



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
13 February 2021

Original: English

---

## United Nations Forum on Forests

### Sixteenth session

26–30 April 2021

Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*

**Emerging issues: impacts of the coronavirus disease  
(COVID-19) pandemic on forests and the forest sector**

## Impact of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector

### Note by the Secretariat

#### *Summary*

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/14](#), the United Nations Forum on Forests at its sixteenth session will consider, under the agenda item on emerging issues, the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on forests and the forest sector.

The present note provides the background information and highlights the results of intersessional activities conducted since the fifteenth session of the Forum. The note serves as the basis for discussion at the sixteenth session of the Forum under agenda item 5.

---

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



## I. Introduction

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/14, the United Nations Forum on Forests at its sixteenth session will consider the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on forests and the forest sector.
2. The present note has been prepared to serve as the basis for discussion on the above-mentioned topic under agenda item 5, on emerging issues. The note provides an overview of the relevant intersessional activities conducted since the fifteenth session of the Forum. It also includes some proposals on the next steps, for discussion by the Forum at its sixteenth session.

## II. Background

3. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous disruption to human lives, livelihoods and economic systems worldwide. In view of the broad range of vital services that forests provide for economic functioning and human well-being, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2020/14 on the outcome of the fifteenth session of the Forum, requested the Forum secretariat, in consultation with other members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, and with input from members of the Forum, to compile an initial assessment of the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on (a) sustainable forest management, (b) the forest sector, forest-dependent people, indigenous peoples and local communities and (c) forest financing and international cooperation. The Forum secretariat was requested to present the initial assessment to the Forum at its sixteenth session.
4. In order to fulfil this mandate, the secretariat conducted and engaged in several activities. These included (a) commissioning studies in different regions, (b) engaging in various initiatives and analytical work related to the impact of COVID-19 on forests, including within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, (c) participating in several relevant meetings and webinars and (d) organizing a webinar and an expert group meeting. Below is a short description of these activities.
5. In June 2020, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs participated in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) webinar entitled “Heads of forestry dialogue on COVID-19 impacts – main issues, response needs and opportunities to build back better”. The Under-Secretary-General highlighted the opportunity to use the potential of forests to align pandemic recovery efforts with efforts to achieve greater sustainability and a more inclusive economy.<sup>1</sup> Around the same time, the Secretariat prepared a policy brief entitled “Forests: at the heart of a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”.<sup>2</sup> The brief outlines how sustainably managed forests could lay the foundation for resilient economies and societies capable of withstanding future pandemics, climate change and other global challenges.
6. In July, the Forum secretariat co-sponsored and participated in the webinar on “COVID-19 and forestry sector: challenges, opportunities and strategies for better resilience in Africa”, organized by the African Union Commission.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Forum secretariat participated in a meeting of African ministers responsible for the

---

<sup>1</sup> Further information is available at: [www.fao.org/about/meetings/cofo/covid-19-forestry-webinar-week/en](http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/cofo/covid-19-forestry-webinar-week/en).

<sup>2</sup> Available at: [www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/PB\\_80.pdf](http://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/PB_80.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Further information is available at: [www.fao.org/in-action/forest-landscape-restoration-mechanism/news-and-events/events-detail/en/c/1295864](http://www.fao.org/in-action/forest-landscape-restoration-mechanism/news-and-events/events-detail/en/c/1295864).

environment and natural resources on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, which was held in November 2020.<sup>4</sup>

7. The Secretariat organized a webinar on “Forests: at the heart of a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”. The webinar was held on 28 September 2020, alongside the high-level segment of the General Assembly, with the participation of senior officials from countries and the United Nations.<sup>5</sup> The event showcased the interlinkages between achieving the global forest goals and the Sustainable Development Goals during the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the significance of forests in relation to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and climate change agenda.

8. In November 2020, the Secretariat prepared another policy brief entitled: “Financing sustainable forest management: a key component of sustainable COVID-19 recovery”.<sup>6</sup> The brief analyses the adverse impact of the pandemic on income-generation from forests, as well as its implications for current and future funding for forests. It also proposes measures to finance sustainable forest management and mobilize investment and other resources for forests, as an essential component of effective post-pandemic recovery plans.

