

Co-Chairs' Summary
UNFF Expert Group Meeting
on the Clearing House of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network
Conference Room VIII- Palais des Nations
12-13 November 2019, Geneva-Switzerland

Introduction

- 1 The Expert Group Meeting on the Clearing House (CH) of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) was held from 12 to 13 November 2019 at Palais des Nations in Geneva. The meeting was attended by over 80 experts from Member States, CPF member organizations, NGOs and academia, with expertise from different fields, including forest management, forest financing, data collection, data sharing, website management, etc. The main objective of the meeting was for the experts to be informed of, and provide their feedback on the development and operationalization of phase I of the CH since UNFF14, including design of databases, information collected for the databases and the way forward.

Agenda item 1. Election of the Co-Chairs

- 2 The meeting was opened by Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge of the UNFF Secretariat, DESA who welcomed participants to the meeting. Following the election of Mr. Thomas Baldauf from Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Germany, and Mr. Renny Madula from Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries, South Africa, as the Co-Chairs of the expert group meeting.

Agenda item 2. Adoption of the agenda and program of work

- 3 The Co-Chairs invited the experts to review and adopt the agenda and program of work of the meeting. The agenda and program of work were adopted. The Co-Chairs invited Mr. Trepelkov to make opening remarks.
- 4 In his opening remarks, Mr. Trepelkov emphasized that great importance was attached to financing issues at the GA summits, the UN Climate Change Action Summit, the SDG summit and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development held in September 2019 in New York. He pointed out that the CH of the GFFFN is initiated at a crucial and right time. Through providing and sharing information, knowledge and data on forest financing, the CH not only contributes to addressing the long-standing challenge of financing forests, but also to tackling myriad of other interlinked challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, water scarcity, desertification, droughts, etc. and contribute to advancement of SDGs. He informed the meeting that the UNFFS had taken steps to initiate phase I of the CH based on the outcome of the January 2019 expert group meeting and UNFF14 discussions, including the design and substantive content of the three databases on forest financing, namely, database on funding opportunities; database on information to access resources; and database on lessons-learned and best practices. He stated that this meeting provides an opportunity for experts to be informed of the progress and provide feedback, and to further advance partnerships and promote synergies among CPF members and other information providers in operationalizing the CH. He emphasized that UNFFS is fully committed to work closely with all partners to

ensure an efficient and cost-effective CH, serving members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders. He also thanked Germany and Switzerland for their generous contributions that enabled this meeting in Geneva.

Agenda item 3: Progress in the development of Phase I of the CH

a. Brief overview of the outcome of the January 2019 EGM on the CH- core elements and timelines of the CH

- 5 Mr. Hossein Moeini-Meybodi, UNFF Secretariat, provided a brief overview of the context of the discussion for the expert group meeting. He stated that the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) was established in 2015 under the auspices of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC resolution 2015/33). One of key functions of the GFFFN is to “Serve as a clearing house and database on existing, new and emerging financing opportunities and as a tool for sharing lessons learned and best practices from successful projects, building on the Collaborative Partnership on Forests online sourcebook for forest financing”.
- 6 At the thirteenth session of the UNFF (UNFF13) held in May 2018, the Forum requested the UNFF Secretariat to “initiate development of Network’s online clearing house mechanism”. Further to this decision, the first Expert Group Meeting on the CH of the GFFFN was organized in January 2019 to discuss the elements and components of the CH. The meeting identified the core elements of the CH, to be developed in two phases. The phase I of the CH will be operationalized by the end of 2020, with four core elements namely; Three databases, 1) funding opportunities for Sustainable Forest Management; 2) database on information and learning materials for accessing resources; 3) Database on lessons learned and best practices on forest financing, and an online interface with basic search function. It was also suggested that phase II of the CH to include a database on financing flow, and more searching criteria and website features to be added to online interface.
- 7 In pursuance to the discussions during the fourteenth session of the Forum (UNFF14), the UNFF Secretariat has been taken steps to further elaborate the CH databases, its content preparation and online interface development.

