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**Emerging issues****Challenges faced by countries, strategies adopted and recovery measures taken by countries to reduce the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on forests and the forest sector****Note by the Secretariat***Summary*

In accordance with its programme of work for 2022–2024, the United Nations Forum on Forests, at its seventeenth session, will consider emerging issues. Under this item, the Forum will consider the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on forests and the forest sector. The present note provides background information and highlights the result of the intersessional activities undertaken since the sixteenth session of the Forum on assessing those impacts. It serves as the basis for discussions on agenda item 6 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, will consider emerging issues. Under the agenda item, the Forum will consider the challenges faced by countries, strategies adopted and recovery measures taken by countries to reduce the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on forests and the forest sector.

2. The present note serves as the basis for discussion on the above-mentioned issues under agenda item 6, Emerging issues. It provides an overview of the results of intersessional activities on the subject matter undertaken since the sixteenth session of the Forum. It also contains proposals that emerged from the intersessional activities, for consideration by the Forum at its seventeenth session.

## II. Background

3. In its resolution [2020/14](#), the Economic and Social Council requested the Forum secretariat to compile an initial assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on, inter alia, forests and the forest sector and to present the assessment to the Forum at its sixteenth session. In response, the secretariat conducted a thorough assessment of those impacts in various regions, in collaboration with members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders. The findings of the various regional assessments were discussed and reviewed in an expert group meeting held in January 2021. The outcome of that meeting and the findings of the assessments were presented to the Forum at its sixteenth session.

4. At the high-level round table on major forest-related developments held at the sixteenth session of the Forum, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector and the means to address those challenges were discussed. Noting that the pandemic was still unfolding, the senior officials from Member States and the United Nations system highlighted and proposed several actions for a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and an enhanced contribution of forests to inclusive sustainable development.<sup>1</sup> The main points that emerged from the discussions included the following:

(a) The COVID-19 crisis continued to affect all countries around the world, devastating people's lives, upending economies, threatening societies, increasing inequalities, having disproportionate adverse effects on the lives of women and girls, and thus causing major setbacks to global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030;

(b) The COVID-19 crisis had adversely affected the establishment of sustainable forest management, including forest governance and forest financing availability, and the livelihoods of forest-dependent people, causing potential setbacks in efforts to implement the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and achieve the global forest goals;

(c) The COVID-19 pandemic had been a stark reminder that the protection, conservation and restoration of nature, in particular forests, was essential to preventing future infectious and zoonotic diseases. Forests had the potential to offset many of the social, economic and environmental impacts of the pandemic and other global challenges. It was therefore critical to strengthen sustainable forest management and actions to halt illegal and unsustainable forest practices in post-pandemic recovery

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<sup>1</sup> See [E/2021/42](#), annex III, para. 34.

strategies. Forests, trees outside forests and agroforestry could also play an important role in addressing hunger and food insecurity in the post-pandemic era;

(d) The interlinked and mutually reinforcing threats of climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, forest fires, desertification, land degradation, pollution and other disasters continued to threaten people's lives and the ecological integrity of the planet. Forest-based actions, grounded in sustainable forest management, had a crucial role to play in addressing those threats, in line with relevant international agreements;

(e) The United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, including the six global forest goals, provided a framework of forest-based actions for the synergetic implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, and the Convention on Biological Diversity and the outcome of the ongoing consultations on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework;

(f) Science and technology, adequate financial resources and increased capacity-building, data collection and analysis were all critically important in addressing the negative impact of COVID-19 and reducing the risk of future pandemics. A better science-policy-society interface, increased investment and more effective governance were essential to a better recovery from the current crisis;

(g) Strengthening intersectoral consultation, cross-sectoral collaboration and stakeholder engagement was important to ensuring sustainable and integrated land-use planning. The pandemic had also highlighted the need for enhanced use of online learning platforms, and the expanded use of information and communications technology;

(h) Appropriate policy and fiscal frameworks were needed to facilitate and promote private sector involvement in sustainable supply chains. The private sector should be responsive and agile, and more proactive in advancing sustainable forest management practices;

(i) It was encouraged that the proposals contained in the note by the Secretariat on the impact of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector (E/CN.18/2021/7) be implemented at the national, regional and international levels.

