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**United Nations Forum on Forests****Fourteenth session**

6–10 May 2019

Item 6 of the provisional agenda\*

**Enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common international understanding of sustainable forest management****Enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common international understanding of sustainable forest management****Note by the Secretariat***Summary*

In accordance with its quadrennial programme of work, the United Nations Forum on Forests at its fourteenth session will consider the topic of enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common international understanding of sustainable forest management. The present note provides background information and outlines the intersessional activities since the thirteenth session of the Forum to serve as a basis for the discussion at the fourteenth session under agenda item 6.

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\* E/CN.18/2019/1.



## I. Introduction

1. In accordance with the quadrennial programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2017–2020, at its fourteenth session the Forum will consider the topic of enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common international understanding of sustainable forest management.
2. The present note has been prepared to serve as a basis for the discussion under agenda item 6. The note provides an overview of the results of intersessional activities on the subject since the thirteenth session of the Forum and suggestions and proposals for discussion by the Forum at its fourteenth session.

## II. Background

3. The Economic and Social Council, in subparagraphs 6 (f) and (g) of its resolution [2015/33](#), decided to improve and strengthen the functioning of the Forum by requesting it to dedicate its odd-year sessions to discussions on implementation and technical advice, including the exchange of experiences among Member States, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and subregional organizations, and major groups, and to provide inputs and proposals to the Forum at its even-year sessions, which focus on policy dialogue and development and decision-making.
4. In its resolution [2015/33](#), the Council specified the tasks for odd-year sessions for the purpose of focusing the attention of Member States. These specific tasks include, among others, assessing progress in and making possible proposals on enhancing policy coherence, dialogue and cooperation on forests, fostering synergies in global forest-related processes and strengthening the common international understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management as set out in the United Nations forest instrument.
5. In accordance with the resolution, the Forum included in its quadrennial programme of work for the period 2017–2020 an item on enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common international understanding of sustainable forest management as a priority action for its fourteenth session.
6. Agenda item 6 relates directly to global forest goal 6,<sup>1</sup> particularly targets 6.1,<sup>2</sup> 6.2<sup>3</sup> and 6.4, as set out in the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution [71/285](#) in April 2017. Targets 6.1 and 6.2 are closely interrelated since entities within or associated with the United Nations system with significant forest-related programmes are also represented in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.
7. Agenda item 6 is also relevant to other agenda items of the fourteenth session of the Forum, notably item 3 on implementation of the strategic plan for forests,

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<sup>1</sup> Global forest goal 6 reads as follows: Enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies on forest-related issues at all levels, including within the United Nations system and across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, as well as across sectors and relevant stakeholders.

<sup>2</sup> Global forest goal 6, target 6.1 reads: Forest-related programmes within the United Nations system are coherent and complementary and integrate the global forest goals and targets, where appropriate.

<sup>3</sup> Global forest goal 6, target 6.2 reads: Forest-related programmes across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests are coherent and complementary and together encompass the multiple contributions of forests and the forest sector to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

item 4 (b) on progress in the development of global forest indicators, and item 7 on enhanced cooperation, coordination and engagement on forest-related issues.

8. Also in accordance with the Council resolution, the Collaborative Partnership, among its other core functions, is to enhance coherence and policy and programme cooperation and coordination at all levels among its member organizations, including through joint programming and the submission of coordinated proposals to their respective governing bodies, consistent with their mandates.

9. The Collaborative Partnership has been conducting a mapping exercise to assess its existing capacities and identify possible capacity gaps to effectively support the implementation of the strategic plan for forests, building on the findings of the report prepared by the World Bank Group and the Programme on Forests (PROFOR) on mapping and gap analysis of forest-related activities of members of the Collaborative Partnership. That study contributed to the development of the workplan of the Collaborative Partnership for 2017–2020, which was later agreed upon by the Partnership and presented to the Forum at its thirteenth session.

10. At a retreat in December 2018, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership discussed ways and means to enhance synergy and coherence in their activities in support of the implementation of the strategic plan for forests, including through developing a new workplan for the period 2021–2024 and a strategic vision towards 2030 (see also [E/CN.18/2019/2](#) and [E/CN.18/2019/6](#)).

