

**Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General  
4 January 2022

Original: English

**United Nations Forum on Forests****Seventeenth session**

New York, 9–13 May 2022

Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

**Preparations for the midterm review in 2024 of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives, including the communication and outreach strategy of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

**Preparations for the midterm review in 2024 of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives**

**Note by the Secretariat**

*Summary*

At its seventeenth session, the United Nations Forum on Forests, should consider preparations for the midterm review in 2024 of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives, including the communication and outreach strategy of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030. The present note serves as the basis for discussions on agenda item 4 at the seventeenth session of the Forum.

\* E/CN.18/2022/1.



## I. Introduction

1. In accordance with the programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2022–2024 (Economic and Social Council resolution [2021/6](#)), the Forum, at its seventeenth session, should consider and decide on the preparations for the midterm review in 2024 of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives, including the communication and outreach strategy of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030.

2. The present note contains an overview of the results of the intersessional activities undertaken in the period since the sixteenth session of the Forum, including the outcome of the expert group meeting, held in November 2021, on the preparations for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests.<sup>1</sup>

3. It is important to note that the Forum will carry out the actual midterm review of the international arrangement on forests at its nineteenth session in 2024. At its seventeenth session, the Forum will therefore discuss and decide on only those actions, events and outputs required to be carried out or prepared in the period between the seventeenth and nineteenth sessions in order to facilitate the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests in 2024.

## II. Basis for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests

4. The midterm review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives is guided by the relevant provisions of Council resolution [2015/33](#), in particular sections I, on the international arrangement on forests beyond 2015, and XII, on the review of the international arrangement on forests; section IV of the United Nations strategic plan for forests (Council resolution [2017/4](#), annex I); and Council resolution [2021/6](#).

### A. Economic and Social Council resolution [2015/33](#)

5. In section I of its resolution [2015/33](#), the Council strengthened the international arrangement on forests, and decided the main components and objectives thereof.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the international arrangement on forests is composed of the Forum and its member States, the Forum secretariat, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network and the trust fund for the Forum. In the resolution, the Council identified interested international, regional and subregional organizations and processes, major groups and other stakeholders as partners involved in the international arrangement on forests.

6. In accordance with section XII of resolution [2015/33](#) and paragraph 66 of the strategic plan, the Forum should undertake in 2024 a midterm review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives, as well as a final review in 2030, on the basis of which, it should submit recommendations to the Council regarding the future course of the arrangement.

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<sup>1</sup> More information, including a questionnaire prepared by the Forum secretariat, a background paper and a Co-Chairs' summary, can be found at [www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html).

<sup>2</sup> The objectives of the international arrangement on forests are contained in paragraph 1 (d) of Council resolution [2015/33](#).

## **B. Section IV of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

7. Pursuant to section IV of the strategic plan, the Forum has two more issues to consider during the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests, namely: (a) an assessment of the progress in the implementation of the strategic plan; and (b) the Forum's contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see also paras. 39 and 45 below).

## **C. Economic and Social Council resolution 2021/6**

8. In accordance with annex I to Council resolution 2021/6, preparations for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests should also include the review of the effectiveness of the communication and outreach strategy of the strategic plan.

## **III. Key developments since the adoption of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33**

9. The present section provides a brief overview of the main functions of the components of the international arrangement on forests, the activities of relevant partners and the key developments that have taken place in the period since the adoption of Council resolution 2015/33 and the holding of the twelfth session of the Forum, which was the first session at which the Forum used its new method of work, in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

### **A. United Nations Forum on Forests and its members**

#### **Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

10. In paragraph 3 of its resolution 2015/33, the Council decided what the Forum's core functions were and requested that those functions be carried out on the basis of a strategic plan for the period 2017–2030.

11. The Council also requested, in paragraph 6 of the resolution, that the Forum hold annual sessions for a period of five days, restructure its sessions and enhance its intersessional work to maximize the impact and relevance of its work. The odd-year sessions of the Forum are focused on discussions on implementation and technical advice; the even-year sessions are focused on policy dialogue and development, and decision-making.

12. In accordance with paragraph 35 of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 (Council resolution 2017/4, annex I), the Forum is the responsible intergovernmental body for follow-up and review of the implementation of the strategic plan, including through providing guidance to the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and ensuring the smooth interplay between its odd- and even-year sessions.

13. According to paragraph 29 of the strategic plan, the individual and collective actions and commitments of the members of the Forum are decisive for the successful implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of its global forest goals and targets. Members may include in their voluntary national contributions, as

<sup>3</sup> In 2017, the Forum adopted the strategic plan and its first quadrennial programme of work for the period 2017–2020, and operationalized its new method of work.

appropriate, the forest-related contributions they intend to make with regard to other international forest-related commitments and goals, such as the implementation of 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.

