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Reference: M511-0559
Your reference:
Our reference: PFR
Contact person: GRU
Bern, 16 December 2013

Assessment of the IAF 2013

Dear Madam, dear Sir,

I have the pleasure to send you the Swiss views and proposals on the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF).

Sincerely Yours

Federal Office for the Environment FOEN

Franz Perrez
Ambassador

Enclosures:

- Swiss views and proposals on the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF).

Copies to: AL, GRU, MAR, KCH, DUC

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Swiss views and proposals on the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF)

I: Introduction

For Switzerland, forests have great importance for economic and social well-being, as well as for the maintenance of the environmental balance, for the protection against natural disasters, as a habitat of biological diversity, as a CO₂-sink, as a resource of timber and non-timber products and services.

The underlying causes of global deforestation and forest degradation are beyond the control of environment and forest ministries. Switzerland is therefore convinced that, due to the multiple cross-sectoral and international interdependencies, the challenge of ensuring the sustainable forest management (SFM) can be best achieved through cooperation between and within countries.

Switzerland is therefore convinced that a strong, international regime for forests is needed.

Since 1992, forests have been dealt with in the UN through various instruments and intergovernmental fora for international forest policy development:

- The Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of all Types of Forests (1992).
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) (1995 – 1997) under the auspices of UN CSD.
- The Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) (1997 – 2000) under the auspices of UN CSD.
- The International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) composed by the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) established by the ECOSOC in 2000 as a subsidiary body to ECOSOC with a universal membership, representing the high level policy forum, and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (14 organizations/conventions related to forests).
- The “Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All types of Forests“(2007).

The UNFF’s six designated functions were:

- To facilitate implementation of forest-related agreements and foster a common understanding on sustainable forest management
- To provide for continued policy development and dialogue among governments, international organizations, including Major Groups, as identified in Agenda 21 as well as to address forest issues and emerging areas of concern in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner
- To enhance co-operation as well as policy and programme co-ordination on forest-related issues
- To foster international co-operation
- To monitor, assess and report on progress of the above functions and objectives
- To strengthen political commitment to the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

II: Swiss answers to the format for soliciting views and proposals on the IAF

A: A full range of options for the IAF

Switzerland believes that the present IAF does not fill the expectations that were placed in the IAF in 2000, nor in 2006. The reasons are elaborated below on the basis of the UNFF questionnaire.

It is noticeable to look back and see that international forest policy has been addressed by quite a few different institutional set-ups since 1992.

Nevertheless, as it will be stated below, further development of the institutional set-up for SFM is greatly needed. Political commitment and collective efforts at all levels need to be further strengthened, to include forests on national and international development agendas, to enhance national policy coordination and international cooperation and to promote intersectoral coordination at all levels for the effective implementation of SFM of all types of forests.

The follow-up organ/instrument to the present IAF should provide a coherent, comprehensive, effective and efficient policy framework driving the implementation of SFM on the ground through enhanced political awareness and political leadership.

Such an organ/instrument should be entrusted with/contain the formulation of a common vision and of common goals and targets for strengthening political commitment between sectors within countries through policy deliberation, policy development, overarching policy guidance. It should also allow for the monitoring of SFM with clear indicators worldwide.

The follow-up organ/instrument to the present IAF should be **the** UN global forest policy hub for all other organizations/instruments related to sustainable forest management, including sectors such as biodiversity, climate change, desertification, agriculture, energy, water, public health, etc.

The follow-up organ/instrument to the present IAF should:

- Streamline forests/forest policy/SFM in the global sustainable development agenda
- Bring forest governance to all LBAs relating to forests (UNFCCC, UNCCD, CBD, CITES, ITTA as well as regional instruments) so as to reduce the fragmentation of decisions and actions, as well as using synergies with forest related processes
- Catalyze cooperation within and between countries, as well as foster the implementation of concrete actions at all levels
- Monitor, analyze and report progress in implementation
- Contribute to identifying challenges and emerging issues in forest related issues
- Address forests in a nexus format: cross-sectoral rather than in isolation
- Build its work on regional processes and knowledge
- Operate peer-reviews of national forest policy

Switzerland is convinced that a legally binding framework would be the simplest and best approach to addressing in a cooperative spirit the common challenges of managing our forests sustainably, because this approach involves:

- The strongest form of commitment
- The highest authority within the sector and across sectors
- The most effective instrument to generate additional resources at both international and national levels
- The best instrument to ensure equal footing with other processes and conventions.

Due to different challenges and conditions in the regions, a global legally binding instrument replacing the IAF may take the format of a framework convention with a set of common overriding principles and goals, implemented through regional conventions/regional annexes of the convention (as in UNCCD) or national and/or local targets for the standards and levels of performance that need to be achieved or maintained (as in UNECE-WHO Protocol on Water and Health, art. 6).

B: Performance of UNFF and its process since 2000 and future options for UNFF

B1 and B2: UNFF structure and performance

The United Nations Forum on Forests was established by the ECOSOC in 2000 as a subsidiary body to ECOSOC with a universal membership. UNFF has been the only global high-level intergovernmental policy body on Forests.

