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Updates on the activities of members of the Forum,
including new announcements of and updates on voluntary
national contributions

Letter dated 15 December 2023 from the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of the Government of India hosted a Country-led Initiative in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests, on the theme "forest fires/wildfires and forest certification and sustainable forest management" from 26 to 28 October 2023 at the Forest Research Institute in Dehradun, India. More than 120 delegates comprising experts from 40 countries and 20 international organizations participated in the Initiative. The objectives of the Initiative were to provide an opportunity for experts from members of the Forum, as well as regional and subregional partners and major groups of the Forum:

(a) To reflect on issues of forest fires/wildfires and best practices on prevention and restoration by considering recent technological developments, innovation and methods, including recent global frameworks and mechanisms on forest fire management;

(b) To discuss the advantages and disadvantages of forest certification, identify key issues and recommend measures that ensure that forest certification aligns with trade rules.

The Initiative provided an opportunity for experts from members of the Forum, regional and subregional partners and major groups to reflect on the issue of forest fires and best practices on prevention and restoration, discuss concerns regarding forest certification, identify key issues and recommend measures to ensure forest certification does not lead to trade barriers.

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* E/CN.18/2024/1.

Please recycle

The enclosed summary report, includes the highlights of the deliberations undertaken during the Country-led Initiative (see annex). We request that the present letter and its annex be issued as a document of the nineteenth session of the Forum.

(*Signed*) Ruchira **Kamboj**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex to the letter dated 15 December 2023 from the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Co-Chairs' summary report of the Country-led Initiative in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests, on the theme "forest fires/wildfires and forest certification and sustainable forest management"

United Nations Forum on Forests Country-led Initiative hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of the Government of India, 26–28 October 2023

Summary

The Country-led Initiative under the United Nations Forum on Forests brought together close to 120 delegates from 40 countries and 20 international organizations. The meeting, which was conducted in Dehradun, the capital of the state of Uttarakhand, India, included discussions on the topics of forest fires/wildfires, and forest certification and sustainable forest management over two plenary sessions. Both the plenary sessions included scene-setting presentations, country presentations and interactive sessions. The event concluded with an address by the Vice President of India.

Through consultations, a set of inputs and ideas, including questions, were put forward on the two thematic areas.

A summary of the recommendations that emanated from the discussions on forest fires/wildfires is as follows:

(a)   Adopt an integrated approach to prevent and manage forest fires/wildfires and manage post-fire landscape restoration through policy interventions;

(b)   Incorporate technology and digital solutions to enhance forest governance and monitoring;

(c)   Strengthen the involvement of civil society, focusing on capacity-building and recognizing the roles of young people and women as important stakeholders in enforcing on-the-ground implementation of integrated forest fire/wildfire management strategies;

(d)   Foster regional, intercontinental and international cooperation for the management of transboundary forest fires/wildfires;

(e)   For the Forum secretariat, facilitate the operationalization of the Global Fire Management Hub by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, aiming to benefit member countries.

The following points highlight the key recommendations that were derived from the interactive session on forest certification and sustainable forest management:

(a)   Establish universally accepted benchmarking standards for forest certification, to be adopted on a global scale, and evaluate current certification programmes with respect to universal standards;

(b)   Enhance international cooperation between producer and consumer countries for the acceptance of forest certification schemes on the basis of international standards;

(c)   Promote the United Nations-based international exchange of knowledge about national and regional regulations, approaches and international standards to enhance trade efficiency.

Contents

I. Background

1.   The Government of India hosted a Country-led Initiative in preparation for the nineteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, scheduled to be held at Headquarters in May 2024. The session will focus on goals 2 and 3 of the global forest goals, as well as cross-cutting goals 4, 5 and 6. In addition, discussions will be held on the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2021/6.

2.   The Country-led Initiative focused on two thematic areas, namely, forest fires/wildfires, and forest certification and sustainable forest management. The Initiative promoted the sharing of good practices on the thematic areas to support global actions in advancing the global forest goals of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030. The Initiative also tapped into the experience gained and the lessons learned in the thematic areas to identify recommendations for global forest policy for the consideration of the Forum in the context of the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests at the nineteenth session.

