

Summary of the Twentieth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests: 5-9 May 2025

Forests cover 31% of the world's land surface and are crucial for planetary well-being. They help mitigate climate change and are home to most of the world's terrestrial biodiversity. They improve soil, air, and water quality, services we are at risk of losing due to deforestation, forest degradation, and other threats. More than 1.6 billion people worldwide depend directly on forests for food, shelter, energy, medicine, and income.

Bearing this in mind, the twentieth meeting of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) met to hold technical discussions on the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 (UNSPF), highlighting synergies with other global efforts on forests, land degradation, biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable development. Under the current format for the Forum's two-year thematic cycles, UNFF20 had a technical focus, while UNFF21 in 2026 will be dedicated to policy dialogue, development, and decision-making.

UNFF20's technical work included discussions on the interlinkages between the Global Forest Goals (GFGs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) at its July 2026 session, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and other international forest-related developments. During the week, Member States and participants weighed in on the challenges facing the UNFF Secretariat in relation to expanding mandates and task lists amid understaffing and financial precarity for many of its core tasks. While nothing was agreed, discussions were productive, and suggestions for solutions from an information paper on the topic, and from Member States, were put forward for consideration at UNFF21.

The three thematic priorities underlining the technical discussions were:

- GFG 1: Reversing the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management (SFM);
- GFG 3: Increasing significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests; and
- GFG 5: Promoting the governance frameworks to implement SFM, including through the UN Forest Instrument, and enhance

the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Panels of speakers informed the UNFF on: valuing forest ecosystems in national policy and strategy; the significance of a global hub on data, information, and knowledge on forest financing opportunities and best practices; and dryland forests.

UNFF20 convened from 5-9 May 2025 at UN Headquarters in New York.

A Brief History of UNFF

The UNFF was established in 2000, following a five-year period of forest policy dialogue within the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). In October 2000, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), in its resolution 2000/35, established the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF), including the UNFF as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, with the main objective of promoting the management, conservation, and sustainable development of all types of forests.

The UNFF's principal functions are to:

- facilitate the implementation of forest-related agreements and foster a common understanding of SFM;

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- provide for continued policy development and dialogue among governments, international organizations, and Major Groups, as well as addressing forest issues and emerging areas of concern in a holistic, comprehensive, and integrated manner;
- enhance policy and programme coordination on forest-related issues;
- foster international cooperation and monitor, assess, and report on progress; and
- strengthen political commitment to the management, conservation, and sustainable development of all types of forests.

The UNFF organizational session, held in February 2001 at UN Headquarters in New York, agreed that the UNFF Secretariat would be located in New York. Except for the third and fourth sessions, all sessions of the UNFF have been held at UN Headquarters. The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), a partnership of 16 major forest-related international organizations, institutions, and convention secretariats, was also established.

Key Turning Points

UNFF5: UNFF5 (May 2005) agreed to four GFGs on:

- significantly increasing the area of protected forests and sustainably managed forests worldwide;
- reversing the decline in official development assistance (ODA) for SFM;
- reversing the loss of forest cover; and
- enhancing forest-based economic, social, and environmental benefits.

They also agreed in principle to negotiate, at some future date, the terms of reference for a voluntary code or international understanding on forests, as well as on means of implementation.

UNFF6: UNFF6 (February 2006) generated a negotiating text containing new language on the function of the IAF, a commitment to convene UNFF biennially after 2007, and a request that UNFF7 adopt a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests. UNFF6 also finalized the four global objectives on forests for the IAF to:

- reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through SFM, including through protection, restoration, afforestation, and reforestation;
- enhance forest-based economic, social, and environmental benefits, and the contribution of forests to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals;
- increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests; and
- reverse the decline in ODA for SFM and mobilize significantly increased new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of SFM.

UNFF7: UNFF7 (April 2007) adopted the non-legally binding instrument and a Multi-Year Programme of Work for the period 2007-2015. Delegates agreed that a “voluntary global financial mechanism/portfolio approach/forest-financing framework for all types of forests” would be developed and considered, with a view to its adoption at UNFF8.