9. The Forum secretariat also contributed to the joint statement of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests entitled “Towards sustainability: forest solutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic”, which was released on the margins of the twenty-fifth session of the Committee on Forestry of FAO in October 2020.<sup>7</sup> Through this statement, the Partnership expressed its support for integrating the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of all types of forests and trees outside of forests into COVID-19 recovery measures and efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the global forest goals and other international forest-related commitments and goals.

10. As part of the global assessment, the Forum secretariat commissioned six studies in different regions to collect information and relevant data from different countries and regions on the impact of the pandemic on the areas identified in Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/14.<sup>8</sup> Upon finalization of these studies, the Forum secretariat organized a virtual expert group meeting on the impact of COVID-19 on sustainable forest management, which was held from 19 to 21 January 2021.

11. The meeting provided an opportunity for experts from Member States, international forest-related organizations, regional and subregional partners and civil society to discuss and share their views on the impact of the global pandemic on forests and the forest sector, including risks, threats and challenges; potential responses and measures for forests and forest sector recovery; the role of forests in recovering from the pandemic; and potential opportunities that the pandemic has brought to the fore to enhance the contribution of forests to inclusive and long-term sustainable development. The outcome of the meeting was a summary by the co-chairs of the discussions and suggestions on the way forward.

12. In 2020, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs prepared a special series of policy briefs examining the economic and social impact of COVID-19.<sup>9</sup> The briefs present detailed analysis of critical social and economic issues, including designing

<sup>4</sup> Further information is available at: [www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/african-ministers-environment-commit-support-green-covid-19-recovery](http://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/african-ministers-environment-commit-support-green-covid-19-recovery).

<sup>5</sup> Further information is available at: [www.un.org/esa/forests/events/covid-19-webinar-september-2020/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/events/covid-19-webinar-september-2020/index.html).

<sup>6</sup> Available at: [www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/PB\\_88.pdf](http://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/PB_88.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> The joint statement is available at: [www.cpfweb.org/49939-01432517605fa82d4a063efc442c48fe9.pdf](http://www.cpfweb.org/49939-01432517605fa82d4a063efc442c48fe9.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> The six assessments are available on the website of the Forum: [www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html).

<sup>9</sup> Available at: [www.un.org/en/desa/covid-19](http://www.un.org/en/desa/covid-19).

inclusive stimulus packages; preventing a global debt crisis; supporting countries in special situations; protecting the most vulnerable groups of people; strengthening the role of science, technology and institutions for an effective response; and working together to build back better and implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

13. Relevant findings, analyses and suggestions on the way forward that emerged from the above-mentioned activities are presented below.

### III. Impact of the global pandemic on forests and the forest sector

14. The COVID-19 pandemic has created an enormous disruption to human lives, livelihoods and economic systems worldwide. It is the worst global crisis that humanity has faced since the Second World War, with its impact being felt in all aspects of social and economic spheres. The ongoing pandemic has caused a massive public health crisis and economic contraction, led to huge human losses, shuttered countless businesses, big and small, left tens of millions out of work, disrupted global supply chains and severely strained fiscal capacity and safety nets. The pandemic-induced turmoil in the global economy has led to the sudden loss of livelihoods and increases in extreme poverty, income inequality and food insecurity in some of the most vulnerable segments of society.

15. The pandemic and the ensuing global economic crisis are on course to reverse years of gains in the reduction and alleviation of poverty, drastically undermining global efforts to meet the deadline, as contained in the 2030 Agenda, of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. It is now predicted that between 71 million and 100 million people were pushed into extreme poverty in 2020, erasing almost all the progress made in the previous five years in the fight against extreme poverty. The efforts to recover from the effects of the pandemic have reinforced the need for global cooperation and collaboration on both the immediate response and longer-term recovery.