11. In order to collect preliminary information and views on enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common international understanding of sustainable forest management, the Forum secretariat circulated an informal survey in September 2018 to members of the Collaborative Partnership, relevant regional and subregional organizations and processes and major group focal points to collect information on progress and efforts made since the adoption of the strategic plan for forests to advance the achievement of targets 6.1, 6.2 and 6.4 (see annex).

12. The survey included 10 questions, with some adjustments in language to reflect the different nature of the respondents, including intergovernmental, international, regional and non-governmental organizations. The survey for major groups included an additional question on the major groups workplan for the period 2018–2020 in support of the strategic plan for forests.

13. Survey responses were received from 21 organizations and entities, including 9 members of the Partnership,<sup>4</sup> 8 regional and subregional organizations and processes<sup>5</sup> and 4 major group focal points.<sup>6,7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), secretariat of the Global Environment Facility, International Union for Conservation of Nature, International Union of Forest Research Organizations, United Nations Development Programme, secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests, and World Bank.

<sup>5</sup> African Forest Forum, Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation, regional forestry commissions of FAO, Forest Europe, Mekong River Commission, Center for People and Forests, Tehran Process on low forest cover countries, and Joint Forestry and Timber Section of the European Commission for Europe and FAO.

<sup>6</sup> Forestry Research Network for Sub-Saharan Africa, Friends of the Siberian Forests, Ikatan Cendekiawan Tanimbar Indonesia, and African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests.

<sup>7</sup> In a few cases, a respondent served multiple roles. For example, FAO responded both as itself and as chair of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, as well as on behalf of its six regional forestry commissions; and the Forum secretariat serves as the secretariat of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and as one of its member organizations.

14. The results of the informal survey were presented for consideration at the following meetings: retreat of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, 10 and 11 December 2018, Rome; expert group meeting on regional and subregional contributions to the Forum, 7 and 8 January 2019, Bangkok; and expert group meeting on major group and other stakeholder contributions to the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests, 9–11 January 2019, Bangkok. The reports of the meetings are available on the Forum website.

15. At the expert group meeting on regional and subregional input to the Forum held in January 2019 in Bangkok, participants discussed regional and subregional contributions to enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common understanding of sustainable forest management, and agreed on the periodicity, format and content of regional and subregional partners' written inputs to the Forum on progress made towards the achievement of the global forest goals and associated targets. The agreement was an effective step towards advancing coherent support for the implementation of the strategic plan for forests at the regional and subregional levels.

### **III. Coherence and complementarity of forest-related programmes within the United Nations system and across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (global forest goal targets 6.1 and 6.2)**

16. Survey results and subsequent discussions suggest that forest-related programmes within the United Nations system and across the 15 member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership encompass a wide variety of forest-related contributions to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, contributing to all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

17. While the mandates, structure, scope and scale of these forest-related organizations vary significantly, there may be room to improve policy and programme coherence and complementarity at both the international and national/country levels. Some forest-related contributions may also warrant further attention, for example in the context of sustainable consumption and production and the important roles of the forest products industry and civil society.

18. The strategic plan for forests and its six global forest goals and associated targets provide an effective framework and new momentum for enhancing forest-related contributions to the implementation of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as for the United Nations system, the Collaborative Partnership and its member organizations, regional and subregional organizations and processes and civil society organizations to enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies on forest-related issues in line with global forest goal 6.

19. In view of the recent adoption of the strategic plan for forests, many forest-related organizations have yet to fully integrate the global forest goals and targets into their current forest-related strategies, plans and programmes, many of which have a 2020 time horizon. To further advance global forest policy coherence, the governing bodies of these organizations could be invited to integrate the global forest goals and targets, including goal 6, into the next guidance and strategic documents for their organizations, and to align the respective timelines to 2030 in line with the 2030 Agenda and the strategic plan for forests.

20. The Collaborative Partnership on Forests has taken significant steps in this direction through the adoption of its new policy document and workplan for 2017–2020, which have been developed in alignment with the strategic plan for forests.

Additional actions to scale up the contribution of the Partnership to goal 6 and other global forest goals may be possible through further integration of the goals and targets into the activities of the Partnership, as well as those of its member organizations.

21. Furthermore, the ongoing efforts by the Collaborative Partnership to develop its strategic vision towards 2030 and its workplan for the period 2021–2024 are indications of its work to further strategize and synergize its programmes and initiatives so as to advance global forest policy coherence in support of the achievement of goal 6 (see [E/CN.18/2019/2](#)).

