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## United Nations Forum on Forests

### Eighteenth session

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Items 3 (g) (i) and (ii) of the provisional agenda\*

### Technical discussions on the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030: monitoring, assessment and reporting:

Global core set of forest-related indicators  
Preparations for the Global Forest Resources  
Assessment 2025

## Monitoring, assessment and reporting on progress in the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

### Note by the Secretariat

#### *Summary*

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution [2021/6](#), the United Nations Forum on Forests, at its eighteenth session, will consider agenda item 3 (g) on monitoring, assessment and reporting on progress in the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, and its sub-items (i) on the global core set of forest-related indicators and (ii) on preparations for the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025. The present note provides background information and highlights the intersessional activities undertaken since the seventeenth session of the Forum. The note will serve as the basis for discussion on agenda item 3 (g) and its sub-items (i) and (ii) at the eighteenth session of the Forum.

\* [E/CN.18/2023/1](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution [2021/6](#), the United Nations Forum on Forests, at its eighteenth session, will hold technical discussions on the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030. Under the discussions, the Forum will consider agenda item 3 (g) on monitoring, assessment and reporting on progress in the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, and its sub-items (i) on the global core set of forest-related indicators and (ii) on preparations for the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025.

2. The present note contains an overview of the relevant intersessional activities conducted since the seventeenth session of the Forum with regard to the above-mentioned agenda item, as well as proposals for discussion by the Forum at its eighteenth session.

## II. Background

3. In its resolution [2015/33](#) on the international arrangement on forests beyond 2015, the Economic and Social Council requested the secretariat of the Forum to propose a cycle and format for national reporting. The secretariat developed the requested format, which was adopted by the Forum at its thirteenth session, in 2018. The format was prepared in close collaboration with Member States and member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. Recognizing the need to make effective use of information from national reports, the Forum requested the secretariat to prepare a flagship publication on progress towards achieving the global forest goals of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030.

4. The first round of national reporting on progress towards the implementation of the strategic plan was conducted in 2019 and 2020. Fifty-two Member States submitted comprehensive reports, which, combined with biophysical data from the Global Forest Resources Assessment carried out in 2020, made it possible to conduct a first assessment of progress towards achieving the global forest goals and produce the flagship publication entitled *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021*. In its work on the publication, the secretariat received guidance from an informal advisory group that was established by the Bureau to provide advice on the development of the flagship publication. The advisory group provided suggestions on various aspects, including the scope of the publication, its main objectives and data sources. Its members gave feedback and suggestions related to communication and outreach, including the importance of considering decision makers as a target audience, the creation of both general global and tailored regional messages for social media messaging and the use of success stories as a means to attract people's interest and attention.

5. In its resolution [2022/17](#) on the outcome of the seventeenth session of the Forum, the Economic and Social Council requested the Forum secretariat to amend the format for voluntary national reporting, taking into account the suggestions and proposals received from members of the Forum, conduct a pilot phase for the use of the refined format in interested countries, with all types of forests, and with different socioeconomic contexts, and report on the progress made to the Forum at its eighteenth session.

6. In the same resolution, the Council invited the Forum to consider establishing an advisory group on reporting, taking into account the experience gained and lessons learned from having an informal advisory group involved with the 2021 flagship publication. In this respect, the secretariat was requested to evaluate the impact of the

flagship publication and propose terms of reference, including the suggested composition of the group, with due regard to the need for balanced United Nations geographical representation, to the Forum at its eighteenth session.

7. In the resolution, the Council also requested that the Forum secretariat, through voluntary contributions and in consultation with members of the Forum, organize jointly with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other relevant member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, a global workshop on national voluntary reporting on progress towards global forest goals and targets, with a focus on data sources, collection and methodologies for which there is a lack of systematic data.

8. The Council further requested that the Forum secretariat, in the context of preparations for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests, and in consultation with members of the Forum, prepare a road map and timeline for the next reporting cycle, in conjunction with the Global Forest Resources Assessment cycle, and explore options for establishing an online reporting platform for the Forum, recognizing the need for streamlined reporting and minimizing the reporting burden, including the challenges faced by developing countries. Detailed information on progress in implementing intersessional activities in preparation for the midterm review is contained in document [E/CN.18/2023/6](#).

