

**Expert Group Meeting on Strengthening the Engagement of Regional and  
Subregional entities in the work of the  
United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)  
21-23 January 2025, UNESCAP, Bangkok-Thailand**

**Co-Chairs Summary**

**I. Background**

1. According to paragraphs 25 to 28 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2015/33<sup>1</sup> on the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) beyond 2015, regional and subregional involvement was strengthened; these entities are partners of the Forum and an integral component of the IAF beyond 2015. On 27 April 2017, the United Nations General Assembly approved a Resolution 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 subregional 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. Furthermore, “regional and subregional 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.”<sup>2</sup>

2. During its 19th Session – UNFF19, the Forum agreed on the text of a draft resolution later adopted by ECOSOC<sup>3</sup> entitled “Outcome of the nineteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.” In the context of the midterm review of the IAF, section I of the said resolution contains invitations directed at the Forum’s regional and subregional partners, as follows:

“30. Invites regional and subregional partners:

- (a) To sustain support to countries in their respective regions to prepare them for the Forum and related sessions under other relevant conventions and frameworks;
- (b) To pursue engagement of regional or subregional financial institutions, such as regional development and investment banks, to expand collaboration on issues related to forests and to attract funding for their forest-related activities and participation in relevant meetings;
- (c) To explore options to organize regional and subregional partner-led initiatives to provide inputs to the Forum and implement regional, subregional and transboundary forestry initiatives leading to the achievement of the global forest goals;
- (d) To consider incorporating the contribution to the global forest goals in their respective plans, programmes and strategies, as appropriate;
- (e) To strengthen collaboration across sectors and facilitate partnerships to promote sustainable forest-based bioeconomy approaches and restoration of ecosystems, contributing to improved livelihoods, including through building capacities of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, underlining the need to ensure sustainable patterns of consumption and production;

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<sup>1</sup> E/RES/2015/33

<sup>2</sup> A/RES/71/285

<sup>3</sup> E/RES/2024/15

(f) To engage major groups and other relevant stakeholders in their forest-related activities;”

3. The UNFF Secretariat (UNFFS) organized the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) from 21 to 23 January 2025 at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand. The main objective of this meeting was to allow experts from regional and subregional partners to share their views on the invitations contained in Section I, paragraph 30, of ECOSOC resolution 2024/15. Due to the United Nations liquidity crisis, funds were only identified in mid-December 2024; the UNFF Secretariat invited UNFF regional/subregional partners to nominate experts to attend the EGM.

4. The following entities were represented in the EGM: the Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Bamboo and Rattan Organization (INBAR), the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC), and the Tehran Process Secretariat for Low Forest Cover Countries (TPS for LFCCs).

## **II. Opening of the meeting**

5. Ms. Juliette Biao, Director of the UNFF Secretariat, opened the meeting through a video-recorded message. In her opening remarks, Ms. Biao highlighted that we are at a critical juncture for our planet and our collective future, that the 2030 Agenda recognizes forests as essential for life on Earth, and that forests and their countless ecosystem services stand at the heart of our ability to confront today’s most urgent global crises: climate change, biodiversity loss, and the struggle to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When healthy and well-managed, forests sequester carbon, safeguard water supplies, and harbour 80% of terrestrial biodiversity. They underpin livelihoods, provide food security, and form the foundation for sustainable development. With only five years until 2030, the imperative to act boldly, urgently, and collaboratively has never been clearer. The decisions and actions we take now will determine the trajectory of our planet for generations to come.

6. The Forum’s partners' insights, strategies, and innovations are vital, and Ms. Biao urged participants to share their boldest ideas, define concrete actions, and demonstrate unwavering resolve. The pressing challenges facing forests must be identified and addressed, and opportunities to contribute effectively to achieving the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests must be seized. Finally, she urged participants to work urgently and purposefully to secure a future where forests thrive.

