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Means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

In accordance with its Quadrennial Programme of Work for 2025-2028, the United Nations Forum on Forests at its twentieth session should consider means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network under agenda item 3(e). The present note provides the background information and highlights the intersessional activities undertaken since the nineteenth session of the Forum. It serves as the basis for discussion during the twentieth session of the Forum on agenda item 3(e).

¹ *E/CN.18/2025/1

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for the period 2025–2028, contained in annex to Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2024/15, the Forum, at its twentieth session, will hold technical discussions on its thematic priorities in support of the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030. Under agenda item 3(e) the Forum will consider means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (Network).
2. The present note contains information on key global developments related to means of implementation and a summary of the activities of the Network since the nineteenth session of the Forum. The note also includes a progress report on the status of implementation of the provisions contained in section D of resolution 2024/15, and an update on the work of the Network clearing house, and the progress towards the establishment of the proposed Network office in Beijing, China.

II. Background

3. The Network was established by ECOSOC pursuant to its resolution 2015/33. In April 2017, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, in which the Network's priorities were set out as follows:
 - a. To promote the design of national forest financing strategies to mobilize resources for sustainable forest management.
 - b. To assist countries in mobilizing, gaining access to and enhancing the effective use of existing financial resources from all sources for sustainable forest management.
 - c. To serve as a clearing house and database for existing, new and emerging financing opportunities and as a tool for sharing lessons learned and best practices from successful projects.
 - d. To serve to contribute to the achievement of the global forest goals and targets, as well as of the priorities contained in the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum.
4. In accordance with section XII of ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, the Forum conducted a midterm review in 2024 to assess the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives. In this context, the Forum at its nineteenth session reviewed the effectiveness of the Network as a component of the international arrangement on forests. The recommendations for the Network emanating from this midterm review are reflected in section D of the ECOSOC resolution 2024/15².
5. Accordingly, the ECOSOC, *inter alia*, invited the members of the Forum to: i) strengthen the provision and mobilization of resources to forests, including through innovative financial mechanism, such as payment for ecosystem services, blended finance, and sustainable financing policies, as appropriate; ii) foster cooperation and public-private partnerships on science and technology in the forest sector; iii) recognize forest tenure/user rights in assessing forest financing; iv) use the clearing house website as a source on forest financing and to share good practices; and v) exchange experiences of the Network's assistance to countries in developing national forest financing strategies.
6. The ECOSOC also requested the Forum Secretariat to i) continue to update and maintain the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network clearing house; ii) make use of digital tools to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the activities of the Network; and iii) continue to support members of the Forum and assist countries in gaining access to and enhancing the effective use of existing financing resources. It also requested the Secretariat, with a view to informing the Forum at each session of the role, functions and funding of the proposed office of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network in Beijing, to provide comprehensive written updates on the above-mentioned items, once agreed in line with the mandate of the Network.