b. Presentation on the CH content presentation -1

- 8 The Co-Chairs then invited Mr. Stephen Donofrio, UNFF consultant, to present his paper on “Scope and content of the Clearing House database -Phase I”. Mr. Donofrio presented an overview of CH phase I, including the rationale for why a CH is needed for countries to be able to (1) identify existing funding sources; and, (2) obtain information on applying for or accessing existing funding sources to support sustainable forest management. He described concepts for how to design and for what information should be collected for each of the three databases of (1) funding sources/opportunities for Sustainable Forest Management; (2) Information and learning materials for accessing resources; and, (3) Lessons learned and best practices. Mr. Donofrio highlighted examples of research that he conducted for each of the databases, and provided insight about the challenges that UNFFS would likely face in compiling the data/information for each database, especially the uncertainty for information in database (1) regarding project scales, various of accessibility standards, etc. He further proposed partnership opportunities to create data transfers from CPF member organisations and other entities into the CH.

c. Presentation on the CH content presentation - 2

- 9 Ms. Jan McAlpine, UNFF consultant, was invited to make presentation on her work on collecting information for the database on lessons learned and best practice. Ms. McAlpine provided a brief overview of the definitions of Best Practices from a number of organizations, both from CPF member organizations and other entities. She stated that many publications are available on successful projects from CPF member organizations and other partners. Information users will need to look into the content of the publication to identify the good practices and lessons learned within. She also gave examples of Best Practices in a variety of projects from around the world, some of which are quite lengthy, others succinct and summaries of two or three sentences. She noted that only one project provided information on the level of funding, and that was in Euro per hectare. On the framework for organizing Best Practices and Lessons Learned, she proposed the six Global Goals for Forests for the Expert Group's consideration. Following this she underlined the importance of Member States voluntarily providing their own best practices and lessons learned to the CH, and further presented one possible Template for Member States to share such information.

d. Presentation on the design and mock-up of the CH website

- 10 The Co-chair invited Ms. Yan Lang from the UNFFS to present the activities conducted by the UNFFS on the development of the CH online platform. Ms. Lang highlighted that the Secretariat evaluated different options for the CH online platforms. With the key consideration on cost and time efficiency, as well as compliance with UN website rules and requirement, the Unite Web was considered the best option for Phase I of the CH website. She provided examples of UN website developed with the Unite Web and further presented a plain mock-up of the CH website. An overview was provided to the immediate next steps for the development of the CH Phase I website and long-term development of the CH. Emphasis was made on a step-wise approach in development of the CH, and on consistent improvement through adding more content to the database and gathering feedback for improvement from the users. Ms. Lang highlighted that the success of the CH website would also be contingent on what information is already available in different sources and what could be shared by member States and developed in the future with partnerships.
- 11 Further to the presentation, the Co-chair invited Ms. Jianqun Wang from UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs to provide more technical information through addressing questions on the website development of the CH, especially in terms of its compliance of the UN rules and requirement in website development.

Agenda item 4: Exchange of views on the development of Phase I of the CH, and the way forward

- 12 Ms. Petya Kangalova, from International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), made a presentation on how IATI database could contribute to the CH phase I. Ms Petya Kangalova recalled the previous presentation made by Ms Annelise Parr on IATI in the first EGM on CH held in January 2019. She further gave an overview of how IATI works, which organizations were publishing to IATI, as well as who were the main users of the data and the key benefits of IATI data. The presentation focused on explaining to experts what type of information IATI data covers and talking through the relevant IATI data fields for the Clearing House. It was highlighted that IATI data provides project information that will be more relevant to the proposed database 1- Database on Funding Sources/ Opportunities, rather than database 2 and 3. Ms. Kangalova demonstrated how experts could access and query IATI data using the recently launched IATI datastore, providing a few example from data already published to IATI.