7. Following Ms. Biao’s remarks, experts elected Dr. Janita Gurung from the Regional Community Forestry Training Centre for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) and Dr. Jayaraman Durai from the International Bamboo and Rattan Organization (INBAR) as the Co-Chairs of the EGM. After their opening remarks, the Co-Chairs proceeded to the adoption of the agenda and programme of work and conducted a “tour de table.” Finally, the discussion on Section I, paragraph 30, items (a) to (f) of E/RES/2024/15 was introduced.

## **III. Discussion on Section I, paragraph 30, items (a) to (f) of E/RES/2024/15**

8. On item (a) of paragraph 30, regional and subregional entities are invited to “(...) sustain support to countries in their respective regions to prepare them for Forum and related sessions under other relevant conventions and frameworks.” In this regard, experts explained their level of collaboration with Member States. FAO, INBAR, TPS for LFCCs, and APFNet work with Member States and support them on various matters related to policy dialogue, capacity building, projects, information sharing, and the elaboration and implementation of Criteria and Indicators (C&I) for sustainable forest management (SFM). RECOFTC, a regional non-governmental entity, usually works with Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) and, to a lesser extent, with Governments.

9. FAO has a standing agenda item on “Update on global initiatives and processes of relevance for the

Commission” in its regional forestry commissions’ meetings, which includes information on the outcome of UNFF sessions and other forest-related processes; however, delegates from Member States are not prepared for UNFF meetings and related sessions under other relevant conventions and frameworks. The APFNet representative informed that the entity supports its Member States in several ways, including providing scholarships to forest-related university courses; the entity does not have a mandate to support delegates in preparing for UNFF and related meetings, but the Greater Central Asia Forestry Cooperation Mechanism (GCA FCM)<sup>4</sup>, initiated by APFNet, is a coordination forum involving seven economies in Central Asia supporting regional policy dialogue, capacity building, project demonstration, and information sharing. TPS for LFCCs focuses on C&I for SFM and mainly on the impact of climate change on dryland forests and rangelands. Finally, INBAR has an extensive network in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean and supports Governments as far as bamboo and rattan are concerned, as well as local MGoS. Most bamboo is found in forests, so the bamboo culture is significantly forest-related. INBAR participates in UNFF sessions and collaborates with the UNFF Secretariat in forest-related events but has no mandate to prepare delegates for UNFF sessions.

10. Experts speculated that the invitation contained in item (a) of E/RES/2024/15 could only be fulfilled with specific mandates and if dedicated funds were to be made available.

11. Item (b) invites the Forum’s regional and subregional partners “(...) To pursue engagement of regional or subregional financial institutions, such as regional development and investment banks, to expand collaboration on issues related to forests and to attract funding for their forest-related activities and participation in relevant meetings.” INBAR works with, among others, the Asian and Inter-American Development Banks and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The entity constantly seeks additional financial partners like the African Development Bank. The fact that INBAR is the only technical international organization that deals with bamboo and rattan helps in accessing funds; the situation is more complicated with forests since many bodies deal with forests directly or indirectly, so there is more competition. Finally, INBAR supports its members in obtaining financing from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) through partnering with FAO and other accredited agencies.

12. RECOFTC tried unsuccessfully to obtain funds for a project with a regional development bank, and this experience discouraged the entity from seeking further support from that financial institution. TPS for LFCCs works with projects usually financed by donor countries but would appreciate receiving project support funds) for LFCC member countries on climate change impact on dryland forests. FAO has a regular budget and receives extra-budgetary funding from various sources, including donor countries and international development financial institutions. APFNet works through projects that aim to demonstrate the best practices for sustainable forest management and rehabilitation; its focus areas are East Asia, Greater Central Asia, the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), North America, Oceania, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (except GMS). APFNet works to align and add value to existing international, regional, and national initiatives to advance forest restoration, such as the United Nations Strategic Plan 2017-2030 and the Sydney Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders’ Declaration on Climate Change, Energy Security, and Clean Development. These projects are financed through APFNet grants.

