

May 22, 2023

**Preparations for the Midterm Review of the International Arrangement on Forests
UNFF Expert Group Meeting on the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, and Implementation
of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) 2017- 2030**

20-22 June 2023, UNON, Nairobi-Kenya (Hybrid)

Timeline for the next reporting cycle to UNFF and options for online reporting tool

I. Introduction

1. The Council in its ECOSOC resolution 2022/17 requested that the Forum secretariat, in the context of preparations for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests, and in consultation with members of the Forum, prepare a road map and timeline for the next reporting cycle, in conjunction with the Global Forest Resources Assessment cycle, and explore options for establishing an online reporting platform for the Forum, recognizing the need for streamlined reporting and minimizing the reporting burden, including the challenges faced by developing countries.

II. Background

2. In accordance with the UNSPF, the Forum should assess progress in its implementation. The assessment should take into account, inter alia, voluntary national reporting, voluntary national contributions and the results of the most recent Global Forest Resources Assessment of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as well as inputs from the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its member organizations and other partners within and outside the United Nations system, including regional and subregional organizations and relevant stakeholders. Moreover, according to paragraph 69 of the UNSPF, the Forum will establish a cycle and format for voluntary national reporting that takes into account the cycle of the global forest resources assessments (FRA) conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the cycle for reviewing the Sustainable Development Goals at the global level by the high-level political forum on sustainable development, in order to reduce reporting burdens.

3. The last reporting cycle to UNFF was conducted in 2019/2020. The Forum considered the results of the first round of voluntary national reporting at its fifteenth session. The reporting format was shared with Members of the Forum in June 2019, and Member States were invited to submit their voluntary national reports to the Forum secretariat by November 2019. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the fifteen session of the Forum was postponed until June 2020 and the deadline for submission of national reports was extended till June 2020.

4. Emphasizing the value of making effective use of the information provided by members through their voluntary national reporting, in its Resolution 13/1, the Forum requested its secretariat to prepare a concise “flagship” publication on progress towards achieving the global forest goals for release by the end of 2021. The secretariat work on the publication commenced following the fifteenth session of the Forum in June 2020. A first consolidated draft of the six chapters on the six global forest goals was produced, on schedule, by the end of December 2020. The goal was to complete the main drafting well in advance to allow sufficient time for the various other steps, including review by the Editorial Board of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, graphic design and layout and other production-related activities.

5. An informal advisory group was actively involved in the development of the flagship publication. The group provided its recommendations on various aspects thereof, including its scope, main objectives and data sources. The Forum secretariat also worked closely with international consultants, who supported the drafting process, as well as with FAO and its FRA team, to ensure that the publication was supplemented with the best available forest-related biophysical data. The publication was finalized and launched at the UNFF16 (May 2021). A special launch

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event was held for the release of the first flagship publication of the Forum and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Global Forest Goals Report 2021.

6. FAO conducts periodic FRA at its Members' request. These assessments collect, analyze and disseminate information on the world's forest resources, their condition, management and uses. The FRA reporting cycle is five years. The assessment is based on two primary sources of data: Country Reports prepared by National Correspondents and remote sensing that is conducted by FAO together with national focal points and regional partners. At the beginning of each reporting cycle, FAO seeks the guidance of international experts on the scope, terms and definitions and other technical aspects of the forthcoming assessment. FRA 2025 Expert Consultation was organized on-line in September 2022. FRA 2025 capacity development and data collection started in March 2023 and is being implemented through a series of regional workshops, where FAO provides technical assistance and guidance to the FRA National Correspondents on how to compile the country reports. After the country reports have been drafted, the National Correspondents will send them to FAO for a review and approval. This process is foreseen to be completed by the end of 2023 and will be followed up by the data analysis and preparation of FRA 2025 publications and other products.

III. Proposed timeline for the next reporting cycle to UNFF

7. The table below, contains the main activities with proposed dates for the next reporting cycle to UNFF. It follows the recommendation from the Forum to synchronize the national reporting to UNFF with the five FAO/FRA reporting cycle. Simultaneously, the proposed timeline will allow for the use of data collected within the FRA2025 process, by both: the UNFF Focal Points - when preparing their national reports to UNFF and the UNFFS - when analyzing the information submitted by countries and assessing the progress made towards achieving the GFGs, at the global level. By January 2025 the UNFF Focal points/persons completing the report, will be able access their national data sets (reviewed and approved) submitted by FRA national correspondents to FAO and by July 2025 the UNFFS will have arrangements in place, to access to the global figures from FRA2025. Consequently, the proposed date for the circulation of format in the next reporting cycle to UNFF is January 2025 - with June 2025, as a deadline for submissions.