5. In the discussions of the high-level round table held at the sixteenth session, it was highlighted that there was a need to conduct a second assessment, with a focus on assessing the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector.<sup>2</sup>

**Main proposed potential responses and measures to reduce the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on forests, contained in the note by the Secretariat on the impact of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector<sup>a</sup>**

- Sustainable forest management can make significant contributions to offset many of the social, economic and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need to integrate sustainable forest management into pandemic recovery plans. 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.

<sup>2</sup> E/2021/42, annex III, paras. 6 (j) and 22 (g)(ii).

- 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.
- The pandemic has highlighted the close interrelationship between the health of ecosystems, people and species. There is growing recognition of the need to work towards the One Health approach to addressing global challenges, including, as appropriate, climate change, biodiversity loss and the risk of emergence of zoonotic diseases. The contribution of ecosystem services provided by forests should be assessed and included in the COVID-19 recovery plans and measures to enhance those values in the short, medium and long term.
- The pandemic provides a unique opportunity to accelerate actions to tackle the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. It is important to build momentum to halt illegal and unsustainable forest practices to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and reduce the risk of future zoonotic diseases, minimize impacts on global trade and supply chains, leverage action to build more sustainable production and resilient supply chains and provide more diverse livelihoods.
- Member States 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Strengthening data collection, analysis and exchange is critical in combating the pandemic and its devastating impact. The rapid spread and pervasive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic requires Governments to provide effective, timely and inclusive responses, in addition to traditional and non-traditional data sources, as well as data analytics tools.

- 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 official development assistance, 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.
- 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. It has highlighted the need for enhanced forest education, the use of online learning platforms and the expanded use of 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.

<sup>a</sup> E/CN.18/2021/7, paras. 55–66.

### III. Challenges faced by countries, strategies adopted and recovery measures taken by countries to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector

6. The Forum, at its sixteenth session, requested 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 an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector. The Forum secretariat commissioned six regional studies<sup>3</sup> to collect information and relevant data from different countries and subregions to identify such impact and elaborate on the above-mentioned issues.

7. Upon the finalization of those studies, the Forum secretariat organized a virtual expert group meeting on the assessment of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector, held from 2 to 4 February 2022. 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 challenges faced by countries in addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector; the strategies and recovery measures being adopted by countries in combating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector; and the best practices adopted by countries and other stakeholders for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector. The outcome of the meeting was a summary by the Co-Chairs of the discussions and suggestions on the way forward. Relevant findings, analysis and suggestions for the way forward<sup>4</sup> that emerged from the second assessment and expert meeting are presented below.

<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2nd-assessment-Covid19>.

<sup>4</sup> The summary by the Co-Chairs is available at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Co-Chairs-Summary-EGM-COVID-19-impact-Feb-2022.pdf>.

## A. Challenges faced by countries in addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector

8. The pandemic revealed systemic weaknesses of global social, economic, development and environmental policies and institutions. Depending on their level of development, the availability of resources and location, the forest sector in different countries and regions, and forests, were impacted to different extents by the pandemic.

9. The major initial socioeconomic and environmental challenges related to forests and the forest sector arose from the health crisis posed by the pandemic and the crisis management measures adopted by countries to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The heterogeneous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had significant implications for crisis management and policy responses, and governments at all levels operated with great uncertainty trying to balance the economic and social pressures they faced.<sup>5</sup> Restrictive measures designed to slow the spread of the virus caused an initial shock to socioeconomic systems, resulting in a temporary gap in production, trade supply chains and slower activity in Eastern Europe<sup>6</sup> and changes in consumer behaviour in North America.

10. Other key challenges were due to mobility restrictions, the reduction of capital investments and the low prioritization of forests in national plans, the shortage of skilled personnel, financial and technological constraints, disruption of trade and supply chains of wood and other forest products, delayed forest operations, in particular planting, and price increases for various goods and services. In some regions, disruption of supply chains negatively affected the importation of machinery and spare parts for the forest sector. These impacts of the pandemic have been more visible in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region and Latin America and the Caribbean.

