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Forum trust fund

Trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present note covers the contributions to and expenditures of the trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests for 2020. The generous contributions of donor countries to the fund are gratefully acknowledged. Without them, implementation of many of the mandated activities of the Forum would not have been possible.

The present note was prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/14](#), annex I, pursuant to which the operation of the trust fund will be considered at the sixteenth session of the Forum.

* [E/CN.18/2021/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2015/33 on the international arrangement on forests beyond 2015, the Economic and Social Council urged donor Governments and organizations, including financial institutions, and others in a position to do so, to provide voluntary contributions to the trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests. In accordance with the programme of work of the Forum for its sixteenth session (Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/14, annex I), the Forum secretariat will report to the Forum on the operation of the fund, including on the amounts contributed, the source of the contributions and a description of how the funds have been expended. The present note is submitted for information purposes. The figures contained herein have not been audited and represent, as such, an estimate as at 31 December 2020.

2. The present note provides an overview of the contributions to and expenditures of the trust fund for 2020. Activities were carried out pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 71/285, on the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, and 62/98, on the United Nations forest instrument, and resolutions pertaining to the Forum, including Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33, as well as annex I to its resolution 2020/14.

II. Contributions to the trust fund in 2020

3. In 2020, five donor countries contributed to the trust fund in support of the Forum's mandates, sessions and intersessional activities, as well as the work of the Forum and its secretariat (see table 1). The contributions amounted to \$1,173,635, inclusive of programme support costs. Implementation of core activities of the Forum would not have been possible without these contributions, which are gratefully acknowledged.

Table 1
Contributions to the trust fund, 2020

(United States dollars)

<i>Contributor</i>	<i>Total</i>
China	315 000
Germany	222 650
Republic of Korea	18 395
Russian Federation	17 590
United States of America ^a	600 000
Subtotal, contributions	1 173 635
Opening balance, 1 January 2020	1 731 037
Refund to donors ^b	(108 949)
Total	2 795 724

^a The funds received comprised the contribution pledged for 2019 (\$300,000) and the contribution for 2020 (\$300,000).

^b In 2020, unexpended funds were refunded to two donors: Japan (\$35,594) and Turkey (\$73,354).

III. Expenditure of the trust fund in 2020

4. In 2020, staffing and consultancy costs funded from extrabudgetary resources accounted for 71 per cent of expenditures and travel related to capacity development for 21 per cent. It is important to note that the delivery of capacity development activities was adversely affected by the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which resulted in some activities originally scheduled for 2020 having to be postponed to a later date. Further information on the expenditure of the trust fund is presented in table 2 and the related figure.

Table 2
Expenditure of the trust fund, 2020

(United States dollars)

<i>Expenditure</i>	<i>Total</i>
Staffing and consultancy costs ^a	532 226
Travel related to capacity development ^b	156 217
Travel of representatives and experts ^c	(11 119)
Staff travel	1 663
Contractual services	28 394
Operating expenses ^d	33 976
Subtotal	741 357
Programme support costs (13 per cent)	96 368
Total	837 725