16. The pandemic has shown that the Sustainable Development Goals are closely interlinked and that progress on one goal, or lack thereof, affects other goals. In addition, the degree of progress on multiple goals and targets is likely to contribute to the eventual impact of the crisis on the Goals. In this regard, it is imperative to accelerate efforts towards achieving the Goals through COVID-19 response and recovery measures. Maintaining past progress made towards eradicating basic deprivations; accelerating the universal provision of quality essential services; reversing course on the degradation of nature, including with respect to greenhouse gas emissions, land degradation, biodiversity loss, wildlife trafficking and the deterioration of coastal waters, will ensure that the world builds back better.<sup>10</sup>

17. While the pandemic has been damaging for many of the people- and prosperity-related Goals, it has had some degree of positive impact on forest-related Goals. For example, annual carbon dioxide emissions for 2020 are projected to be 4–7 per cent lower than for 2019.<sup>11</sup> Air and water have become cleaner; and in many places, a resurgence of nature has been observed. This illustrates that the current ways of achieving prosperity are a threat to the health of the planet. The zoonotic nature of

<sup>10</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs, policy brief No. 84 on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the wake of COVID-19: scenarios for policymakers. Available at: [www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-des-a-policy-brief-84-achieving-sdgs-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-scenarios-for-policymakers/](http://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-des-a-policy-brief-84-achieving-sdgs-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-scenarios-for-policymakers/).

<sup>11</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Sustainable Development Outlook 2020: Achieving SDGs in the wake of COVID-19: Scenarios for policymakers”. Available at: [www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/sustainable-development-outlook-2020-achieving-sdgs-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-scenarios-for-policymakers/](http://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/sustainable-development-outlook-2020-achieving-sdgs-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-scenarios-for-policymakers/).

COVID-19 and other recent epidemics such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), Ebola virus disease and avian influenza (bird flu), shows the importance of protecting the planet and sharing it equitably with other animal and plant species.<sup>12</sup>

18. Given the broad range of vital services that forests provide for socioeconomic functioning and human well-being, these precious natural resources and the people dependent on them have also been negatively affected by the pandemic. The nature and extent of the impact of the pandemic and the response measures adopted by Governments to curb the spread of the disease vary by country and region. National and regional circumstances, including the structure of economies and forestry, the level of development and the degree of urbanization have significantly influenced the impact of the pandemic. More detailed analyses of the impact of the pandemic on forests, the forest sector and forest-dependent people are provided below.<sup>13</sup>

## A. Impact on forests and forest management

19. The main negative consequences common to many countries include delays in and the reduction of planned forest management activities, and reduced public and community involvement in most forest management activities, such as reforestation campaigns in several regions. In particular, movement restrictions and measures to curb the spread of the disease caused the postponement or cancellation of some silvicultural activities, such as pruning and thinning. However, in Latin America, forest management activities continued with minimal disruption during the pandemic. In Africa and other less-developed regions, the lack of income and resources had a negative impact on the management of protected forest areas and increased the risk of illegal activities.

20. Incidents of illegal harvesting of forest resources, including illegal logging, illegal harvesting of non-timber forest products, poaching and land-use change have been observed in several regions. This is attributed to several factors, including reduced monitoring by public sector forest agencies and communities due to pandemic-related movement restrictions. Given the likelihood of reduced monitoring by public sector forest agencies owing to such restrictions, and the ensuing risk of an increase in illegal activities, these remain important areas for monitoring.

21. In some regions, reverse migration from urban areas to rural areas due to lack of employment linked to the pandemic is putting additional pressure on forests. In other regions, there is a risk of overharvesting to meet subsistence needs in areas where smallholders who rely on the forest and forest products also experience food insecurity and decreased income.<sup>14</sup>

22. Incidents of forest fires in community forests and protected areas decreased in some regions but increased in others. The resulting smoke caused a significant health hazard to vulnerable populations, especially in the Asia-Pacific region and North America. In regions such as North America, firefighting was affected by safety requirements that entailed social distancing measures to reduce the risk of firefighters contracting and spreading the virus. The pace of fire risk reduction activities, such as prescribed burning and the trimming of vegetation near power lines, slowed as a result of social distancing policies in some regions. There have been also valuable lessons

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Additional information is contained in the summary by the co-chairs of the expert group meeting on the impact of COVID-19 on sustainable forest management, as well as in the regional background studies available at: [www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html).