### **Key developments since 2015**

14. The Forum made several decisions with regard to carrying out its functions and other mandated tasks. For example, the Forum developed the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and the quadrennial programme of work for 2017–2020, which it subsequently adopted at a special session, held in January 2017; restructured its sessions; renamed the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests as the United Nations forest instrument; extended its global objectives on forests to 2030; and agreed to update the United Nations forest instrument to make reference to the 2030 Agenda. The Forum also adopted guidelines on the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network and regularly contributed to the follow-up, review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

15. The Forum played an important role in advancing global partnership and collaboration on forests, including by providing guidance to the Collaborative Partnership on Forests to develop its workplan and its Strategic Vision towards 2030.<sup>4</sup> The Forum discussed the ways and means to promote a common understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management. On an annual basis, it discussed and considered progress made in the implementation of the strategic plan, the operation of the Network and the enhanced involvement of stakeholders in its technical and policy sessions. The Forum promoted the science-policy interface by receiving an increased number of scientific studies and reports and increasing interactions among experts. It adopted the updated guidelines for country-led and other initiatives and enhanced the contributions of those initiatives to the priorities of the Forum by organizing various stakeholder-led initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

16. The Forum performed positively during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, from March 2020 to April 2021. During that period, the Forum organized two substantive sessions and was among the first intergovernmental bodies to react immediately to an emerging issue of global concern to forests and people. It assessed the impacts of COVID-19 and, based on that assessment, recommended several measures to reduce the negative impacts of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector.

17. At its sixteenth session, in April 2021, the Forum drew the attention of high-level officials to major global forest-related developments and the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and forest-dependent people. In the period from March 2020 to the end of its sixteenth session, the Forum set a high standard of efficiency and effectiveness by continuing with its substantive work, adopting its new quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024 and discussing the key concerns of its members.

18. Members of the Forum also played an important role in advancing the work of the Forum by supporting the work of different components of the international arrangement on forests and providing timely advice, guidance and resources to facilitate the work thereof. During the initial reporting cycle in 2018, however, only 52 members submitted voluntary national reports and only 19 members announced voluntary national contributions.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/strategic-vision-2030/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/strategic-vision-2030/index.html).

<sup>5</sup> For additional information, see the background paper drafted by the Forum secretariat, available at [www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html).

## B. Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests

### Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

19. Pursuant to paragraph 17 (a) of its resolution 2015/33, the Council decided that the secretariat should continue to implement its six original functions, and, under paragraph 17 (b), added four additional functions. In the strategic plan (Council resolution 2017/4, annex I, para. 36), it is further stipulated that the secretariat services and supports the Forum in all matters related to the Forum's quadrennial programmes of work and the strategic plan.

### Key developments since 2015

20. Since the adoption of Council resolution 2015/33, the Forum secretariat has consistently delivered on its mandated functions and played its essential supportive role. In accordance with the resolution, the Forum established an open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group and a working group to support updating the United Nations forest instrument and developing the strategic plan for the period 2017–2030, as well as the quadrennial programme of work for the period 2017–2020. The secretariat supported the work of those bodies by providing operational, logistical and substantive support, including by preparing documentation (see General Assembly resolutions 70/199 and 71/285).

21. The secretariat followed up and operationalized the provisions of Council resolution 2015/33 on restructuring the sessions of the Forum. Within two months of the adoption of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and the quadrennial programme of work, the secretariat organized the twelfth session of the Forum. It also supported the work of the Forum, especially during the challenging time of the COVID-19 pandemic, by organizing virtual consultations and sessions. In the period between 2015 and 2021, the secretariat consistently advised the Bureau of the Forum on the organization and conduct of the sessions of the Forum. It prepared substantive documents, several analytical reports and background studies – including on the thematic priorities of the Forum and the interlinkages between forests and the Sustainable Development Goals – and enhanced the engagement of stakeholders with intersessional activities and the sessions of the Forum.

22. The secretariat played an important role in enhancing collaboration on forest-related issues, including through the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. It played a leading role in the preparation and adoption of the Partnership's Strategic Vision towards 2030, in Forum discussions on enhancing a common understanding of sustainable forest management, and in interdepartmental work on the interlinkages between forests, climate change and biodiversity. The secretariat organized several events during international conferences and meetings and prepared communication materials and briefs on issues of great concern with regard to forests. Further explanations on the activities of the secretariat in performing its functions, as contained in Council resolution 2015/33, are provided in sections A, C–H and J below.

## C. Collaborative Partnership on Forests

### Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

23. Pursuant to paragraph 20 of resolution 2015/33, the Council defined the core functions of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and, under paragraph 21, reaffirmed that the Partnership should continue to receive guidance from the Forum

and submit coordinated inputs and progress reports to the sessions of the Forum, and to undertake periodic reviews of its effectiveness. In paragraph 22 of the resolution, the Council also encouraged the Partnership and its member organizations to, among other things, strengthen the Partnership by developing procedures for its effective functioning and operation; assess its membership and the potential added value of additional members with significant forest-related expertise; develop a workplan, aligned with the strategic plan, to identify priorities for collective actions by all of the members of the Partnership or subsets of members and the resource implications of such actions; and further develop and expand its thematic joint initiatives, taking into account the strengths and focuses of the members of the Partnership.

24. Pursuant to paragraph 38 of the strategic plan, the Partnership's member organizations were encouraged to integrate the global forest goals and targets into their forest-related plans and programmes, where appropriate and consistent with their respective mandates (Council resolution 2017/4, annex I). In that respect, in paragraph 39, the Partnership was invited to support the Forum and its members in advancing the global forest goals and targets, including through cooperation and partnership among its members, implementing a joint workplan with the Partnership that is aligned with the Forum's quadrennial programmes of work and identifying collective actions by all or subsets of the Partnership's members, as well as associated resource needs.