3.   The objective of the Country-led Initiative was to provide an opportunity for experts from members of the Forum, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its members, regional and subregional partners and major groups to:

   (a)   Reflect on the issues of forest fires/wildfires and best practices on prevention and restoration, by taking into account recent technological developments, innovation and methods, including recent global frameworks and mechanisms on forest fire/wildfire management;

   (b)   Discuss policies and measures required to implement integrated fire management;

   (c)   Identify the short- and medium-term actions required to manage the transition towards the new paradigm of fire prevention and landscape restoration;

   (d)   Understand how to make the best use of the evolving Global Fire Management Hub and develop recommendations for the Forum in that regard;

   (e)   Assess the extent of forest lands under certification and the impact of certification on sustainable forest management;

   (f)   Deliberate on the challenges in developing and implementing forest certification and the issues concerning market access and compliance with international trade rules;

   (g)   Recommend measures and strategies for fostering the development and uptake of sustainable forest certification.

II. Thematic background

Thematic area 1: forest fires/wildfires

4.   In recent years, the world has witnessed an alarming increase in the scale and duration of forest fires/wildfires, leading to profound impacts on biodiversity, ecosystem services, human well-being, livelihoods and national economies. Forests have been particularly affected, with approximately 100 million hectares, equivalent to 3 per cent of the world's forest area, affected by fires every year.

5.   At a meeting in Chennai, India, on 28 July 2023, the Group of 20 environment and climate ministers highlighted that forest fires/wildfires contributed to global carbon emissions and air pollution and that high-intensity forest fires/wildfires may

affect the conservation and regeneration of ecosystems and their functions and services could exacerbate climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss.

6.   The Group of 20 recognized the importance of preventing and managing forest fires/wildfires and restoring forest fire/wildfire-affected land, as appropriate, to help achieve Sustainable Development Goal 15 and meet global land degradation targets.

7.   Given the increasing frequency and intensity of such events, it has become imperative to develop a comprehensive and long-term strategy to prevent and combat forest fires/wildfires and initiate ecosystem restoration in fire-affected areas.

8.   The Country-led Initiative provided an opportunity to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange, develop strategies for effective fire prediction, prevention, monitoring and management, discuss the importance of traditional knowledge derived from Indigenous groups and local communities and deliberate on ways to restore ecosystems after catastrophic events, thereby contributing to sustainable and resilient land management that is less affected by fire.

9.   Accordingly, there is a need to scale up efforts to enhance collaboration and action at the local, regional and international levels on the management of the impact of forest fires/wildfires and, where appropriate and feasible, their prevention and reduction, and work towards the restoration of forest fire/wildfire-affected land.

Thematic area 2: forest certification and sustainable forest management

10.   Forest certification has received growing global attention in recent years. The total forest area under certification has increased by 35 per cent (or 120 million hectares) since 2010. Between 2020 and 2021, the certified forest area increased by 27 million hectares, led mainly by an increase in Europe and North America. Nevertheless, developing countries, small stakeholders and marginal forest managers continue to face several challenges with the certification process. This includes the high costs of certification, audit and compliance issues, inaccessibility to forest owners in remote regions and a lack of capacity due to the complexity of various certification standards.

11.   The United Nations forest instrument has adopted several policy measures to encourage sustainable forest management by promoting and implementing voluntary instruments such as voluntary certification systems or other appropriate mechanisms in a transparent manner. However, some countries consider that the measures and requirements for certification create trade challenges and/or market barriers for their forest products. On the other hand, other countries consider forest certification as an effective means to ensure sustainable forest management and a tool for preventing forest degradation and/or deforestation. Another major concern is that most consumer markets recognize certification from a select few certifying bodies, at the expense of other certification schemes.

12.   The Country-led Initiative provided a forum to discuss all of the above aspects. It also provided an occasion to discuss how to align voluntary certification systems with trade rules.

III. Summary of discussions at the Country-led Initiative

Inaugural session

13.   Day 1 of the two-day Country-led Initiative meeting started with an inaugural session. The Additional Director General of Forests of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bivash Ranjan, welcomed the participants to the meeting in his inaugural address and outlined the background, objectives and expected outcome of the meeting. He shared with the plenary the concept of "lifestyle for the environment" as an international mass movement to protect and preserve the environment, as well as the green credit programme that incentivizes individuals' and communities' positive actions towards the environment. He highlighted the alarming scale of forest fires/wildfires across the globe and the urgent need to develop a comprehensive and long-term strategy. He also underscored the complexities faced by the global South with respect to forest certification.

