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Implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030:

Technical discussion and exchange of experiences on the thematic and operational priorities, priority actions and resource needs for the period 2019–2020, taking into account the review cycle of the high level political forum on sustainable development during the biennium and the theme of the International Day of Forests

Voluntary announcement of voluntary national contributions

United Nations system-wide contributions to the implementation of the global forest goals and targets

Emerging issues and challenges

Implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The United Nations Forum on Forests, at its fourteenth session, will consider the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030. The present note has been prepared to serve as the basis for discussions under agenda item 3 (a), on the technical discussion and exchange of experiences on the thematic and operational priorities, priority actions and resource needs for the period 2019–2020, taking into account the review cycle of the high-level political forum on sustainable development during the biennium and the theme of the International Day of Forests; item 3 (b), on the voluntary announcement of voluntary national contributions; item 3 (c), on the United Nations system wide contributions to the implementation of the global forest goals and targets; and item 8, on emerging issues and challenges.

* 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, the Forum at its fourteenth session will consider the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030. In particular, the Forum will consider the technical discussion and exchange of experiences on the thematic and operational priorities, priority actions and resource needs for the period 2019–2020, taking into account the review cycle of the high-level political forum on sustainable development during the biennium and the theme of the International Day of Forests; the voluntary announcement of voluntary national contributions; and the United Nations system-wide contributions to the implementation of the global forest goals and targets.

2. The present note has been prepared to serve as the basis for discussions on the above-mentioned issues under agenda items 3 (a), 3 (b), 3 (c) and 8 of the provisional agenda of the fourteenth session of the Forum.

II. Background

3. The United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution [71/285](#), and its global forest goals provide a global framework for ambitious and transformational actions to sustainably manage all types of forests and trees outside forests, halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation and increase forest area.

4. The six global forest goals and 26 targets set out in the strategic plan are to be attained by 2030. The strategic plan provides a framework of roles and responsibilities for all actors at all levels, including through the provision of voluntary national contributions towards the achievement of the global forest goals and targets.

5. The Forum at its thirteenth session made several decisions to advance implementation of the strategic plan, to prepare for productive technical discussions at the fourteenth session and to provide inputs to the high level political forum in 2019.

6. The Forum requested its secretariat to prepare a report containing proposals on actions to accelerate progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 13, as well as background analytical studies on the contribution of forests to the achievement of the other Sustainable Development Goals to be reviewed by the high-level political forum in 2019, for consideration by the Forum on Forests at its fourteenth session (see [E/2018/42-E/CN.18/2018/9](#), para. 31).

7. The Forum agreed that at its fourteenth session it should finalize its substantive input to the high-level political forum in 2019 (see [E/2018/42-E/CN.18/2018/9](#), para. 33).¹

¹ The President of the Council, in her letter dated 26 November 2018, invited the Forum to provide its input to the 2019 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, taking into account: (a) the identification of progress, gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and/or in relation to the theme within the area under the purview of the Forum; (b) valuable successful experiences and lessons learned on empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality; (c) emerging issues likely to affect inclusiveness and equality at various levels; (d) an assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global, regional and national levels; (e) areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required; and (f) policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in empowering people, ensuring inclusiveness and equality, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

8. The Forum also requested its secretariat to report on progress made in implementing the communication and outreach strategy of the strategic plan to the Forum at its fourteenth and subsequent sessions and to produce a concise print and online publication on the global forest goals and targets, featuring infographics, to be used in outreach to a range of audiences within and outside the forest community (see [E/2018/42-E/CN.18/2018/9](#), para. 4).

9. Also at its thirteenth session, the Forum welcomed the announcements by several members of the Forum of their initial voluntary national contributions towards achieving one or more of the global forest goals and targets set out in the strategic plan and encouraged other members of the Forum to make their announcements at its fourteenth session and to communicate them beforehand to the Forum secretariat (see [E/2018/42-E/CN.18/2018/9](#), para. 1).

10. The Forum also welcomed the Collaborative Partnership on Forests workplan for 2017–2020 and requested the Partnership to report on progress in implementing the workplan to the Forum at its fourteenth and fifteenth sessions.

III. Key contributions of forests, global forest goals and targets of the strategic plan to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2019

11. The 2019 session of the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council will be held from 9 to 18 July 2019 under the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”. Sustainable Development Goals 4, 8, 10, 13,² 16 and 17 will be reviewed in depth.³

12. In addition, the high-level political forum will also be held under the auspices of the General Assembly on 24 and 25 September 2019. A single negotiated political declaration, covering the different and complementary functions of both sessions of the forum, will be considered during the two 2019 sessions, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [70/299](#). It is expected that the modality and new programme of work for the new phase of the high-level political forum will be decided upon as a result of those meetings.

13. In the light of the 2019 theme of the high-level political forum, the Bureau of the fourteenth session of the Forum on Forests decided that the technical discussions and exchange of experiences at the fourteenth session would focus on the following thematic priorities: (a) forests and Goal 13; (b) forests and Goal 8; and (c) forests and Goals 4, 10 and 16, taking into account Goal 17.