#### **Key developments since the twelfth session of the Forum**

25. In response to the relevant provisions of Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, the Partnership also: (a) prepared its new policy document outlining its mission, functions, membership and delivery mechanisms and containing its rules of procedure;<sup>6</sup> (b) assessed its membership and added the secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora as a new member organization; (c) developed its workplan for the period 2017–2020;<sup>7</sup> (d) developed its Strategic Vision towards 2030; and (e) developed its workplan for the period 2021–2024.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Partnership developed and expanded its joint initiatives and other joint activities since the twelfth session of the Forum, taking into account the strengths and focuses of the Partnership's member organizations.<sup>9</sup>

### **D. Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network**

#### **Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

26. Under section IV of its resolution 2015/33, the Council reiterated that there was no single solution to address all needs in terms of forest financing and that a combination of actions was required at all levels, by all stakeholders and from all sources, public and private, domestic and international, bilateral and multilateral. It welcomed the positive work carried out by the facilitative process (see E/2009/118 and E/2011/42), and decided to upgrade the facilitative process and rename it the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network. The Council designated the Forum

<sup>6</sup> Available at [www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/cpf-policy-document/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/cpf-policy-document/index.html).

<sup>7</sup> Available at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/cpf-workplan-2017-2020/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Available at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/cpf-work-plan-2021-2024/index.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Additional information is available at: <https://www.cpfweb.org/en/>.

secretariat to manage the Network (resolution [2015/33](#), paras 13 (f) and 17 (a) (iii)), and also requested the Forum to define clear priorities for the Network in the strategic plan. The priorities of the Network were subsequently defined in paragraph 62 of the strategic plan.

### **Key developments since 2015**

27. From 2017 to 2020, the secretariat regularly prepared and submitted an annual report at each session of the Forum on major global developments related to financing sustainable forest management, the secretariat's activities in carrying out different priorities of the Network and other relevant mandated activities, and the availability of resources for its operations.

28. The Network's guidelines and measures to increase the Network's effectiveness were considered and adopted by the Forum its thirteenth session in May 2018 (see [E/2018/42](#)). At the Forum's request, the secretariat developed: (a) a generic guide and modular training package to assist countries in developing national forest financing strategies; and (b) officially launched the first phase of the Network's clearing house mechanism at the sixteenth session of the Forum, held in April 2021. The first phase involves the development of a website and three databases on funding opportunities, on information and learning materials for obtaining access to resources, and on lessons learned and best practices.

29. Also at its thirteenth session, in 2018, the Forum noted with appreciation the offer of the Government of China to establish and make operational a Forum secretariat office for the Network in Beijing. By the end of 2020, four rounds of consultations between the United Nations and China had been conducted on the draft host country agreement and the draft memorandum of understanding. Further consultations are required to reach a common understanding, including on the nature and scope of the activities of the proposed office. In accordance with the Forum's requests, regular updates on the matter have been provided by the secretariat at the annual sessions of the Forum.

30. The secretariat voluntarily conducted an internal assessment of the work and achievements of the Network for consideration by the Forum at its fifteenth session, in 2020 (see [E/CN.18/2020/5](#)). The assessment covered, among other things, the key challenges and opportunities for the Network. Owing to the global pandemic, the fifteenth session was not held in person, however, and the Forum could not have thorough deliberations on the assessment.

31. Since the Network was established in 2015, the secretariat has received 35 country requests and two subregional requests for the Network's assistance in developing national forest financing strategies and project proposals on mobilizing finance for sustainable forest management. Almost all such requests have been or are being responded to by the secretariat. As the result of the work of the Network, 23 national forest financing strategies and project proposals have been developed. Around 1,000 experts from the national and subregional levels have also been trained in developing national forest financing strategies and project proposals.

32. The work of the Network is funded mainly from extrabudgetary resources provided through the Forum's trust fund. From the inception of the Network in May 2015 to December 2020, the Forum secretariat had mobilized a total of \$4.8 million to carry out the Network's priorities.



## **E. Trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests**

### **Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

33. The trust fund for the Forum was established in 2001 to finance activities in support of the Forum from voluntary, extrabudgetary resources. The trust fund's resources have been critical to the implementation of the secretariat's core activities in support of the Forum, including its capacity development activities, arrangements for representatives to travel to Forum meetings, and staff and consultancy costs.

34. In section XIV of its resolution 2015/33, the Council urged donor Governments and organizations, including financial institutions, and others in a position to do so, to provide voluntary contributions to the trust fund. It called upon donor countries and international organizations, including financial institutions, and others in a position to do so, to provide financial support to the trust fund in order to support the participation of developing countries, according priority to the least developed countries, African States, small island developing States and countries with economies in transition.

35. In accordance with paragraph 64 of the strategic plan, the trust fund can be used to support the activities of the Network, and, under paragraph 65, the Forum is to monitor and assess the work and performance of the Network, including the availability of trust fund resources.

### **Key developments since the twelfth session of the Forum**

36. Every year since 2017, the secretariat has submitted a report to the session of the Forum on the operation of the trust fund, including the amounts contributed during the year, the source of the contributions and a description of how the funds have been expended. The Forum has also provided regular guidance on the operation of the trust fund. During the period between 2017 and 2020, an estimated \$4.6 million has been contributed to the trust fund by ten donor countries.<sup>10</sup>

37. The liquidity crisis affecting the United Nations over the past couple of years had a major impact on the Organization's financial situation and resulted in restrictions and limitations on its post and non-post resources. Since the adoption of Council resolution 2015/33, the mandates of the Forum, the scope of its activities and the number of its outputs have substantially increased. At the same time, however, the resources allocated from the regular budget of the United Nations have not always kept pace with those developments. The resources thus had to be supplemented by the trust fund to ensure the continued smooth operation of the secretariat in support of the Forum.