14.   The Director of the United Nations Forum on Forests secretariat, Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo, stated that the issue of forest fires/wildfires had been escalated as a global concern and their detrimental impact on ecosystems and communities made action-taking imperative. With respect to the second theme for the Country-led Initiative, she stated that forest certification had been a long-standing topic for discussion and actionable solutions were now needed. She also highlighted that the impact of forest fires/wildfires on the ecosystem was more profound now and spoke about the challenges of numerous stakeholders and upcoming regulations that needed attention. She stressed that the outcome of the Initiative was very important and its success would lie in our collective ability to identify areas for action and recommendations for the nineteenth session of the Forum.

15.   In his address, the Director General of Forests of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of India, Chandra Prakash Goyal, highlighted the importance of discussions during the Country-led Initiative meeting in enhancing cooperation and engagement. He also highlighted the negative impacts of greenhouse gases and the crucial need for nations across the globe to collectively seek a solution. He shed light on some of the challenges of forest certification and urged the plenary to use the Initiative as an opportunity to discuss such major issues. He also shared India's proposal to launch the Gandhinagar Implementation Roadmap and Gandhinagar Information Platform that emanated from the Group of 20 deliberations, to work towards the restoration of lands degraded by forest fire and mining.

16.   In a video message, the Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Labour and Employment of the Government of India, Bhupender Yadav, stressed that forest fires/wildfires not only caused irreparable damage to flora and fauna but also affected the livelihoods of communities living in forest peripheries. He emphasized that an important tool for the promotion of sustainability of forests was forest certification, which currently presents numerous challenges, notably for small-scale producers in developing countries. He further stated that the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had developed a national action plan on forest fire to minimize incidences of forest fires/wildfires, by informing, enabling and empowering communities living near forests.

17.   In his address, the Minister for Forests, Languages and Technical Education of the government of Uttarakhand, Subodh Uniyal, spoke about the state's initiatives and programmes and said that, in order to reduce forest fires/wildfires, the successful strategy of Uttarakhand was empowering communities living in proximity to forests and incentivizing them to work in tandem with the forest departments. He also provided an overview of the role of Uttarakhand in ecological conservation and

emphasized that all would benefit from the exchange of traditional knowledge, technology innovation and community engagement practices.

18.   The inaugural session ended with a word of thanks from the Inspector General of Forests of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, R. Raghu Prasad. On behalf of the Ministry, he expressed his gratitude to all the dignitaries for attending the meeting. He also thanked the delegates joining online and in person, as well as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, the International Tropical Timber Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for their technical support.

Thematic area 1: forest fires/wildfires, 26 October 2023

19.   The first plenary session on forest fires/wildfires was moderated by Ms. Koudenoukpo, alongside the Chief Executive Officer of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority of New Delhi, Subhash Chandra; Mr. Ranjan; and Mr. Prasad.

20.   To set the scene for further discussions, presentations were made by representatives of FAO, Peter Moore, and of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, Sanjeev K Chauhan.

21.   Mr. Moore discussed the growing intensity of forest fires/wildfires due to multiple parameters, including demographics, land use change and climate change, leading to many socioeconomic impacts. He stated that FAO and other organizations were applying a "review, risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery" methodology to work systematically on improving fire management. He also spoke about the Global Fire Management Hub as an approach to enhance collaboration to bring together global experience, knowledge and networks. He suggested that the Forum, if it so wishes, may build recommendations regarding both the Hub and the Landscape Fire Governance Framework as appropriate technical, management, planning and policy efforts to address the multiple and complex causes of damaging forest fires/wildfires.

22.   Mr. Chauhan, in his presentation, stressed the need to treat forest fires/wildfires as a science-led policy issue and to understand the criticality of the issue, which is leading to environmental degradation and deforestation. He categorized the problem of forest fires/wildfires in terms of environmental cost, social cost and economic cost and highlighted his views on a scientifically sound governance model with the engagement of different stakeholders to serve the Sustainable Development Goals. He requested the plenary to consider new and innovative approaches for dealing with forest fires/wildfires, as a quick response was of paramount need.