### **III. Amended format for voluntary national reporting**

9. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2022/17](#), and following the conclusion of the seventeenth session of the Forum, the secretariat amended the format for voluntary national reporting,<sup>1</sup> taking into account the suggestions and proposals received from members of the Forum. The overall functionality and layout of the format was simplified and improved. The amended format consists of five parts: progress towards the global forest goals and targets, voluntary national contributions, other questions, success stories and feedback on the format.

10. The format is structured in line with the global forest goals. Sections related to goals 1 to 3 contain standard questions on actions taken to advance or contribute to the achievement of the goals and related targets. As requested, distinctions between legislative/policy, institutional, financial and technical/scientific actions were deleted to avoid repetition and duplication. Assessment of progress towards achieving goals 1 to 3 will be supplemented to a large extent by quantitative data derived from a variety of global and regional sources and databases, including the Global Forest Resources Assessment, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, criteria and indicators processes and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development process.

11. The sections related to goals 4 to 6 also contain additional questions, which are based on the previous format used for reporting to the Forum. Targets 6.1 and 6.2 are not included under goal 6 in the reporting format as they address actions taken at the international level, not at the national level. At the end of the first part there is a table for self-assessment, in which countries are asked to self-assess their progress towards all the targets of the goals under the strategic plan. The second part is dedicated to voluntary national contributions, and the third part contains additional questions on gender and International Day of Forests. Under the fourth part, respondents are asked to share success stories related to the implementation of the strategic plan, and the fifth part is dedicated to feedback on the format.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MAR-amended-reporting-format-Oct-2022.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MAR-amended-reporting-format-Oct-2022.pdf).

### **Pilot phase and global workshop**

12. In response to the request made by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 2022/17, the Forum secretariat sent a letter to the Forum's national focal points in October 2022, inviting them to express their country's willingness to participate in the pilot phase for use of the amended reporting format. In response to the letter, the secretariat received expressions of interests from Algeria, Argentina, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Jamaica, Japan, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, Peru, South Africa, Türkiye and Zimbabwe. In addition, feedback on the amended format was provided by the United States of America. The pilot phase ran from November 2022 to February 2023.

13. The results of the pilot phase, including lessons learned and feedback, will be presented at the global workshop on national voluntary reporting on progress towards the global forest goals and targets,<sup>2</sup> to be held from 22 to 24 March 2023 at FAO headquarters in Rome. The workshop will be organized jointly by the Forum secretariat and FAO pursuant to paragraph 22 of resolution 2022/17. During the workshop, participants are expected to share their knowledge and national experiences with access to and availability of forest data. Furthermore, lessons learned on selected indicators of the global core set of forest-related indicators will be shared for the improvement of methodologies and approaches to further enhance data availability.

14. The discussion during the workshop is expected to provide additional suggestions, proposals and modifications for the amended reporting format, as well as suggestions to advance the work on selected indicators of the global core set of forest-related indicators for reporting on progress towards the global forest goals. Workshop participants will include experts from countries and member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests who work on forest inventory, forest-related data collection and reporting and have a good knowledge of forest-related reporting requirements to the Forum and/or FAO. More information is contained in the concept note for the workshop.<sup>3</sup>

## **IV. Evaluation of *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021***

15. Recognizing the need to make effective use of information in national reports, and following the request made by the Forum at its thirteenth session, the Forum secretariat prepared a flagship publication entitled *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021*, which was launched in 2021 at the sixteenth session of the Forum. During the session, the Forum welcomed the launch of the first flagship publication and encouraged its widespread dissemination.

16. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2022/17, in which the secretariat was requested to evaluate the impact of the publication, the secretariat sent a short survey to all members of the Forum in January 2022, asking them about the usefulness and impact of the publication at the national level. The majority of the responding countries (15 out of 24) indicated that the publication was very useful, 8 found it somewhat useful and 1 found it somewhat not useful. Most respondents (16) read the entire publication rather than the shorter version entitled "Overview of progress". According to 16 responding countries, the publication contributed to and enhanced their data and statistics; 14 stated that it helped advocacy efforts; and 14

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.un.org/esa/forests/events/mar-workshop-march-2023/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/events/mar-workshop-march-2023/index.html).