11. In Eastern Europe, the pandemic had negative impacts on the wood processing industry due to a decline in foreign trade and disrupted cross-border trading in countries with a clear export orientation. Forest production and forest management in this subregion were not strongly affected by the pandemic, and the demand for basic forest products remained unchanged. In general, the forest sector in Eastern Europe was perceived as less affected by and more resilient to the pandemic, whereas export-oriented wood processing industries experienced more difficulties due to restriction measures and trade barriers. Public pressure to conserve forest resources and ensure biodiversity protection increased, sometimes resulting in pressure on forest management. Businesses felt challenges from economic stagnation, increased expenditures, employee absence and performance losses. In North America, the forest sector, especially forest management, industry, and communities, demonstrated remarkable resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic. The major challenges related to travel restrictions for non-national specialists and the disruption of tourism and forest hospitality enterprises, but there does not appear to have been much impact on forest management operations.

12. Demand for construction timber plummeted in some countries at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic but mostly recovered later, not least due to economic stimulus packages. Nordic countries reported price increases for lumber and roundwood but cautioned that price developments may be volatile and in part influenced by developments external to the forest sector. Increased demand for packaging materials was reported by several countries, largely driven by online

<sup>5</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *OECD Economic Outlook*, vol. 2021, issue 2, No. 110 (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2021), p. 15, and *OECD Economic Outlook*, vol. 2021, issue 1, No. 109, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> ECE/TIM/2021/2-FO:EFC/2021/2.

shopping, which experienced a substantial boost during the pandemic. The increased use of forests for recreation was largely seen as an opportunity in most countries, with many emphasizing the importance of urban forests and other green spaces for human health.

13. Several countries faced extreme difficulty in securing resources to respond in a timely fashion to the socioeconomic and health-related needs emerging from the global pandemic. The insufficiency and unavailability of resources was exacerbated by weak infrastructure such as health facilities, insufficient health-care services and personnel and increased unemployment. Many countries saw a decrease in income, especially in the forest sector, tourism and recreational industries, due to supply chain disruptions and travel restrictions. The pandemic also affected global solidarity and multilateralism. Despite several initiatives to assist those in greatest need, some parts of the world are still struggling to get sufficient resources for addressing both the health crisis and economic recovery.

14. Forestry enterprises, especially in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, experienced difficulties in several ways. Mobility restrictions, trade barriers, new health and safety measures were some of the challenges faced by forest enterprises. Additionally, changing production and market dynamics, reduced availability of workers, global supply chain disruption and travel bans contributed to a challenging situation.

15. In Africa, the Asia-Pacific region and Latin America and the Caribbean, a decrease in income was observed in forest-based tourism and recreational industries due to supply chain disruptions and travel restrictions. It was reported that in some areas of Africa, women were disproportionately impacted as they lost their forest income when urban dwellers moved to rural communities and entered the forest sector. North America and Western and Eastern Europe reported a surge in the use of forests for recreational purposes during the pandemic, with some challenges arising related to local overuse. Forests and the forest sector in North America also received support through government stimulus packages.

16. In several regions, the reduction of forest enforcement and monitoring due to travel restrictions resulted in reduced inspection activities and an increase in illegal activities in forests, including illegal mining. This subsequently caused an increase in deforestation in some regions, as well as forest fires. In some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, an increase in deforestation and forest degradation caused by forest fires was reported to be a problem. Brazil, for example, lost the most primary forests in 2020, with a loss that was 25 per cent greater than in 2019, an area equivalent to approximately 1.7 million ha.<sup>7</sup> Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Mexico and Peru also reported considerable loss from deforestation. However, some countries in the Asia-Pacific region experienced a decrease in deforestation, forest degradation and forest fires due to the travel restrictions and reduced industrial activity.

17. While the designation of the forest sector as an essential service helped the forest industries to remain operational, it also brought its own challenges as companies had to deal with new health and safety conditions, changing production and market dynamics and, in some jurisdictions, reduced availability of workers. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating effect on many indigenous peoples and in tribal territories. Thousands of dwellers were infected. Many forest-based communities lost markets for their forest products and tourism services. In some countries, forest landscape restoration activities were

<sup>7</sup> World Resources Institute, S. Boehm and others, "State of climate action 2021: systems transformations required to limit global warming to 1.5°C", Washington D.C., 2021, figure 55.

unable to proceed, leading to both environmental and socioeconomic consequences. Efforts to prevent forest fires, illegal logging and land invasions in those territories were weakened. In the current context of the pandemic, such invasions not only threaten the forests but also endanger the lives of the inhabitants. Measures to prevent forest invasive species were also negatively affected.