² <https://www.undocs.org/en/E/RES/2024/15>

III. New developments on forest finance

A. Global Environment Facility

7. In its eighth replenishment period, the Global Environment Facility continued to implement its integrated strategy to promote the conservation and sustainable use of forests through different approaches: (a) the finalization of the GEF Integrated Programs related to forests; (b) the approval of stand-alone projects and programs; (c) the approval of the first projects financed by the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund; (d) the elaboration of the new GEF strategy on forests, and (e) the approval of a new strategic project involving CPF members and focused on primary forest advocacy and finance. In total over the year 2024, the GEF made available for forest-related projects \$977 million of grants leveraging expected co-financing of \$8.2 billion.
8. The Amazon, Congo and critical forest biomes Integrated Program (CFB IP) is the biggest Program of GEF-8. With the addition of 3 countries approved by the GEF Council in June 2024 (Guinea Bissau, Guyana and Togo), the Program now includes 28 countries and is supported with \$307 million grant from the GEF (in total \$1.8 billion including the co-financing). The objective of the Program is to safeguard high ecological integrity forest landscapes in biomes that are irreplaceable in terms of biodiversity and carbon stocks and are critical for other ecosystem services, and the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The GEF finalized the CEO endorsement of the child projects of 25 national projects and 5 regional coordination platforms. The implementation of the Program will begin in 2025. As the CFB IP, the Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program finalized the design of its child projects in 20 countries across Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America and will begin implementation in 2025. In addition, the GEF Council approved in February 2024 the Food Systems and the Wildlife Conservation for Development Integrated Programs that include investments aiming at reducing forest loss and degradation through landscape approaches. Together, these two Programs are supported with \$417 million grant from the GEF and \$3.1 billion of expected co-financing.
9. In addition to the Integrated Programs, over the year 2024, the GEF Council approved 43 new forest-related projects in 35 countries mobilizing \$312 million of GEF grants and \$1.7 billion of expected co-financing. The GEF Council also approved the Program “Transformation Approach to Large Scale Investment in Support of the Implementation of the Great Green Wall Initiative - TALSISI-GGW” supported with \$87 million of GEF funding and \$3 billion of expected co-financing.
10. In May 2024, the GEF posted its new Strategy on Forests³. Recognizing the critical role of forests in sustaining biodiversity and stabilizing Earth’s climate, the Strategy builds on 30 years of experience and presents the elements to be prioritized to achieve its overarching goal to maintain, preserve, and restore the integrity and functioning of forest biomes, particularly in tropical areas and primary forests.
11. In May 2024, the GEF CEO approved the project “Strengthening Conservation of Primary Forests through Partnership Enhancement and Coordination of Support”. This \$2 million project aims at strengthening the conservation of tropical primary forests worldwide through increased awareness among government and donor decision-makers and stakeholders of their importance in combatting climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation, leading to increased supportive funding and investments. Executing partners of the project are the UNFF Secretariat, IUCN and FAO, Griffith University and Wild Heritage.

B. Green Climate Fund

12. Forest finance at the Green Climate Fund (GCF) falls primarily under the forest and land use result area⁴ while additional forest-related finance is delivered indirectly through several adaptation result areas, namely ecosystems and ecosystem services; livelihoods of people and communities; and health and well-being and food and water security. One of the comparative advantages of nature-related result areas such as forests and land use is that they contribute a wealth of non-climate co-benefits such as biodiversity, provision of clean water, and

³ https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-05/GEF-StrategyOnForests-final_0.pdf

⁴ <https://www.greenclimate.fund/results/forests-land-use>

livelihoods for local communities. As of December 2024, the GCF has approved a cumulative \$1.812 billion worth of projects in the forest and land use sector. This includes financing for REDD+ phase III (results-based payments of \$496 million).

13. Since the last reporting period ending in December 2023, the Board has approved 12 projects related to forests and land use, totaling \$160 million in GCF finance (the projects were cross cutting projects combining other results areas as well). Three projects are in Africa, four in Latin America and the Caribbean, five in Asia-Pacific.
14. As of December 2024, the pipeline contained at least a further USD 2.4 billion in forest and land use projects, with possible additional forest-related financing, including from the relevant adaptation result areas. Regarding REDD+ results-based payments, the GCF Board requested the Fund's Secretariat to prepare a new proposal on REDD+ results-based payments. This was presented at the Board's 40th meeting in October 2024 and approved by the board by decision GCF/B.40/11⁵.

C. Adaptation Fund

15. Established under the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2010 and serving the Paris Agreement since January 2019, the Adaptation Fund has provided a total of \$ 1.1 billion to more than 100 countries. It has increased support as needs have risen, offering countries flexible and innovative grant funding windows centered on scaling up support and accelerating action, innovation, learning and sharing in adaptation. The Fund's portfolio has a total of 164 climate change adaptation-specific projects in vulnerable communities of developing countries around the world, including eight small innovation grants. The approved projects are expected to benefit a total of 41 million people and protect or rehabilitate 635,296 ha of natural habitats, among other results. Since 2010, the Fund has allocated more than \$165 million (or approximately 20% of the portfolio) under the impact area of increased ecosystem resilience in response to climate change- and variability-induced stress, which includes projects in the forestry sector and nature-based solutions.
16. Implementing entities can apply for funding of up to \$20 million per country for single-country adaptation projects or programmes, for a maximum amount of \$10 million per project, or for a maximum of \$14 million for a regional project/ programme (they are not mutually exclusive). In addition, national implementing entities can gain access to funding outside their country's cap for enhanced direct projects of up to \$5 million per project. Access to large innovation grants of up to \$5 million can be obtained by all implementing entities, and access to small innovation grants of up to \$250,000, learning grants of \$150,000 and project scale-up grants of \$100,000, respectively, can be obtained by national implementing entities only.
17. The Fund has been providing financial assistance also to non-accredited entities through the Adaptation Fund Climate Innovation Accelerator (AFCIA)⁶. Two of the Adaptation Fund's accredited Multilateral Implementing Entities (MIEs), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), have been administering the first phase of this programme. The Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN)⁷, which is the operational arm of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Technology Mechanism⁸, works in conjunction with UNEP as an executing entity in the AFCIA. Grantees can access funds up to \$ 250,000 per project, aiming to address adaptation challenges in various thematic areas including innovative nature-based solutions.
18. In addition, under the current medium-term strategy for 2023-2027⁹, the Fund aims to establish a locally led adaptation facility to provide grant funding to all the IEs and also to non-accredited entities. The Adaptation Fund's medium-term strategy continues to increase the ambition under the strategic areas of action, innovation