Panel discussion 1, on living with fire in a warming world

23.   The panel discussion included presentations from countries, followed by an interactive session. A brief overview of the presentations is as follows:

(a)   New Zealand (online) shared a perspective on the theme covering the country's topography and sizeable forest fires/wildfires in parts of the country, due mostly to anthropogenic causes, and highlighted the existing policy and institutional structure to manage the issue, including the Landscape Fire Governance Framework to promote cooperation on forest fire/wildfire management at the global level. An integrated fire management strategy was highlighted as the need of the hour;

(b)   Madagascar (in person) stated the concern that most forest fires/wildfires were human-caused in Madagascar, with the key reasons including pasture renewal,

soil fertilization techniques and uncontrolled carbonization, and that climate change exacerbated the issues. The national fire management strategy in Madagascar was also highlighted as a key preventive measure that deals with active fires and includes repressive measures to manage fires in the country;

(c)   Colombia (in person) stated that the Amazon area was becoming fire prone and the recurrence of forest fires/wildfires was affecting ecosystems gravely, and highlighted combatting measures such as the creation of forest brigades and the inclusion of local communities as a means of response. It also stated that it was also working with the private sector and other stakeholders to arrest forest fires/wildfires;

(d)   Morocco (online) stated that, even if the burned area of the land was low, the difficulties in reconstruction and regeneration, especially in arid and semi-arid regions, were very high. The role of climate change in amplifying the scale of forest fires was emphasized. The Moroccan integrated management strategy for forest fires/wildfires was also shared with the plenary, wherein a new data-driven approach for predicting forest fires/wildfires and integrating artificial intelligence was being adopted.

Panel discussion 2, on the policies needed to implement integrated fire management and for manage the transition towards the new paradigm of fire prevention

24.   Presentations from countries were delivered during the panel discussion, followed by a round of discussion, including the following highlights:

(a)   India (in person) stated that the nation had pioneered the deployment of remote sensing technology and was deploying near-real-time fire monitoring. It also highlighted the implementation of an online geoportal to facilitate forest fire/wildfire reporting and the deployment of ecosystem-based approaches for the restoration of forest fire/wildfire-affected landscapes. India recalled the importance of community involvement in response to forest fires/wildfires, as well as training and capacity-building, the development of effective preventive strategies to pre-empt forest fire/wildfire incidences, and the budgeting of investments in forest firefighting resources, among others;

(b)   Portugal (online) emphasized the Landscape Fire Governance Framework, which builds upon integrated fire management principles, and stated its objectives to foster cooperation at all levels, facilitate dialogue and data-sharing, and thereby aid in addressing a cross-sectoral issue. It stressed the need for financing mechanisms for integrated fire management, the training and certification of experts and decentralized planning and management with regular monitoring. It also identified the importance of international cooperation and dialogue as the key to the Landscape Fire Governance Framework, which can be used to tackle the complexity of the forest fire/wildfire issues;

(c)   Malawi (in person) stated the need to strengthen fire management systems to ensure the sustainable management of plantations and private forests for the economic development of the country and to promote research. It highlighted the challenges, including limited capacity and inadequate research and development, a lack of financial resources, obsolete communication systems and weak enforcement mechanisms. Malawi recommended the development of a fire management policy and legislation, a modernized communication system, the enhanced practice of fire management operations and capacity enhancement of local governing institutions;

(d)   Botswana (in person) highlighted inter-agency collaborations with Australia and Japan on capacity-building for improved fire management strategies and building forest inventory. It shared its policy landscape towards integrated fire

management, including Vision 2036, its forest policy and the national integrated wildland fire management strategy. It also highlighted the key challenges, including poor participation and engagement of stakeholders, inaccessibility to some areas, the shortage of skilled fire experts and a lack of resources, including finance;

(e)   The Russian Federation (online) shared its monitoring practices in ground-based areas using automatic surveillance systems, aerial forest monitoring, aerial initial attack and the deployment of remote sensing for fire detection. It highlighted the key areas of international cooperation, including joint scientific research and training programmes and experience-sharing on the application of state-of-the-art technologies.

