

Expert Meeting on Regional and Sub-Regional Input to the United Nations Forum on Forests

(20-21 November 2017, United Nations Office in Nairobi, Kenya)

1. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THE MEETING

The multi-year programme of work of the Forum for the period 2007-2015, which was prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/49 and adopted by the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) in its resolution 7/1, set a new focus on regional collaboration and partnerships. In paragraph 2 (c) of its resolution 2006/49, the Council agreed to strengthen interaction between the Forum on relevant regional and sub-regional forest related mechanisms, institutions and instruments, organizations and processes, with the participation of major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, and relevant stakeholders to facilitate enhanced cooperation and the effective implementation of sustainable forest management, as well as to contribute to the work of the Forum. In the Forum's programme of work, relevant regional and sub-regional entities were invited to address issues and agenda items planned for each Forum session, and to submit a concise summary of their deliberations to the Forum secretariat prior to the session. Such entities were also invited to contribute to discussions at Forum sessions as per their respective mandates, while the Secretary-General is requested to prepare a report summarizing the entities' submissions. To facilitate the submission of inputs, until the Forum's eleventh session the UNFF secretariat prepared an information note and a questionnaire; the inputs received from regional and sub-regional entities would then be published in full on the Forum's website and summarized on Secretary-General Reports.

Through paragraph 25 to 28 of the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 on the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) beyond 2015, the regional and sub-regional involvement was strengthened, as an integral component of the IAF beyond 2015. On 27 April 2017 the United Nations General Assembly approved the Resolution A/RES/71/285, entitled "United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests" (UNSPF), which states that "regional bodies (...) provide a crucial bridge between international policies and national actions and are important partners in efforts to implement the strategic plan and achieve its global forest goals and targets"; moreover, "the Forum works with regional and sub-regional bodies and processes to identify ways to contribute to the global forest goals and targets, including by encouraging them to exchange information, enhance cooperation, raise awareness, strengthen stakeholder engagement and build capacity to scale up best practices

within and across regions”. Finally, “regional and sub-regional bodies and processes (...) are encouraged to build and strengthen synergies between the strategic plan and their policies and programmes, including in the context of their contributions to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals”¹.

The Quadrennial programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2017-2020 (4PoW)² represents the Forum’s contribution to implement the UNSPF; in the regard, UNFF’s odd-year sessions “focus on discussions on implementation and technical advice, including exchange of experiences among members of the Forum, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and sub-regional organizations, major groups and other relevant stakeholders, and the science-policy interface”.

On May 2017 the 12th Session of the Forum agreed on a Resolution³ which invites Member States, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), UN system partners, regional and sub-regional organizations processes, Major Groups and other stakeholders to provide inputs to the Forum Secretariat on the contribution of forests to the issues under consideration by the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2018 by 30 November 2017; in this regard, the Forum Secretariat is requested to synthesize the inputs received and submit the synthesis as background information to the thirteenth session of the Forum.

Finally, the report of the 23rd Session of FAO’s Committee on Forestry (COFO)⁴ contains an invitation to UNFF (paragraph 53 b), which reads:

“53. The Committee invited the UNFF to:

(...)

b) consider the potential offered by the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions for enhancing regional/sub-regional involvement, including through using the Commissions for regional dialogues related to the UNFF, noting that the respective roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined in collaboration with other relevant regional forest-related bodies and processes.”

¹ E/2017/10

² E/2017/10

³ Paragraph 24 of Resolution 12/1

⁴ COFO 2016/REP

The UNSPF and the 4PoW provide a new framework for the Forum's work. Due to the enhanced role that regional and sub-regional entities will play in the IAF, those partners' contributions to the Forum, including as they relate to the written format of their future input, are of the utmost importance. For that reason, and to address the issues mentioned above, an Expert Group Meeting on Regional and Sub-Regional Input to the United Nations Forum on Forests took place at the United Nations Office in Nairobi on 20-21 November 2017. Nine regional and sub-regional entities⁵ nominated experts to attend the meeting at hand.

The main objective of the expert group meeting was to enhance the contribution of regional and sub-regional partners to the implementation of the UNSPF and the 4PoW. In this context, the expert meeting provided experts with an opportunity to discuss the following key issues:

- The format and content of the regional/sub-regional written input to UNFF sessions;
- Contribution to the substantive input of the Forum to the HLPF 2018;
- Provision of views on COFO's invitation to UNFF (in case such an invitation is accepted by Member States) considering the section of paragraph 53 b) which reads "(...) noting that the respective roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined in collaboration with other relevant regional forest-related bodies and processes".