UNFF9: UNFF9 (January-February 2011) launched the International Year of Forests 2011. The Forum adopted a resolution on forests for people, livelihoods, and poverty eradication, which addressed, *inter alia*: procedures for assessment of progress; increased regional and subregional cooperation; enhanced

cooperation, including with Major Groups; and means of implementation for SFM, including an ad hoc expert group process on forest financing.

UNFF11: UNFF11 (May 2015) forwarded a resolution to ECOSOC recommending, *inter alia*, to:

- rename the non-legally binding instrument the “UN Forest Instrument”;
- strengthen and extend the IAF to 2030;
- decide that the IAF is composed of the UNFF and its Member States, the Secretariat of the Forum, the CPF, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN), and the UNFF Trust Fund;
- set clear priorities for the GFFFN in a new strategic plan, later officially named the UNSPF; and
- convene an ad hoc expert group to develop proposals on a replacement for the reference to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the UN Forest Instrument with an appropriate reference to the SDGs and targets, the UNSPF, and the Quadrennial Programme of Work (4POW) for the period 2017-2020.

UNFF11 also agreed on a new format for the Forum: sessions would take place annually, but based on two-year thematic cycles, with the first year comprising discussions on implementation and technical advice and the second focusing on policy dialogue, development, and decision making.

ECOSOC approved the UNFF11 recommendations in its resolution 2015/33, and the UN General Assembly gave effect to the changes recommended by ECOSOC on 22 December 2015 in resolution 70/199.

Recent Meetings

UNFF12: UNFF12 (May 2017) was the first session to be held under the new format. UNFF12 adopted an omnibus resolution covering monitoring, assessment, and reporting (MAR), means of implementation and enhanced cooperation, coordination, engagement on forest-related issues, and contributions to the HLPE. The resolution, *inter alia*:

- requested the Secretariat to revise the format for voluntary national reporting on UNSPF implementation;
- adopted guidelines for country-led initiatives in support of the Forum; and
- requested the Secretariat, with the CPF, to prepare a report on actions to accelerate progress in achieving SDG 15 (life on land) and forest-related targets, and a background study on the contribution of forests to other SDGs.

UNFF13: UNFF13 (May 2018) forwarded a resolution to ECOSOC which, *inter alia*:

- adopted a communications and outreach strategy;
- decided UNFF would consider the results of the first round of voluntary national reporting at UNFF15; and
- requested the UNFF Secretariat to initiate development of the GFFFN’s online Clearing House mechanism.

UNFF15: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in accordance with ECOSOC resolution E/2020/L.8, the Forum took place through virtual informal consultations. UNFF15 adopted an omnibus resolution on:

- the implementation of the UNSPF;
- MAR;

- means of implementation;
- emerging issues and challenges;
- the 4POW for the period 2021-2024; and
- information on the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) reform pertaining to the Forum.

UNFF17: UNFF17 (May 2022) adopted an omnibus resolution on: implementation of the UNSPF; means of implementation; MAR; and preparations for the 2024 Midterm Review (MTR) of the effectiveness of the IAF.

UNFF18: UNFF18 (May 2023) facilitated technical discussions on the interlinkages between the GFGs, the SDGs, the GBF, and other related international developments. It also reviewed preparations for the 2024 MTR.

UNFF19: UNFF19 (May 2024) adopted an omnibus resolution that included the MTR of the effectiveness of the IAF and set the mandate for future actions by the UNFF and its stakeholders, including: the CPF, the GFFFN, and the UNFF Trust Fund. It also adopted a high-level commitment reaffirming the UNSPF as a global framework for action at all levels.

UNFF20 Report

On Monday morning, UNFF20 Chair Ismail Belen (Türkiye) opened the meeting. He recalled that the Forum had elected the Bureau in May 2024. Delegates approved Maria Sokolenko (Russian Federation) as rapporteur for UNFF20 and UNFF21. Delegates approved the provisional agenda ([E/CN.18/2025/1](#)) and the organization of work, as proposed by the Chair.