13. Participants noted that the invitation did not mention the private sector, which may eventually be a significant project-funding source for regional/subregional entities and countries. RECOFTC has been actively collaborating with the private sector, guided by Environmental, Social, and Governance Standards (ESG) and the principles of relevance, additionality, development, and risk. Finally, regarding attracting funding for participation in relevant meetings, experts said that, in their experience, this would only happen in the context of projects.

14. Paragraph 30 item (c) invites “(...) To explore options to organize regional and subregional partner-led initiatives to provide inputs to the Forum and implement regional, subregional and transboundary forestry initiatives leading to the achievement of the global forest goals.” FAO highlighted two regional/subregional initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region. The first is “RESULT Asia-Pacific,”<sup>5</sup> which focuses on landscape restoration, and the second is the “FAO -

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.apfnet.cn/Home/PolicyDialogue/Hightlevel/MMRF-GCA>

<sup>5</sup> [Result Asia-Pacific - Restoring and Sustaining Landscapes Together Asia](#)

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) - GEF 8 Indo-Malaya Critical Forest Biome Integrated Program<sup>6</sup> aimed at conserving primary forests. As mentioned above, APFNet focuses its projects on six geographical areas. Its project priorities are the multifunctional restoration of degraded forests through assisted natural regeneration and of deforested lands through forest planting, as well as the improved management of remaining non-degraded forests using best practices in SFM to minimize further forest loss and degradation. The projects cover several topics<sup>7</sup> and are classified as small, which are projects that seek funds from APFNet not exceeding USD 100,000 and are to be completed within 24 months, and regular, which are projects requesting APFNet grants above USD 100,000; the maximum APFNet grant for a three-year project is USD 500,000 and USD 1,000,000 for a five-year project, as well as earmarked projects directly identified by APFNet donors. As an example, the APFNet representative mentioned the Asia-Pacific Forestry Education Coordination Mechanism (AP-FECM)<sup>8</sup>, initiated by the University of British Columbia and Beijing Forestry University, the project is supported by APFNet and other entities.

15. INBAR has projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. They are all related to bamboo and rattan but with different focuses, such as increasing resilience to climate change, post-pandemic economic revitalization, atmospheric measurements for bamboo forests' carbon sequestration, and promoting sustainable bamboo and rattan trade. RECOFTC has several regional projects in the Asia-Pacific region, including Explore, a research network dedicated to forest landscape governance in Southeast Asia, and the Regional Model Forest Network-Asia, with its Secretariat hosted by RECOFTC. TPS for LFCCs cooperates with international organizations and countries on C&I for SFM and climate change issues. Low financial support impedes further activities.

16. Item (d) invites to "(...) consider incorporating the contribution to the global forest goals in their respective plans, programmes and strategies, as appropriate." Experts were reminded of the six Global Forest Goals and respective targets and were asked if and how they are incorporated into their entities' plans, programmes, and strategies. FAO has the implementation of the UNSPF and the achievement of the GFGs embedded in its work plan. Moreover, its role as chair of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) makes the entity a strong advocate for publicizing and achieving the GFGs. APFNet, INBAR, and RECOFTC have not explicitly incorporated the GFGs in their plans, programmes, and strategies. However, their projects and actions contribute to achieving all the Global Forest Goals and the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). TPS for LFCCs' work is more related to GFGs 1 and 6 since its work is focused on C&I for SFM and the role that LFCCs forest-cover can play in addressing climate change, as well as in enhancing cooperation, coordination, and cooperation with the UN System and the CPF.

17. Experts suggested that further coordination with the UNFF Secretariat might be helpful on this and other Forum-related matters. In-person meetings would be ideal, but given their financial implications, virtual meetings may suffice. The challenge of different time zones was mentioned, but it can be worked out.