<sup>3</sup> See [www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MAR-workshop-CN-programme-Jan2023.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MAR-workshop-CN-programme-Jan2023.pdf).

also considered the publication at conferences, events and meetings. The full spectrum of responses can be seen in the figure below.

### Figure



17. There were a total of 3,215 downloads for the flagship publication between its launch in April 2021 and the end of 2022.<sup>4</sup> The first two days after the launch saw the highest number of daily downloads, amounting to several hundred, and the period after that settled into a slower pace of, on average, single-digit daily downloads. Geographically, the highest number of downloads was recorded in India, followed by the United States, China, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Canada, Germany, Italy and France.

18. The production of *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021* was a major milestone for the Forum secretariat as it was the first stocktaking report on progress towards the global forest goals and targets, and it was also the first Department of Economic and Social Affairs flagship publication by the secretariat. The publication was successfully launched at the sixteenth session of the Forum in April 2021 and subsequently at the fifteen World Forestry Congress in May 2022.

19. The report showed that progress was being made in increasing the global forest area through afforestation and restoration, expanding protected forests and increasing forest carbon stocks. At the same time, it highlighted growing concerns that some of those gains could be at risk owing to the devastating socioeconomic impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the escalating impacts of the climate and biodiversity crises.

20. The report provided an overview of the many actions being taken to implement the global forest goals around the world and included national success stories and best practices to provide inspiration for action for forests. Although the launch of the publication had to be scaled back owing to the pandemic, the publication helped to increase the visibility of the goals and the strategic plan for forests. In particular, the infographics included in the publication were an essential component of subsequent outreach campaigns, including in the context of the annual celebrations for International Day of Forests.

<sup>4</sup> *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021* is available at <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/category/Forest> and [www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Global-Forest-Goals-Report-2021.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Global-Forest-Goals-Report-2021.pdf).

21. While the number of responses to the survey evaluating the impact of *The Global Forest Goal Report 2021* was limited, the majority of the respondents found the publication to be very useful and indicated that they had used it to enhance data, for conferences, workshops and events and to raise awareness.

## V. Advisory group on reporting to the United Nations Forum on Forests

22. Monitoring, assessment and reporting on sustainable forest management is a challenging and complex process. At the international level, organizations whose areas of work include monitoring, assessment and reporting activities are supported by various technical groups and bodies. For example, following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Statistical Commission created the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.<sup>5</sup> The Group was tasked with developing and implementing the global indicator framework for the Goals and targets under the 2030 Agenda, providing technical support to monitor the framework, sharing experiences on monitoring the Goals and encouraging good practices, including in the area of national capacity-building. In implementing its mandate on the Global Forest Resources Assessments, FAO regularly seeks broad guidance from a number of national and international experts and agencies. The FAO advisory group on the Global Forest Resources Assessment,<sup>6</sup> although informal in nature, has a long-term arrangement. At the Economic Commission for Europe, a team of specialists on monitoring sustainable forest management<sup>7</sup> is tasked with strengthening the work on forest-related monitoring, assessment and reporting activities.

23. Analysis of the national reports submitted to the Forum in the first reporting cycle revealed a number of challenges ranging from the assessment methodology to data availability. For some targets of the strategic plan, quantified data confirm that the measures taken are leading to progress towards the targets. However, the lack of standardized and comparable statistical data remains a challenge for the assessment of several targets. Bearing this challenge in mind, taking into account the positive experience of the informal advisory group established for the flagship publication, and in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2022/17, the Forum secretariat has developed draft terms of reference for the advisory group on reporting for consideration by the Forum at its eighteenth session (see annex).

## VI. Global core set of forest-related indicators

24. Work on the global core set of forest-related indicators is conducted within the Collaborative Partnership on Forests joint initiative on streamlining global forest-related reporting. The initiative is focused on harmonizing reporting on forest resources and their management and using reports for various processes and conventions. Its aims are to improve the coverage, quality and transparency of forest-related data and information and to reduce the forest-related reporting burden of countries. The status of, and trends in, the global core set of forest-related indicators is summarized in a publication released by FAO and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests in 2022.<sup>8</sup> Information collected and analysed through the set have also been integrated into *The State of the World's Forests 2022*.<sup>9</sup> Other areas of work include

<sup>5</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs>.