14. For the purpose of the technical discussions and exchange of experiences on the thematic priorities at the fourteenth session of the Forum, it should be noted that the theme for the International Day of Forests in 2019 is “Forests and education” to highlight the interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 15.

² Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international and intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

³ Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; Sustainable Development Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; Sustainable Development Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries; Sustainable Development Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and Sustainable Development Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

15. In response to paragraph 31 of resolution 13/1 of the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Forum secretariat commissioned a set of three background studies⁴ corresponding to the above-mentioned thematic priorities for the technical discussions and exchange of experiences at the fourteenth session of the Forum. The studies focused on forests and climate change; forests, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and employment; and forests, peaceful and inclusive societies, reduced inequality and inclusive institutions at all levels, and education. The studies were aimed at identifying the interlinkages of forests, in particular in relation to the global forest goals and targets of the United Nations strategic plan for forests, and the Sustainable Development Goals under the review of the 2019 high-level political forum. The following section provides an overview of the key findings and suggestions from those background analytical studies.

A. Forests and Sustainable Development Goal 13

16. The main findings and suggestions of the background analytical study on forests and climate change are described below.

17. Forests and trees play an essential role in regulating and stabilizing the global climate. Through their ecosystem services, forests and trees are a key determinant of local, regional and global precipitation and temperature patterns, acting as a natural air conditioner. There is a growing body of evidence that sustainably managed forests significantly contribute to the quantity of water circulating in watersheds through evapotranspiration, sustaining food and water security.⁵

18. The world's forests constitute a vital part of the carbon cycle, absorbing, recycling and storing large amounts of carbon dioxide through trees, understory vegetation and soils, thus regulating the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

19. When the amount of carbon dioxide sequestered by forests exceeds that released through deforestation and forest degradation, forests are a proven natural tool that contributes to mitigating emissions of carbon dioxide and remove additional carbon from the atmosphere.

20. Currently, forests store over 861 ± 66 gigatons of carbon contained in their soil (44 per cent), live biomass (42 per cent), dead wood (8 per cent) and litter (5 per cent).⁶ Geographically, 55 per cent of forest carbon stock is stored in tropical forests, 32 per cent in boreal forests and 14 per cent in temperate forests.⁷ Additionally, forests annually sequester approximately 30 per cent of anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thereby mitigating the effects of climate change.⁸

21. Despite growing recognition of the critical role of forests in the carbon cycle, land use and land-use changes, mainly from the loss of forests through conversion of

⁴ Background analytical studies prepared for the fourteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests are available at the Forum website: www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/current-session/index.html.

⁵ David Ellison, "From myth to concept and beyond: The biogeophysical revolution and the forest-water paradigm", background analytical study on forests and water prepared for the thirteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (2017).

⁶ Yude Pan and others, "A large and persistent carbon sink in the world's forests", *Science*, vol. 333, p. 988 (2011).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Corinne Le Quéré and others, "Global Carbon Budget 2017", *Earth System Science Data*, vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 405–448 (March 2018).

forest land to agricultural land, is a leading cause of climate change, along with emissions from the energy and transport sectors.⁹

22. Between 1990 and 2015, the global forest carbon stocks in biomass decreased by approximately 11.1 gigatons, mainly owing to forest conversion to other uses and forest degradation, equivalent to a reduction of 442 million tonnes per year, or 1.6 gigatons of carbon dioxide.¹⁰ Consequently, annual flux of greenhouse gas emissions from land use and land-use change activities accounted for approximately 9.3 to 11.3 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent for the period 2000–2010, totalling approximately 19 to 23 per cent of anthropogenic emissions.¹¹

23. While there continues to be a limited understanding of how, and to what extent, forests are affected by changing climate, shifting patterns of temperature and rainfall, increasing and intensifying occurrences of forest fires, infestations, droughts and storms have directly and indirectly caused severe damage to forest resources in a number of countries. This has also had a negative impact on local communities by depriving them of a host of socioeconomic and environmental benefits of forests that sustain their daily lives.

24. Forests play a major role in the adaptation of societies to climate change through the vital ecosystem services they provide that enhance human well-being and reduce socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Forests provide a range of essential livelihood, safety net and environmental benefits to communities, facilitating the adaptation and resilience of people and ecosystems to the effects of climate change and shocks.

25. A wide range of wood and non-wood forest products, such as timber, food, fuel and fodder, serve as a key source of livelihood in many rural communities at the onset, during and in the aftermath of extreme climate events and shocks. Many forest products are more resilient to climate variability than monocultures and sustain the survival of households and livestock.

26. Urban forests and trees constitute a key strategy for reducing climate change impacts on growing urban communities by providing shade and shield from sunlight and wind, and cooling the air through evapotranspiration, thus reducing the risks of climate-induced disasters such as heat waves and storms. The median annual value of the wide-ranging ecosystem benefits of urban forests is estimated at \$505 million in the world's largest cities.¹²

27. There is growing realization of the potential contributions of wood products to combating climate change and its impacts. The increasing use of harvested wood products can contribute to climate change mitigation through increasing the carbon stock fixed in those products and replacing products manufactured from greenhouse-gas-intensive materials such as concrete or brick, metals or plastics, thus directly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and raising the value of forests.