Despite its mandate, UNFF did not succeed to decide, in 2005, to develop a legal framework on all types of forests. In 2006, the initial IAF (UNFF + CPF) was reconducted with some changes, strengthening the interaction between the global forest policy dialogue and regional and subregional level processes. In 2007, the NLBI was adopted.

Some of the relevant work in connection with enabling conditions for SFM has been done in CLI's in support of the UNFF. (see B5)

UNFF, through the joint work of the CPF, dealing with forest financing, had an impact on donors' coordination, bringing much knowledge on forest financing worldwide, specifically on the inadequacies/gaps/challenges of the financing system, as well as on the weaknesses in the donor and recipient countries. But singling out one issue in the means of implementation, and giving much time for it, made the discussion incomplete and has not allowed sufficient time to discuss other substantive themes of SFM.

The Facilitative Process through focused regional meetings in Africa, the least developed countries, the low-forest-cover countries, and the small islands has been one of the most positive ventures of UNFF. It showed the importance of looking into the financing challenges of as well the opportunities for regional hot spots, spreading information on forest financing to facilitate its access. Those seminars helped not only the recipients but also the donor countries/financing organizations in these regions to better focus the thematic of forest financing according to local conditions, raising the efficiency of demands as well as of provisions.

UNFF did stimulate a wide reporting from regional organizations initiated through the Regional Led-Initiative organized in 2008 by Australia and Switzerland. The regional organizations have been aware of UNFF work and have been discussing its results.

The objective of UNFF was to be the world platform for policy development and dialogue on SFM. Unfortunately, it ended up being mostly an endless negotiation arena, with little implemented soft law (NLBI and numerous resolutions), due to their non compulsory nature. The resolutions have had little impact on other sectors or conventions. Side-events enabled substantial discussion and information exchange.

At the same time, the climate change convention has put forests far more in the limelight than UNFF, even though mostly relating to the carbon.

The UNFF High Level sessions, long series of prepared interventions, have not been as interactive as one could have wished. There was little time for discussion due to their format.

The NLBI reporting has been low (around 25%), but increased in 2012 through the organization of some regional capacity building seminars. Therefore, its effectiveness as well as its impact is hard to judge.

UNFF has attracted all the international organizations of the forest sector and those related to it (among them the members of the CPF) but with a decreasing interest over the years. In addition, it did not succeed to establish regular links with the forest-related sectors that strongly influence/impact the forest conservation and sustainable management.

Although it was in the IAF mandate, there has been little attention given to follow-up of all the IFF and IPF proposals, partly because of poor institutional memory of countries due to changes in staff and delegations. In addition, UNFF seems to invent new concepts/ventures, forgetting to look back at the past work.

The website of UNFF has not been modernized for more than 6 years. It is increasingly difficult to find substantive documents of its new ventures that are hidden by video clips. Improvement is much needed so as to enable a quicker search of documents. Sometimes, important documents (such as those for the facilitative process) were placed in obscure locations on the UNFF website. General public light communication seems to have been its unique purpose.

At country-level, there is little institutional memory on the origin and purpose of UNFF and the CPF. There is a certain sense of remoteness from problems on the ground. Coordination is weak in capitals between experts on forests and those of other sectors, including with the focal points of the forest-related conventions. This also has impaired the work at UNFF.

B3: Future options (See A)

B4: UNFF and the post-2015 development agenda

This fully depends on the final format of the follow-up organ/instrument to the present IAF and its role in the post-2015 development agenda.

B5: Country-Led initiatives and Ad Hoc Expert Groups

The Country-led/Organization-led/Region-Led initiatives have been numerous and very useful to inform participating countries on more specific issues, discuss and develop them in informal settings. It also allowed countries to deal with emerging issues. It played an important role in exchange of experience and capacity building. Nevertheless, their findings were little captured by the secretariat to enrich the documents for the sessions and the resolutions.

Some of the relevant work in connection with enabling conditions for SFM has been done in CLIs in support of the UNFF. In the pivotal complex of forest governance (comprising questions on tenure and use rights, decentralization and the interplay and roles of different governance levels from national to local), since 2004 Switzerland, Indonesia, South Africa, Mexico and the Ukraine have biannually organized a series of international workshops as country-led initiatives in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests, bringing together countries undergoing decentralization and governance reform, from around the globe and within regions, in a spirit of mutual exchange and learning. The workshops in the series brought together a mix of participants from Government, civil society, research institutions, community organizations and the business sector. All were organized around key aspects of decentralization and governance theory and practice in the context of the forest sector, and considered cross-

cutting issues of livelihoods, equity and sustainable development more generally. All were designed to draw lessons and recommendations for action by the United Nations Forum on Forests and other key institutional actors and decision makers. The series of workshops can also be considered as the contribution of UNFF to a larger debate on tenure rights which did also manifest itself in the work of the Rights and Resources Initiative or the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (2012), and did also surface as a key aspect in the negotiations of the UNFCCC and the REDD+ safeguards. In spite of the CLIs in support of the UNFF and the crucial importance of the theme for the implantation of SFM, the themes, findings and recommendations of the workshops were little captured in the official documents of the UNFF sessions. A key document which encompasses the first four workshops and which was jointly sent by Switzerland, Indonesia, South Africa and Mexico to the Secretary General of the UN can be found at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/693/46/PDF/N1069346.pdf?OpenElement> (<http://www.un.org/esa/forests/documents-unff.html#9> . Letter dated 2010/11/03 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, Indonesia, South Africa and Mexico to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General • E/CN.18/2011/16)