- 13 Following presentations, experts engaged in discussions with the Secretariat, consultants and the IATI. A summary of key suggestions and proposals made during the discussions are reflected in paragraph 18 of this Co-Chairs summary.

Agenda item 5: Summary of discussions, including key suggestions and proposals

- 14 Following are the Co-Chairs summary of key suggestions and proposals made by experts in reaction to the presentations and suggestions made during the meeting:

I. General consideration

- a. It is important to develop the clearing house of the GFFFN in a step-wise approach, and in the most cost-effective manner.
- b. The CH is not aimed to reproduce data and reinvent the wheel. The CH provides a one-stop shop in the form of a meta-database for countries and stakeholders to have access to a comprehensive set of information on forest financing.
- c. In developing the CH, it is important to learn from the past and to avoid experienced failures and deficiencies of the CPF Source Book, by carefully evaluating what worked and what didn't work.
- d. The primary users of the CH databases are member States of the Forum. In addition, CH may also provide useful information for other data-users, including non-state actors on access to funding.

II. Scope and type of information in the CH

- a. A wide range of information is available within various international organizations and institutions which are of relevance to the CH.
- b. Several issues have to be further clarified, including what should be the limit of information to be included in the CH databases; whether or not the CH should include databases; criteria for identification of best practices, different time sensitivities of the three databases, e.g. funding sources and experiences;
- c. Learning from the past experiences, it is of critical importance for the CH to use and interact with, to the extent possible, available information in existing databases (e.g. IATI, DEVEX, development aid, FAO Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World (SW4SW), ITTO, etc.), including by providing links to existing databases in the CH.
- d. The 2008 and 2012 studies on Forest Financing are still relevant and provide a rich source of information to be used in the CH databases.
- e. Collaboration of CPF organizations and information providers with the UNFFS is imperative to ensure capturing the most relevant data in the CH, without recreating or reproducing their data. The Forum

could, e.g. invite the CPF member organization to incorporate the relevant information in the CH databases or other practical means.

- f. CPF member organizations are major relevant data providers. However, they do not have specific resources to support the work of the CH databases. To avoid the experienced deficiencies of the CPF Source Book, it would be necessary to request the CPF member organizations to provide their information for inclusion in the CH databases.
- g. The CH database on funding opportunities for sustainable forest management should include information on all sources of funding, including private sources.
- h. The issue of data quality control and validation are of paramount importance and have to be taken into full account.
- i. Permanent Missions in NY and the UNFF-NFPs have a key role in validating and quality control of the respective information. Other UN intergovernmental processes and the UN Specialized Agencies also provide sources for official data which can be used in the CH.
- j. It would be also useful to provide information in the CH databases on different international and regional initiatives that have forest financing data component.

III. CH database on lessons-learned and best practices

- a. One main issue is the fact whether by best practices, we mean the best practices in implementation of forest-related projects, or we mean those forest-related projects that successfully attracted funding. It seems that the latter should be focus for the third CH database on best practices and it should include the relevant criteria of success in attracting funding.
- b. To make utmost use of the information in the CH databases, in particular, the database on lessons-learned and best practices, it would be useful to classify the information based on forest-cover type of countries and/or can be collated to give regional perspectives.
- c. The CH database on lessons learnt and best practices should also include useful information that assist countries to address their capacity-gap in project preparation, and to include information about resource-based payment projects, and information about the participating countries in those projects.
- d. The third CH database on lessons-learned and best practices should be more interactive and with rely on information mainly provided by member States.
- e. In communicating information about best practices, it is important to avoid additional reporting burden for Members of the Forum. In this regard, consideration should be given to take the most use of the National Reports to the UNFF, as well as other existing reporting frameworks to extract lessons-learned and best practices.