<sup>14</sup> See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "The impacts of COVID-19 on the forest sector: How to respond?". Available at: [www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca8844en](http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca8844en).

learned from fire suppression activities and preparations and from personnel management in some regions, which could be beneficial to other regions.

23. In Latin America and Caribbean, forest management activities continued during the pandemic, although some countries reported during the expert group meeting that their forest production activities had been negatively affected by the pandemic and that their forest community enterprises had insufficient cash to pay their workforce and continue operations. The forest industry also faced restrictions resulting from a reduction in the number of staff and/or the number of work-hours of government agencies. Nevertheless, the forest sector in the region has proved to be resilient and can play a significant role in socioeconomic recovery.

24. In more developed regions such as North America and the Western European<sup>15</sup> and other States region, forest management and the manufacturing of forest products have been declared essential businesses. This has allowed essential activities to continue, with measures being taken to protect workers and the public.

25. The restrictions and measures adopted by countries to contain the pandemic have had an impact on forest certification-related activities. However, the major certification bodies responded with some level of flexibility, including by conducting audits remotely; extending certification periods or postponing surveillance audits for a period not exceeding six months and extending transition periods.<sup>16</sup> The Forest Stewardship Council revised forest management certification requirements in some regions to allow online verification of records from certified companies.<sup>17</sup>

## B. Impact on the forest industry and trade

26. The trade and supply chains for forest-based products have been affected differently, depending on the sector, during the pandemic. Demand for wood and wood products decreased globally, while at the same time demand for packaging material, pallets and tissue for masks and toilet paper remained stable or increased.<sup>18</sup> The decreasing demand for construction timber in many European countries has been countered by an increasing demand for do-it-yourself construction materials.<sup>19</sup>

27. The pandemic has accelerated the existing decrease in the demand for newsprint, commercial copying and printing paper and, at the same time, it has increased demand for containerboard used in shipping packaging. What was not foreseen was the spike in demand for hygiene and personal protective equipment in many regions.

28. In several regions, forest resources are under increased pressure owing to reduced income, increased unemployment and reduced funding, which may harm the

<sup>15</sup> For the purpose of the present report, the assessments for North America and for Western Europe and other States (Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) were conducted separately.

<sup>16</sup> Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes, "COVID-19: sustainable forest management guidance for certification bodies and certified companies". Available at: <https://pefc.org/news/covid-19-sfm-guidance-for-certification-bodies-and-certified-companies>.

<sup>17</sup> See Forest Stewardship Council auditing derogation document, available at [https://fsc.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/FSC-DER-2020-001\\_Covid-19\\_auditing\\_derogation\\_20.11.2020.pdf](https://fsc.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/FSC-DER-2020-001_Covid-19_auditing_derogation_20.11.2020.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), sectoral brief, "Impact of COVID-19 on the forest sector", June 2020. Available at: [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---sector/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_749497.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/briefingnote/wcms_749497.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> FAO, "Impacts of COVID-19 on wood value chains and forest sector response: results from a global survey 2020". Available at: [www.fao.org/3/cb1987en/CB1987EN.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/cb1987en/CB1987EN.pdf).

stability and viability of the forest sector. This includes the threat that environmental and conservation projects may lose priority in national budgets.

29. Forest industries in many countries in Africa and Asia have experienced reduced sales of timber and falling prices. The consequences of the pandemic for forest industries include, inter alia, increased costs for forestry enterprises in terms of labour, transportation and production and distribution activities; the liquidity squeeze and capital chain rupture facing forest enterprises; reduced capital investments in forest industries; reduced export demand for forest products; and higher costs and lowered efficiency associated with international trade and the transportation of forest products.