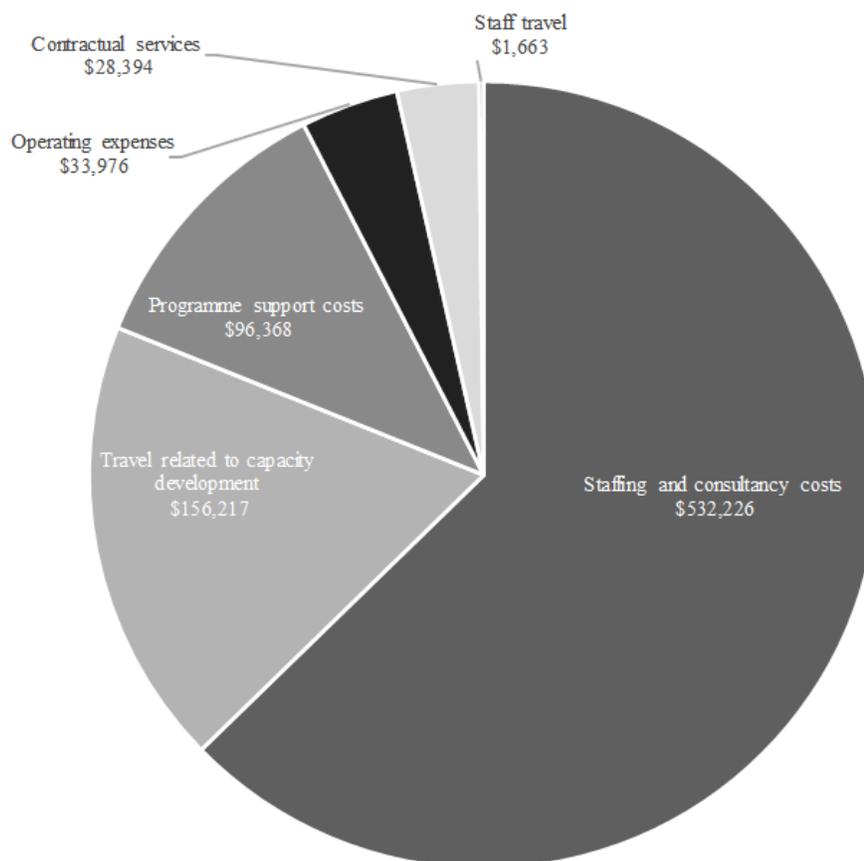
^a Includes staff posts funded from extrabudgetary resources, rental of office space, information technology equipment, other staff-related expenses and consultants' fees.

^b Includes travel of participants, consultants and staff to capacity development workshops of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network.

^c Credit is due to liquidation of prior-period obligations.

^d Includes conference-servicing costs, United Nations Development Programme service fees, supplies and bank fees.

Expenditures of the trust fund, 2020



5. During 2020, extrabudgetary funds were used to supplement funds from the regular budget (programme 7, Economic and social affairs, subprogramme 8, Sustainable forest management). These contributions funded a significant part of the work of the Forum secretariat in 2020, including the following:

(a) **Secretariat staff and consultants and technical experts to support Forum activities.** In order to implement mandated activities, three posts – two at the P-3 level and one at the G-5 level – were funded from extrabudgetary resources. In 2021, it is expected that all three posts will continue to be funded from extrabudgetary resources. In 2020, extrabudgetary resources were also used to engage consultants and technical experts to support the work of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, work conducted for the initial assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable forest management and other mandated activities;

(b) **Travel related to capacity development.** In 2020, the travel of participants, consultants and secretariat staff to capacity development workshops of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network was funded from extrabudgetary resources. National and regional capacity development workshops were held in Nigeria, North Macedonia and Thailand during the first quarter of 2020;

(c) **Travel of representatives and experts.** Owing to the operational challenges and travel restrictions caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not feasible for Forum-related meetings to be held in person. Accordingly, there were no expenditures related to the travel of representatives and experts to Forum-related meetings in 2020;

(d) **Travel of staff.** Fund resources were used to supplement regular budget funds to cover the travel costs related to participation by the secretariat in key international and intergovernmental forest-related events concerning regional coordination that were held in the first quarter of 2020. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the postponement or cancellation of many of the international and intergovernmental forest-related events in which staff were originally scheduled to participate, including meetings and conferences related to the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its member organizations, regional coordination, major groups and capacity development;

(e) **Contractual services, conference servicing and operating expenses.** During 2020, extrabudgetary funds were used to cover costs relating to individual contractors, the development of the website of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network clearing house, conference servicing, United Nations Development Programme service fees and bank charges related to expert group meetings held away from Headquarters.