<sup>6</sup> See [www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/background/advisory-group/en](http://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/background/advisory-group/en).

<sup>7</sup> See <https://unece.org/forests/team-specialists-monitoring-sustainable-forest-management>.

<sup>8</sup> See [www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb9963en](http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb9963en).

<sup>9</sup> See [www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb9360en](http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb9360en).

improving the methodology for reporting for the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025.

25. Most of the 21 forest-related indicators in the global core set have already been established, and data are collected and reported on in the Global Forest Resources Assessment. The indicators support and are already used in the assessment of progress towards achieving the global forest goals and targets. In particular, goals 1 and 3 and all their associated targets have benefited from the set and the supplementary data provided by the Assessment. However, for the indicators classified as tier 3 and 2, most of which are socioeconomic, to become operational, more data and further work on concepts and the methodology are needed.

26. Progress has been made on indicator 10, on the wood-based energy share of total final energy consumption. Based on the systematic country-by-country data search to identify existing information on wood fuel production and consumption, work is being conducted by FAO and an expert working group to develop a new model for better estimation and verification of wood energy production and consumption in countries that lack officially reported data. The first results are expected to be available by the end of 2023. Furthermore, data availability for this indicator could be improved by assessing and improving data consistency and coherence across agencies and carrying out an inclusive dialogue involving experts on forest products, forest resources and energy statistics. Capacity development at the country level will be an essential step in increasing data availability and quality.

27. For indicator 12, on employment related to the forest sector, FAO collaborated with the Thünen Institute and the International Labour Organization to develop a methodology to estimate the number of people employed in the forest sector. Results were published in November 2022 in a report on the contribution of the forest sector to total employment in national economies.<sup>10</sup> The report's authors analysed terminologies, definitions, data sources and data gaps related to employment in the forest sector and provided an estimation of current forest-related employment using International Labour Organization data and applying a new statistical methodology. The results revealed that the forest sector had generated jobs for at least 33 million people for the period 2017–2019.<sup>11</sup> On the basis of the progress made, it is proposed that the indicator be upgraded to tier 1.

28. Further progress has also been made on indicator 13, on the number of forest-dependent people in extreme poverty. In 2022, FAO published a report on the new methodology and global estimates related to the number of forest- and tree-proximate people. It estimated that 3.27 billion people outside urban areas lived within 1 km of a forest with a minimum size of 1 ha in 2019, and 4.17 billion lived within 5 km. The study demonstrated that the proposed methodology can be readily used to produce updated estimates based on publicly available data by combining geospatial information on tree cover, population density and poverty data sets. Further work is planned to generate statistics on forest-proximate people in extreme poverty in order to provide a baseline for the indicator.

29. Further participatory development of the tier 3 indicators and efforts to make the global core set of forest-related indicators available for as many countries, global and regional forest-related reporting processes and mechanisms as possible are necessary. Countries interested in testing and finalizing certain indicators, such as indicator 13 on the number of forest-dependent people in extreme poverty and

<sup>10</sup> See [www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc2438en](http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc2438en).

<sup>11</sup> See [www.fao.org/food-agriculture-statistics/resources/resources-detail/en/c/1621707](http://www.fao.org/food-agriculture-statistics/resources/resources-detail/en/c/1621707) and the ILOSTAT blog, available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/forest-sector-employs-33-million-around-the-world-according-to-new-global-estimates>.



indicator 14 on the contribution of forests to food security, are invited to collaborate in the process.

## **VII. Preparations for the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025**

30. The scope, terms and definitions of the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025 and other technical aspects of the reporting process were finalized soon after the expert consultation, which took place online in September 2022 during the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition. Changes in the reporting content for the Assessment were implemented in the data entry, review, analysis and dissemination platform in early 2023, and the data and metadata from the Global Forest Resources Assessment in 2020 were pre-filled in appropriate sections of the template for 2025. The capacity development programme for the Assessment was initiated in the first quarter of 2023 and will continue until the end of 2023. FAO expects to complete the data collection and initiate the data analysis and report writing in early 2024.