18. In many developing countries, forestry financing and investments are always a challenge in the forest sector, but during the pandemic, the main challenge has been to mobilize adequate financing for forest conservation and the restoration of degraded areas. In Africa, the lack of financial resources caused countries difficulties to maintain the same level of staffing in some sectors, including the forest sector. These impacts may affect the performance of the forest sector in the short term. A shortage of financial resources was a major challenge in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region and Latin America and the Caribbean. Many developing countries had difficulties mobilizing adequate funding for combating the health and economic crises caused by the pandemic. The insufficiency of resources resulted in natural resource management programmes, including forests, not being recognized as a priority in some countries.

19. The lack of capacity, appropriate infrastructure and financial resources to access technology such as digital technology, drones and satellite data for forest monitoring in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region and Latin America and the Caribbean were additional major constraints for countries in those regions, hindering efforts to maintain levels of efficiency and effectiveness in their forest sector during the pandemic.

20. Some of the challenges faced by countries in addressing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector have also become persistent obstacles to implementing their recovery plans for the forest sector. In particular, supply chain disruptions, labour shortages and mobility restrictions continue to influence the recovery of forestry industry and tourism. For developing countries, these challenges continued to further exacerbate shortages of financial resource and falling foreign direct investment and impaired many recovery measures.

## **B. Strategies and recovery measures being adopted by countries in combating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector**

21. Governments around the world have adopted different strategies to limit the spread of COVID-19 and measures to promote economic recovery and stability. The reports from different regions indicate that the majority of the measures adopted have tended to focus on fiscal policy responses and strategies to address the health and economic challenges. The assessment also revealed that the majority of the countries in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region and Eastern Europe had adopted general strategies and recovery measures that were aimed at reducing the impacts of COVID-19 in general and not specifically directed towards forests and the forest sector, although the forest sector also benefited. In some countries, especially in Latin America, civil society also played a significant role in addressing pandemic-related challenges in some communities.

22. In the developed countries in Western Europe and North America, forests were deliberately included in both stimulus and pandemic recovery plans and programmes. For example, restoring degraded forests in the United States of America and Canada is seen as having the potential to contribute to the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the sequestering of carbon, adapting to climate change, combating biodiversity loss and creating new green jobs. Forests have also been included in plans and



programmes to build back better. Examples include the infrastructure plan of the United States and the European Green Deal and special funds for economic recovery and assistance to people in vulnerable situations.

23. In Eastern Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, some countries have instituted strategies and recovery measures specifically related to forests and the forest sector, including financial support in the form of subsidies, deferred payments and cost reductions. In other cases, existing forestry development programmes have been realigned to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well. For example, in India, the economic recovery package worth nearly \$800 million has a provision for assisting indigenous communities in forest protection and management. Pakistan has repurposed its tree-planting campaign under the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami programme<sup>8</sup> as part of the effort to fight the pandemic. The programme was developed against the backdrop of COVID-19 and focused on two objectives: protecting nature and creating green jobs. It provided jobs and income to many workers, mostly rural workers and youths laid off from factory jobs in cities due to the lockdowns. Kazakhstan also has announced a massive tree planting programme as a part of its recovery strategy.

24. In Latin America and the Caribbean, in addition to measures to contain and prevent the spread of the disease, the most common key response and recovery strategies included the designation of forestry activities as essential services that could work during the emergency period. The economic measures undertaken in that region included, inter alia, credit lines for small and medium-size companies, direct payment assistance to low-income households, programme and special funds for economic recovery and assistance to people in vulnerable situations. Some countries established specific financing facilities for the forest sector, as well as for small producers and farming families. In Brazil, for example, a plan for the Amazon region, the “Amazon Plan”, an initiative of three private banks (Itaú Unibanco, Bradesco and Santander), has the objective of leveraging sustainable development in the region. Argentina created the Forest Sustainability and Competitiveness Programme, and Peru has established a direct financing programme for forest plantations as well as a programme for a forest outgrower scheme and the sustainable management of forest production. In some cases, programmes to maintain existing jobs or create new ones were developed, some of which included provisions for paid leave. In Africa, a few countries with a better fiscal space have increased their social protection expenditure to cushion the most vulnerable households. For example, South Africa provided support to vulnerable businesses and set up an unemployment and insurance fund and tax subsidies for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. Senegal established a response and solidarity fund. However, in Africa there were no recovery strategies specific to the forest sector, with the result that the sector relied on the general national response and recovery strategy.

