

Co-Chairs' Summary
Expert Group Meeting on
Quadrennial Programme of Work of the UN Forum on Forests for the period 2021-2024
14-15 November 2019, UN Office at Geneva

Introduction

1. The Expert Group Meeting on the Quadrennial Programme of Work (4POW) of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) for the period 2021-2024 was held from 14 to 15 November 2019 at the UN Office at Geneva. The meeting brought together 89 experts from Member States, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and subregional organizations and processes, as well as major groups and other stakeholders.
2. The main objective of the meeting was to review and discuss the results of the survey on the 4POW 2021-2024¹ and elaborate possible elements for the 4POW 2021-2024, with a view to making its proposal, taking into account lessons learned from the implementation of the 4POW 2017-2020 as set out in ECOSOC resolution 2017/4². Based on its review, the expert meeting was expected to make a proposal on the 4POW 2021-2024 for consideration by UNFF15.

Agenda item 1. Election of Co-Chairs

3. Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge of the UNFF Secretariat, opened the meeting and welcomed the experts. Following the opening of the meeting, Mr. Rob Busink, Vice-Chair of the UNFF15 Bureau and Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, Nature and Biodiversity Department of the Netherlands and Mr. Javad Momeni, Vice-Chair of the UNFF15 Bureau and Director, Division for UNESCO and International Scientific Cooperation, Department of Sustainable Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran were elected as the Co-Chairs of the expert group meeting.

Agenda item 2. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

4. The Co-Chairs invited the experts to review and adopt the provisional agenda and programme of work of the meeting. The draft provisional agenda and programme of work was adopted.
5. The Co-Chairs invited Mr. Trepelkov to deliver his opening remarks. In his opening remarks, Mr. Trepelkov highlighted achievements made, and lessons learned during the current quadrennial programme of work of the Forum, including the fulfillment of all expected tasks and mandates provided in the ECOSOC Resolution 2015/33 such as the development of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests and its Global Forest Goals and targets, as well as their adoption by the UNGA. He further underscored growing recognition of importance of forests and in accelerating the progress towards the achievement of the SDGs as expressed in the many forest-related commitments and actions announced at the 2019 Climate Action Summit and the 2019 SDG Summit, noting the need to ensure that the commitment to the UNSPF remains steadfast through the new 4POW, and the

¹ To gather ideas on possible elements for the 4POW 2021-2024, a brief questionnaire was circulated to Members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders in September 2019. All the survey responses are available on the UNFF website at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/programme-of-work/questionnaire-4pow-21-24/index.html>.

² E/RES/2017/4, Annex II, paragraphs 1-6 and tables 1-4

importance to ensure coherent implementation of the global forest policies, taking into account important forest-related developments in other forums such as the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the post-2020 global biodiversity framework scheduled to be decided in October 2020 and the first global stock-take of the Paris Agreement on climate change scheduled to be held in 2023.

Agenda item 3. Development of a proposal on the 4POW 2021-2024

a) Mandate for the development of the 4POW 2021-2024 and relevant provisions of the UNFF11 resolution

6. Mr. Hossein Moeini-Meybodi, UNFF Secretariat, provided an overview of the mandate for the development of the 4POW 2021-2024 and relevant provisions of the 2017 UNFF Special Session resolution. He stated that in accordance with the 4POW 2017-2020, the fifteenth session of the UNFF (UNFF15), to be held on 4-8 May 2020 at UNHQ, New York, is expected to adopt the 4POW 2021-2024.

b) Presentation of the Discussion Paper, including the results of the survey and possible elements for the 4POW 2021-2024

7. Ms. Stephanie Caswell, UNFFS consultant, presented the Discussion Paper on possible draft elements for the Forum's 4POW 2021-2024³. She provided an overview of responses to Questions 1-3 of the four-question survey circulated by the Secretariat on 19 August⁴, offered some observations on the current 4POW which may be useful going forward, and, on this basis, suggested possible draft elements for the 4POW 2021-2024. She made the following points:
 - a. The 4POW 2021-24 offers an opportunity to further enhance the Forum's work in support of the UNSPF 2030 and the GFGs and targets, as well as the linkages between odd- and even-year Forum sessions;
 - b. As of mid-October, the Secretariat had received 35 responses from 28 Member States and 7 partner organizations:
 - i. Regarding thematic priorities, respondents were fairly divided between specifying which GFGs would be the focus for each biennium in the 4POW or leaving the decision on the GFG priorities to the Bureau, with some respondents suggesting a hybrid approach which would involve closer consultations with Member States, e.g. during Forum sessions;
 - ii. The majority of respondents supported operational priorities/elements focused on: GFFFN operations/resources; follow up to the flagship publication and timing for the next voluntary national reporting; VNC announcements and follow up; communication and outreach; and preparation for the 2024 mid-term review of the effectiveness of the IAF (Question 2);

³ Discussion Paper is available on the UNFF website at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Consultant-Paper-Possible-Elements-4POW-2021-24.pdf>.