⁵ <https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/gcf-b40-11>

<https://www.greenclimate.fund/document/gcf-b40-11-add01-rev01>

⁶ <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/apply-funding/innovation-grants/adaptation-fund-climate-innovation-accelerator-afcia/>

⁷ <https://www.ctc-n.org/>

⁸ https://unfccc.int/tclear/misc_/StaticFiles/gnwoerk_static/TEM/0e7cc25f3f9843ccb98399df4d47e219/174ad939936746b6bfad76e30a324e78.pdf

⁹ <https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Medium-Term-Strategy-2023-2027.pdf>

and learning and sharing, and introduces a crosscutting strategic emphasis on promoting locally based and locally led adaptation as well as on scaling up funded activities and results, while building on the Sustainable Development Goals and serving the Paris Agreement to help to meet the challenge of climate change. Currently the Fund has in the pipeline over \$425 million in project proposals and a steady stream of demand for its support work, whose concrete work on the ground is supporting the most climate-vulnerable through tangible adaptation projects and accessible innovative financing.

D. Global Biodiversity Framework Fund

19. The Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF)¹⁰ was ratified by 186 countries and launched at the Seventh GEF Assembly in Vancouver, Canada in August 2023. As of November 2024, a total of \$383 million had been pledged to the GBFF by 12 sovereign and subnational contributors: Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Province of Québec, Spain, and the United Kingdom. In 2024, the newly established Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) hosted by the GEF, approved its first four projects. These include two projects in Brazil for a total of \$19.8 million in GBFF grant funding to conserve biodiversity in indigenous lands, notably in the Amazon and Atlantic forests, and to improve conservation of the Caatinga biome - a mosaic of thorny shrubs and seasonally dry forests. They also include two projects to support the achievement of 30x30 at the national scale in Mexico (\$18.2 million) and Gabon (\$1.5 million), which will strengthen the protection of forests across the two countries. A further 36 project preparation grants were approved for projects addressing biodiversity loss across a wide range of ecosystems, including forests. A total of \$157 million of GBFF resources has been set aside for these 36 projects, which are expected to leverage an additional \$397 million in co-financing.

E. Debt for nature swap

20. Debt-for-nature swaps are emerging as one of the innovative financing mechanisms to incentivize countries to invest in nature conservation. The market for debt-for-nature swaps (DNS) is growing rapidly, with over \$1 billion raised in 2023 alone. Recent examples highlight the growing momentum behind this innovative financing approach for forest and marine ecosystems conservation. In 2024, a \$300 million debt conversion deal was signed by the Bahamas and Standard Chartered to unlock approximately \$124 million in interest savings, which will be allocated to marine conservation projects¹¹. Similar agreements were completed by Gabon and Ecuador in 2023. These initiatives have been driven by increasing private sector involvement. Similarly, under the Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation Act (2019), twenty-two DNS agreements have been finalized so far generating over 380 million USD for tropical forest conservation¹².