## **VIII. Conclusions**

31. The format for voluntary national reporting to the Forum has been amended and the pilot phase for use of the format is currently under way. The results of the pilot phase, lessons learned and feedback on the amended format will be presented and discussed at the global workshop in March 2023. The secretariat will share the outcome of the workshop during the eighteenth session of the Forum.

32. The number of responses to a survey evaluating the impact of *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021* was limited. However, a majority of those who responded to the survey found the publication very useful and used it to enhance data, for conferences, workshops and events and to raise awareness.

33. The Forum secretariat continues to cooperate closely with FAO in the area of monitoring, assessment and reporting. This includes engaging in joint capacity-building activities, working on the global core set of forest-related indicators, streamlining reporting, and sharing data and information on preparations for upcoming reporting cycles to the Forum and the next Global Forest Resources Assessment.

34. The positive experience of the informal advisory group, which provided advice on the development of the flagship publication, could be extended by establishing an advisory group on reporting to the Forum. Engaging national experts on a regular basis in work related to monitoring, assessment and reporting to the Forum would allow for a more user-friendly reporting process in line with countries' needs and capabilities.

## **IX. Proposals**

35. The following points are suggested for discussion during the eighteenth session of the Forum and for inclusion in the Chair's proposals for submission to the Forum at its nineteenth session:

(a) Take note of the amended format for national reporting and the ongoing preparatory work for the next reporting cycle to the Forum;

(b) Establish an advisory group on reporting to the Forum, in accordance with the terms of reference attached to the present note;



- (c) Make the Global Forest Goals Report a recurring publication, taking into account the positive feedback received from members of the Forum on the flagship publication;
- (d) Request the Forum secretariat to continue to organize, jointly with FAO, capacity-building workshops in the area of monitoring, assessment and reporting.

## Annex

### **Draft terms of reference for the advisory group on reporting to the United Nations Forum on Forests**

#### **I. Purpose**

1. The main objective of the advisory group is to support the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests in the area of monitoring, assessment and reporting on progress towards achieving the global forest goals and targets of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030.

#### **II. Scope of work**

2. The advisory group will be informal in nature, and the term of office of its members will correspond to a three-year period from 2024 to 2026. Members of the group are expected to:

(a) Provide guidance on matters related to data collection, the reporting format, data sources and indicators used to assess progress towards achieving the global forest goals and targets of the strategic plan for forests;

(b) Give advice on the methodologies and tools to be used for analysing the data and information received from countries in the reporting process;

(c) Advise the Forum secretariat on the overall scope and content of a possible future edition of the Global Forest Goals Report, if the Forum decides to produce one;

(d) Provide feedback on the draft Global Forest Goals Report before its publication and on the general design and layout of the publication;

(e) Assist in promoting the publication.

#### **III. Size and composition of the advisory group**

3. The advisory group will be composed of 10 to 15 individuals, taking into account geographical and gender balance, with representation from the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, major groups and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The Forum secretariat will liaise with the Bureau on the nomination of representatives of Member States. If needed, the secretariat can invite experts in specific areas of work, without official affiliation, who can contribute to the group's work at its invitation, in close consultation with the secretariat.

#### **IV. Qualifications and expertise of the advisory group**

4. Membership of the advisory group will be constituted taking into account the following qualifications:

(a) Demonstrable internationally or regionally recognized interest and expertise in sustainable forest management;

(b) Practical and relevant international, regional or national experience in monitoring, assessment and reporting to the Forum, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Rio conventions on forests and in publications related to sustainable forest management;

(c) Willingness to contribute expertise.

## **V. Mode of work**

5. The Forum secretariat will convene advisory group consultations on a yearly and on an as-needed basis. The primary mode of consultations will be virtual.
6. If and when in-person meetings are deemed necessary, an attempt will be made to hold such meetings in conjunction with other international meetings, in order to maximize efficiency and effectiveness, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

## **VI. Reporting**

7. The Forum secretariat will update Member States on the work of the advisory group during sessions of the Forum.
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