30. In some countries, migrant workers make up a significant share of the forestry sector workforce. Travel restrictions and border closures had a substantial impact on the industry, in the form of temporary workforce deficits, and for migrant workers, in the form of lost wages, the lack of a social safety net and uncertain status within their host countries.<sup>20</sup>

31. At the national level, the impact included a sharp decline in the trade in timber and non-timber forest products, which implies a reduction in national demand and consumption; an accelerated shrinkage of the traditional export market, for the same reason; and a significant increase in the risk to the global timber supply chain. Those effects also had an impact on people's livelihoods.

32. Supply chains have been adversely affected, as pandemic-related measures and restrictions had an impact on exports of timber and non-timber forest products and on imports of forest products, chemicals, spare parts and machinery.

33. Manufacturing industries faced increased production costs, especially in Africa. The most affected countries seem to be those that are heavily dependent on international trade, as both exports and imports have been impeded owing to the pandemic-related restrictions on transport. Furthermore, in many developing countries, small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up the bulk of companies in the forestry sector, have been the worst affected, as they are highly vulnerable to economic recessions.

34. The annual rate of growth in gross domestic product in many countries in different regions has declined significantly, compared with the year prior to the pandemic. Consequently, industrial production also decreased in several countries. This could have an impact on forest sectors and local communities in various countries, including with respect to the allocation of reduced resources for forests and forest-dependent communities.

35. The pandemic has had an impact on forest-related recreational and hospitality services in many countries and regions. The ecotourism and hospitality sectors have been severely affected by the pandemic, owing to travel restrictions and the closure of urban and local markets. The reduced number of visitors to national parks and national forests caused by restrictions on travel, particularly international travel, has had a negative impact on communities located adjacent to or outside park boundaries or within national forests that depend on spending by tourists for services and on tourism taxes. This has also led to the loss of jobs and incomes in local communities, especially among women and youth. Some regions, such as North America, Eastern Europe and the Western European and other States region, have experienced an increase in the use of urban and peri-urban forests for recreational purposes. This demonstrates an important benefit that forests can provide for human health and well-being, particularly when normal events and travel are disrupted.

<sup>20</sup> ILO, "Impact of COVID-19 on the forest sector".

### **C. Impact on livelihoods of forest-dependent people, indigenous peoples and local communities, smallholder forest owners, workers, women and youth**

36. Forests are the source of livelihoods for millions of people throughout the world, including local and traditional communities and indigenous and tribal peoples. Forests are the basis for employment, public health and disaster risk reduction and thus contribute to livelihoods and economic safety nets.<sup>21</sup> Globally, the pandemic is aggravating hardships among forest-dependent people from several perspectives, including with respect to job losses, reduced income, decreased remittances from migrant family members, reduced access to markets and information, increased physical isolation, a lack of health assistance and disruption to government assistance programmes.<sup>22</sup> Communities lacking secure rights and access to forests faced serious livelihood-related distress and have been less able to prevent the spread of COVID-19.<sup>23</sup>

37. The pandemic has resulted in decreased income and revenues, lower investments and increased costs for forest companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises. It has also had a negative impact on the production of non-timber forest products as a main source of income and food for local communities. Communities that are dependent on forest-based tourism for jobs and livelihoods experienced declines in their incomes and an increase in the risk of engaging in illegal activities such as poaching and illegal timber production.

38. In many regions, especially Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, the lack of access to information and communications technology has exacerbated the impact of the pandemic on the livelihoods and income of forest-based communities. Vulnerability caused many indigenous and local communities, including returning migrant and urban workers, to retreat deeper into forests to seek food, fuel, shelter and protection from the risk of COVID-19 infection.

39. In several regions, the pandemic has dramatically deepened inequalities and vulnerabilities experienced by forest-dependent populations. Many people, particularly women and youth, have lost seasonal employment. It has been reported that women have been largely responsible for homeschooling tasks during the pandemic and, as a result, their ability to earn an income has been negatively affected.