F. Proposal to establish a Tropical Forest Finance Facility

21. Brazil's Ministry of Finance and Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change have proposed the establishment of the Tropical Forest Finance Facility (TFFF), an international blended-finance mechanism aimed at compensating and incentivizing High Forest, Low Deforestation (HFLD) countries for preserving their tropical forest coverage. The TFFF is suggested to be designed as a results-based framework that rewards measurable performance in maintaining standing forests while complementing existing global forest initiatives, including REDD+. The concept was first introduced by the Brazilian government during COP 28 in Dubai in 2023 and has since been presented at subsequent COPs to solicit feedback from countries and refine its design. The concept is proposed to be launched at COP 30, to be held in Belém, Brazil in 2025¹³.
22. Key features of the TFFF are (i) performance-based incentives: the facility will reward countries for demonstrable success in maintaining standing tropical forests while imposing penalties for deforestation, ensuring accountability and long-term forest conservation, and (ii) unified monitoring system: participating countries will adopt a standardized, globally recognized system for monitoring national forest cover. This system

¹⁰ <https://www.thegef.org/what-we-do/topics/global-biodiversity-framework-fund>

¹¹ <https://apnews.com/article/bahamas-debt-nature-conservancy-marine-protection-ed89e57b81133d5790163f798f64dc1b>

¹² <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1724>

¹³ Tropical Forest Finance Facility (TFFF) – A concept note by Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Brazil (2024)

will incorporate minimum technical parameters to ensure transparency, credibility, and comparability across nations and, (iii) direct support to conservation efforts: annual payments will prioritize direct support to those actively conserving forests, including local communities, indigenous groups, and protected area managers. A minimum percentage of funding will be allocated for these stakeholders to ensure the benefits reach at the grassroots level.

23. The TFFF aims to integrate financial incentives with robust monitoring mechanisms, fostering a collaborative, transparent approach to forest conservation. By aligning with other global forest initiatives and focusing on tangible results, it aims to be a transformative step toward preserving tropical primary forests. A brief presentation by Brazil on the TFFF is planned to be made at UNFF20.

G. Outcomes from the Conference of the Parties of the three Rio Conventions

24. During the last quarter of 2024, back-to-back Conference of Parties (COPs) of the three Rio Conventions saw significant political commitments made toward funding global efforts to fight climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss. Given the role of forests in addressing the triple planetary crisis, many of these commitments offer opportunities for financing the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of forests.

Sixteenth Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity

25. During the sixteenth Conference of Parties (COP16) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Cali, Colombia, the governments of Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the Province of Québec lent a US\$ 163 million boost to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), which aims to scale up financing for implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework¹⁴.
26. During COP 16, the International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits (IAPB) introduced the Framework for High-Integrity Biodiversity Credit Markets, an innovative tool aimed at directing financial resources toward nature restoration and conservation efforts. Comprised of 21 High-Level Principles, the framework is designed to establish robust standards and uphold market credibility. The IAPB framework is designed to tackle challenges faced by carbon credit markets such as transparency issues and inconsistent regulations. It also includes establishing clear principles and promoting accountability to build trust and encourage participation from both public and private stakeholders, ensuring that biodiversity credits deliver meaningful conservation outcomes while maintaining market integrity¹⁵.

Twenty ninth Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

27. Significant progress was made at the twenty-ninth Conference of Parties (COP29) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in advancing international carbon markets under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. The agreement reached at COP29 provides clarity on reporting requirements, authorization processes, and registry architecture, enabling countries and private entities to confidently participate in international carbon market mechanisms.
28. Notably, the COP 29 advanced Article 6.2, which establishes the mechanism for trading carbon credits—referred to as Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs)—through bilateral agreements. By introducing a robust system for generating certified emissions reductions and removals, the agreement ensures clear rules to prevent double counting. This enhanced transparency and accountability strengthen the integrity of the system and boost confidence among corporate buyers and investors in the voluntary carbon market (VCM). The outcomes of COP29 represent a crucial step in operationalizing Article 6, fostering greater collaboration among countries and unlocking new opportunities for climate finance through credible and transparent carbon markets¹⁶.

¹⁴ <https://www.thegef.org/newsroom/press-releases/boost-nature-governments-announce-163-million-new-pledges-global>

¹⁵ <https://www.iapbiocredits.org/framework>

¹⁶ <https://www.clydeco.com/en/insights/2024/12/carbon-trading-and-article-6-at-cop29#>.