22. Regional and subregional organizations and processes have an important role to play in fostering coherence and complementarity among member countries and national constituencies and facilitating joint interventions and proposals at the international level in support of enhanced global forest policy coherence. This can be done, inter alia, through integration of the global forest goals and targets of the strategic plan for forests into relevant programmes and strategies of these organizations and processes, and by scaling up the exchange of information and best practices on forest policy coherence at the regional and national levels.

23. In the expert group meeting in January 2019, major groups discussed several issues in preparation for the fourteenth session of the Forum, including concerning enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common understanding of sustainable forest management. The meeting noted that major groups have been actors in implementing the strategic plan for forests. The major groups saw, however, a need to reinforce their engagement in dialogue with other forest partners including the member organizations of the Partnership. In seeking to contribute to overall global forest policy coherence, they felt that they should also demonstrate coherence within and among their own workplans, which outline specific actions to promote coherence, including information-sharing, developing a knowledge-sharing platform, advocacy for gender mainstreaming, starting with gender-disaggregated data, advocacy for enterprise development and land and tree tenure security, and promoting mutual accountability. The major groups also recognized the link between forest policy coherence and a shared understanding of sustainable forest management.

24. The major group workplan for 2018–2020 constitutes an important step by non-state actors to support the strategic plan for forests and its global forest goals and targets and to advocate for greater forest policy coherence at the global, regional, national and local levels.

25. The Collaborative Partnership and its member organizations, as well as forest-related major groups, may benefit from a closer association with United Nations entities outside the Partnership that focus on constituencies and stakeholders which are crucial to achieving sustainable forest management but who are often marginalized in the forest sector, particularly indigenous peoples, women and forest workers.

26. The achievement of forest policy coherence and complementarity at the global level largely depends on the guidance and resources provided by the governing bodies of the United Nations entities and member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership, many of which are comprised of largely the same Member States and parties.

#### **IV. Common understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management and identification of an associated set of indicators (global forest goal target 6.4)**

27. A common understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management can contribute to enhancing global forest policy coherence. The strategic plan for forests recognizes the concept of sustainable forest management set out in paragraph 4 of the United Nations forest instrument, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 2007 (resolutions [62/98](#) and [70/199](#)). The forest instrument recognizes that sustainable forest management, as a dynamic and evolving concept, is intended to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental value of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations.

28. The results of the survey indicate that other forest-related conceptual expressions in use by United Nations entities and member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership include “ecosystem approach”, “integrated landscape management” and “conservation and sustainable management of forests”, among others. These terms reflect different contexts and focuses, such as forests as ecosystems providing multiple benefits, forests within landscapes and forests in the context of biodiversity conservation or reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

29. Such concepts and terms are overlapping and generally complementary in that they all contribute conceptually to sustainable development and serve as conceptual umbrellas for national policies, plans and programmes to advance the sustainability of forest management practices. Nevertheless, to further advance a common understanding of sustainable forest management additional analytical work may be useful so as to make sure that all issues and aspects of forests are covered sufficiently within the United Nations system and across the member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership. Such analytical work could benefit from the recent studies and surveys conducted by the Partnership and its member organizations and could include proposals on further advancing a common international understanding of sustainable forest management.

30. The global core set of forest-related indicators ([E/CN.18/2018/4](#), annex II), which includes Sustainable Development Goal indicator 15.2.1,<sup>8</sup> can contribute significantly to advancing a common understanding of sustainable forest management by identifying key factors that need to be measured to assess global progress and trends towards sustainable forest management. In this regard, it is important for the governing bodies of the member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership to encourage use of the already agreed global forest indicators in their respective operational programmes and, at the same time, for member organizations of the Partnership to expedite finalization of the remaining pending indicators, within a specific time frame.

31. While the global core set of indicators are an important tool for advancing a common understanding of sustainable forest management, they may not be sufficient for this purpose at the country level, given the variations in national, subnational and landscape contexts. Interpretations of what practices are sustainable for a given set of objectives in a given situation will be required, recognizing that not all forests are managed for all goods and services.