## **F. Implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

### **Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

38. In section V of its resolution 2015/33, the Council invited member States of the Forum to continue to monitor and assess progress towards implementing sustainable forest management, including the United Nations forest instrument and the global objectives on forests. The Council also invited member States to submit on a

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<sup>10</sup> Additional information can be found in paragraph 51 of the background paper, available at [www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html).



voluntary basis national progress reports to the Forum and requested the secretariat to propose a cycle and a format for voluntary national reporting for consideration by the Forum at its twelfth session.

39. According to paragraphs 67 to 69 of the strategic plan (resolution [2017/4](#), annex I), the Forum should assess progress in implementing the strategic plan in the context of its midterm and final reviews of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives, in 2024 and 2030. The assessment should be based on internationally agreed indicators, including relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators, that are relevant to the global forest goals and targets. The assessment should take into account voluntary national reporting on the implementation of the strategic plan, the United Nations forest instrument, voluntary national contributions and the results of the most recent *Global Forest Resources Assessment* of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, as well as inputs from the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its member organizations and other partners within and outside the United Nations system, including regional and subregional organizations and relevant stakeholders.

### **Key developments since the twelfth session of the Forum**

40. At the expert meeting on reporting to the Forum, held in Brasília in February 2017, a draft format for voluntary national reporting on progress towards the implementation of the strategic plan was proposed for consideration by the Forum at its twelfth session. After its review, the Forum provided feedback and requested the secretariat to conduct pilot testing with interested members of the Forum. At the second expert group meeting, held in Nairobi in November 2017, the draft was further revised. At the thirteenth session of the Forum, its member States adopted the draft as the format for initial voluntary reporting and decided to invite members to submit their first round of voluntary national reports for consideration by the Forum at its fifteenth session in 2020. In total, 52 voluntary national reports were submitted to the fifteenth session. Explanatory notes on reporting were also developed and submitted to the Forum at its fourteenth session, in 2019, with the aim of avoiding inconsistent interpretations of certain questions and terms.

41. In the period between April 2017 and May 2021, 19 members of the Forum submitted voluntary national contributions as their contribution to advancing the implementation of the strategic plan. In response to resolution 13/1, on the outcome of the thirteenth session of the Forum (see [E/2018/42](#)), the secretariat established a repository of voluntary national contributions on its website.<sup>11</sup>

42. In response to resolution 13/1, the secretariat prepared a concise “flagship” publication on progress towards achieving the global forest goals for release by the end of 2021, using the information contained in the first round of national reports. The flagship publication *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021* was finalized and launched, as mandated, on 26 April 2021, during the opening day of the sixteenth session of the Forum.

43. Through its resolution [2020/14](#), the Council requested the secretariat to propose refinements to the format for voluntary national reporting based on lessons learned during the first reporting cycle and from developing the flagship publication, for consideration by the Forum at its seventeenth session in 2022. The Council also invited the Forum to synchronize future voluntary national reporting with the five-year global forest resources assessment process, beginning with the next forest resources assessment cycle.

<sup>11</sup> See [www.un.org/esa/forests/documents/un-strategic-plan-for-forests-2030/vncls/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/documents/un-strategic-plan-for-forests-2030/vncls/index.html).

## G. Contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

### Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

44. Pursuant to paragraphs 35 and 36 of its resolution 2015/33, the Council decided that the Forum should offer to contribute to the implementation, follow-up and review of the forest-related aspects of the post-2015 development agenda (2030 Agenda), including its forest-related goals and targets, and affirmed that the Forum should also offer to contribute to the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

45. According to paragraph 70 of the strategic plan, the contribution of the Forum to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda should also be reviewed during the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests in 2024. In the strategic plan it is recognized that the Forum, as a functional commission of the Council, should contribute to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as highlight the contribution of forests to the Goals, to be reviewed in depth at the annual sessions of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

46. The strategic plan provides a framework for forest-related contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, among other international forest-related instruments, processes, commitments and goals (Council resolution 2017/4, annex I, para. 1). The shared United Nations mission, as defined in the strategic plan, is to promote sustainable forest management and the contribution of forests and trees outside forests to the 2030 Agenda, including by strengthening cooperation, coordination, coherence, synergies and political commitment and action at all levels (ibid, para. 4). Global forest goal 5 and its targets are also aimed at promoting governance frameworks to implement sustainable forest management, including through the United Nations forest instrument, and enhancing the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda (ibid, para. 27).

### Key developments since the twelfth session of the Forum

47. Since its twelfth session in 2017, the Forum, its members and the secretariat have been actively engaged in enhancing the contribution of forests to and their interlinkages with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda by conducting analytical studies, regularly submitting inputs to, organizing events on the margins of and participating in the meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

48. The secretariat commissioned seven analytical studies on the interlinkages between forests and various Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>12</sup> The studies generated interactive exchanges among members of the Forum and contributed to a better understanding of the important role of forests, and of the global forest goals, in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The secretariat also contributed to the relevant United Nations reports and documents for the high-level political forum on sustainable development through its participation in interdepartmental activities and related expert group meetings. It also provided substantive support to the Bureau of the Forum to facilitate its participation in the relevant meetings and events.