Panel discussion 3, on making best use of the newly developed Global Fire Management Hub

25.   The session opened with presentations from South Africa and Spain, followed by an interaction session wherein participants shared their views on the Global Fire Management Hub. The following key highlights emerged from the presentations:

(a)   South Africa (in person) discussed the loss of life, property and environment caused by forest fires/wildfires and highlighted that its legislation focused on preventing and combatting forest fires/wildfires, as well as strengthening fire protection associations. Its legislation also encouraged the sharing of resources via robust stakeholder cooperation. It emphasized the important role of Government in disaster management, funding and operationalizing the fire programme;

(b)   Spain (online) stated the usefulness of the Hub as a repository of reference documents on forest fire management and as a facilitator to promote exchanges. It highlighted the importance of the hub in sharing accurate messaging, which is crucial in case of emergencies.

Highlights of the interactive sessions of thematic area 1

26.   The interactive sessions held after each panel discussion included detailed discussions and deliberations on issues and solutions that could help effectively to manage forest fires/wildfires. A summary of the same is as follows:

(a)   The use of fire as a natural rejuvenation mechanism, where ecologically relevant, keeping the central focus on utilizing the experiences and knowledge of forest fire/wildfire management of local communities, Indigenous Peoples, women and expert institutions across countries and regions;

(b)   The planning and implementation of an integrated fire management strategy that requires a concerted approach to the prevention, management and restoration of forest fires/wildfires and policy interventions at the national, regional and global levels;

(c)   The importance of livelihood improvement programmes, the significance of incorporating incentivization schemes while formulating policies related to forest fire/wildfire management and the need to manage effectively and mobilize resources on the basis of the severity of the problem in a specific area;

(d)   The significance of aligning and adopting the Landscape Fire Governance Framework proposed by the technical and scientific community at the eighth International Wildland Fire Conference, held in Porto. The Framework is a fire governance model that brings together Governments, businesses, academia and members of civil society to develop balanced and technically supported solutions. FAO and UNEP, through the Global Fire Management Hub, are leading the mechanism to implement and monitor the Framework's effectiveness, which hinges

on robust collaboration and coordination, risk assessment, prevention and mitigation, and community engagement;

(e)   An acknowledgement of the critical role of regional and international cooperation and coordination among Governments to address subnational and transboundary forest fire/wildfire issues;

(f)   A discussion on Global Fire Management, including the recognition of the following five pillars: knowledge and data-sharing; capacity building; fire risk assessment and early warning; wildfire resilient communities; and policy support;

(g)   Further recommendations for the Hub and the Framework were identified as useful for countries, which could be considered at the nineteenth session of the Forum.

Thematic area 2: forest certification and sustainable forest management (27 October 2023)

27.   The second plenary session on the second day of the Country-led Initiative was opened by the moderator, Mr. Ranjan, alongside Ms. Koudenoukpo and Mr. Prasad.

28.   Mr. Ranjan spoke about the growing global attention on forest certification in recent years, as well as certification as a tool for recognizing sustainable forest management. He also highlighted the challenges posed by the interface of forest certification and international trade rules. He concluded by sharing the objectives of the day's session.

29.   To set the scene for discussion, a presentation was made by the Officer-in-Charge of the International Tropical Timber Organization's Division of Forest Management, Hwan-ok Ma. He spoke about forest certification as an important initiative to promote the sustainability of forests, gave a presentation on the coverage of global certified forest areas and shared various examples of national forest certification programmes. He stressed that uniting legality and sustainability was imperative for advancing sustainable forest management and shared with the plenary some challenges of forest certification, including the high cost of transactions, especially for developing countries and small producers, as well as limited market recognition, regulatory issues and a lack of harmonization.