IV. Achievements and results

6. The following achievements and results are attributable to contributions made to the trust fund:

(a) Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, in June 2020 the fifteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests successfully adopted an omnibus resolution that charted the way forward for some of the key areas of Forum's work, including national reporting, means of implementation, capacity development and thematic priorities for the biennium;

(b) Resources from the trust fund were used to support the development of the strategic vision towards 2030 of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and the development of the Partnership's workplan for the period 2021–2024. The strategic vision, agreed in January 2020, contains specific objectives and strategic priorities for the implementation of the strategic plan for forests and its six global forest goals, as well as other major forest-related commitments, by 2030. Further details on the activities of the Partnership are contained in the note by the Secretariat on the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, focused on the contributions of and enhanced cooperation with partners towards achieving the thematic priorities of the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Forum ([E/CN.18/2021/3](#));

(c) Fund resources were used to supplement funds from the regular budget and the regular programme of technical cooperation for the activities of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network. Work conducted to operationalize the first phase of the clearing house of the Network, through the development of its website and three databases, was carried out with funding for human resources from the trust fund. Further details on the activities of the Network are contained in the note by the Secretariat on the means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network ([E/CN.18/2021/4](#));

(d) Resources from the fund were essential in supporting work related to monitoring, assessment and reporting, including by covering human resources costs for the development of a global core set of forest-related indicators and the preparation of the flagship publication on the progress made with regard to the global forest goals and targets of the strategic plan for forests. Further details on key activities are contained in the note by the Secretariat on monitoring, assessment and reporting, regarding progress towards the implementation of the United Nations

strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, including the United Nations forest instrument, and voluntary national contributions ([E/CN.18/2021/5](#));

(e) The trust fund continues to be a critical source of supplementary funding for meeting the staffing needs of the Forum secretariat, which is still the smallest division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In 2020, the fund covered the staffing costs of three staff members, two at the P-3 level and one at the G-5 level.

V. Priorities and challenges

7. Since the Forum was established, its mandates and outputs have continued to grow. The human and budgetary resources needed by the secretariat to support the Forum and its member States have been highlighted and well recognized in resolutions, including Economic and Social Council resolution [2015/33](#). The human resources of the secretariat have been adversely impacted by the ongoing liquidity crisis of the Organization and the associated temporary hiring freeze. As a result, the recruitment process for two posts funded from the regular budget (one P-3 and one G-5 post), is temporarily on hold.

8. Securing sufficient human and financial resources to scale up the activities of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network remains a challenge. Furthermore, the ongoing development of the clearing house of the Network depends entirely on voluntary contributions.

9. Travel was severely curtailed in 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once in-person meetings resume, securing dedicated contributions for the travel of representatives and experts from developing countries and countries with economies in transition will be a challenge. Funding for such travel is entirely dependent on dedicated contributions to the trust fund. If the trend of declining contributions in this area continues, it will be extremely difficult to facilitate balanced representation of developed and developing countries at future Forum-related meetings.

10. Sustained and adequate human and financial resources continue to be critical in enabling the secretariat to support the implementation of the strategic plan for forests and the achievement of the six global forest goals and the 26 associated targets. These resources are vital to ongoing activities related to all substantive areas of the work of the Forum and its secretariat, including capacity development; the mobilization of forest financing; monitoring, assessment and reporting on progress in implementation; enhancing cooperation and coordination; promoting regional collaboration, communication and outreach; and strengthening stakeholder engagement, including with the private sector. Sustained and consistent contributions of extrabudgetary funds to the trust fund are thus essential to enable the secretariat to have a stable basis for the performance of its core functions.

Table 3
Estimated expenditures from the trust fund for 2021

(United States dollars)

<i>Expenditure</i>	<i>2021</i>
Staffing costs ^a	475 000
Consultants, experts and contractual services ^b	200 000
Travel of representatives and experts ^c	160 000
Travel of staff	75 000
Subtotal	910 000
Programme support costs (13 per cent)	118 300
Total	1 028 300
Closing balance, 31 December 2020	1 974 720
Expected contributions, 2021	700 000
Total expected funds, 2021	2 674 720

Note: Estimated expenditures refer to funds required to implement the current programme of work of the Forum secretariat; they do not include funding for any additional activities that may be decided upon by the Forum at its sixteenth session.

^a Estimate based on the cost of funding two P-3 posts and one G-5 post from extrabudgetary resources in 2021.

^b Includes costs of engaging consultants to support preparations for the seventeenth session of the Forum, in 2022, and the work of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network.

^c Includes travel costs of representatives from developing countries and countries with economies in transition to participate in Forum-related meetings in the second half of 2021.