32. Various sets of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management currently in use to assess, monitor and report trends at the national, subnational and

<sup>8</sup> Sustainable Development Goal indicator 15.2.1 (Progress towards sustainable forest management) includes five sub-indicators, all of which are part of the global core set of forest-related indicators.

forest management unit levels provide a basis for operationalizing sustainable forest management in practice. In the light of recent policy and technical developments, including those related to the Sustainable Development Goals and their associated indicators, as well as a review of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management,<sup>9</sup> these sets of criteria and indicators may benefit from review.

## V. Conclusions

33. The strategic plan for forests and its global forest goals and targets provide a solid foundation for advancing global forest policy coherence within the United Nations system and across the member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership. Since the adoption of the strategic plan for forests in 2017, a number of member organizations of the Partnership have integrated the global forest goals and targets into their respective programmes of work. Some member organizations are also in the process of developing the next cycle of their programme and strategies for achieving their respective forest-related goals. Member organizations of the Partnership are also engaging in developing the strategic vision of the Partnership beyond 2020.

34. This momentum needs to be maintained by additional efforts by members of the Forum, the Collaborative Partnership and its member organizations, regional and subregional partners and major groups to further integrate the global forest goals and targets of the strategic plan for forests into their respective plans, programmes and strategies related to forests. Moreover, it could be beneficial for relevant organizations to consider aligning the timelines of the next cycle of their global forest-related strategies and programme with the timeline of the 2030 Agenda and the strategic plan for forests, so as to maximize the focus and energy of the global community. In addition, the intention of the Partnership to develop its strategic vision for 2030 (see [E/CN.18/2019/2](#)) provides an excellent opportunity to galvanize the collective efforts of the Partnership to advance global forest policy coherence and accelerate achievement of targets 6.1 and 6.2 of the strategic plan for forests.

35. The United Nations entities and member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership have also developed various forest-related conceptual expressions with a focus on their priority areas, including, “sustainable forest management”, “ecosystem approach”, “integrated landscape management” and “conservation and sustainable management of forests”. These are all valuable operational concepts that sometimes overlap. To further advance a common understanding of sustainable forest management at the global level, however, further analytical work could be useful to ensure there is no substantive gap in the collective mandates of the member organizations of the Partnership on issues related to forests. Such analytical work could also include proposals on the way forward.

36. The results of progress in integrating the strategic plan for forests into relevant programmes and strategies by members of the Forum, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership, regional and subregional organizations and processes and major groups, as well as the outcome of analytical work, could be reported for consideration and decision to the Forum at its fifteenth session. This will provide enough basis for the Forum to decide at that session on the follow-up actions for promoting coherence of global forest policy and a common international understanding of sustainable forest management, when it considers and decides on its quadrennial programme of work for the period 2021–2024.

<sup>9</sup> Stefanie Linser and others, “25 years of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management: how intergovernmental C&I processes have made a difference”, *Forests*, vol. 9, No. 9 (September 2018).

## VI. Suggestions and proposals

37. The fourteenth session of the Forum is a technical session and as such is not expected to adopt any decision or resolution. In accordance with the provisions of the quadrennial programme of work, however, the output of the technical session is a summary of the discussions by the Chair, which may include possible proposals to be reported to the Forum at its subsequent session for further consideration and recommendations. These also include some suggestions on activities to be undertaken in the intersessional period leading up to the fifteenth session of the Forum. In this regard, the following suggestions are made to stimulate discussions at the Forum during its present session:

(a) Inviting members of the Forum, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and subregional partners and major groups to utilize the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and its global forest goals as the overarching framework for advancing global forest policy coherence and promoting international understanding of sustainable forest management;

(b) Inviting governing bodies of the member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership to consider and use the strategic plan for forests and its global forest goals and targets as an effective framework for achieving the forest-related Sustainable Development Goals and internationally agreed forest-related goals and, in this respect:

(i) Consider integrating the global forest goals and targets into the post-2020 strategies, plans and operational programmes of member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership, as well as aligning the timelines for such strategies, plans and programmes to 2030;

(ii) Consider allocating dedicated budgetary resources for joint activities of the Collaborative Partnership to implement the strategic plan for forests and achieve its global forest goals and targets;