Panel discussion on forest certification and sustainable forest management

30.   The following highlights emerged from the country presentations:

(a)   South Africa (in person) provided an overview of the challenges related to forest certification, the significant advancements made in the forest certification of plantation forests and commercial timber and the contribution of certification towards responsible forest management practices. Issues of monopolization, the high costs of certification, the lack of transparency in decision-making and contradictions with national legislation were also raised. Key recommendations included ensuring the alignment of certification with global trade rules, third-party validation to reinforce the credibility of forest certification, government support via incentives and policies, capacity-building, the promotion of transparency, international collaboration and partnerships;

(b)   The Russian Federation (online) presented its experience in dealing with so-called non-profit schemes of forest certification and thus questioned the independent nature of such international non-governmental certification schemes. It was highlighted that the voluntary national forest certification system was under development. In addition, it stated that, in order to enter international markets,

confirmation of compliance with the legislation of the timber's country of origin, as well as proof of legal timber harvesting, processing and transportation, was crucial. The important role of official international standards was also highlighted. It was suggested that international work on the issues of forest certification should ensure good communication with industry, commerce, customs, law enforcement agencies and businesses. The regular international exchange of knowledge on national regulations, and national approaches to confirm compliance, was of high importance for efficient trade;

(c)   India (in person) deliberated on forest certification and associated issues, such as mechanisms for monitoring, tracing and labelling timber and non-timber forest products, monopolization, high costs, complicated processes and the lack of accessibility for small landholders under agroforestry. India also stated that it was launching the Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme, anchored by government institutions at the national level, and highlighted that the Scheme provided an alternative certification scheme to the existing certification programmes, stabilized market rates for certification and aimed to include small and marginal farmers in the certification portfolio to promote agroforestry.

Highlights of the interactive sessions of thematic area 2

31.   The following highlights emerged from the interactive discussion among delegates after country presentations:

(a)   The need for capacity-building and training in forest certification, as well as planning and implementation, transparency and ease of accessibility to all types of landowners;

(b)   The recommended establishment of global benchmark standards for forest certification for countries to adopt;

(c)   The need to provide guidance on capacity-building for sustainable forest management and long-term management of forests for countries, and on national certification programmes of various exporting countries;

(d)   The dissemination of information on national certification programmes across producer and consumer countries;

(e)   The emerging need to guide producer and consumer countries to enhance the implementation of more cost-effective forest certification practices;

(f)   The need to encourage international cooperation and capacity-building for certification and sustainable forest management;

(g)   The issue of enhancing collaboration and partnership to amplify forest certification and compliance, to be taken up at the nineteenth session of the Forum.

Closing session

32.   Mr. Ranjan, in his closing address, expressed his appreciation to all delegates for their active participation in rendering the Country-led Initiative a success and summarized key recommendations that emanated from the meeting, such as the role of international cooperation, as well as the need to deploy an integrated forest fire/wildfire management approach, to enhance capacity and knowledge, and to aim for more inclusive action on forest fire/wildfire management. Regarding forest certification, he highlighted a few pivotal requirements to make it a success, including: setting benchmark standards that are accepted globally for all countries to adopt unanimously; ensuring proper capacity-building; assisting producer and

consumer nations in implementing more economical forest certification procedures; and facilitating smoother communication of certification standards.

33.   Ms. Koudenoukpo stated that the Country-led Initiative meeting hosted by India provided a much-needed opportunity to deliberate on the thematic areas and summarized the key takeaways. She highlighted the rising issue of forest fire/wildfire incidences and stressed the need for coordinated action for its detection and suppression. She thanked the Forum Steering Committee for the implementable progress at the Country-led Initiative and gave assurances that the collective experience and the best practices shared at the meeting would set the stage for policy discussions at the nineteenth session of the Forum, to be held in May 2024 at Headquarters.

34.   Mr. Goyal, in his closing remarks, highlighted the significance of integrated fire management system to enhance the prevention and control of forest fires/wildfires. He stressed that forest certification needed to be further promoted as a responsible and sustainable forest management practice that aligned with international trade rules and agreements.

35.   The session was attended by the Governor of Uttarakhand, Gurmit Singh, who welcomed the audience to "Dev Bhumi" ("the land of God") and stated that Uttarakhand was the birthplace of the "chipko" forest conservation movement where women wrapped their hands around trees so they could not be cut down without measures for replacement. He highlighted that the protection of our ecology was a means to protecting livelihoods and that Uttarakhand promoted livelihoods related to spiritual tourism, horticulture and wellness. He stated that the Initiative had brought together the wisdom acquired by nations through years of service and its outcomes would guide us going forward for the promotion of environmental sustainability.