Opening Statements: Chair Belen stressed three important priorities: the role of forests and SFM for achieving the SDGs and addressing climate change, biodiversity, and land degradation; the importance of investing in healthy forests; and the need to improve access to data, knowledge, and good practices.

ECOSOC President Bob Rae (Canada) highlighted that well-managed forests offer nature-based solutions to pressing global challenges and provide crucial livelihoods for people all over the world.

Noting that only five years remain to meet the SDGs, UN General Assembly (UNGA) President Philémon Yang (Cameroon) called for urgent action to ensure sustainably managed forests remain “the cornerstone of a healthier planet for all.”

Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination, DESA, Bjørge Sandkjær called for strengthened global cooperation and multilateralism and stressed the fundamental role of forests in planetary vitality.

Opening Discussion: During the general opening discussion, participants delivered statements on the UNSPF, progress on the implementation of the outcomes of the IAF MTR, and emerging issues.

Several countries reaffirmed their commitment to achieving the GFGs. Poland, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION (EU), underscored that the UNSPF provides a key framework for promoting SFM and enhancing collaboration. BRAZIL highlighted strategic cross-regional initiatives that aim to conserve tropical forests, including the Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF) and the 2023 United for Our Forests Joint Communiqué.

Morocco, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, called for national and regional forest initiatives tailored to local realities. CONGO stated that their new Forest Code has strengthened collaboration on

the national level. Together with GHANA and CÔTE D’IVOIRE, she highlighted that partnership with the EU has helped to ensure the legality and traceability of their timber products.

Several countries highlighted ongoing work at the national level to address deforestation and promote SFM. BRAZIL, IRAN, and others detailed how enhanced enforcement helped them tackle illegal logging, forest degradation, and deforestation. JAMAICA described efforts to improve timber traceability to ensure legality “from forest to market.” ISRAEL noted that their country is 60% arid and semi-arid, making dryland forestry methods a key component of their SFM.

CHILE described SFM efforts through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change’s (UNFCCC) Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programme to encourage climate adaptation and mitigation while achieving the SDGs, including through forestry projects that include women, Indigenous Peoples, and other vulnerable communities. COSTA RICA stressed the importance of addressing the immediate needs of people living in forests, and COLOMBIA called for more financing for Indigenous Peoples and peasant farming communities as forest stewards.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said that efforts to digitize forest management has improved their ability to monitor timber supply chains and prevent illegal timber production and trade. NEPAL, MALAYSIA, BURUNDI, GUATEMALA, and others called on developed countries to provide financial support for developing countries to scale up SFM efforts. PHILIPPINES, along with several other countries, called for more equitable financing mechanisms to support the “inextricable link” between forest health and climate resilience. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA, JAPAN, and ALGERIA highlighted the need to address the climate-driven risks threatening forests, from fires to droughts to landslides.

CONGO commended the UNGA’s adoption of the proposal to declare 2027-2036 the UN Decade for Afforestation and Reforestation ([A/79/L.64](#)).

CHINA described innovative SFM tending models for young and middle-aged forests. Several countries, including TÜRKIYE, NEPAL, and AUSTRALIA, reported increases to their national forest cover. INDIA, the UK, MADAGASCAR, MONGOLIA, and SAUDI ARABIA highlighted national tree-planting and forest restoration initiatives.

ARGENTINA said that international community efforts to protect the environment must promote equitable treatment and avoid covert restrictions on international trade.

The ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS) highlighted their strategy to promote regional programmes and initiatives for sustainable development and SFM. The CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP argued that the success of UNFF hinges on meaningful collaboration and participation and called for early and consistent engagement with forest stewards as co-partners.

Technical Discussions on the Implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030

On Monday, the UNFF Secretariat introduced the document ([E/CN.18/2025/2](#)) on technical discussions on activities in support of the thematic priorities for the biennium 2025-2026 for the implementation of the UNSPF 2017-2030.