28. A total of 181 of the 184 parties to the Paris Agreement had submitted their first nationally determined contributions and one had submitted its second. Analysis shows that 80 per cent of the nationally determined contributions include land use, land-use

⁹ FAO, *State of the World's Forests 2018: Forest Pathways to Sustainable Development* (Rome, FAO, 2018).

¹⁰ FAO, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015* (Rome, FAO, 2015).

¹¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Geneva, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014).

¹² Theodore Endreny and others, "Implementing and managing urban forests: A much needed conservation strategy to increase ecosystem services and urban wellbeing", *Ecological Modelling*, vol. 360, pp. 328–335 (September 2017).

changes and forestry-related actions in their commitments to mitigation, and 58 per cent, including the 25 countries with the highest forest cover, include specific policies and measures for forestry.¹³

29. It is critically important for Governments and stakeholders to place forest-based climate actions as an essential strategy to close the gap of greenhouse gas emissions and limit the global temperature rise, including by reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and promoting the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD-plus), forest and agriculture commodity supply chain initiatives, sustainable forest management, increased forest cover, sustainably produced wood products and biomass energy. In advancing those actions, it is vital to provide sufficient forest-related financial and capacity-building support and improve forest governance and law enforcement.

30. Governments and stakeholders could strengthen efforts to adapt to climate change through forest and other ecosystem-based adaptation strategies, taking into account the current and future climate risks and the benefits and costs of different risk management options for local communities, businesses, households or individuals. In providing assistance to countries and communities, it is crucial to take into account the many ecosystem services and benefits of forests, including watershed management, local climatic regulation and biodiversity conservation.

B. Forests and Sustainable Development Goal 8

31. The main findings and suggestions of the background analytical study on forests, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and employment are described below.

32. Forests are among the world's most productive renewable natural resources, influencing the sustainable paths to development as a key driver of economic growth while providing livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people, particularly in rural areas.

33. When sustainably managed, forests provide an irreplaceable and lasting foundation for economic activities across sectors through the provision of wood and non-wood products and ecosystem services to meet the growing demand for food, fuel, fodder, shelter, clean air, soil and water. All types of sustainably managed forests can help meet the growing demand for those vital goods and services as the global population is projected to reach 9.8 billion by 2050.¹⁴

34. Conversely, if not sustainably managed, forests could become a source for conflict and a space for refuge for marginalized populations. A wide range of economic activities can rapidly drive large-scale loss of forests and trees as per capita income rises,¹⁵ particularly in the earliest stages of economic development. This is often followed by a stabilizing and recovery phase during which the loss of forests slows and begins to reverse, depending on the level of sustainability in government policies and measures, sectoral activities and technological changes, as well as financing and trade.

35. Forests are the origin of many sources of food, water, energy, medicines, raw construction materials, plants and crops. As the full extent of their cross-sectoral contributions are not yet fully valued and taken into account in policy planning and

¹³ Duncan Brack, background analytical study on forests and climate change prepared for the fourteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (2018).

¹⁴ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables*, Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP/248 (2017).

¹⁵ Jesús Crespo Cuaresma and others, "Economic Development and Forest Cover: Evidence from Satellite Data", *Nature, Scientific Reports*, vol. 7, article No. 40678 (January 2017).

economic activities owing to a limited availability of reliable data, forests in many countries are often at a crossroads between economic development and environmental sustainability.

36. Many of the contributions of forests to economic development, including subsistence benefits, informal work opportunities and environmental services, continue to be underestimated and unrecognized in official economic data and statistics in many regions and countries, posing fundamental challenges to the decoupling of economic growth from the unsustainable use of forest resources.

37. There is a continuing shift in forest ownership and management towards decentralization and increased private ownership in many regions in support of inclusive and sustainable development. Clear forest ownership and management rights are vital for good governance, sustainable management of forests and access to better prices as they provide access to the formal economies, incentives, payments for ecosystem services, credit and other sources of financing. The lack of secure access rights and land tenure may disincentivize many local communities, particularly the poor and marginalized, to mobilize efforts and invest in sustainable land management.

38. New technological developments and innovations in wood products, ranging from building materials to wood-based energies, can facilitate development of sustainable economic models, which would respond to market demands for better quality products in larger volumes while sustainably managing forest resources. Among renewable natural resources, wood is the most commonly used raw material and is often irreplaceable for its many applications in terms of cost-effectiveness and environmental sustainability.

39. Value addition and diversification of non-wood forest products is critical to improving livelihoods and economic growth at the local level. While local communities often use non-wood forest products for their daily domestic needs as a source of food, fodder, medicine and income, local populations tend to only be marginally integrated in value chains despite their essential role in the collection and processing of products, which limits the production of many non-wood forest products and their potential contributions to local and national economies.¹⁶

40. Interactions and interlinkages between forests and other sectors signal the need for a coherent approach to forests and other land use to address the nexus between forests, agriculture and food systems, water and energy at the international, regional, national and subnational levels through cross-sectoral dialogue and collaboration.