36.   The guest of honour for the closing session, the Vice-President of India, Jagdeep Dhankhar, planted a sapling at the Forest Research Institute Campus in Dehradun, and addressed the audience. He highlighted that the Country-led initiative meeting, hosted by India as part of the United Nations Forum on Forests, was a crucial and impactful event at which nations had converged to find solutions. He emphasized that forests provided livelihoods to over 1 billion people in the world, in addition to conserving biodiversity, watershed protection and mitigation of climate change. He reiterated the motto of the presidency of India of the Group of 20 – "one Earth, one family, one future" – to convey to the plenary the need to secure synergized solutions to the global problem. Mr. Dhankhar affirmed that forest fires/wildfires needed to be addressed through a multilayered approach that included technology such as satellite monitoring and the involvement of people, and added that the Forum was an apt forum to discuss such affirmative policies. He highlighted that striking a balance between development and conservation was quintessential for a secure future. Mr. Dhankhar also stated that India was ensuring that the continuity of its high-growth path to become the third largest economy in the world by 2030 was environmentally sustainable. This was made possible because India was undertaking initiatives such as aiming to generate 50 per cent of its electricity using renewable sources by 2030. He concluded by quoting the father of the nation, stating that "the world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed", and urged the delegates to come together to address these issues.

IV. Recommendations and action items proposed for the Forum

37.   Across the two-day meeting, several key recommendations and action items emerged. A detailed summary of the same is contained in the present chapter.

Thematic area 1: forest fires/wildfires

38. The recommendations for the thematic area of forest fires/wildfires were divided into the following categories: policy and institutional; technology; capacity-building and communication; access to finance; involvement of community, young people and women; and national and global cooperation.

39. The policy and institutional recommendations are as follows:

(a) Adopt an integrated approach to prevent and manage forest fires/wildfires and post-fire landscape restoration through policy interventions;

(b) Utilize the Landscape Fire Governance Framework for holistic integrated planning as an effective approach for countries to adopt;

(c) Develop governance systems and policies on forest fire/wildfire mitigation, management and prevention at every level in rural societies;

(d) Design policies towards sustainable and safe housing for women, children and Indigenous Peoples affected by forest fires/wildfires.

40. The technology recommendations are as follows:

(a) Mainstream technology for enhanced forest governance and monitoring and the integrated planning and management of forest fires in policymaking for fire prevention;

(b) Scale up the deployment of remote sensing-based measures and digital alert systems, as technology and robust transport infrastructure could help to reach remote areas affected by forest fires/wildfires.

41. The capacity-building and communication recommendations are as follows:

(a) Undertake awareness generation, capacity-building and skills development for various actors at all levels, including but not limited to front-line workers, firefighters and especially local forest communities;

(b) Enhance the involvement of civil society and universities in imparting awareness and capacity-building training;

(c) Create clear communication channels for easy information flow where they do not exist.

42. The access to finance recommendations are as follows:

(a) Identify ways to increase the availability of and access to finance for the monitoring and prevention of forest fires/wildfires, as well as for infrastructure improvement and post-fire restoration of degraded land;

(b) Devise a mechanism to enhance the availability of resources, including finance, on the basis of total area of forests prone to fire events.

43. The involvement of community, young people and women recommendations are as follows:

(a) Integrate the traditional knowledge of local communities and Indigenous Peoples for forest fire/wildfire management and devise incentivization schemes to gather the support of communities affected by forest fires/wildfires for restoration;

(b) Recognize the roles of young people and women as important stakeholders in enforcing on-the-ground implementation of integrated forest fire/wildfire management strategies.

44. The national and global cooperation recommendations are as follows:

(a) Foster regional, intercontinental and international cooperation for the management of transboundary forest fires/wildfires;

(b) Recognize the critical role of the Global Fire Management Hub in knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, fire risk assessment and early warning, and of scientific research and policymaking and advocacy on forest fire/wildfire management;

(c) Mainstream the sharing of accurate messaging and correct information in times of emergency, wherein press and public campaigns have a key role;

(d) Exploring avenues to influence the efforts of different United Nations organizations for integrated fire management;

(e) For the Forum secretariat, facilitate the operationalization of the Global Fire Management Hub by UNEP and FAO, aiming to benefit member countries.