- f. There could be multiple ways to organize information about the lessons-learned and best practices in the CH database, including e.g. around one or several GFGs. This information could be also grouped based on the GFG4 on forest financing.
- g. UNFF15 provides the opportunity for countries to see the interconnection of the work of the CH and provision of information about lessons-learned and best practices with the voluntary national report and other existing reporting processes.
- h. It is also necessary to prepare a guide or manual for countries that assist them to identify and communicate the best practices.
- i. There are lots of manuals on the best practices in various organizations that can be used in the CH, incl. CPF SFM tool box. There is also useful information from ITTO and GEF related to best practices which are of direct relevance and benefit to the CH databases.
- j. Major groups and stakeholders have great potential to assist countries to implement relevant activities. To this end, they need to be supported.
- k. Once operationalized, it is important to maintain and keep the information on the CH databases up-to-date. The issues regarding the frequency of updating the information should be considered by the Forum, considering all other timelines, including national reporting, and the flagship publication, etc.

IV. Technical Platform for the CH databases

- a. The Unite Web, which is hosted by the UN in New York, provides a sound and cost-effective platform for the CH databases.
- b. Given the fact that the Unite Web is in compliance with UN specific standards for its websites, and it is already operational and available with basic functions, there will be no need for additional resources to establish a new website from scratch, but to further build on the existing features of the Unite Web.

V. Partnership with data-provider organizations

- a. Encourage maximum partnership with data-holder organizations and suggest that the UNFFS provide some specific recommendations to UNFF15 on potential partnership with other organization in the process of developing the CH.
- b. Within the scope of phase I of the CH, IATI databases are most relevant to database one of the CH, providing information on issues such as organization names, title of the projects and narrative about those projects and participating countries in the project, geographical location, thematic areas, budget, type of financing, and the relation of the projects with the SDGs.
- c. IATI database has its own organizational arrangement and focus on data to be collected. IATI can add additional item, such as adding a tag on the GFGs, under certain conditions, but IATI cannot change the standard design of their databases.

- d. IATI data is providing mostly past and current funding activities. However, IATI does not provide information on the funding opportunities. Using IATI as source of data for funding flows could be considered in the development of Phase II of Clearing House for database on financial flow, within the bigger scope of discussion under the Global Core Set of indicators which will also discuss data for financial flow for SFM.
- e. Information in other relevant data-provider organizations such as DEVEX for the CH database one, as well as CPF member organizations would be useful to be used in the CH databases. E.g. SFM Tool Box could be beneficial for database 2 of the CH.
- f. Some experts emphasized that the CH is not equal to a database. Thus, the CH of the GFFFN should mainly rely on providing a platform for information from other data providers and not to duplicate the work of other organizations.
- g. To facilitate the discussions at UNFF15, they asked the Secretariat to have suggestions in the relevant UNFF15 documentation on the partnership between the UNFFS and the data-provider organizations on the CH, e.g. through conclusion of an MoU with IATI. It was stated that IATI, as a voluntary initiative, did not have MoU with others.
- h. Other experts stated that the CH databases should not be just a place for provision of different links of other data providers. Despite the usefulness of having links, but this will limit the ability of countries to access useful information. Moreover, provision of simple links will lead to more fragmentation. Thus, it is important to have a meaningful CH and databases which are beneficial for Members of the Forum and respond to their needs in the area of financing.
- i. Member organizations of the CPF have key role in providing relevant information for the CH. In this regard, CPF was urged to take a more proactive role in the development of the CH, including e.g. through proposing a new joint initiative, as well as in the context of its ongoing discussion on the CPF Strategic Vision Towards 2030.
- j. Some of the CPF members considered the lack of resources as a constraint and indicated that the CPF member organizations' meaningful involvement and support to the CH is contingent upon provision of donor contributions.

Agenda item 6: Closure of the meeting

- 35. The Co-Chairs will circulate the draft Co-Chairs' summary to the participating experts for any factual corrections before the end of November 2019.
- 36. The UNFF Secretariat will incorporate main outcome of the expert group meeting on the CH of the GFFFN in the relevant UNFF15 documentation for the Forum's consideration at its fifteenth session in May 2020.