41. For the rural economies of many countries, forests play an important role in generating employment and income for both men and women, including in regions with limited livelihood alternatives. It is estimated that small and medium-sized enterprises account for 80 to 90 per cent of forest-related employment in some countries, contributing to a large share of over 40 million people employed in formal and informal forest sectors,¹⁷ in addition to forest-dwelling indigenous peoples and local communities who primarily depend on forests for their livelihoods.

42. While the forest sector plays a crucial role in rural economies and supports the livelihoods of local communities, many forest-related jobs, particularly in small-scale forest sectors, are informal and often associated with decent work deficits, such as

¹⁶ Tarig Elsheikh Mahmoud, "Potentials of non-wood forest products for value chain development, value addition and development of NWFP-based rural microenterprises in Sudan", report prepared for FAO (Rome, FAO, 2017).

¹⁷ Programme on Forests (PROFOR), Forest smart brief on forest sector small and medium size enterprises: unlocking the potential of forest sector small and medium enterprises, 2018. Available from https://www.profor.info/sites/profor.info/files/PROFOR_Brief_ForestSMEs.pdf.

low labour productivity and earnings, poor labour standards and unsustainable use of resources, as well as significant gender gaps.

43. Many forest workers in some developing countries lack adequate skills and qualifications owing to limited or non-existent training opportunities. Women in rural areas are often the most disadvantaged in forest-related employment and tend to be more involved in subsistence activities related to the collection and sale of non-wood forest products.

44. In order to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth and employment, it is important for Governments to further develop policies that secure tenure rights and equal benefit-sharing for the poor and vulnerable, including indigenous peoples, landless farmers, rural women and youth. Such policies should facilitate access to markets and better prices by providing access to the formal economy, payments for ecosystem services, credit and other sources of financing, including blended finance. Knowledge generation on forest ownership is key to gaining a better understanding of the primary users and beneficiaries who control forest use and management, and those who stand to benefit or lose from the sale of forest products and services.

45. Governments and stakeholders could support the development of wood-based products and their markets as strategies to enhance income and employment in rural economies and move away from reliance on carbon intensive materials. National policies and international support could focus on creating proper conditions and solutions for sustainable wood production, taking into consideration all actors in value chains, especially the most marginalized, and ensuring property rights and access to legal sources of wood and non-wood forest products.

C. Forests and Sustainable Development Goals 4, 10 and 16

46. The main findings and suggestions of the background analytical study on forests, peaceful and inclusive societies, reduced inequality and inclusive institutions at all levels, and education are described below.

47. Globally, forests play a central role in providing subsistence benefits and social safety nets for over 1.6 billion people, including an estimated 300 to 350 million people living within and around forests who depend almost entirely on forest resources for their subsistence.¹⁸

48. Many populations living in and around forests derive a considerable share of their household income from forest products, particularly the rural poor.

49. For populations mainly relying on forest products, income inequalities among households and individuals are most often the result of inequalities in access to forests and other land, as well as financial resources. Secure land and forest tenure rights of indigenous peoples and local communities therefore provide a critical foundation for local economic development, rural livelihoods and social inclusion.¹⁹

50. Deforestation rates are markedly lower in communities with legal rights to their forests and government support for enforcement and management than in other

¹⁸ Sophie Chao, "Forest peoples: numbers across the world" (Moreton-in-Marsh, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Forest Peoples Program, 2012). Available from http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2012/05/forest-peoples-numbers-across-world-final_0.pdf.

¹⁹ Gerardo Segura Warnholtz and others, *Securing Forest Tenure Rights for Rural Development: Lessons from Six Countries in Latin America* (Washington, D.C., PROFOR, 2017).

areas.²⁰ For forest-dependent communities, the depletion of forest resources translates directly into the erosion of income sources, aggravating inequalities resulting from a reduction and loss of income. Such income inequalities could in turn undermine the ability of communities to be peaceful and inclusive, hurting the management of common natural resources.

51. Despite the substantial progress made in many countries to recognize and take proper account of the customary rights of local communities and forest-dependent people, implementation of legal frameworks for the transfer of rights to specific communities has seen uneven progress owing chiefly to limited institutional capacities for their enforcement.²¹ Such uncertainties surrounding forest tenure often prevent long-term planning for forest management, subsequently hindering implementation of and investment in sustainably managed forest resources.

52. As the growing number and proportion of the world's population resides in urban areas (currently 55 per cent and projected to reach 68 per cent in 2050),²² forest education plays a key role in promoting sustainable living and the production and consumption of forests and other natural resources.

53. Through formal, non-formal and informal education approaches, forest education plays an essential role in training technical experts and practitioners, generating scientific knowledge and information for sustainable forest management, and raising awareness on the importance of forest resources for sustainable development among the general public.

54. In addition to forestry education, a wide array of interdisciplinary education and training programmes in many countries place forest issues as part of essential components to facilitate a multidimensional understanding of sustainability.

55. Forest education reflects the changing societal needs and demands on forests in each country. The effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development entails education and pedagogies that foster awareness of the complexities and uncertainties facing today's world.