⁴ Question 4 of the survey focused on the organization of the Forum's technical sessions. Since this is not directly related to the 4POW, it is not covered in the Discussion Paper.

- iii. The vast majority of respondents considered the contributions of CPF and regional, subregional and MG partners to be important elements of the next 4POW. Most respondents also favoured elements on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the global stock-taking under the Paris Agreement at an appropriate time during the quadrennium (Question 3).
- c. While responses to the survey provide a useful indication of views on the next 4POW, it is also useful to consider experience with the current 4POW which piloted the new system of annual Forum sessions, alternating between technical and policy discussions, and which was largely “programmed” by tasks set out in the UNFF 11 resolution.
- d. With the exception of the IAF reviews, all these tasks have been or soon will be completed, which means the 4POW 2021-2024 has a more “open” starting point and offers an opportunity to further enhance the Forum’s work in support of the UNSPF 2030 and the GFGs and targets, as well as the linkages between odd- and even-year Forum sessions.
- e. A number of areas might benefit from further emphasis and/or clarification in the next 4POW given current guidance in ECOSOC resolution 2017/4 (Annexes I and II), particularly regarding the Forum’s contribution to the UNSPF 2030 and the central role of the GFGs and targets in this regard. Core guidance for the 4POW is contained in paragraph 34 of the UNSPF which states that the “4POWs are to reflect the Forum’ contribution to the GFGs and targets”.
- f. The proposed elements for the 4POW 2021-2024 contained in the Annex 4 of the Discussion Paper aim to: i) mainstream GFGs/targets in the Forum’s agendas; ii) reflect that all Forum work/activities support UNSPF implementation; iii) highlight linkages between GFGs & SDGs; iv) thematically link odd and even-year sessions within a biennium based on GFGs; v) reflect that technical session outputs inform/feed into next policy session; vi) reduce duplication across agenda items; and vii) provide flexibility in identifying specific future tasks as needed.

c. Possible elements for the 4POW 2021-2024

- 8. Following presentations by the Secretariat and the consultant, experts discussed possible elements for the 4POW 2021-2024. A summary of key suggestions and proposals are reflected in paragraph 10 of this summary.

d. Finalization of a proposal on the 4POW 2021-2024

- 9. Participating experts also discussed and proposed several modifications to the consultant’s proposed elements for the 4POW. Annex I of this summary contains elements for the 4POW 2021-2024 which draw on the suggestions made by the experts during the meeting.

Agenda item 4. Summary of discussions of the EGM

10. Following are the Co-Chairs summary of key suggestions and proposals made by experts on the 4POW 2021-2024. Annex I also contains proposed elements for the 4POW 2021-2024, based on the views expressed by experts during the expert group meeting:

General Consideration

- a. The 4POW should be **flexible and clearly structured in support of the implementation of the UNSPF 2030**, addressing specific GFGs and targets with a view to advancing their achievement; The 4POW should reflect a **cross-sectoral approach**, avoid looking at forests in isolation and promote engagement with other key sectors;
- b. The 4POW should highlight **interlinkages between forests and climate change and forests and biodiversity**;
- c. The **science-policy interface** and **emerging issues** should be addressed in the context of the Forum's technical discussion;
- d. The 4POW should address the **contributions of forests to the SDGs** and continue to provide concise annual inputs/messages to the HLPF;
- e. The **means of implementation** should be addressed at all Forum sessions;
- f. The 4POW should promote Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs);
- g. The 4POW should incorporate a **gender perspective** in the Forum's work;
- h. There needs to be greater involvement of the **private sector** in the Forum's work, and several targets provide entry points in this regard;

4POW Themes

- a. The 4POW should give **more prominence to the GFGs and targets** as thematic priorities. The decision on which GFGs and targets will be the thematic focus of each biennium may be left to **the Bureau** based on an exchange of views by the Forum at appropriate sessions;
- b. It is important to **thematically link technical and policy sessions** within a biennium based on the GFGs and targets, with technical session outputs feeding into and informing policy discussions;
- c. The Bureau may **highlight specific GFG targets or sub-themes** based on the SDGs under review by the HLPF or new/recent global forest-related developments, for example in the context of the Rio Conventions. Suggestions made included governance, biodiversity, green economy, emerging issues, catastrophic events (e.g. fire, tropical storms), among others;