25. A common strategy adopted by the forest sector in all regions was the use of modern digital technology and innovative ways of providing services, conducting trade and conducting virtual meetings, among others. In the Asia-Pacific region, the measures included online platforms for providing services such as approval of permits for businesses (e.g. in Fiji), online bidding (e.g. in Japan), services for marketing seedlings and free rental of forestry equipment (e.g. in the Republic of Korea), the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (e.g. in Bangladesh) and virtual meetings and communication. The use of mobile phones for monitoring and surveillance by local communities and the adoption of digital technologies and advocacy were reported to be the most relevant measures that were broadly used, and continue to be used, in the

<sup>8</sup> More information is available at <http://www.mocc.gov.pk/ProjectDetail/M2QzOWJmMjUtZTU3MC00NmFkLWE4YmMtZDFhMmRIOGU2NGRh>.

sector, in particular for promoting post-pandemic recovery and the effective monitoring of the forest resources. In Africa, some countries accelerated the use of e-services for licensing and payments in the forest sector. That has improved service delivery and reduced unnecessary congestion in public offices. In the forest sector, electronic payments have been introduced for taxation, permit fees, licence fees, parking fees and other revenue sources. Digital platforms have also been used for online auctions, harvesting licences and log-tracking systems. Several other online services are in development to respond to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

26. In terms of regional and international cooperation and collaboration, a number of multilateral banks and donors, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Union,<sup>9</sup> the African Development Bank and the African Export-Import Bank,<sup>10</sup> initiated stimulus packages and support mechanisms that could be accessed by countries as loans and for emergency response and debt relief. The World Bank<sup>11</sup> announced the availability of \$160 billion to enhance the ability of the beneficiary economies to ease the effects of COVID-19 on small businesses and vulnerable populations. The African Development Bank established a \$10 billion COVID-19 response package, of which \$5.5 billion is for its sovereign operations in the African Development Bank member countries, and \$3.1 billion is for operations under the African Development Fund.<sup>12</sup> The International Monetary Fund approved \$2.7 billion for COVID-19-related emergency responses in African countries.

27. In southern Africa, one strategy has been the establishment of partnerships with bilateral donors to support environmental activities in recovery programmes. For example, a significant amount of resources were mobilized for conservation and ecotourism by the Peace Parks Foundation<sup>13</sup> and the Government of Germany in support of the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area in order to mitigate the devastating impacts of COVID-19 in four of the partner States (Angola, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe). In East Africa, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has developed the East Africa Resilience Strategy<sup>14</sup> to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 and other long-term impacts related to food and climate change. The strategy centres on several targets that are related to the forest sector, including the following areas:

- (a) Climate information and adaptation;
- (b) The link between resilient food systems and humanitarian food security needs;
- (c) Curbing the spread of the desert locust and protecting the livelihoods of affected communities;
- (d) Boosting the resilience of smallholders for COVID-19 recovery.

28. The important role of forests in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 is now more evident and recognized worldwide. At the global level, forests have risen in

<sup>9</sup> More information is available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_604](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_604).

<sup>10</sup> More information is available at <https://www.afreximbank.com/afreximbank-announces-3-billion-facility-to-cushion-impact-of-covid-19>.

<sup>11</sup> More information is available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/09/covid-19-coronavirus-drives-sub-saharan-africa-toward-first-recession-in-25-years>.

<sup>12</sup> More information is available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/african-development-bank-launches-record-breaking-3-billion-fight-covid-19-social-bond-34982>.

<sup>13</sup> More information is available at <https://www.peaceparks.org/eur-4-million-COVID-19-relief-efforts-in-kaza>.