56. Public institutions have a key role in balancing the social and environmental benefits of forests with their economic values. Through policies, legislation and management functions, the quality of governance and institutions influences whether forest resources are used efficiently, equitably and sustainably, as well as whether countries achieve forest-related development goals.

57. The main elements for good governance and institutions include adherence to rule of law, transparency and accountability frameworks, stakeholder participation in decision-making, and low regulatory burden for the management and use of natural resources.²³

58. In order to enhance the contributions of forests to social inclusion and equality, it is central to simplify regulatory frameworks for small-scale and community forestry

²⁰ Caleb Stevens and others, "Securing rights, combating climate change: how strengthening community forest rights mitigates climate change" (Washington, D.C., World Resources Institute, 2014).

²¹ Hubertus Jacobus Van Hensbergen, "Rethinking forest concessions: Improving the allocation of state-owned forests for better economic, social and environmental outcomes", Forestry Working Paper No. 4 (Rome, FAO, 2018).

²² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, Key facts* (2018). Available from <https://population.un.org/wup/>.

²³ Minang Peter and others, "Transparent and accountable management of natural resources in developing countries: the case of forests", study prepared for the European Parliament (Brussels, European Union, 2017). Available from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/578045/IPOL_STU\(2017\)578045_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/578045/IPOL_STU(2017)578045_EN.pdf).

and incentivize local added value and investments in sustainable forest management, including through simplified management plans and tax regimes, fiscal stability and tax deductions, and infrastructure to facilitate market access. Technical support, capacity-building (organizational, technical, financial and commercial) and inclusive finance are key in catalysing local small-holders and community forestry initiatives.

59. Governments and stakeholders could promote forest-based education for sustainable development by harnessing growing scientific research and utilizing and adapting such knowledge in terms of policy, extension, communication and education. Specific measures could include systematic research on forests in education, development of a global core curriculum on forests and the strengthening of teacher trainings and education networks, among others.

60. In order to foster effective, accountable and inclusive forest institutions, Governments could focus on enabling policy dialogue spaces and forest stakeholders' participation in decision-making processes, ensuring inclusion of vulnerable groups including women and youth. Decentralization of forest-related decision-making processes could provide an opportunity to advance the involvement of local communities in sustainable forest management with a view to securing a level playing field and transparency in land planning processes.

IV. Progress report on the implementation of the communication and outreach strategy of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

61. In accordance with the aim of the communication and outreach strategy to raise awareness of forests and trees as being vital to life on Earth and human well-being (communication and outreach strategy, para. 2 (a)), since the thirteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, held in May 2018, the Forum secretariat has held several events in the side-lines of key international forest-related conferences and meetings, including the session of the high-level political forum held in July 2018 and the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in December 2018. The Forum secretariat also used those opportunities to raise awareness of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and to promote synergy between the strategic plan, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

62. As part of its communication efforts to promote sustainable forest management (*ibid.*, para. 2 (b)), the Forum secretariat is gathering good practices, success stories and lessons learned on the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and the global forest goals, with a particular focus on the contributions of those initiatives to the Sustainable Development Goals under review at the 2019 high-level political forum, as well as to other related Sustainable Development Goals. Information provided by countries is posted on the United Nations Forum on Forests website.

63. To raise awareness of the global forest goals and encourage implementation of the strategic plan (*ibid.*, para. 2 (c)), the Forum secretariat has prepared presentations, social media advisories, brochures and publications on the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, the United Nations forest instrument and capacity development activities carried out by the secretariat, including related to monitoring, assessment and reporting and forest financing. The presentations and brochures were also shared with the participants in events organized by the Forum secretariat at the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

64. To amplify communications from the forest community (*ibid.*, para. 2 (d)), the Forum secretariat has also been working in close cooperation with partners from the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) regional communications networks to enhance cooperation and synergies on communication and outreach and increase the impact of messaging, including through the annual celebration of the International Day of Forests. In that regard, it was agreed that “Forests and education” would be the theme for the 2019 International Day of Forests.

65. Furthermore, in accordance with paragraph 4 of resolution 13/1 of the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Forum secretariat is preparing a concise publication on the global forest goals and targets of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 to be launched on the occasion of the fourteenth session of the Forum. The publication will be made available in print and online formats and will be a valuable tool for outreach activities to raise awareness on the United Nations strategic plan for forests to a range of audiences within and outside the forest community.

66. The communication and outreach strategy recognizes that the actions and commitments of Member States are decisive for the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of its goals and targets, and notes that national focal points for the United Nations Forum on Forests are ideally positioned to disseminate the strategic plan to national decision makers, other ministries, departments and authorities involved in forests. In that regard, the Forum secretariat sent a communiqué to national focal points in which they were encouraged to disseminate the strategic plan to their relevant networks at the national level.

V. Voluntary national contributions and their voluntary announcement

67. In accordance with paragraph 30 of the strategic plan, Member States may, on a voluntary basis, determine their contributions towards achieving the global forest goals and targets, taking into account their national circumstances, policies, priorities, capacities, levels of development and forest conditions.