<sup>12</sup> The studies are available at [www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/background-analytical-studies/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/background-analytical-studies/index.html).

49. The Forum and its Bureau have provided regular inputs into the annual sessions of the high-level political forum on sustainable development since 2017.<sup>13</sup> The secretariat also organized an event, held on 8 July 2018, in conjunction with the session of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, entitled “Forest-based transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies: lessons learned and success stories”, which was aimed at bringing together representatives of the delegations to the high-level political forum on sustainable development at the time of its consideration of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 15.

50. In 2019, the Chair of the fourteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests participated in the ministerial segment of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, convened on 16 July, and delivered key messages highlighting the Forum’s input thereto. In 2020, the Chair of the fifteenth session of the Forum participated in the meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development on the theme “Building back better after COVID-19 and acting where we will have the greatest impact on the Sustainable Development Goals: protecting the planet and building resilience”, convened on 8 July, and delivered the key messages of the Forum to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

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

### Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

51. In accordance with paragraph 39 of resolution 2015/33, the strategic plan should outline a communication strategy to raise awareness of the work of the international arrangement on forests. It is further stipulated in the strategic plan, in its paragraphs 71 to 75, that a communication and outreach strategy should be developed to raise awareness, within and outside the forest sector, of the vital contribution of all types of forests and trees to life on Earth and human well-being. The communication and outreach strategy should draw on the strategic plan, synchronize with the quadrennial programmes of work and consider relevant themes, including those which are relevant to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Actors at all levels were encouraged to contribute to those efforts.

### Key developments since the twelfth session of the Forum

52. To fulfil its mandate, the strategic plan’s communication and outreach strategy was adopted by the Forum at its thirteenth session in 2018. Through resolution 13/1 (see E/2018/42), members of the Forum requested the Forum secretariat 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. The concise publication was presented to the Forum at its fourteenth session.

53. The secretariat also produced *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021*, as an important communication product, and launched it at the sixteenth session of the Forum in 2021. As reflected in the Chair’s summary of the sixteenth session of the Forum, delegations welcomed the secretariat’s work on promoting awareness of the role of forests during the COVID-19 pandemic through policy briefs and social media activity coordinated by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and encouraged additional advocacy related to the strategic plan. They also highlighted

<sup>13</sup> The Forum’s annual inputs to the high-level political forum on sustainable development are available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/inputs>.

the need for greater engagement with cross-sectoral audiences, further use of online and social media and virtual events, and the engagement of well-known persons to advocate the benefits of forests and the implementation of the strategic plan. The promotion and dissemination of *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021* was encouraged, including through the fifteenth World Forestry Congress, the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and other global events, as well as through communication materials aimed at non-technical audiences.

54. The annual celebration of the International Day of Forests has also been an important communication tool enabling the secretariat and countries to raise awareness of the multiple benefits and contributions of forests to global sustainable development, including with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the global forest goals. The themes of the International Day of Forests are identified in collaboration with the Partnership's member organizations. The theme for the International Day in 2017 was forests and energy; in 2018, forests and sustainable cities; in 2019, forests and education; and, in 2020, forests and biodiversity. In 2021, the theme was "Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being"; the theme for the forthcoming International Day in 2022 is on forests and sustainable production and consumption.

## **I. Regional and subregional involvement**

### **Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

55. Section VIII of Council resolution 2015/33 is dedicated to regional and subregional involvement in the international arrangement on forests beyond 2015, as is section III A 6 of the strategic plan. The provisions called for enhanced collaboration between relevant regional and subregional partners and the Forum, including with regard to the implementation of the strategic plan and the Forum's quadrennial programmes of work. Furthermore, relevant regional and subregional partners were encouraged to build and strengthen synergies between the strategic plan and their policies and programmes, and invited to provide coordinated inputs and recommendations to sessions of the Forum. Member States were also invited to consider strengthening regional and subregional processes or platforms for forest policy development, dialogue and coordination to avoid fragmentation and to advance the strategic plan.

### **Key developments since the twelfth session of the Forum**

56. In the period since the twelfth session of the Forum, the role of regional and subregional entities has been enhanced. The Forum has engaged with additional regional and subregional partners, and the secretariat has organized several expert meetings to enhance regional and subregional cooperation and coordination, and held dedicated panels during sessions of the Forum.

57. Through its quadrennial programmes of work for the periods 2017–2020 and 2021–2024, the Forum has dedicated a specific agenda item to collaboration with regional and subregional partners, thus providing an opportunity for those partners to share information on the challenges they faced at the regional levels, as well as the opportunities and lessons learned, with the broader global forest community.

58. In addition, regional and subregional partners have consistently contributed to the work of the Forum by providing inputs with regard to the thematic focuses of different sessions of the Forum and answering questionnaires prepared by the secretariat ahead of Forum meetings. Such interactions between the Forum and those partners have contributed to making the work of those bodies supportive of the

implementation of the strategic plan and more aligned with the global forest goals. The inputs were included in the official documents for discussion and decision at each session of the Forum.