Each session featured a presentation and an interactive discussion on the topic at hand. Some key elements of the discussions are reflected in this summary; Attached to it are the Organization of Work (Annex 1) and the List of Participants (Annex 2).

2. MEETING SUMMARY

A. Opening Session

The meeting was opened by Ms. Afsa Kemitale-Rothschild, Senior Programme Officer, UNFF Secretariat, on behalf of the Dr. Manoel Sobral-Filho, Director, who could not be present. Ms.

⁵ African Union Commission (AU), Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet), Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (COMIFAC), East African Community Secretariat (EAC), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), FOREST EUROPE, International Model Forest Network (IMFN), Tehran Process Secretariat for Low Forest Cover Countries (LFCCs), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

Kemitalé-Rothschild welcomed participants, provided an overview of the UNSPF and highlighted its linkage to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. She underscored the key role of regional and sub-regional partners in promoting and implementing Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) worldwide and in bridging the gap between the global and national levels.

Ms. Barbara Tavora-Jainchill, Forest Affairs Officer, UNFF Secretariat, highlighted the efforts in the past two years to enhance and strengthen the involvement of regional and sub-regional partners in the implementation of the IAF; she also gave an overview of the history of the regional/sub-regional collaboration with the Forum and explained those partners' input submission process until the Forum's eleventh session. She explained the rationale behind each item to be discussed by participants and then invited experts to make brief presentations on their professional backgrounds, as well as on how their individual regional/sub-regional entity is contributing to the implementation of the United Nations Forest Instrument (UNFI) and the UNSPF. It became clear from the presentations that the work carried out by those entities contribute to the implementation of the UNSPF and UNFI.

B. Discussions

B.1. Format and content of the future written input to UNFF sessions

Ms. Barbara Tavora-Jainchill introduced the matter and shared with participants copies of a past questionnaire prepared by the UNFF Secretariat so to request input from the regional/sub-regional partners to a Forum's session occurred before the approval of the UNSPF; she explained the questions, informed how the partners' answers summaries were incorporated in the pertinent Forum document and told experts that the full answers were posted on the UNFF website. Ms. Tavora-Jainchill also reminded participants that the UNFF Secretariat did not have the mandate to analyze the answers received.

In addition, experts received copies of annex 1 of the Report of the Secretary-General to UNFF 12⁶ entitled "Monitoring, assessment and reporting on progress towards implementing the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017-2030, including the United Nations forest instrument and voluntary national contributions". The annex, named "Proposed guidelines and format for reporting

⁶ E/CN.18/2017/3

on progress towards the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017-2030, the United Nations forest instrument and voluntary national contributions”, which was presented and discussed during UNFF12 by not agreed upon by Member States, was being shared with participants with a view to serve as an example of the thinking regarding national voluntary reporting after the approval of the UNSPF.

Mr. Tomasz Juszcak, Forest Affairs Officer, UNFF Secretariat, presented the ongoing work on the elements of the voluntary national reporting format. He gave a brief overview of the pertinent history and mandate, highlighting the fact that the annex shared with experts was prepared having countries in mind. Mr. Juszcak then explained in detail the content of the Report of the Secretary-General E/CN.18/2017/3 as far as voluntary national reporting goes and each section of the annex; moreover, he clarified that the format of countries’ voluntary national reporting, as well as the future reporting cycle will be deliberated upon by Member States during the 13th Session of the Forum.

Experts voiced that regional and sub- regional organizations are to assist countries in their responsibilities in implementing SFM. It is therefore logical that there should be some sort of linkage between voluntary regional/sub-regional and national reports, as they are complementary to each other but with separate perspectives; in this regard, experts concurred on the need for a generic template, aligned with the entities’ programmes of work, with a view to avoid unnecessary duplications. Moreover, in the request accompanying the questionnaire, the UNFF Secretariat should make it clear to regional/sub-regional entities the purpose, procedure and future use of the information to be eventually forwarded to the Forum.

Regarding the reporting cycle, experts referred to two viable options: a 4 or 5-year cycle to be followed by a publication which would possibly include information received from countries; and an annual or biannual cycle, if thematic, directly linked with the UNFF technical sessions. The importance of the alignment of the UNFF voluntary regional/sub-regional cycle with the still to be agreed voluntary national reporting was highlighted, as well as the need to consider other reporting processes so to avoid further duplication. Participants asked to be kept abreast of developments regarding Member States’ deliberations on voluntary national reporting.