68. Member States may include in their voluntary national contributions, as appropriate, national actions and targets related to other international forest-related commitments and goals, such as the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and actions to address climate change under the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

69. In response to paragraph 2 of resolution 13/1 of the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Forum secretariat has compiled announcements of the voluntary national contributions in a publicly accessible and centralized repository on the Forum website.²⁴

70. The Governments of Ecuador, Ghana, Guatemala, Jamaica, Liberia, Morocco, New Zealand and Ukraine had announced their voluntary national contributions at the thirteenth session of the Forum or communicated their intent to announce such contributions. At the time of writing, the Governments of Germany, Madagascar and Slovakia had communicated their intent to announce voluntary national contributions at the fourteenth session of the Forum.

²⁴ See the Forum website: <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/documents/un-strategic-plan-for-forests-2030/vnacs/index.html>.

71. In accordance with paragraph 30 of the strategic plan, voluntary national contributions are intended to determine Member States contributions towards achieving the global forest goals and targets, taking into account their national circumstances, policies, priorities, capacities, levels of development and forest conditions. In that regard, the preparation of a concise and simple template for the voluntary national contributions and preparation of a synthesis of the already announced voluntary national contributions, organized in terms of their contribution to specific global forest goals and targets, could be useful next steps in showcasing the role of voluntary national contributions in accelerating efforts to achieve the global forest goals and targets of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030.

VI. United Nations system-wide contributions to the implementation of the global forest goals and targets

72. The strategic plan serves as a reference for forest-related work of the United Nations system to achieve its global forest goals and targets. In accordance with paragraph 2 of the strategic plan, its use should be promoted within the United Nations bodies and partners.

73. Since the thirteenth session of the Forum, various activities have been carried out by different stakeholders to promote implementation of the global forest goals and targets, including within the United Nations system and by members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and subregional organizations and partners, civil society and major groups.

74. Information on forest-related progress made in implementation of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity, which provide the basis for discussions of the Forum on agenda items 7 (b) and 7 (c), is detailed in the note by the secretariat on enhanced cooperation, coordination and engagement on forest-related issues on agenda item 7 (see [E/CN.18/2019/6](#)).

75. With regard to agenda item 6 of the fourteenth session of the Forum, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and subregional organizations, major groups and other stakeholders have also provided inputs on enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common understanding of sustainable forest management in response to surveys commissioned by the secretariat. Information on those inputs is detailed in the note by the secretariat on enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common international understanding of sustainable forest management on agenda item 6 (see [E/CN.18/2019/5](#)).

A. Progress report on the implementation of the workplan of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests

76. In accordance with resolution [2015/33](#) of the Economic and Social Council and resolution [12/1](#) of the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests developed and presented at the thirteenth session of the Forum its workplan, aligned with the strategic plan and the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for the period 2017–2020, taking into account other relevant forest-related intergovernmental agreements recognized in the strategic plan.

77. The workplan of the Partnership identifies priorities for collective actions by its member organizations, guides their implementation and contains the resource implications of such actions.

78. As part of the workplan, joint initiatives are a major delivery mechanism for the Partnership and important vehicles for strengthening collaboration within and beyond the Partnership and mobilizing political, scientific, technical and financial support in that regard. The implementation of the joint initiatives is led by all of the members of the Partnership or subsets of members. The Partnership may establish joint initiatives to implement its core functions, in accordance with its workplan.

79. Under its current workplan, the Partnership is implementing nine joint initiatives, including: (a) communicators' network; (b) forest finance facilitation; (c) global forest expert panels; (d) global forest information service; (e) streamlining global forest-related reporting; (f) Wangari Maathai Forest Champions Award; (g) policy learning initiative; (h) forest landscape restoration; and (i) sustainable wood for a sustainable world. Information on recent progress made in their implementation is detailed in the note by the Secretariat on enhanced cooperation, coordination and engagement on forest-related issues (see [E/CN.18/2019/6](#)).

B. Integration of the strategic plan and its global forest goals in the forest-related plans, programmes and policies of the member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests

80. In accordance with paragraph 38 of the strategic plan, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its member organizations play an important role in implementing the strategic plan and are encouraged to integrate relevant global forest goals and targets into their forest-related plans and programmes, where appropriate and consistent with their mandates.

81. Since adoption of the strategic plan by the General Assembly in April 2017, a number of member organizations of the Partnership have considered the strategic plan and its global forest goals relevant to their ongoing work, plans and programmes with a view to enhancing global forest policy coherence, complementarity and a common understanding of sustainable forest management. Member organizations of the Partnership responded to the inquiry of the Secretariat on how, and to what extent, the strategic plan has been integrated in their work.²⁵

82. Member organizations indicated that their relevant strategies, plans and programmes included the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets; the Expanded Programme of Work on Forest Biological Diversity; the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (to be developed); the strategic vision for 2008–2020 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (under review for the period beyond 2020) and its tree species programme; the FAO programme of work and budget for 2018–2019 and medium-term plan for 2018–2021; the 2016–2020 strategic framework of the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries; the programming directions of the seventh replenishment of the Global Environment Facility and its Sustainable Forest Management Impact Programme, as well as other forest-related components; the programme for 2017–2020 of the International Union for Conservation of Nature; the strategy for 2019–2024 of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (in process); the land degradation neutrality target setting and implementation programmes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa; the “Pathway to implementation” global

²⁵ Information was provided in response to a survey and an inquiry carried out by the secretariat.

platform of the New York Declaration on Forests (in process); the Warsaw Framework for REDD-plus; and the Forest Action Plan 2016–2020 of the World Bank Group.