## **J. Involvement of major groups and other relevant stakeholders**

### **Relevant provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution [2015/33](#) and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

59. Through section IX of its resolution [2015/33](#), the Council invited major groups and other stakeholders to enhance their contributions to the work of the international arrangement on forests beyond 2015 and requested the Forum secretariat to promote the involvement of major groups and other stakeholders in the work of the Forum, in particular leaders from the private and non-governmental sectors, including forest industries, local communities and philanthropic organizations.

60. In paragraph 50 of the strategic plan, it is stipulated that the Forum endeavours to work with major groups and other relevant stakeholders to identify ways to enhance their contributions to the achievement of the global forest goals and targets at all levels and their interactions with the Forum and the Partnership, including through networks, advisory groups and other mechanisms, to raise awareness, foster information exchange and dissemination, and facilitate coordinated inputs.

61. In paragraph 51 of the strategic plan, major groups and other relevant stakeholders such as private philanthropic organizations, educational and academic entities, volunteer groups and others are encouraged to autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms at all levels for interaction and participation in the Forum and other forest-related United Nations bodies.

### **Key developments since the twelfth session of the Forum**

62. Since the twelfth session of the Forum, representatives of the Forum's major groups have consistently engaged in the work of the Forum. More specifically, the participation of the private sector has been enhanced through its active participation in technical discussions, high-level panels and round tables at the sessions of the Forum. The secretariat has also collaborated with representatives of major groups, including by organizing expert meetings and the Major Group-Led Initiative in Support of the United Nations Forum on Forests, allocating them seats in various panels and providing travel assistance to facilitate their participation in the sessions of the Forum.

63. Through its resolution 12/1 on the outcome of the twelfth session (see [E/2017/42](#)), the Forum encouraged major groups and other relevant stakeholders to continue their involvement in the work of the Forum, including by elaborating proposals or workplans on how they could contribute to the implementation of the strategic plan and the Forum's quadrennial programme of work. Through its resolution 13/1 on the outcome of the thirteenth session (see [E/2018/42](#)), the Forum welcomed the joint workplan developed by major groups to accelerate achievement of the global forest goals and invited them to inform the Forum at its fourteenth session of the progress made in implementing their workplans. To ensure their continued active engagement, a specific agenda item on the contributions of major groups and other relevant stakeholders has been included for each session of the Forum in the quadrennial programme of work for the period 2021–2024.

## **K. Paragraph 42 of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and paragraph 66 of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

64. In accordance with paragraph 42 of Council resolution 2015/33 and paragraph 66 of the strategic plan,<sup>14</sup> it was decided that, in the context of the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests in 2024, the Forum could consider:

(a) A full range of options, including a legally binding instrument on all types of forests, the strengthening of the current arrangement and the continuation of the current arrangement;

(b) A full range of financing options, inter alia, the establishment of a voluntary global forest fund, in order to mobilize resources from all sources in support of the sustainable management of all types of forests.

65. Paragraph 43 of Council resolution 2015/33 provides that the establishment of a global forest fund could be further considered, should there be a consensus to do so, at a Forum session prior to 2024.

### **Key developments since the twelfth session of the Forum**

66. There is no indication that the global political landscape regarding the development of a legally binding instrument on forests and the establishment of a global forest fund has changed since 2015, nor that there is now a better chance of a consensus for the consideration by the Forum of such issues in the context of the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests in 2024. Moreover, the Forum's quadrennial programmes of work for the periods 2017–2020 and 2021–2024 did not include consideration of the establishment of a global forest fund by the Forum. In addition, recent developments regarding the negotiation of regional legally binding instruments on forests do not make clear whether the international community is ready to consider a global instrument. The divergent responses to the secretariat's questionnaire in July 2021 also indicate that the time may not yet be right to reach a consensus regarding consideration of a legally binding instrument on all types of forests and a global fund for forests.

## **IV. Conclusion**

67. There have been important developments regarding forests since the adoption of the adoption of Council resolution 2015/33, which strengthened the international arrangement on forests in 2015. Climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and increased inequality and poverty have been exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of which continue to pose great challenges to the integrity of the planet and to the sustainable development of countries and people. Addressing these challenges demands strengthened global solidarity and greater responsiveness by Governments, international organizations and all other stakeholders.

68. There have been significant achievements with regard to the international arrangement on forests and its components since the operationalization of its new *modus operandi* in 2015. Nevertheless, there is still space to improve the work of the

<sup>14</sup> Further information on the history of the Forum's discussions of these issues can be found in the background paper prepared for the expert group meeting on preparations for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests (paras. 90–96). Available at [www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html).



current arrangement, including by ensuring a stronger role for the Forum, as a universal body on all forest-related issues. It is critical for the intergovernmental agreements of the Forum to be effectively integrated into all international policymaking processes and outcomes regarding forests (e.g. the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use). In its capacity as a United Nations expert body on Sustainable Development Goal 15, the Forum can also play a stronger role in advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Such engagement and collaboration would ensure that forest-based actions play a role in addressing global challenges in the most effective manner.

69. The midterm review of the international arrangement on forests provides an opportunity for the Forum to make appropriate decisions to address these gaps. In that respect, the Forum should focus on identifying measures to strengthen the existing framework, structure and resources. These include accelerating implementation of the United Nations forest instrument, the strategic plan and its global forest goals; inviting an increased number of national reports and voluntary national contributions; and enhancing the capacity, ability and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network, its operations and its clearing house mechanism to respond more effectively to the needs of countries in mobilizing and gaining access to resources for forests from all sources. In addition, it is important to explore practical means for elevating the status of the Forum in global policy-setting on forests, including through enhanced interaction and exchange between the Forum and other forest-related bodies.