29. Additionally, at COP29, developed countries pledged to contribute at least US\$ 300 billion in climate finance to developing countries annually, tripling the previous target of US\$ 100 billion annually by 2035. Parties agreed to work on a “Baku to Belém Roadmap” to scale up financing from public and private sources to at least US\$ 1.3 trillion per year by 2035. However, the agreement fell short of the ambitions of developing countries, as well as civil society organizations calling to address the gap in financing for nature¹⁷.

Sixteenth Conference of Parties of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification

30. Sixteenth Conference of Parties (COP16) of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was held in December 2024 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. During COP16, parties to the Convention and partners pledged more than US\$ 12 billion toward drought resilience and land restoration¹⁸. The Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership, launched at COP16 to connect vulnerable countries and communities with resources to improve drought preparedness and response, attracted a US\$ 10 billion pledge from the Arab Coordination Group, whereas the OPEC Fund and the Islamic Development Bank will each contribute US\$ 1 billion. The Great Green Wall, an African-led initiative to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land, mobilized € 11 million and € 3.6 million from the Italian and Austrian governments, respectively. According to an assessment released during COP16, there is a US\$ 218 billion annual shortfall in funding to achieve the objectives of the Convention. Forests that support drought resilience and land restoration may also benefit from the above-mentioned pledges.

IV. Activities of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network since the nineteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

A. Provision of technical support to members of the Forum

31. Since its establishment in 2015, the GFFFN has worked with 39 countries and 3 subregions to design national and regional forest financing strategies respectively and has built their capacity to develop project proposals for financing from existing multilateral funding institutions. Since the nineteenth session of the Forum, the Secretariat has continued to provide support to five countries and one region. A summary of these activities is provided below.

Burundi, Perú, and Uzbekistan

32. The GFFFN completed providing technical support to Burundi, Peru and Uzbekistan in 2024. The support to Burundi focused on the development of the national forest financing strategy and included conducting an analytical background study on the status of forests, forest management and utilization, forest financing and the contribution of forests to food security, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Special focus was paid to forest governance and socio-economic development in the context of economic recovery. The study provides detailed baseline information which informed the design and formulation of the national forest financing strategy. The national forest financing strategy has to be aligned with the national sustainable development strategy and responsive to priorities identified through stakeholder consultations. This was followed by a capacity building workshop aimed at equipping national experts with knowledge, tools and techniques for development of national forest financing strategies and formulation of project proposals for mobilizing financing for sustainable forest management. A total of 27 national experts attended the workshop. A multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral drafting team selected from the trained participants worked under the guidance of the GFFFN and an international consultant to formulate the national forest financing strategy which was validated and adopted by government in October 2024.
33. The GFFFN continued to support Peru and Uzbekistan to finalize their national forest financing strategies and project concept notes for mobilizing funding for sustainable forest management from multilateral and other

¹⁷ <https://unfccc.int/news/cop29-un-climate-conference-agrees-to-triple-finance-to-developing-countries-protecting-lives-and>

¹⁸ <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/press-releases/united-nations-conference-riyadh-charts-path-global-action-land-drought>

sources. Focus was placed on mobilization of domestic resources from both the public and private sectors. Peru partnered with the World Bank whilst Uzbekistan partnered with FAO as their accredited agencies in developing the project concept notes to the Green Climate Fund. The validation workshop for the national forest financing strategy and project concept note for Uzbekistan was held in Tashkent in November 2024 whilst the validation workshop for Peru was held in Lima in December 2024.

Mozambique and Suriname

34. The capacity building workshop for Suriname on the development of national forest financing strategy and formulation of project proposal for mobilizing financing for sustainable forest management from all possible sources available at domestic and international levels was conducted in Paramaribo in March 2024. Sixty national experts drawn from the relevant government agencies, private sector, civil society organizations, academia and research were trained. Following the workshop, the country established a multi-disciplinary task team to develop their draft national forest financing strategy with technical guidance from the GFFFN. The task team under the technical guidance of the GFFFN has been engaged in the design and formulation of the national forest financing strategy and a project concept note for accessing funding from existing multilateral sources. It is envisaged that the support to Suriname will be completed by end of the first quarter of 2025. The GFFFN also continued to work with and provide technical support to the task team of Mozambique. Unfortunately, progress was delayed due to some unforeseen reasons but, it is expected to finalize this work during the first quarter of 2025.

Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization

35. The Secretariat continued to support member countries of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) in the development of the regional forest financing strategy aimed at strengthening the capacity of member states of the region (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela) in mobilizing resources for sustainable management of the Amazon forests from all possible sources. The regional forest financing strategy is aligned with the ACTO regional forest programme and the forest-related decisions from the Belem Declaration. The validation workshop was held in Brasilia, Brazil from 17 to 19 December 2024 and was attended by representatives from all the eight member countries of ACTO.

New and Outstanding Requests

36. Since UNFF19, the UNFFS has received one new request for GFFFN support from Bolivia. In addition, there are still four outstanding requests for GFFFN technical support from Burkina Faso, Comoros, Congo and Mali, dating back to 2023. These countries requested support in the design of national forest financing strategies to mobilize resources for sustainable forest management and preparation of project concept notes to access funding from multilateral funding institutions. Due to lack of financial resources, the secretariat has not yet been able to provide GFFFN technical assistance to these countries. The Secretariat has also lost one of its GFFFN supporting posts. Lack of sufficient human and financial resources have negative impacts on the pace of provision of the GFFFN technical support to countries. In this respect, and in the context of discussion at UNFF20 on the Information Paper on the workload, gaps and needs of the Forum Secretariat, members of the Forum are encouraged to address this human and financial gap in a sustainable and reliable manner. This Information Paper will be posted in advance of upcoming session of the Forum on the UNFF website and will be discussed under agenda item 4 during UNFF20.

B. Partnerships and joint activities

37. The secretariat, as the manager of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, participated in several partnerships and joint initiatives with international, regional and subregional organizations and governments, some of which were discussed above. Some other key partnerships and joint initiatives in which the Secretariat has participated since the nineteenth session of the Forum are summarized below.

Partnership with GEF/IUCN/FAO

38. The UNFF Secretariat has signed an agreement with IUCN, the accredited entity, to serve as one of the executing agencies for a GEF-funded medium-size project focused on primary forests. This project aims to prevent the loss of tropical primary forests globally by enhancing their protection and conservation. Although all natural forests were originally primary, only 25% of these biomes remain intact today. Alarming, in 2023, nearly 60% of the 6.37 million hectares of forest lost globally were primary forests. The preservation of these forests is essential for achieving multiple international objectives, including the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and the targets outlined by the CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD, and several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite their undeniable importance, primary forests, particularly tropical primary forests, are grossly under-recognized and underfunded. This lack of prioritization stems from insufficient awareness of their ecological, economic, and cultural value in global policy agendas and forest financing strategies, exacerbating their ongoing deforestation and degradation. Financial commitments toward their conservation remain woefully inadequate.
39. This project aims to address these gaps by assessing the comprehensive ecosystem values of primary forests and engaging global stakeholders through targeted regional and international dialogues. These efforts will elevate the profile of primary forests, highlight their critical importance, and devise innovative financial architectures to bolster conservation efforts by establishing robust donor-recipient dialogue mechanisms. The project will integrate primary forest conservation into forest financing strategies, broader conservation initiatives, and global policy frameworks. Leveraging the mandate of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN), the initiative will support countries and regions in developing finance strategies that prioritize intact tropical primary forests.
40. This transformative approach will strengthen existing financing mechanisms, foster innovative solutions, and mobilize critical resources to ensure the sustained protection of tropical primary forests. The project will be implemented in collaboration with FAO, IUCN, Griffith University and Wild Heritage.

Partnership with CBD Secretariat

41. In December 2023, the UNFF and CBD Secretariats signed a Joint Implementation Agreement to enhance collaborative efforts for the synergetic implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) and the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030 (UNSPF). This agreement seeks to align forest-related policies and action plans with National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) by fostering cooperation among countries and agencies, thereby elevating the recognition and conservation of natural forests globally.
42. In July 2024, the two Secretariats further strengthened their partnership by signing a UN-to-UN Agreement to conduct detailed case studies in pilot countries. These studies aim to assess opportunities, challenges, and pathways to harmonize forest-related policies and action plans within NBSAPs and other national strategies. The findings will play a pivotal role in building the capacity of countries to prioritize and accelerate the conservation of natural and primary forests, contributing to the implementation of the KM-GBF and UNSPF.
43. The CBD Secretariat has provided seed funding for the first phase of these case studies. Building on the initial experiences and lessons learned, the two Secretariats plan to mobilize additional resources to expand the initiative to more regions and countries. This expanded effort will further enhance the capacity of countries to integrate forest conservation into broader policy frameworks, advancing global biodiversity and forest-related goals.