83. The secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) reported that it made a direct contribution to the global forest goals of the strategic plan. The strategic vision for 2008–2020 of the Convention integrated the global forest goals and targets on actions at all levels to sustainably manage all types of forests. By assessing the nature and scope of activities encompassed in the six global forest goals and 26 associated targets of the strategic plan, the Convention could make direct contributions to all goals and to most associated targets as they supported and contributed to the pillars of the Convention regarding legality and sustainability of all international trade in CITES-listed species of fauna and flora.

84. FAO reported that it had presented the strategic plan and possible follow-up action to its regional forestry commissions and Committee on Forestry, both of which had held sessions in 2016 and 2018. The Committee on Forestry had come up with a set of recommendations, including requesting the organization to support the implementation of the strategic plan and the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for the period 2017–2020; continue and strengthen its leadership role in the Partnership and initiate new activities; and recognize the contribution to the strategic plan as a core function of the organization and include it in its medium-term plan and programme of work and budget. FAO has dedicated, albeit limited, funding for Partnership-related work, while various elements of the implementation of the strategic plan appear in the thematic programmes of the organization.

85. The FAO Committee on Forestry had worked towards strengthening collaboration with the Forum, inviting the Forum to collaborate closely with the organization on its areas of expertise, including by using its major analytical products, such as the Global Forest Resources Assessment, the *State of the World's Forests* and others. The Committee on Forestry had suggested deeper collaboration between the regional forestry commissions and the Forum through its regional dimension and that their collaboration be flexible and adapt to different regional circumstances.

86. The International Union of Forest Research Organizations reported that its strategy for 2015–2019 had set out the institutional goal to provide analyses, insights and options to policy processes, and to respond to emerging forest-related policy needs in the light of the important role of science in informing the development and implementation of forest policies, thus playing an integral part in the strategic plan and its global forest goals. Through its active participation in the Forum, and as a member of the Partnership, the International Union contributed to the effective implementation of the strategic plan and related global forest goals by informing policy and decision makers of the most effective actions and by providing scientific evidence on forest-related topics. Its activities were directly relevant to achieving global forest goal 4, which called for strengthening scientific and technical cooperation and partnerships. In addition to global forest goal 4, the activities of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations were guided by and contributed to other global forest goals, such as goals 1, 2, 5 and 6.

87. The secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification reported that its work, including through its Global Mechanism, supported interested countries in their national land degradation neutrality target setting and implementation processes in support of Sustainable Development Goal target 15.3, thereby supporting and contributing to the achievement of global forest goal 1 and its targets, such as increasing the forest area by 3 per cent worldwide, maintaining or enhancing the world's forest carbon stocks and promoting the implementation of sustainable management of forests, halting deforestation, restoring degraded forests

and substantially increasing afforestation and reforestation globally. Forest-sector stakeholders within those countries were strongly encouraged to collaborate in implementing their land degradation neutrality targets, which included forests and trees outside forests, and to help align them with the strategic plan. As of early 2019, a total of 120 countries had participated, shared their experiences and begun resource mobilization and implementation. Those countries accounted for approximately 71 per cent of the global forest cover and many of them had set forest-related land degradation neutrality targets, such as increasing forest area or enhancing the productivity of forest lands.

88. The United Nations Development Programme reported that it served as one of the key partners constituting the secretariat for the global platform of the New York Declaration on Forests and was in a good position to support countries in identifying overlaps and enhancing synergies between the sets of goals. The Programme emphasized that the goals of the New York Declaration on Forests and the global forest goals were mostly consistent and complementary.

89. The Centre for International Forestry Research reported that it had integrated relevant global forest goals and targets in the design of its activities where appropriate and consistent with its activities, using the goals and targets to guide and prioritize the activities of the forests, trees and agroforestry research programme of the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers.

90. The International Union for Conservation of Nature reported that its work programme promoted and supported the global forest goals in a variety of ways, including through the definition and implementation of the Bonn Challenge pledges to reduce the loss, degradation and fragmentation of forest ecosystems in support of global forest goal 1, as well as through its work in protected areas in support of global forest goal 3.

C. Strategic vision beyond 2020 of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests

91. The Partnership held its 2018 retreat on 10 and 11 December in Rome. Among the main objectives of the retreat were to hold a discussion on the future direction of the Partnership beyond 2020 and, more specifically, on how the Partnership could further strategize its work to support achievement of the global forest goals and targets of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 beyond 2020. In that respect, members explored possible approaches and options to develop a strategic vision of the Partnership and the workplan of the Partnership for the period 2021–2024.