## **V. Proposed actions in preparation for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests**

70. In the light of the explanations provided in the present note, the Forum may wish to consider and decide to take the actions set out below, in preparation for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests, during the period between the conclusion of the seventeenth session, in May 2022, and the commencement of the nineteenth session of the Forum in 2024.

### **A. Actions related to the Forum and its members**

71. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To assess the progress made by the Forum and its members towards the objectives of the international arrangement on forests, as defined in Council resolution [2015/33](#);

(b) To analyse the performance of the Forum in carrying out its functions, as defined in paragraph 3 of resolution [2015/33](#), by identifying its impact on the global forest policy landscape and on the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, as well as the means to enable the Forum to broaden its impact;

(c) To explore additional measures to improve the use of the Forum's annual sessions and to engage members in the Forum's intersessional activities to foster the achievement of the global forest goals;

(d) To identify further means to encourage the submission of more voluntary national reports and announcements of voluntary national contributions by members of the Forum, as well as identify the means to encourage increased voluntary national contributions by members of the Forum and promote their effectiveness.



72. To carry out the above-mentioned tasks, the secretariat should, in consultation with members of the Forum and stakeholders, conduct an analytical study and submit it to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **B. Actions related to the Forum secretariat**

73. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To assess the achievements made by the secretariat in carrying out its functions and in making progress towards the objectives of the international arrangement on forests, as defined in Council resolution [2015/33](#);

(b) To analyse the gaps in and the existing capacity of the secretariat with a view to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations, strengthening its capacities, gaining a better understanding of its decision-making processes and procedures, and amplifying the impact of its activities;

(c) To identify additional measures to enhance collaboration and synergies and to reduce duplication with regard to forest-related issues at the global level, bearing in mind the mandates of different organizations and entities.

74. To carry out the above-mentioned tasks, the secretariat should, in consultation with members of the Forum and stakeholders, conduct an independent study and submit it to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **C. Actions related to the Collaborative Partnership on Forests**

75. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To assess the progress made by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests in carrying out its functions towards the objectives of the international arrangement on forests, as defined in Council resolution [2015/33](#);

(b) To assess the effectiveness, impact and added value of the Partnership's activities as outlined in its workplan, including with regard to its resources; output delivery; joint initiatives, including how the Forum can provide input thereto, and recurrent activities to foster the implementation of the strategic plan and the achievement of the global forest goals and the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) To consider the suitability of establishing criteria for membership of the Partnership;

(d) To assess how the Partnership could provide greater support to the policy development work of the Forum and assist countries to strengthen their implementation of the strategic plan, Forum resolutions and decisions on the ground, including the means to further benefit from the capacities of other international and regional stakeholders and partners;

(e) To assess the efficacy of internal communications within the Partnership to promote mutual synergies, reduce duplication of effort and enhance the Partnership's communications and outreach externally to promote awareness-raising of the multiple benefits of forests and raise the visibility of the strategic plan and the global forest goals within other forest-related processes.

76. To carry out the above-mentioned tasks, an independent study could be carried out, in consultation with the Partnership and Forum members. The result of the study

should be presented at an intersessional meeting to be organized by the Partnership (the organization-led initiative) for discussion, with a view to making proposals regarding the Partnership to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **D. Actions related to the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network**

77. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To assess the progress made by the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network towards achieving the objectives of the international arrangement on forests, as defined in Council resolution [2015/33](#);

(b) To assess the status of existing resources for forests available from all sources, including private funding, as well as the gaps and constraints with regard to gaining access to such funds;

(c) To review the performance of the Network and the impacts of its activities, the sufficiency of its resources and the challenges to and constraints on its work;

(d) To propose measures to increase the efficiency and added value of the Network and strengthen its capacity to facilitate and enhance access by eligible countries to resources for forests from all sources, and review the Network's guidelines in 2024, in the context of the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests, and revise them as needed.

78. To carry out the above-mentioned tasks, the secretariat, in consultation with members of the Forum and partners, should conduct an assessment of the performance, impacts and resource sufficiency and longevity of the Network and other measures to strengthen its work. The assessment should be presented for discussion at an intersessional meeting, the outcome of which should be submitted to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **E. Actions related to the trust fund for the Forum**

79. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To assess the impact of voluntary contributions to the trust fund on supporting the core activities of the Forum;

(b) To explore options to encourage sustained and adequate contributions to the trust fund;

(c) To identify the key challenges and constraints with regard to mobilizing adequate resources for the trust fund.