40. Delays in obtaining administrative permits for harvesting timber and non-timber forest products negatively affected forest-dependent people in some countries in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. In some regions, fiscal support has been provided to individuals, communities, forest owners, workers, women and youth. In some countries, indigenous peoples received similar benefits to others. However, given the limitation of resources, this has not been a blanket approach in all regions.

<sup>21</sup> United Nations, “Shared responsibility, global solidarity: responding to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19”, March 2020. Available at: [www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg\\_report\\_socio-economic\\_impact\\_of\\_covid19.pdf](http://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_report_socio-economic_impact_of_covid19.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> FAO, Forestry Technical Network Webinar, “Social protection for forest-dependent communities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic”, 22 July 2020. Available at: [www.fao.org/forestry/49810-0e3cf49a1603cf7fc3ecb119381623888.pdf](http://www.fao.org/forestry/49810-0e3cf49a1603cf7fc3ecb119381623888.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> COVID-19 forestry webinar week, “Building back better: COVID-19 pandemic recovery contributions from the forest sector”, 22–25 June 2020. Chairperson’s summary report available at: [www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/idf/COFO25/COVID\\_Forestry\\_Webinar\\_Week\\_Chairs\\_summary\\_df-clean.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/idf/COFO25/COVID_Forestry_Webinar_Week_Chairs_summary_df-clean.pdf).

## **D. Impact on institutional capacity**

41. In an effort to reduce the spread of infection in most countries, forestry and environmental agencies involved in monitoring and supporting forest-related activities have been operating in a reduced capacity and restricted to office work. Many regions faced challenges, mainly related to financial, technological and human resources capacities.

42. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, institutional capacity for monitoring, control, capacity-building and other activities related to forest management has been affected by the pandemic. In some countries in Africa, the introduction of restrictions and measures to control the pandemic and reduced staffing resulted in the reduction or suspension of patrols by forest protection services. In some countries, certain administrative processes, such as permit issuance, have slowed as a result of travel restrictions, weak information technology infrastructure and other constraints, resulting in delays in decision-making on issues such as permit issuance.

43. The pandemic has also disrupted forest research activities, especially field measurements and other field-based activities, as a result of travel restrictions and social distancing requirements. In addition, access to research labs has also been reduced, which has had a negative impact on the work.

44. The longer-term impact of cancelled scientific and technical conferences and the inability to gather and share knowledge is harder to gauge. However, research is very critical in supporting evidence-based policymaking and decision-making and the identification of appropriate response and recovery measures for the forest sector. Science and the scientific community have major roles to play in assisting decision-making officials to devise effective pandemic recovery plans and identifying new opportunities for forests and the forest sector during the pandemic and beyond.

45. In some regions, such as Eastern Europe, data collection and overall data management have been interrupted and in some cases the reliability and quality of data and information and the timely application thereof has deteriorated.

46. The pandemic has weakened the budgetary capacity of the forest institutions in some regions, such as Africa and Asia-Pacific. Several State forest agencies are dependent on national budget allocations, which have been affected by the pandemic, as priority has been given to addressing the immediate health and economic effects of the pandemic. There are concerns over reduced financial allocations to the forest sector in the short term in some regions, as resources are being allocated to immediate health and economic response measures. In the Western European and other States region and North America, there are well-established, well-staffed and adequately resourced institutions that are robust and reasonably resilient.

47. Although all countries have adapted to the increased use of virtual meetings, they have also recognized the limitations of virtual meetings in some areas of work for the longer term. The lack of social contact in such meetings makes the resolution of complex and difficult issues more challenging, and larger meetings tend to restrict the effective engagement of all participants. A lack of face-to-face meetings and reliance on virtual communication may also negatively affect the ability of Governments to maintain dialogue, especially with stakeholders who do not have access to digital communication tools.

## **E. Investment, financing and international cooperation**

48. Globally, countries have taken various steps to address the impact of the pandemic on their citizens. The impact of the pandemic on the availability of

resources for forests varies from region to region. The pandemic has created more challenging situations, especially in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region and some countries in Latin America, with regard to funding forest-related activities. The limited available resources are mainly targeted at funding the most immediate public health needs in these regions. Many countries have also provided assistance to forest-dependent and indigenous peoples. However, the extent and scope of recovery measures vary among regions and countries.