18. Paragraph 30. Item (e) invites regional/sub-regional partners to "(...) strengthen collaboration across sectors and facilitate partnerships to promote sustainable forest-based bioeconomy approaches and restoration of ecosystems, contributing to improved livelihoods, including through building capacities of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, underlining the need to ensure sustainable patterns of consumption and production." As mentioned, RECOFTC works with forest-dependent communities and has MGoS, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, as their primary partners on the ground. APFNet, FAO, and INBAR also involve MGoS in their field projects. TPS for LFCCs does not work directly with MGoS but with countries and scientific entities that may include these partners and/or input received from them.

19. Regarding building the capacities of women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, APFNet, FAO, INBAR, and RECOFTC are actively involved in this exercise through their projects. Collaboration on the ground with universities and research agencies occurs frequently, and Governments generally request or stimulate the

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<sup>6</sup> [GEF-8 Indo-Malaya Critical Forest Biome Integrated Program](#)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.apfnet.cn/Home/Projects-en/ProjectFacts>

<sup>8</sup> <https://apfecm.forestry.ubc.ca/>

participation of civil society in forest-related projects. APFNet mentioned the project "Promoting the Sustainable Production of Sandalwood in Fiji"<sup>9</sup> launched in September 2024, which aims to promote sustainable sandalwood plantations, management, and best practices, while enhancing long-term rural socio-economic development in Fiji. It involves government and non-government stakeholders, including local forest communities.

20. Entities that work with MGoS generally enable capacity-building activities for these constituencies to be available online and in different languages. Finally, additional capacity-building opportunities for stakeholders are needed, but financial constraints make them difficult.

21. Finally, item (f) invites the Forum's regional/subregional partners to "(...) engage major groups and other relevant stakeholders in their forest-related activities. Experts felt that the invitations contained in items (e) and (f) were closely related and that the thrust of the discussions on item (e) is also actual for item (f). Some additional points were raised regarding the need to engage MGoS more efficiently, including ensuring that the training materials, for instance, are available in local languages. Moreover, engaging Major Groups and other Stakeholders is difficult since they are very diverse, and different engagement strategies are needed to attract the various constituencies.

22. Since the Forum's MGoS focal points were also meeting at UNESCAP during the same period, participants felt it would be helpful to meet with them and hear their views on paragraph 30, items (e) and (f). The three Major Groups and other Stakeholders' Co-chairs, Salma Motunrayo Omotara (Youth), Mia Crawford (Farmers/Small Forest Owners), and Andrei Laletin (Non-Governmental Organizations) conveyed the following action proposals:

1. The International Arrangement on Forests Major Groups Internal Coordination Mechanism (IAF MG ICM) and focal points from regional and subregional partners may organize a joint workshop on the margins of the 20<sup>th</sup> UNFF session or online to explore ways to strengthen collaboration on sustainable forest-based bioeconomy approaches and ecosystem restoration, contributing to improved livelihoods.
2. Invite regional and subregional partners to conduct tailored capacity-building activities to empower women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities by providing training and resources designed to align with their specific regional contexts and strengthen these efforts by building networks at the regional level.
3. Request that regional and subregional partners engage MGoS in forest-related activities.

23. Moreover, regional/subregional experts and their MGoS counterparts agreed to meet again in New York during UNFF20 to discuss their common challenges and seek further opportunities for collaboration.

## ANNEX

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

- **Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet)**
  - Dr. LU De
  
- **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)**
  - Dr. Sheila Wertz
  
- **International Bamboo and Rattan Organization (INBAR)**
  - Dr. Jayaraman Durai (Co-chair)
  - Ms. Li Yanxia
  - Mr. Borja de la Peña Escardó
  
- **Regional Community Forestry Training Centre for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC)**
  - Dr. Janita Gurung (Co-chair)
  
- **Tehran Process Secretariat for Low Forest Cover Countries (TPS for LFCCs)**
  - Dr. Mostafa Jafari