Interagency Task Force on Financing for Development

44. The secretariat continued to participate in the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development. The main activities included participation in the preparations of financing for sustainable development report 2024 (FSDR2024). The report highlighted that the world is facing a sustainable development crisis, and that financing challenges are at the heart of the crisis and imperil the SDGs and climate action. It notes that the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in 2025 will be a last chance to correct course if we want to achieve the SDGs by the 2030 deadline.

United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

45. The secretariat continued to participate in the FAO-led taskforce on best practices under the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, in collaboration with other partners. The focus was on creation of strategies for adoption of the Standards of Practice for ecosystem restoration and implementing the Capacity, Knowledge, and Learning Action Plan which is designed to address capacity gaps and priorities for ecosystem restoration among different types of stakeholders. The plan includes eight initiatives, but the taskforce prioritized three namely building a professional platform for education and learning; establishing a community-based ecosystem restoration mechanism and identifying case studies on pluralistic extension and advisory services for ecosystem restoration, aiming at documenting and showcasing good practices and facilitating knowledge sharing among countries. The UNFF Secretariat, as a task force member, has been collaborating with FAO to develop E-learning courses on Ecosystem Restoration in collaboration with other partners. The best-case studies will be published in a compendium and presented at a global workshop to help develop capacities to effectively provide extension and advisory services that integrate ecosystem restoration knowledge and practice.

C. Resources leveraged for supporting the operation of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network

46. The work of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network is funded mainly from extrabudgetary resources provided through the trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests by donor countries. Since the nineteenth session the UNFFS has received \$178,344.90 from the Government of China for the GFFFN activities managed by the Forum Secretariat. Given the limited availability of resources within the regular programme plan, the UNFFS has historically leveraged the UN's Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC) to shore up the activities of the GFFFN. Since July 2024, the secretariat has mobilized \$52,991.00, for GFFFN activities from the RPTC and \$280,000,00 from GEF under the MSP project on primary forests.
47. Continued extrabudgetary resources, including contributions from donor countries, are required to support the activities of the Network during the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for the period 2025–2028 and to cover the costs associated with the development and maintenance the Network clearing house.

D. Update on the development of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network clearing house

48. The Secretariat launched the Clearing House on Forest Financing¹⁹ website in 2021 with three databases namely, financing opportunities, learning materials related to mobilizing financial resources for forests, and good practices and lessons learned. Since the nineteenth session of the Forum, the secretariat has continued to expand and improve the entries contained in the three databases. By the end of 2024, the number of entries in the three databases exceeds three hundred data entries (financing opportunities-164; learning materials-109; and good practices and lessons learned-44). The secretariat also continued to publish the quarterly highlight on forest financing, a communication product that was initiated in 2022 to disseminate information on forest financing news which has attracted new users to the clearing house. By the end of 2024, ten quarterly highlight issues had been published. In 2025, the Secretariat is preparing to launch a set of regular online webinars to provide an interactive platform for members and stakeholders of the Forum to share good practices and more on forest financing.
49. Given the significance of access to relevant data, the UNFF Secretariat and the COP29 Presidency co-organized a High-level Event during COP29 of UNFCCC on 21 November 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan. The discussions during the event highlighted the significant funding gap for sustainable forest management and the challenges countries face in accessing comprehensive data on forest financing opportunities, flows, and best practices in one-stop-shop. To address data gaps and fragmentation, suggestions were made to improve the global architecture on forest financing data, including through developing a global data hub on forest financing opportunities, flows, and best practices. Such a global hub should be developed through strategic partnerships with relevant global data holders and should be built on the work of the existing mechanisms such as the UNFF Clearing House on Forest Financing. A panel discussion will be organized during UNFF20 to discuss the possible role that the UNFF clearing house can play in this respect.