B.2. Contribution to the substantive input of the Forum to the HLPF 2018

Ms. Afsa Kemitale- Rothschild presented the subject and emphasized that forests are closely linked to many aspects of human development; they can also contribute to the achievement of most, if not all, the SDGs; in this context, she pointed out that the HLPF 2018 presents us with an opportunity to highlight the multi-faceted contributions of forests to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. She invited experts to propose key policy recommendations for consideration by the 13th Session of UNFF as input to HLPF 2018 so to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs and the transformation towards sustainable resilient societies.

The HLPF 2018 was highlighted by experts as a good opportunity to demonstrate the value of forests and their crosscutting contribution to all SDGs while, at the same time, sending a strong message to other sectors that SFM contributes to the achievement of all SDGs. It was emphasized that in the next year review all contemplated SDGs components have a strong link to forests: water, energy, livelihoods, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity and ecosystems.

Experts concurred on the need for a clear and dedicated communication plan, noting that in the next UNFF, where a new overall communication strategy will be proposed and deliberated upon, communication activities related to the HLPF 2018 may be considered. Participants provided examples of ways to enhance forests' presence in the meeting itself and in the corridors: forest related buttons, a tree where the linkages between the highlighted SDGs and SFM are portrayed, the nomination of a high-level forest envoy and the proclamation of a decade of forests. Finally, participants requested the UNFF Secretariat to keep regional and sub-regional entities informed on details related to the HLPF 2018.

B3. Provision of views on COFO's invitation to UNFF (in case such an invitation is accepted by Member States) considering the section of paragraph 53 b) which reads “(...) noting that the respective roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined in collaboration with other relevant regional forest-related bodies and processes”

Ms. Barbara Tavora-Jainchill provided a background of the relationship between the UNFF Secretariat and FAO as far as regional and sub-regional collaboration goes. FAO has a Committee

on Forestry and regional forestry commissions which meet every two years and the Forum's Secretariat usually observe their deliberations. Recently an agenda item dealing with global matters was added to those commissions sessions and, within that context, UNFF related issues are presented and discussed; on those occasions, the UNFF Secretariat representative makes a statement. In view of the above, COFO's invitation may be interpreted as a proposal to upgrade the way UNFF issues are currently dealt with by FAO's regional forestry commissions.

Ms. Tavora-Jainchill also mentioned that, even though the invitation is directed to Member States and those will be the ones to deliberate and decide upon it, there is a section of the pertinent text which mentions other relevant regional forest-related bodies and processes. So, it was proposed that first, participants from APFNet, FAO and UNECE present an overview of their respective entities' relationship with UNFF, to be followed by a brainstorming exercise where experts would hypothetically consider that Member States accepted COFO's invitation and, in that case, would provide suggestions on how to make it work.

Ms. Paola Deda, UNECE, provided a brief overview of that UN Economic Commission's governing structure in general and of the UNECE/FAO Joint Section in particular. She pointed out the importance of the integrated work programme, which is valid for both parties, and defines the activities they undertake together in relation to four principal areas: data, monitoring, reporting and assessment; policy advice and dialogue; communications and outreach; capacity-building. An important aspect in this regional cooperation model is the ability to cover normative and operational work, respecting governance.

Mr. Xia Jun, APFnet, pointed out their commitment to helping the economies and people of the Asia- Pacific region by promoting and improving sustainable forest management and rehabilitation. Their work is based on four activity pillars: policy dialogue, information sharing, capacity building and demonstration projects. Their cooperation and partnership with other bodies are very important for the entity and the region.

Mr. Ekrem Yazici, FAO, highlighted the work that the organization carries out on forestry. FAO is currently developing a new strategic forestry plan which will be presented to and discussed by

COFO in 2018. He also provided an overview of each of the regional forestry commissions, their governing structure, their role and work. Finally, he informed participants of the historical background of COFO's invitation to UNFF.

Experts then reiterated that the COFO's invitation was directed to Member States and it is solely up to Member States to deliberate on it, including regarding future work modalities (in case the invitation is accepted). It was noted, though, that "other relevant regional forest-related bodies and processes" were mentioned in the invitation and, therefore, they would take the liberty to make some points of a more general nature based on their individual experiences.

There is a variety of possible working modalities regarding regional and sub-regional cooperation; no matter which way the arrangement is to be operationalized (in case it is agreed upon) it should offer a dialogue platform bringing together the regional/sub-regional and global dimensions of SFM. Moreover, many forest-related bodies and processes which are active at the regional and sub-regional level do not have the opportunity to attend UNFF meetings mainly due to lack of dedicated funds. They do, however, attend FAO's regional forestry commissions and would gain from interacting more substantively with the Forum, emphasizing the importance of bringing forward a universal perspective to regional discussions and vice-versa. It was finally mentioned that, currently, UNFF does not count with a formal regional/sub-regional structure.