Ad Hoc Expert Groups have been preparing, through intersessional meetings, the sessions of UNFF on specific items of the agenda. Somehow, their work has not always been advancing the work of UNFF as the same discussions restarted at UNFF sessions. This might have served more as capacity building than anything else.

B6: Engagement of major groups

The multistakeholder (i.e. major groups) dialogues were given a half day session in the middle of the UNFF sessions, looking more like a “side event”, and were poorly attended by very few delegations. These dialogues had little impact on the formal decision-making as major groups were not integrated in the plenaries. Their participation was ghettoized with this separate dialogue session.

B7: Impacts of the International Year on Forests (IAF)/International Day of Forests

At global level the 2011 International Year on Forests created increased attention on the importance of forests, at least within the UN processes. Switzerland has been honored during IAF, having one of the six best forest policies and legislation.

At national level, some countries used this opportunity for promoting forests and sustainable forest management nationally, even if it is difficult to find the right ways of communication in a time of overflow information on all sorts of topics. It is also challenging to keep the attention on forests on a long term basis due to their slow growing nature.

C: Non-legally binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI)

It is difficult to judge to which extent the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI) has been implemented since reporting was low (2011: only 16 reports: 2012: 55). The only advantage it might have brought is through some cross-sectoral coordination within countries, supported by some UNFF seminars. The rate of reporting is still too low. In some countries, it did not bring additional national financing resources because of its voluntary nature.

Apart from the Global Objective on Forests number 4 (GOF4), the 3 others lack precise indicators. The non legally binding nature of the GOFs did not influence the forest-related conventions’ decisions as they have their own, legally binding goals and have more precise targets.

According to the study on forest financing of the CPF, the Global Objective on Forests 4 (Reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management and mobilize significantly increased, new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management) has been reversed, mainly due to REDD activities as well as a window for financing SFM within the GEF.

The GOFs might be a basis to build on a SDG on forests if it is so decided. But any SDG will need more precise targets and indicators. So the development of SDGs might possibly run in parallel to the NLBI GOFs and the SDG process should be given priority given its impact and political importance.

Section D: The Forum's secretariat

Countries continuously asked for information on the structure, number of employees and their tasks as well as financial mechanisms, especially given the large number of consultants that have been engaged to link with national UNFF focal points to write reports. Lack of transparency was one of the reasons of little response for contributions of the trust fund of UNFF.

The participation of UNFF staff in other international forest-related forums has not been as active as one would wish. Although MOUs were signed between UNFF secretariat and other organizations, it is unclear what they encompass and how this had any effect on the work of either UNFF or the given organizations/conventions. . There was also no analysis or reports on these MOUs.

It is also noticeable that some important members of the CPF have not seconded any staff lately as they did in the past.

The funding of the extrabudgetary activities of the secretariat has not been clear.

The secretariat engaged in some activities/ documents that were not agreed upon by the countries/Bureau.

Section E: CPF and CPF members

The CPF has been an important platform for getting some of the 14 organizations to discuss and come forward with very useful documents on common issues such as climate change and more recently with great knowledge, the forest financing. The sourcebook on forest financing has also been an important asset, although it is difficult to know how useful it has been to recipients countries. The main problem of the CPF is that it is not a body headed by UNFF as most members are independent conventions driven by their own governing bodies. This had an effect on the low level of participation of some of its members, by lack of time and finances.

It is unclear how the CPF members have transmitted the work of UNFF into their constituencies.

Recent developments on SDGs have not been addressed in a concerted manner.

Section F: Financing options and strategies

The facilitative process has been of great value to increase the understanding of the funding sources and mechanisms, the obstacles to access them and to join regional donors with countries. It also had a great value in capacity building.

Forest financing must come mostly from national sources (public and private). As far as international support is needed, the recent Warsaw REDD+ framework might influence other future forest finance processes. It states that results-based payments cannot be received without first a presentation of a summary report on safeguards (with forest governance as an important aspect). Unfortunately forest governance in many countries is yet to evolve to create the proper conditions for improved access to and increased funding, including accountability and transparency.

A legally binding instrument would be the only set-up that would allow for a global forest fund, as this is the case in other instruments. On the other side, the implementation of a legally binding instrument needs new and additional finances.

UNFF is not the appropriate institution for such a fund, as it is a policy forum and not an implementing agency. Cooperation with existing funding mechanisms should also be included in the reviewing different options.

In conclusion:

Past assessments and lessons learnt have not received the necessary follow-up and thus had no recognizable impact; this assessment must be taken more seriously