<sup>14</sup> Available at <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/CB0692EN>.

priority on the political agenda during the pandemic, for several reasons, including an increased recognition of the benefits of forests for human health and their importance to rural economies. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to that increased recognition. Additionally, the contribution of forests to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and to climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as their importance for the conservation of biodiversity, are now accepted concepts. As a result, a number of developed countries and countries with economies in transition have adopted or initiated policies addressing nature conservation and the restoration of forest ecosystems and have started working on the conceptualization of resilient forest management systems, which integrate the role of forests into a green economy. Other recovery measures include targeted forestry programmes linked to wider objectives, in particular with regard to climate change, forest fires, pests and disease management, as well as enhanced regional cooperation, especially on fire management.

### **C. Best practices adopted by countries and other stakeholders for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector**

29. While at this stage it may be too early to label as a best practice any of the following practices to address the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic poses for forests and the forest sector, there are a number of strategies and measures that have been identified as effective in reducing the impact of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector.

30. The designation of the forest sector as an essential service has been common to all regions. That designation helped keep most forest industries open and contributed to minimizing the negative impacts of measures to curb the spread of the disease. In some regions, such as Europe and Latin America, some companies actually recorded increased demand for their products (e.g. packaging, building and hygiene materials) as a result of the pandemic.

31. Another common practice in all regions was the use of digital technology and information and communications technology for communication, surveillance and monitoring, the provision of online services and e-commerce. In some areas, virtual forest tours were created to raise awareness of the importance of forests and to build interest in post-pandemic ecotourism activities.

32. Other practices were the provision of financial support to forest-based enterprises, including the provision of concessionary loans, the extension of loan repayment periods and credit lines for small and medium-sized companies in the production sector and rural producers. In Latin America, emergency credit lines are notable, in particular those for small and medium-sized companies in the production sector and rural producers.

33. The integration of sustainable forest management and forest industries in recovery and build-back-better strategies aimed at promoting recovery from the health and economic crises caused by the pandemic, contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and combating loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, as has been done by some countries in Europe, North America and Latin America, appears to offer an efficient and effective approach for enhancing the role and contribution of forests in sustainable development.

34. Strengthened international cooperation at the global, regional and subregional levels is an effective way to mobilize resources and provide support for recovery of the forest sector and increase the contribution of forests and forest ecosystems to a “green” recovery, especially in countries that have limited fiscal space.

## IV. Conclusion

35. The continuing COVID-19 pandemic has caused severe health and socioeconomic impacts in all countries and regions of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous disruption to human lives, livelihoods and economic systems worldwide. The major socioeconomic and environmental challenges related to forests and the forest sector are a result of mobility restrictions, the reduction of capital investments and the low prioritization of forests in national plans, the shortage of skilled personnel, financial and technological constraints, the disruption of trade and supply chains of forest products and delayed operations, in particular planting, and price increases for various goods and services. Countries around the world have adopted different strategies to protect their peoples from the COVID-19 pandemic and to promote economic recovery and stability based on their national conditions and capabilities.

36. Implementation of the recovery measures has been affected by a number of challenges, most of which stem from mobility restrictions, which have resulted in the disruption of forest management, industrial activities, trade, supply chains, tourism and hospitality services. In most developing countries, the major challenge was the shortage of financial resources due to limited fiscal space. Many of the countries have had to borrow money to address the health and economic problems caused by the pandemic, which has significantly increased their debt burden and the risk of falling into debt stress. At the same time, the important role that forests play in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 is now more evident and recognized worldwide. At the global level, forests have also risen in priority on the political agenda during the pandemic, for several reasons, including an increased recognition of the benefits of forests for human health and the planet and their importance to economies. Additionally, the contribution of forests to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and to climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as their importance for the conservation of biodiversity, are now accepted concepts. A number of developed countries and countries with economies in transition and developing countries have adopted or initiated policies and recovery programmes that incorporate nature conservation and restoration of forest ecosystems.

37. Unfortunately, there continues to be a general lack of knowledge among the public about the full value of forests, forest products and services and their contribution to the livelihoods and health of people and the planet. The lack of knowledge of the full value of forests, how to use them in national accounting, and how to translate such knowledge into concrete actions are fundamental gaps that have to be addressed. In this regard, the value of forest services and products and the benefits of sustainable forest management for adaptive and resilient development need to be communicated more broadly to the public and decision makers. Improved communication can help to increase the understanding of the important role of forests and sustainable forest management.

