinctive role and added value of the IAF (enhance cooperation, coordination, political commitment). On the other hand, it should be kept concise.

2.3 Strategic approach/global goals/objectives/targets – options

Clarity on how goals are related to targets and targets are related to actions is needed. The several proposed options in the Co-chairs text are not consistent. Some goals look more deliverable than a target and the other way round. The relation between GOF's and SDG's should be identified as well. It should be clear how the IAF concretely implement the SDGs.

The option that could be further explored is to develop the strategic approach that would build upon already agreed global goals, objectives/targets and indicators and to cluster them according to certain action areas, as proposed by the Co-chairs. In this regard we also note the proposed consultant paper for the Tokyo 2016 meeting.

2.4 Implementation framework

The implementation framework should highlight overarching principle that SP is to be providing a coherent framework for action and reverse a trend of increased pressure on forest resources and policy fragmentation of forest-related issues.

In line with our position on strategic approach/goals/ targets, we should consider clustering the existing goals and targets into attractive action areas/thematic priorities. The areas listed by the co-chairs could serve as a basis for discussions.

Poverty eradication and food security are inter alia missing in the list of action areas proposed. Biodiversity conservation and combating desertification are important areas for action as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation.

We should not repeat measures from United Nations Forest Instrument (UNFI) in the text.

As regards **roles and responsibilities**, it is not clear which UN agencies, programmes, conventions and secretariats are meant in the section B.1 (probably not those which are members of the CPF). Once it is UN SP, it should be relevant for all the UN organizations and thus help achieving the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda in the most comprehensive way. The role of other UN conventions that cover forests should be made clear as well. In the case of the UNFF, there is no description of the role of the alternating sessions as revolving review mechanism.

In the case of Member States, we support the idea of the concept of Voluntary Planned Contributions (VPCs). Nevertheless, more clarity on the concept is needed. VPCs should be linked with the cycles of 4POWs.

There is the need to better clarify link between CPF and UNFF. Organisation and division of labour among CPF members and clear timeline will be important here; these may go to a work plan to be developed by CPF. We see no need to repeat text from UNFF11 resolution regarding core functions of the CPF. Clarity on the funding role of the CPF in GFFFN is also needed. Text in the section B.5 should be more specific regarding the envisaged role of

regional partners and processes in the implementation of SP, as they play an important role in the IAF.

A key role of Major Groups in implementing SP should be particularly stressed. More clarity on the proposal to establish a multi-stakeholder advisory group would be needed.

Means and resources for implementation should be addressed in general terms in SP (e.g. introducing main financing instruments). The Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development (AAAA) which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda, need to be taken into account and agreed language on ODA interpreted in this new context.

Private sector involvement in mobilisation of resources for implementation should be encouraged, as well as domestic resource mobilisation. They both are central in the AAAA and should be clearly visible. Creating enabling environment for better use of ODA and private sector financing is needed too. It is in the quadrennial programmes of work we can allocate the resources and see the real needs for implementation. Relation to the proposal for voluntary commitments by countries, stakeholders and organisations need to be addressed as well here.

Overall priorities for GFFFN should be listed in the SP while specific priorities for 2017-2020 should go to quadrennial programme of work. The EU does not support assistance in project development through the GFFFN. The review of the GFFFN should focus on the functioning of this instrument, not only on sufficiency of resources.

Concerning GEF, the text should be revisited in terms of consistency with general principles and exiting strategies of GEF and desirable options to enhance cooperation between GEF and GFFFN. Inter alia, we see no reason to establish any new focal area on forests. The current cross-cutting forest programme is functioning and can be developed, if necessary.

There is no need to have the section on a global forest fund since it is only a repetition from UNFF11 resolution.

2.5 Review framework

We note that the current co-chairs text does not include elements of assessments. As it is stated above, the alternating UNFF sessions can also play a part of the review framework.

In relation to the evaluating progress on the implementation of the SP, there is a lack of reference to the deliverables and indicators in the co-chairs text. The role of deliverables needs to be further clarified. For many action areas, we see an opportunity to make use of already existing indicators such as those from criteria and indicators for SFM and the SDGs indicators. For the proposed cross-cutting strategies, further considerations are needed. In case of a mid-term review or evaluation of the SP we would like to receive further clarifications on this.

We remind that the section on contributions to the 2030 Agenda review process should be developed in close cooperation with experts responsible for the review framework of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

2.6 Communication and outreach strategy

The EU and its Member States reiterate their position that communication should be stressed in SP as such. SP should be effectively used to increase the visibility and communication of forest-related matters at a global level.

Quadrennial Programme of Work 2017-2020

The text submitted by the Co-chairs elaborates that quadrennial programmes of work should identify priority actions and associated resources needs and responsible parties for specific period time, based on the guidance of the SP. Nevertheless, it is stated further in the text that priority actions and resource needs can be better considered once “the strategic approach/global goals and targets” and “actions” of the SP are agreed.

Considering the above, the EU and its Member States are of the view that the Quadrennial Programme of Work 2017-2020 needs to be developed concurrently with the SP to ensure its relevance and consistency. Namely, consistent with our earlier comments, some deliverables of the SP suggested by the Co-chairs could be more relevant for 4PoW. Also, the concept of Voluntary Planned Contributions (VPCs) proposed in the SP should be linked with the cycles of 4POWs. The question needs to be clarified how these contributions and other actions can be monitored against global goals/objectives/targets/deliverables/indicators.

We believe that within 4POW the focus should also be on actions that are headed to a stronger involvement of all potential IAF actors. Therefore, we are not aiming only on restructuring the UNFF sessions and outputs but we should strive for a strengthened IAF as a result of an active participation and engagement of all potential relevant actors, meaning that we should also maximize involvement.