Activity	When	Who
1. Setting up the Advisory Group on Reporting to UNFF	October 2023 – February 2024	UNFF Bureau, Member States
2. Finalization of the format for national reporting to UNFF ¹	February – May 2024	UNFFS, Advisory Group
3. Setting up online reporting tool	March – June 2024	UNFFS, Advisory Group
4. Revision of the Explanatory notes ² for country reports to UNFF ³	September – December 2024	UNFFS, Advisory Group, Member States
5. Circulation of the format for national reporting along with the explanatory notes for country reports	January 2025 ⁴	UNFFS
6. Capacity building workshop for experts involved in preparation of the national reports to the Forum	April 2025	Member States UNFFS, Advisory Group,
7. Deadline for submission of national reports to UNFF	June 2025	Member States

¹ <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MAR-amended-reporting-format-Oct-2022.pdf>

² <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Explanatory-Notes-national-reports-unff15.pdf>

³ Dedicated workshop (subject of availability of resources) or online consultations

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8. Analysis of information submitted in national reports and incorporating bio-physical data from FRA2025/ other sources	June – October 2025	UNFFS, Advisory Group
9. Drafting, editing, layout – <i>if the results of the reporting cycle are to be published in May 2026 – in any other format than the “Note by Secretariat”</i>	October 2025 – January 2026	UNFFS, Advisory Group
10. Final product	May 2026	

IV. Use of the information provided by Member States through their voluntary national reporting,

8. The timeline proposed above takes into consideration the possibility of producing, by the Forum, an overview of progress towards achievement of the Global Forest Goals, in a form of a publication. The proposed circulation of the format for reporting from January to June will allow for enough time to analyze, compile, draft and design of the final product, for example: i) a short overview ii) a concise publication iii) leaflet(s) focused on specific areas/GFGs, for release by May 2026. If the decision of the Forum will be to summarize the findings only in a Note by the Secretariat, as it was done prior to UNFF15, the circulation of the format for reporting could be conducted later e.g., in March 2025 with September 2025, as a deadline for submission.

9. At the last session of the Forum (UNFF18, May 2023), delegations commended the ongoing cooperation between the UNFFS with FAO in the area of monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR) and underlined the importance of this cooperation for reduction of reporting burden and increased consistency of the international forest-related data. Participants took note of the information and further underlined the importance of aligning the reporting cycle to UNFF with FAO/FRA. There was a general support for the preparation of another report on the state of implementation of the GFGs, however, countries had diverse views on whether this should be another “flagship publication”. The need for a transparent and inclusive discussions regarding the scope and topics of any potential publication and the importance of demonstrating the synergies and coherence with other forest-related goals such as those under the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), was emphasized. The UNFFS was also encouraged to seek other cost-effective ways of disseminating and publishing the information submitted by Members States in their national reports to the Forum and make efforts to link it with the FAO State of the World’s Forests.

V. Online reporting tool

10. Data collection with deploying online reporting tools became a standard way of gathering information and data for public agencies and private sector companies. This method has numerous advantages over the traditional data collection/reporting processes, via e-mails with MS Word file attachments, as it facilitates entry and analysis, providing more accurate outcomes within a shorter time frame.

11. The online reporting provides a more dynamic and informative way to compile information submitted in the national reports, presenting the information in a more accessible and manageable format, further contributing reducing time for and putting in place tools that help improve the data quality. The benefits of a flexible and easy-to-use on-line reporting system would not be limited to the Secretariat, but would also help countries to organize, store, maintain, and share information on progress towards UNSPF and to review progress.

12. The online reporting tool would contain all opened ended and closed questions contained in the format for national reporting and structured around the Global Forest Goals and targets of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030 (UNSPF).

13. The information requested from countries in the reporting process to the Forum is mostly of qualitative, non-numerical in nature- narrative text, which would require a relatively simple a web application. There are many

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existing online platforms which could be used to collect, organize, process, and analyze the information submitted by countries. The functionality of these platforms varies greatly, some simply allow collection, others highlight important parts of reports and the most advanced employ software with the help of artificial intelligence allow to tag, analyze and visualize data/information instantly.

14. The main criteria for selection of the online tool would include: i) an application easy to use, ii) flexibility to add/modify/make visible reporting year(s) and questions/sub-questions and responses; iii) English, as the language of interface, potentially allowing responses in other UN official languages, iv) review of progress and send reminders to optimize response rate, download survey responses in Excel or CSV format, allows for export as PDF document, iv) cost effective, v) in accordance with UN ICT standards.

15. If implemented, countries will be encouraged to use this system, however, the use of it will be optional and submission of a national report in MS Word format will remain as an option for those countries which do not feel ready to get started with the online reporting tool.