45. A committee was constituted during the Country-led Initiative meeting to deliberate on five pillars of the newly launched Global Fire Management Hub. A suggestion emerged that more information and engagement on the Hub was required, including in relation to the Landscape Fire Governance Framework. A summary of the recommendations is presented below:

(a) **Knowledge- and data-sharing**. Define major fire concepts, develop publications, streamline technical advice on integrated fire management, host workshops and events and explore avenues for easy access to datasets for further research and training:

- Set up networks to interact and share and exchange experiences, needs and issues

- Assemble working groups on relevant topics of concern, covering challenges, recommendations and ways forward

- Explore avenues to formalize the above through workshops and events at the regional level, or among small groups of countries;

(b) **Capacity-building**. Deliver training to national actors and devise mentoring programmes for young fire experts:

- Identify a cyclical and systematic approach to building understanding and capacity development through repeated and routine connection on topics of interest, need or concern

- Highlight the above periodically at international events, such as the international wildland fire conferences held every four years

- Explore innovative training programmes and exposure channels for young professionals on fire management through workshops, exchanges and internships

- Coordinate and build upon existing networks to avoid duplicity, ensuring optimal utilization of resources and sharing best practices among member nations

- Develop and standardize site-specific strategy and expertise for the restoration of forest fire/wildfire-affected areas, and ensure the capacity-building of various stakeholders on the topic;

(c) **Fire risk assessment and early warning**. Review, deliberate on and develop forest fires/wildfires risk assessment methods and tools, including post-fire loss and damage and early warning systems:

- Prepare the principles and core concepts of fire danger rating and early warning systems

- Leverage discussion forums to share experiences of creating early warning systems, including challenges, successes and key lessons learned

- Set up infrastructure and systems for fire prediction, prevention, monitoring and management, for the transmission of information to stakeholders on a timely basis

- Review the effectiveness of forest fire/wildfire risk assessment methods and tools, sharing experiences on their use and application to identify improvements

- Advocate for the adoption of a systematic approach and policy for the mainstreaming of reviews and assessments of loss and damage from forest fires/wildfires (assets and cost);

(d) **Forest fire/wildfire-resilient communities**. Consider Indigenous and traditional knowledge and community-based fire management, and mainstream gender, equity, diversity and inclusion in the management of forest fires/wildfires:

- Integrate rich and effective Indigenous and traditional knowledge on fire management and scale up its deployment through the development and dissemination of documents on case studies, techniques, methods and modalities, for a wider application

- Activate and enhance the participation and leadership of women and young people in the activities of the Hub

- Create and strengthen networks of forest communities by exploring capacity-building programmes on ways to operate and manage systems for prevention and restoration;

(e) **Policy support**. Incorporate integrated fire management into national and subnational policies and provide support for regional fire networks:

- Hold frequent interactions at the regional level to incorporate integrated fire management into policy and develop capacity for fire management policy

- Host regular interactions at the regional level through networks to deliberate on policy support processes and approaches.

Thematic area 2: forest certification and sustainable forest management

46. The following recommendations emerged from the discussion on the thematic area of forest certification and sustainable forest management:

(a) Explore additional actions on resolving issues such as monopolization, transparency in tracking and contradiction with national legislation and legislation systems;

(b) Establish universally accepted benchmarking standards for forest certification for adoption on a global scale and evaluate current certification programmes with respect to the universal standards;

(c) Enhance international cooperation between producer and consumer countries for the acceptance of all forest certification schemes on the basis of international standards;

(d) Assess the role and contribution of certification in sustainable forest management;

(e) Encourage capacity-building for certification, as well as collaboration and partnerships for certification and legal compliance;

(f) Explore technology and digital integration, as digitalization can act as a strong enabler to minimize the cost of certification, as well as best practices on collaboration for horizontal and vertical integration;

(g) Explore the existing official international standards as tools to confirm compliance;

(h) Promoting United Nations-based international exchange of knowledge about national and regional regulations, approaches and international standards for enhancing trade efficiency.

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