¹⁹ <https://forest-finance.un.org/>

E. Update on the proposed Forum secretariat office for the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network in China

50. At its thirteenth session, the Forum noted with appreciation the offer of the Government of China to establish and make operational an office in Beijing for the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network and requested the Forum Secretariat to regularly report on the possible arrangements for and operation of the proposed office. At the nineteenth session, the Forum requested the Secretariat, “with a view to informing the Forum at each session of the role, functions and funding of the proposed office of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network in Beijing, to provide comprehensive written updates on the above-mentioned items, once agreed in line with the mandate of the Network.”
51. From its fourteenth to nineteenth sessions, the Secretariat has provided regular updates on the progress to each session of the Forum. Five rounds of consultation between the United Nations and China had been held to discuss relevant legal, administrative, budgetary and substantive matters. Major progress has been made during the course of these consultations. Since the conclusion of the nineteenth session of the Forum, the UNFF Secretariat and the National Forestry and Grassland Administration of China organized intensive informal discussions with the objective of resolving the differences on the remaining substantive issues related to the office, including its name, nature, scope, objective, functions, institutional arrangement, budget, staffing and the operation of the proposed office. Major agreements were made informally on remaining substantive issues. Both sides are now planning to organize the next formal consultation to formalize the informal agreements, and deal with remaining legal issues. This round of consultation is planned to be held in March/April 2025 and in advance of the twentieth session of the Forum. An update on the results of this round of consultation will be presented during UNFF20.

V. Conclusion

52. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of forests and trees outside forests in addressing the global challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, threats from zoonotic diseases and poverty, the financial flows to the forest sector remain a small fraction of the estimated requirements. This situation is exacerbated by continued challenges experienced by the intended beneficiary countries in accessing the funds available or announced under various initiatives. The new developments in the last year, whilst welcome, highlight the growing fragmentation of the forest financing landscape, making it more challenging to track the global progress on the overall scale of finance available for forests from various sources. This also makes it more challenging for countries and other stakeholders to maneuver the global landscape of forest financing to access resources efficiently and in a timely manner.
53. In the same vein, the Declaration of the High-Level Segment of the nineteenth session of the Forum highlighted the deep concerns that, despite the increase in forest finance pledges, there are persistent financial gaps to support the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of forest ecosystems, especially in developing countries, and stressed the urgent need to further support developing countries, in particular by facilitating access to existing resources and strengthening multilateral funding mechanisms in support of sustainable forest management. The GFFFN has been trying to play its role in assisting countries to mobilize resources and enhance their access to funding sources. To enable the Network to respond to the continued and increased demand from countries, necessary resources should be provided to support the work of the Network, and address its human and financial needs for its operation.
54. It is also essential to strengthen the global architecture for data sharing and knowledge management related to forest financing flows, opportunities, and best practices. It is important to intensify efforts to provide comprehensive, and reliable data, robust analysis, and up-to-date information to countries and stakeholders. This can be done effectively through shaping a global hub to provide a one-stop-shop for provision of such data, building on the existing mechanisms. The Clearing House of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network has been established to enhance access of countries to data on forest financing. The clearing house could play an important role in this respect, through establishing a strategic partnership with major UN and non-UN data providers on forest financing such as WB, FAO, UNEP, UNDP, OECD, etc.

F. Proposals

55. The following points are suggested for discussion during the twentieth session of the Forum and for inclusion in the Chair's proposals for submission to the twenty-first session of the Forum:
- a. Welcome the support provided by the GFFFN to countries in strengthening capacity to mobilize resources from all sources for sustainable forest management, and invite members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to actively engage in the activities of the GFFFN.
 - b. Invite Members of the Forum and others in a position to do so, to provide voluntary contributions to the Forum Trust Fund to enable the GFFFN to respond and provide the requested support in an effective and timely manner.
 - c. Invite the Forum Secretariat to explore additional avenues for cooperation and strategic partnership with relevant UN and non-UN data providers on forest financing with the objective of facilitating access of countries and stakeholders to comprehensive, and reliable data on forest financing flows, opportunities, knowledge and best practices in a one-stop-shop.