49. Compared to the Western European and other States region, North America and some countries in Eastern Europe, other regions have encountered more challenges in providing timely stimulus packages and undertaking recovery measures, including for forests and the forest sector.

50. Financial support from Governments to help businesses and agencies survive the pandemic has included direct subsidies, grants, favourable interest rates, tax reductions and waivers on tax payments, additional credit lines and regulatory changes.

51. In many regions and countries, the pandemic has resulted in decreased income, revenues and investment and increased costs for forest companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises. It has also negatively affected the ability of the production of non-timber forest products to serve as a main source of income and food for local communities. Communities dependent on forest-based tourism for jobs and livelihoods have experienced major declines in their incomes. There has been decreased operational and capital investment in forestry in some regions, while responding to the pandemic has caused them to incur significant incremental costs with regard to the implementation of health and safety measures to protect workers and local communities. Furthermore, the prevailing uncertainty resulting from the pandemic has delayed capital investments in the sector.

52. International and regional cooperation has been negatively affected by the pandemic and the resulting restrictions, especially those concerning travel. The pandemic caused the suspension and rescheduling of several international meetings in 2020, which has had a negative impact on progress towards developing a common global approach or strategy to address the impact of COVID-19. On the other hand, the convening of virtual meetings has enabled some international and regional cooperation on forests and forestry issues to continue in all regions and globally.

53. The convening of virtual meetings has helped enable international and regional dialogues to continue. However, some stakeholders have felt that they have been left behind owing to technological limitations in their regions. Some stakeholders have questioned the effectiveness and quality of remote interactions and noted that such meetings are a poor substitute for in-person exchanges, because cooperation is more complicated, more effort is required and fewer people participate. In the short term, there have been advantages in that the virtual meetings have enabled more people to engage in meetings at a much lower cost, but in the long term, the limitations of virtual meetings for dealing with complex and difficult matters will need to be addressed.

54. At the global level there is concern that the global recession, especially in donor countries, could lead to reduced international public financing for forests, including through official development assistance (ODA).

#### IV. Potential responses and measures for the recovery of the forest sector and the enhanced contribution of forests to inclusive sustainable forest management

**55. Integrate sustainable forest management into pandemic recovery plans.** Sustainable forest management can make significant contributions to offset many of the social, economic and environmental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The value of forests for preserving biodiversity, regulating the climate and supporting livelihoods is undeniable. It is important to acknowledge the role of forest-dependent people, local communities and indigenous peoples as well as their vulnerabilities to crises such as pandemics. In particular, integrating forest-based action in national programmes related to land use, including energy, mining and agricultural programmes, will contribute to inclusive, sound and sustainable development after the pandemic.

**56. Renew commitment to internationally agreed forest-related goals and targets.** Sustainable forest management practices may reduce the risk of future pandemics and must be prioritized through renewed commitment to the internationally agreed forest-related goals and targets. Healthy forests are vital to addressing many pandemic-induced challenges, including through creating new jobs in afforestation, reforestation and agroforestry.

**57. Promote a One Health approach.** The current pandemic has highlighted the close interrelationship between the health of ecosystems, people and species. There is a need to work towards a new norm that integrates care for people, species and the planet, based on the “One Health” approach to addressing the global challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and pandemics.

**58. Build momentum to halt deforestation and unsustainable forest practices.** The response to the pandemic provides a unique opportunity to accelerate actions to tackle the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. In order to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and future zoonotic diseases, minimize their impact on global trade and supply chains of forest products, leverage action to build more sustainable production and resilient supply chains and provide more diverse livelihoods, it is important to build momentum to halt deforestation and unsustainable forest practices.

**59. Include the value of ecosystem services in recovery plans.** The contribution of ecosystem services provided by forests should be assessed and included in post-pandemic stimulus packages to enhance their value in the short, medium and long term.