92. To that end, member organizations of the Partnership agreed to establish its working group to develop a draft strategic vision of the Partnership towards 2030, to be considered and decided at a meeting of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests Principals scheduled to be held in the second half of 2019. Member organizations also agreed to consider the development of the workplan for 2021–2024 of the Partnership, taking into account the scope of the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for the period 2021–2024, to be developed intersessionally after the fourteenth session of the Forum, the intersessional work for the fifteenth session of the Forum and the new cycle of the high-level political forum, beginning in 2020.

VII. Conclusions

93. The world's forests are essential to stabilizing the global climate and providing a crucial foundation for the future prosperity of people and the planet. Sustainably managed forests are productive, resilient and renewable ecosystems that provide essential goods and services to people worldwide, contributing to inclusive societies and reduced inequalities while sustaining economies.

94. Despite their critical importance, forests continue to be lost and damaged in many parts of the world. Annually, over 7 million hectares of natural forests are converted to other land uses for large-scale commercial agriculture and other economic activities with regional variation. While the rate of deforestation has slowed down in many regions over the past decade, it is estimated that that of tree cover loss has steadily been rising in the tropics since 2000 owing to human and natural causes, including fires and storms.

95. The United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and its global forest goals and targets provide a solid framework for collective actions at all levels aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the world's forests and maximizing the contribution of forests to the Sustainable Development Goals under consideration by the high-level political forum in 2019. The voluntary national contributions have the unique potential to become the focus of an efficient action agenda to accelerate achievement of the global forest goals and targets, while contributing to all other globally agreed forest-related commitments. In that regard, implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, including its global forest goals and targets, increased announcement of the voluntary national contributions and focusing them on specific global forest goals and targets are key to addressing multiple global challenges through forest based actions. As the Forum at its fifteenth session, to be held in 2020, will decide on the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for the period 2021–2024, it may be useful that, in the intersessional period between the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests, the secretariat undertake the necessary consultations with Member States and relevant stakeholders to explore some suggested elements for inclusion in the next quadrennial programme of work, as well as a suggested template for the voluntary national contributions.

VIII. Suggestions and proposals

A. **Implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and increased contribution of forests to the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2019**

96. The fourteenth session of the Forum is a technical session and as such the Forum is not expected to adopt any decisions or resolutions. However, in accordance with the provisions of the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for the period 2017–2020, 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 suggestions to be undertaken in the intersessional period leading up to the fifteenth United Nations Forum on Forests. In that regard, the following suggestions are made to stimulate discussions by the Forum at its present session:

(a) Strengthening implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 as an integrated framework for forest-based national actions and

international cooperation to accelerate progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 13 and the objectives of the Paris Agreement;

(b) Promoting synergies on forest-related climate actions within voluntary national contributions to the strategic plan and nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement;

(c) Enhancing integrated implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement;

(d) Recognizing the need for the secretariat to conduct consultation with members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders during the intersessional period between the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests to explore some suggested elements for inclusion in the next quadrennial programme of work;

(e) Requesting the Forum secretariat to prepare and provide input on forest-based climate solutions to the 2019 sessions of the high-level political forum and the 2019 United Nations Climate Summit, in collaboration with member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests;

(f) Strengthening technical skills and capacities of forest-related institutions to be inclusive of local communities, particularly women, in the planning and implementation of forest and land tenure rights, including their benefit-sharing arrangements;

(g) Promoting forest education and consumer awareness on sustainable use of forests and integrate forest based climate solutions into climate change education, building on the existing efforts made under the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development;

(h) Identifying, compiling and communicating best practices in forest education.

B. Communication and outreach strategy of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

(a) Encouraging members of the Forum to share their best practices and success stories in support of the implementation of the strategic plan at the fifteenth session;

(b) Encouraging Member States, the United Nations system, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional organizations, major groups and other stakeholders to share their communication materials on the strategic plan so that they can be showcased through the United Nations Forum on Forests website.

C. Voluntary national contributions

(a) Requesting the Forum secretariat, in consultation with Member States, to prepare a simple template for voluntary national contributions that clearly specifies the contribution of voluntary national contributions to specific global forest goals and targets;

(b) Encouraging its Members to make the announcement of their voluntary national contributions to achieve the global forest goals and targets set out in the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and communicate them to the Forum secretariat;

(c) Requesting the Forum secretariat to synthesize the submitted voluntary national contributions based on their connections with different global forest goals and targets and provide them to the Forum at its fifteenth session as an information source.

D. Collaborative Partnership on Forests

(a) Welcoming the progress made in integrating relevant global forest goals and targets into the forest related plans and programmes of several member organizations of the Partnership and inviting member organizations to further integrate the strategic plan and its global forest goals in their existing and new forest-related plans, programmes and policies and report to the Forum at its fifteenth session on its progress;

(b) Welcoming the decision made by the Partnership to establish its working group to develop its strategic vision beyond 2020 in support of the strategic plan and its presentation to the Forum at its fifteenth session;

(c) Inviting the Partnership to report on the progress made in implementing its workplan to the Forum at its fifteenth session and to initiate the development of its workplan for the period 2021–2024.