Organization of technical sessions (2016 and 2018)

10. It is important that the exchange of experiences among participants on the themes be **interactive and involve perspectives from outside the forest sector**. The organization of work should provide the time and format needed to foster and stimulate such interactions within the one-week time limit;
11. A variety of suggestions were made in this regard, including reducing the number of panels and panelists, better focusing panels and better time management, inviting the leaders of the UN bodies and those outside the forest sector to present their linkages with the forests, reducing time for opening statements, and making use of side events; and
12. Panels may also be a useful way to explore linkages between the GFGs and targets and the SDGs.

Agenda item 5: Closure of the meeting

13. The Co-Chairs will circulate the draft Co-Chairs' summary to the participating experts for any factual corrections before the end of November 2019.
14. The UNFF Secretariat will incorporate main outcome of the expert group meeting on the 4POW 2021-2024 in the relevant UNFF15 documentation for the Forum's consideration at its fifteenth session in May 2020.

Annex 1. Draft elements for the Forum’s Quadrennial Programme of Work 2021-2024

General guidance⁵

1. The Forum’s quadrennial programme of work (4POW) for the period 2021-2024 represents the Forum’s contribution to implementing the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 and achieving the Global Forest Goals and associated targets and provides a framework for setting the agendas for annual sessions within the quadrennium.
2. The Forum’s 4POW 2021-2024 includes two thematically-linked bienniums: 2021-2022 (16th and 17th sessions of the Forum) and 2023-2024 (18th and 19th sessions of the Forum). Thematic priorities for each biennium will be based on the Global Forest Goals and targets, taking into account the post-2020 programme of the HLPF and relevant international forest-related developments. The Bureau will decide the thematic priorities, taking into account guidance from the Forum.
3. The 16th and 18th sessions of the Forum in 2021 and 2023 are technical sessions which will include an interactive exchange of experiences on thematic priorities among Members of the Forum, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its member organizations, regional and subregional organizations, and Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders. The interactive exchange will include consideration of the science-policy interface and emerging issues and will incorporate a gender perspective.
4. The output of the technical sessions will be a concise chair’s summary, including proposals, for consideration by the subsequent policy session in 2022 and 2024. The output of the policy sessions will be a concise Forum resolution on next steps. The high-level segment in 2024 will issue an appropriate outcome document.
5. The Forum’s work programme elements for the 2021-22 and 2023-24 bienniums are contained in tables 1 and 2 and tables 3 and 4, respectively.

⁵ Based on paragraph 34 of the UNSPF 2030, paragraphs 1-3 of Annex II of ECOSOC res. 2017/4 and suggestions made during the expert group meeting.

Forum 4POW 2021-2024: 2021-2022 Biennium (tables 1 and 2)

Table 1: 16th session of the Forum (2021) - Technical session

Priorities in support of implementation of the UNSPF 2030
1. Thematic Priorities for the 2021-22 biennium: Selected GFGs and associated targets
2. Technical session elements
a. Contributions of Members of the Forum to implementing the UNSPF 2030: New VNC announcements; VNC updates and follow up related to the thematic priorities
b.
c. Contributions of, and enhanced cooperation with, partners to achieving the thematic priorities:
i. Contributions of CPF, its member organizations and the UN system to achieving the thematic priorities; progress on the CPF work plan
ii. Contributions of regional and subregional organizations and processes to achieving the thematic priorities
iii. Contributions of Major Groups and other relevant stakeholder, including private and philanthropic communities, to achieving the thematic priorities; progress on Major Group work plans
d. Interlinkages between the GFGs and targets and the SDGs under review by HLPF 2021 ⁶ , the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (to be agreed in 2020) and other relevant international forest-related developments
e. Implementation of the UNSPF 2030 Communication and Outreach Strategy, activities regarding International Day of Forests 2021
f. Means of implementation, including GFFFN operations and resources
g. Monitoring, assessment and reporting: Forum flagship publication (for release by the end of 2021); global core set forest-related indicators; FRA 2020
h. Forum Trust Fund

⁶Element 2.c will be adjusted as needed to reflect how the SDGs are addressed in the post-2020 HLPF program.