80. The secretariat should, in consultation with members of the Forum, undertake the above-mentioned tasks and present its findings and suggestions in a background note for submission to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **F. Actions related to the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

81. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To gather new information from member States on their actions in implementing the strategic plan since the fifteenth session of the Forum in 2020, the challenges and constraints they are facing in the preparation of voluntary national reports, ways to reduce duplication and reporting burden, the suitability of setting a 6- to 12-month timeline from the publication of the Global Forest Resources Assessment for the submission of voluntary national reports and regional and global issues of concern with regard to forests, in response to a concise questionnaire developed by the secretariat, as well as information gathered in 2019 and 2020 and submitted by member States to the fifteenth session of the Forum, along with voluntary national contributions and the most recent global publications and reports on forests;

(b) To invite the secretariat to collate the above-mentioned information in one background note for discussion at an intersessional expert group meeting, to be held prior to the nineteenth session of the Forum, and to submit its outcome document to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **G. Actions related to the contributions of the Forum to the 2030 Agenda**

82. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To assess the contribution of the Forum to the high-level political forum on sustainable development on the interlinkages between forests and the Sustainable Development Goals, and the extent to which the Forum's contributions are reflected in the outcomes of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, since the adoption of Council resolution [2015/33](#);

(b) To identify additional opportunities for the enhanced and direct contribution of the Forum, its secretariat and the Partnership on forest-related issues to the sessions of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, in particular when it reviews the forest-related Sustainable Development Goals, and to other global forest-related forums, including the three Rio Conventions (Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change);

(c) To propose measures to raise the visibility of forests at the meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and increase the political relevance of forests to the broader sustainable development agenda, including by highlighting the impact of other sectors on global forests and the wide range of benefits that sustainable forest management hold for the Sustainable Development Goals.

83. To perform the above-mentioned tasks, the secretariat, in consultation with members of the Forum and partners, should conduct an analytical study and present its findings at an intersessional meeting for discussion and submit the outcome document of that meeting to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **H. Actions related to the communication and outreach strategy of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030**

84. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To assess the progress made in the implementation of the communication and outreach strategy by members of the Forum, the secretariat, the Partnership, regional organizations and relevant stakeholders, and identify ways to address the challenges to furthering its implementation, including challenges with regard to achieving greater visibility of the strategic plan and the global forest goals;

(b) To assess the impact of the communication and outreach activities carried out to promote the strategic plan and the global forest goals, including the International Day of Forests and the usefulness of its themes to raise awareness of the multiple benefits of forests, as well as the visibility of the Forum's work within the United Nations system;

(c) To identify additional communication options, platforms and channels that have come into prominence in recent years to better reach target audiences and with greater impacts;

(d) To explore ways to make use of the capacities of members of the Forum and other players and partners at the global, regional and national levels to strengthen advocacy on the implementation of the strategic plan.

85. To perform the above-mentioned tasks, the secretariat, in consultation with members of the Forum, partners and the member organizations of the Partnership, should conduct an analytical study and submit its findings to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **I. Actions related to the involvement of regional and subregional partners**

86. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To assess regional and subregional entities' involvement in and contribution to the Forum's sessions since its twelfth session;

(b) To review developments regarding the establishment or strengthening of regional and subregional processes or platforms for forest policy development, dialogue and coordination to promote sustainable forest management while seeking to avoid fragmentation, in line with paragraph 28 of Council resolution 2015/33, as well as the progress made in implementing paragraph 27 of the resolution;

(c) To identify options for the further involvement of regional and subregional partners, including with regard to the better use of the capacities provided by existing regional partners, in the work of the Forum and its future quadrennial programmes of work.

87. To perform the above-mentioned tasks, the secretariat, in consultation with regional and subregional partners, should conduct the assessments and present them for discussion at an intersessional meeting, the outcome of which should be reported to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **J. Actions related to the involvement of major groups and other relevant stakeholders**

88. The Forum may wish to decide:

(a) To assess the level of engagement of the major groups with the Forum's work, including their contributions to the achievement of the global forest goals and targets at all levels and their interactions with the Forum and the Partnership through networks, advisory groups and other mechanisms to raise awareness, foster information exchange and dissemination, and facilitate coordinated inputs;

(b) To assess the efforts made by the major groups to autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms at all levels for interaction and participation in the Forum and other forest-related United Nations bodies;

(c) To assess the ability of stakeholder groups to deliver effective representation through appropriate and representative memberships and focal points, and effective consultation processes within their constituencies;

(d) To identify potential financial resources that could facilitate the development and implementation of quadrennial meetings of the Major Group-led Initiative in Support of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

89. To perform the above-mentioned tasks, the secretariat, in consultation with major groups and other relevant stakeholders, should conduct the assessments and present them for discussion at an intersessional meeting, the outcome of which should be submitted to the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group referred to in paragraph 91 of the present note.

## **K. Actions related to paragraphs 42 (a) and (b) of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33**

90. The Forum may wish to decide to defer consideration of paragraphs 42 (a) and (b) of resolution 2015/33 to the final review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in 2030.

## **L. Open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group on the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests**

91. To review all studies, analytical documents, assessments and outcomes of preparatory intersessional work related to the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests, as outlined in paragraphs 71 to 89 of the present note, the Forum may:

(a) Decide to establish an open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group, to be convened by the secretariat towards the end of 2023;

(b) Decide that the ad hoc expert group will be open to all members of the Forum, the member organizations of the Partnership, relevant regional and subregional partners and the representatives of the Forum's major groups, and that it shall be organized using existing resources, including extrabudgetary contributions, with a view to making proposals to the Forum at its nineteenth session on the midterm review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests, including the future steps to be taken by the international arrangement on forests beyond 2024;

(c) Decide that the Bureau of the nineteenth session shall, taking into account the outcome of the ad hoc expert group, conduct informal consultations with members

of the Forum, and prepare and submit to the nineteenth session the zero-draft resolution on the international arrangement on forests beyond 2024;

(d) Invite those members of the Forum that are in a position to do so to contribute to the Forum trust fund to enable the secretariat to organize the ad hoc expert group.

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