3. Other matters, content of meeting's summary and closing remarks

Ms. Barbara Tavora- Jainchill recalled that the Forum's odd-year sessions are to focus on discussions on implementation, technical advice and exchange of experiences involving other stakeholders, including regional and sub-regional partners; in this context, participants were invited to express their views on how to better organize those sessions so to highlight regional and sub-regional cooperation.

Participants suggested the organization of a regional day or regional 3-hour segment, so to hold an interactive dialogue among entities, exchanging experiences and learning from one another. The lack of dedicated funds of some regional and sub-regional partners to attend UNFF meetings was again mentioned, since it constrains the achievement of a more inclusive dialogue and cooperation

between the Forum and those entities. The UNFF Secretariat was requested to explore ways and means to facilitate the participation of those entities in future meetings.

Regarding the content of the meeting's summary, Ms. Erika Lopez, Consultant, presented some initial key elements identified from the discussions. It was informed that the summary's first draft would be distributed to participants as soon as possible with a request for comments.

In closing, the UNFF Secretariat thanked experts for attending the meeting, reiterated the importance of regional and sub-regional cooperation within the IAF and hoped that those partners continue to support the work of the Forum.

ANNEX 1: Organization of Work

Time/Day	Monday 20 November	Tuesday 21 November
9:00 am ~ 12.00 pm	<p>1. Opening remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcoming remarks by UNFFS [<i>Ms. Afsa Kemitale-Rothschild, Senior Programme Officer-UNFFS</i>] <p>2. Description of Meeting’s Objectives [<i>Ms. Barbara Tavora-Jainchill</i>]</p> <p>3. Participants’ Tour de Table – Implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Description of the work of each organization represented and its contribution to the achievement of the Global Forest Goals(GFGs), including the implementation of the United Nations Forest Instrument (UNFI) and Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs) (<i>Coffee/Tea Break at appropriate time</i>) <p>4. Discussion on the format and content of written input to UNFF sessions, including a possible dedicated questionnaire [<i>Barbara Tavora-Jainchill, Forest Affairs Officer, UNFFS</i>]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction - Presentation on previous questionnaire - Presentation and discussion on the elements of the national reporting format [<i>Tomasz Juszcak, Economic Affairs Officer, UNFFS</i>] - General Discussion 	<p>6. Discussion on proposals for enhancing collaboration in support of the implementation of the UNSPF and the UNFF Process [<i>Barbara Tavora-Jainchill, Forest Affairs Officer, UNFFS</i>]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation -Promotion of forestry and collaboration with the UN Regional Economic Commissions [<i>Ms. Paola Deda UNECE</i>] • Presentation – Promotion of forestry and collaboration with other regional/subregional fora and processes [<i>Mr. Xia Jun, Assistant Director, APFNet Secretariat</i>] • Presentation -Promotion of forestry and collaboration with Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Regional Commissions & views on the FAO Committee on Forestry - COFO’s invitation to UNFF [<i>Mr. Ekrem Yazici & Mr. Magnus Grylle, FAO</i>] • General Discussion and recommendations on the way forward (<i>Coffee/Tea Break at appropriate time</i>)
12:00 pm ~ 2:00 pm	Lunch Break	Lunch Break
2:00 pm~ 5:00 pm	<p>5. Regional and sub-regional partners’ contribution to the substantive input to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on “Transformation toward sustainable and resilient societies” and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review by the 2018 HLPF [<i>Ms. Afsa Kemitale-Rothschild, Senior Programme Officer-UNFFS</i>]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation – Substantive contributions of forests to SDGs under review by the 2018 HLP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants’ tour de table on their organisation’s contribution to the implementation of the following SDGs : 15-Forests,6-Water,7-Energy,11-Cities and communities,12-Consumption and production, and 17-Partnerships: • General Discussion - Key policy recommendations to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs and transformation towards sustainable resilient societies for consideration by the 13th Session of UNFF as input to HLPF 2018 <p>(<i>Coffee/Tea Break at appropriate time</i>)</p>	<p>7. Participants’ tour de table on how to better organize regional/sub-regional events during UNFF’s technical sessions</p> <p>8. Discussion on the content of the meeting’s summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation by <i>Ms. Erika Lopez, Consultant</i> - General Discussion <p>(<i>Coffee/Tea Break at appropriate time</i>)</p> <p>9. Closing Remarks [<i>Afsa Kemitale-Rothschild</i>]</p>

ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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