**60. Integrate investment in forests into recovery plans.** Countries should integrate investment in forests and forest management into their national recovery strategies, taking into account their national conditions and priorities. Integrating disaster-risk reduction and adaptive planning within the forest sector and integrating national forest financing strategies into recovery plans will also be useful in proactively planning for and managing future crises similar to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**61. Strengthen institutions and policies.** In the long term, countries, depending on their national conditions and priorities, may consider taking additional steps to adopt optimal land-use planning and other measures to utilize the full potential of forests; address policy barriers; promote sustainable forest management; improve the security of land tenure; promote community engagement and secure the tenure rights of communities to forests and forest resources; and embed social protection and inclusive measures within forest sector policies and planning.

**62. Strengthen the role of science, technology and governance.** Science, technology and governance have critical roles to play in enhancing understanding of

the virus, enabling productivity growth and advancing education. There is a need for a better science-policy-society interface and more effective governance, in order to ensure that the best science-based evidence and technological solutions are available for crisis response and recovery efforts. Strengthening governance and supporting mechanisms to combat forest-related illegal activities, integrating disaster and risk mitigation approaches in planning, policies and response mechanisms and promoting intersectoral consultation and collaboration (for example between the forestry, mining and agricultural sectors) are important steps towards ensuring optimal and efficient land-use planning.

**63. Strengthen data collection, analysis and exchange.** This is critical in combating the pandemic and its devastating impact. The rapid spread and pervasive impact of COVID-19 requires Governments to provide effective, timely and inclusive responses in addition to traditional and non-traditional data sources, as well as data analytics tools.

**64. Increase resources from all sources for forests.** It is important to increase resources from all sources for forests at all levels in the post-pandemic era. At the international level, official financial flows to forestry, in particular ODA, are now more important than ever, as are technological cooperation and assistance, multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacity development. The Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network could also assist countries in addressing the adverse impact of the pandemic on forests through the development of national forest financing strategies.

**65. Seize the opportunities provided by the pandemic.** The pandemic has created opportunities to build back better and create jobs in a more inclusive, sustainable and environmentally friendly economy, while continuing with forest restoration and sustainable utilization. The pandemic has highlighted the need for enhanced forest education; the use of online learning platforms; and the expanded use of technology, in particular information and communications technology. There is a need to exchange best practices among countries, enhance scientific research on the role of forests in addressing zoonotic diseases and take full advantage of the traditional knowledge of local communities and indigenous peoples.

**66. Invite the Forum to carry out a second assessment.** The COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving situation. Regular assessments must be carried out to identify the broad range and long-term impact of the pandemic on sustainable forest management, as well as potential solutions and recovery measures. As the central body for following up on the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests, the Forum is uniquely positioned to take the lead in carrying out a second assessment, which will address, inter alia, the impact of the pandemic on and its interlinkages with wildlife and wildfires.

## V. Conclusion

**67.** The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe negative impact on all countries and regions of the world. The extent and scope of the impact, however, differ from country to country and region to region. Countries are taking various measures to protect their people and economies from the negative impact of the pandemic, in accordance with their national conditions and capabilities. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to confront this situation; however, there are huge opportunities for countries to work together collaboratively to minimize the adverse impact of the pandemic. The assessment carried out by the Forum secretariat is just an initial step towards identifying the immediate and most visible impact of the pandemic on sustainable forest management. As the pandemic is still unfolding, additional assessments and studies are needed to provide a better understanding of the short-, medium- and long-term impact of the pandemic on sustainable forest management and forest industries.

## **VI. Follow-up actions**

68. The following are suggested for discussion during the sixteenth session of the Forum:

(a) Consider the implementation of the proposed responses and measures, contained in section IV of the present report, at the national, regional and international levels;

(b) Invite the Forum secretariat, in collaboration with the members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, members of the Forum, regional and subregional partners and major groups to conduct a second assessment to identify the broad and long-term effects of the pandemic on sustainable forest management, as well as potential solutions and recovery measures.

---