(c) Inviting the Collaborative Partnership to prepare a background analytical study to examine the coherence, complementarity and coverage of forest-related programmes within and outside the United Nations system and across member organizations of the Partnership, taking into account the strategic plan for forests and their respective programmes and strategies, and building on the results of the capacity mapping exercise and other work of the member organizations of the Partnership undertaken in these areas;

(d) Recognizing the significance of the development of a strategic vision towards 2030 and a workplan for the period 2021–2024 by the Collaborative Partnership, in advancing global forest policy coherence within the United Nations system and across member organizations of the Partnership, with a focus on the global forest goals and targets of the strategic plan for forests;

(e) Inviting regional and subregional organizations and processes to integrate the global forest goals and targets of the strategic plan for forests into their respective strategies, programmes and plans, where appropriate, and to advance exchange of best practices and lessons-learned on fostering coherence;

(f) Supporting acceleration of efforts to implement elements of the major groups workplan for the period 2018–2020 relevant to global forest goal 6 and strengthening those elements in the next workplan cycle;

(g) Strengthening multi-stakeholder dialogues on global forest goal 6, building on existing mechanisms and platforms.



## Annex

### **Survey sent to members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, relevant regional and subregional organizations and processes and major group focal points, in September 2018**

1. What steps, if any, has your organization/process/network taken since the adoption of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and the Forum’s quadrennial programme of work 2017–2020 to: (a) Contribute to promote/advocate enhanced global forest policy and programme coherence and complementarity within the United Nations system and/or across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests? (b) Promote/advocate a common understanding of “sustainable forest management”?
2. Has your organization/process incorporated global forest goal 6 and associated targets into its forest-related plans, programmes or policies?
3. In your view, are the forest-related programmes within the United Nations system and across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests currently fully coherent and complementary? (a) What gaps do you see? (b) What challenges or issues may be preventing coherence and complementarity? (c) What actions can/should be taken by member organizations of the Partnership or others to help address these challenges/issues?
4. In your view, do the collective programmes of member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests encompass the multiple contributions of forests and the forest sector to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development? If no, what forest contributions are missing?
5. Would it be useful for the Forum secretariat to carry out a mapping study to develop further information on question (3) and question (4) above? If yes, what criteria could be used to measure coherence/complementarity?
6. Does your organization/network have a working definition or interpretation of “sustainable forest management”?
7. Do you see/what is your understanding of the conceptual differences among the terms: “sustainable forest management” as set out in the United Nations forest instrument, “conservation and sustainable management of forests” as used in the REDD-plus context and article V of the Paris Agreement,<sup>1</sup> and “ecosystem approach” as applied by the Convention on Biological Diversity to the management of forests?
8. In your view, does having a common understanding of the concept of “sustainable forest management” mean having a common definition?
9. In your view, is the ongoing work to develop a global set of forest indicators sufficient to achieve a common understanding of “sustainable forest management”? If no, what additional actions can/should be taken?
10. In light of the Partnership’s core function to enhance coherence and policy and programme coordination:<sup>2</sup> (a) What actions, in addition to any listed in question (3) above, can be undertaken by your organization, at the secretariat and governing body level, to further enhance global forest policy and programme coherence and a common understanding of “sustainable forest management”? (b) What additional actions can be undertaken by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests itself to further

<sup>1</sup> FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, annex.

<sup>2</sup> Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33, para. 20 (c).

enhance global forest policy and programme coherence and a common understanding of “sustainable forest management”?<sup>3</sup>

11. What future role and/or opportunities, if any, do you see for regional/subregional organizations and processes to promote or contribute to: (a) Forest policy coherence and complementarity within the United Nations system and across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests? (b) A common understanding of “sustainable forest management”?<sup>4</sup>

12. What future role and/or opportunities, if any, do you see for major groups and other stakeholder organizations to further advocate, promote or contribute to: (a) Forest policy coherence and complementarity within the United Nations system and across member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests? (b) A common understanding of “sustainable forest management”?<sup>5</sup>

13. Which actions/interventions contained in the major groups workplan 2018–2020 contribute to enhancing global forest policy coherence and/or a common understanding of “sustainable forest management”? Please list actions/interventions by number.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The question is addressed only to members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

<sup>4</sup> The question is addressed only to regional and subregional organizations and processes.

<sup>5</sup> This question is addressed only to major groups and other stakeholders.