38. Because the COVID-19 pandemic is still unfolding, and given the long-term nature of trends in forestry, the assessment of the impact of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector should be a continuous and long-term task. Such assessments could help Governments and other stakeholders to better understand the impacts, find solutions, identify the best practices, improve their recovery measures and strategies and incorporate all these elements into the long-term recovery of and development plans for the forest sector.

## **V. Recommendations for strengthening recovery of the forest sector from the impacts of COVID-19 and the enhanced contribution of forests to inclusive and sustainable recovery**

39. The key proposals emanating from the regional assessments of the strategies and recovery measures adopted by countries in combating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector, and from the expert group meeting held in January 2022, are summarized below.

40. Actions and policies intended to reduce the impact of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector should be conducted in a manner that accelerates implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and its global forest goals,<sup>15</sup> as well as other global forest-related goals and commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals. These actions should be linked to existing forest sector policy priorities, especially climate change mitigation and adaptation.

41. Strategies that promote nature-based solutions to address short- and long-term shocks to livelihoods should be implemented, and policies to conserve, restore and sustainably manage and use forests should be promoted as a means of creating resilient and sustainable recovery plans.

42. Innovative forest management practices and forest landscape restoration should be promoted to increase the economic performance of forests. Information exchange for business practices, new market opportunities and digitalization should also be enhanced.

43. More attention should be paid to strengthening the sociocultural services provided by forest ecosystems. It is desirable to improve communication and outreach to the broader population with respect to the benefits of sustainable forest management for adaptive and resilient forests and to reduce any negative image relating to forest management.

44. Improved collaboration among stakeholders from the forest sector and wider society, along with efficient international cooperation, is required to align opposing interests and cope with the uncertainties and challenges posed by the pandemic.

45. Greater investments in new business opportunities, in particular in enhancing the skills of youth, women and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, should be promoted. The capacity of civil society groups and their engagement in the implementation of recovery strategies should be strengthened.

46. Public and private investments are needed to enhance forest resiliency and the capacity to adapt to climate change and can help forests to cope with the negative impacts of climate change, protect people against current diseases and reduce future pandemics.

47. Enhancing international cooperation in the areas of capacity-building, including in forest education, and technological cooperation should be a main component of all strategies and measures to minimize the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector. Technological solutions are emerging as areas of opportunity for the forest sector, in the specific areas of training and communication. There is a need to build capacity to accelerate the migration to the digital age with respect to the monitoring and evaluation of forest resources and promote investments in this area.

48. International cooperation in the form of financial and policy measures can build capacity in sustainable forest management. It is important to leverage support from

<sup>15</sup> [E/2017/10](#), annex I.

the private sector and the international development community for a post-COVID-19 recovery and to identify additional funding alternatives to support sustainable forest management and the production of sustainable timber and non-timber products.

49. Measures should be taken to strengthen the monitoring and inspection of forests to prevent deforestation and forest fires and to promote sustainable development. Forest-dependent communities should be supported through social protection and livelihood options, as well as in capital investments such as seeds and income-generating activities. The most vulnerable and marginalized groups such as indigenous peoples have specific challenges and needs, and they should be key stakeholders engaged in building back better. The impacts of the pandemic on forest-based communities and indigenous peoples should be assessed, with their involvement.

50. Collaboration on forest-related policies, education and scientific research should be strengthened with other relevant sectors and stakeholders, including, in particular, with the health sector, in line with the One Health framework. Interdisciplinary research and synergies between foresters, environmentalists and experts in human and wildlife infectious diseases should also be enhanced to prevent future zoonotic diseases.

## **VI. Proposals for consideration by the Forum at its seventeenth session**

51. The Forum may wish to:

(a) Encourage its members, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and relevant stakeholders to integrate relevant proposals contained in section V of the present note into their recovery strategies and response measures relating to COVID-19, and in this respect, request the secretariat to raise awareness of these proposals at the national, regional and international levels;

(b) Consider continuing to monitor and assess the broad range of impacts, including long-term impacts, of the pandemic on sustainable forest management, as well as potential solutions and recovery measures;

(c) Invite countries and organizations which carried out specific initiatives to reduce the impacts of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector, share such information with the Forum secretariat for further dissemination to members of the Forum and organize side events at the eighteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests and share their experiences, achievements and lessons learned.