Table 2: 17th session of the Forum (2022) - Policy session

Priorities in support of implementation of the UNSPF 2030
<p>1. Thematic priorities for the 2021-22 biennium: GFGs and associated targets (<i>same as UNFF 16</i>)</p>
<p>2. Policy session elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Consideration of proposals contained in the UNFF16 Chair’s summaryb. New VNC announcementsc. Progress on the CPF work plan, including as related to the thematic prioritiesd. Interlinkages between the GFGs and targets and the SDGs under review by HLPF 2022⁷ and relevant international forest-related developmentse. Implementation of the UNSPF 2030 Communication and Outreach Strategy, activities regarding the International Day of Forests 2022f. Means of implementation, including GFFFN operations and resourcesg. Monitoring, assessment and reporting: Second round of voluntary national reporting on progress in implementing the UNSPF, the UN Forest Instrument and VNCs (input to 2.h)⁸h. Preparations for the mid-term review of the effectiveness of the International Arrangement for Forests in achieving its objectives in 2024 (consistent with section XII of ECOSOC res. 2015/33 and paragraphs 66-68 of the UNSPF)⁹i. Forum Trust Fund

⁷ Element 2.c will be adjusted as needed to reflect how the SDGs are addressed in the post-2020 HLPF program.

⁸ The timing of the second round of voluntary national reporting will be determined at UNFF15. Element 2.g will be adjusted accordingly as needed.

⁹ Consistent with ECOSOC res. 2015/33 (para 1.b), the IAF is composed of the Forum and its Member States, the Forum Secretariat, the CPF, the GFFFN and the Forum Trust Fund

Forum 4POW 2021-2024: 2023-2024 Biennium (tables 3 and 4)

Table 3: 18th session of the Forum (2023) - Technical session

Priorities in support of implementation of the UNSPF 2030
1. Thematic Priorities for the 2023-24 biennium: Selected GFGs and associated targets
2. Technical session elements
a. Contributions of Members of the Forum to implementing the UNSPF 2030: New VNC announcements; VNC updates and follow up related to the thematic priorities
b. Contributions of, and enhanced cooperation with, partners to achieving the thematic priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. Contributions of CPF, its member organizations and the UN system to achieving the thematic priorities; progress on the CPF work planii. Contributions of regional and subregional organizations and processes to achieving the thematic prioritiesiii. Contributions of Major Groups and other relevant stakeholder, including private and philanthropic communities, to achieving the thematic priorities; progress on Major Group work plans
c. Interlinkages between the GFGs and targets and the SDGs under review by HLPF 2023 ¹⁰ and relevant international forest-related developments
d. Implementation of the UNSPF 2030 Communication and Outreach Strategy, activities regarding the International Day of Forests 2023
e. Means of implementation, including GFFFN operations and resources
f. Monitoring, assessment and reporting: Second round of voluntary national reporting (input to 2.g) ¹¹ ; global core set of forest-related indicators; preparations for FRA 2025
g. Preparations for mid-term review of the IAF in achieving its objectives in 2024 (consistent with section XII of ECOSOC res. 2015/33 and paragraphs 66-68 of the UNSPF) ¹²
h. Forum Trust Fund

¹⁰ Element 2.c will be adjusted as needed to reflect how the SDGs are addressed in the post-2020 HLPF programme.

¹¹ The timing of the second round of voluntary national reporting will be determined at UNFF15. Element 2.f will be adjusted accordingly as needed.

¹² Consistent with ECOSOC res. 2015/33 (para 1.b), the IAF is composed of the Forum and its Member States, the Forum Secretariat, the CPF, the GFFFN and the Forum Trust Fund.

Table 4 – 19th session of the Forum (2024) - Policy session

Priorities in support of implementation of the UNSPF 2030
<p>1. Thematic priorities for the 2023-24 biennium: GFGs and associated targets (<i>same as UNFF18</i>)</p>
<p>2. Policy session elements</p>
<p>a. Consideration of proposals contained in the UNFF18 Chair’s Summary</p>
<p>b. New VNC announcements</p>
<p>c. Interlinkages between the GFGs and targets and the SDGs under review by HLPF 2023¹³ and relevant international forest-related developments</p>
<p>d. Mid-term review of the effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forests in achieving its objectives (consistent with section XII of ECOSOC res. 2015/33 and paragraphs 66-68 of the UNSPF)¹⁴</p>
<p>e. High-level segment</p>
<p>f. Adoption of the Forum’s 4POW for the period 2025-2028</p>

¹³ Element 2.c will be adjusted as needed to reflect how the SDGs are addressed in the post-2020 HLPF programme.

¹⁴ Consistent with ECOSOC res. 2015/33 (para 1.b), the IAF is composed of the Forum and its Member States, the Forum Secretariat, the CPF, the GFFFN and the Forum Trust Fund.