Secretariat's vision, priorities and achievements: UNFF Secretariat Director Juliette Biao reviewed the Secretariat's recent intersessional activities, its vision for advancing work in the coming year, and ongoing challenges, including financial resource gaps that "put the Secretariat's capacity to deliver at great risk."

Activities in support of the thematic priorities for the biennium 2025-2026, in support of the implementation of the UNSPF: On Monday, the UNFF Secretariat presented the three thematic priorities for the biennium:

- reversing the loss of forest cover worldwide through SFM;
- increasing significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests; and
- promoting governance frameworks to implement SFM, including through the UN Forest Instrument, and to enhance the contribution of forests to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

He said forests and their contributions to gross domestic product are "dramatically undervalued" and therefore not prioritized enough at the national level. He called for redesigning policies to promote more sustainable practices in agroforestry and organic farming, and to strengthen the implementation of legislation designed to prevent degradation and deforestation. Noting that demand for timber is expected to quadruple over the next thirty years, he highlighted the importance of involving civil society in planning and building green value chains.

Contributions of Members of the Forum to implementing the UNSPF: On Monday, Vice Chair Abderrahim Houmy (Morocco) opened this agenda item and delegates outlined their country-led initiatives.

CONGO highlighted the 2024 Brazzaville Declaration, which seeks to, *inter alia*, adopt a global reforestation strategy and strengthen cooperation among states and technical partners. AUSTRIA emphasized that SFM, timber construction, and the timber industry are key to their bioeconomy, and underscored the need for global cooperation, data, capacity, and support for innovation in the forest and timber sector.

TÜRKIYE called for enhanced international cooperation to address forest fire management. REPUBLIC OF KOREA highlighted initiatives to strength partnerships and private sector engagement in support of SFM, including the Friends of Asia and Asian Forests collaborative platform for climate action and the Climate Action Matching Platform crowd-funding initiative.

In the subsequent discussion, PERU underscored a commitment to preserving existing forest cover through, *inter alia*, strengthening security to stop illicit activities in the Peruvian Amazon.

ZIMBABWE, on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), requested help from UNFF in addressing the financial and capacity challenges Forum members face in submitting voluntary national contributions (VNCs).

The EU called for addressing the underlying drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, namely agricultural land expansion and commodities trading, and said improved forest monitoring is essential for properly assessing the contribution of forests to SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

JAMAICA announced new and enhanced VNCs, including to increase forest biodiversity through the propagation and

establishment of endemic species and enhance food security through sustainable agroforestry systems. GEORGIA highlighted commitments to improve the ecological conditions of degraded forests.

The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC) stressed the essential role of forests in regulating precipitation in Africa and called for integrating SFM with efforts to combat poverty and prevent armed conflicts. INDONESIA highlighted a task force on regenerative agroforestry and a new forest utilization business licensing framework that integrates multiple uses under a single permit covering all forest commodities.

Noting that 60% of its territory is covered in forest, COSTA RICA outlined projects supporting SFM, including timber licensing and standards to verify the origin of timber products. INDIA endorsed the possible thematic areas related to community-based forest management, technological innovations, and sustainable finance for forests. The UK underscored that reporting on goals is important for transparency and sharing of best practices.

ARGENTINA outlined actions to manage its national forest inventory, including the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and highlighted the importance of adequate financing for forestry. BRAZIL explained that its efforts to fight illegal deforestation are coupled with efforts to restore native vegetation. SOUTH AFRICA underscored that implementing the UNSPF is a collective responsibility. NEW ZEALAND described its efforts to test the optimal mix of vegetation for tree planting, with the goal of planting "the right tree in the right place for the right purpose."

Contributions of and enhanced cooperation with partners to achieving the thematic priorities: Vice Chair Houmy opened this agenda item on Monday. The Secretariat introduced the document ([E/CN.18/2025/3](#)), highlighting several proposals for discussion at UNFF20 on: concrete steps the CPF and its member organizations can take to accelerate progress toward achieving the GFGs by 2030; strengthening the engagement of regional and subregional partners and Major Groups in the work of the UNFF; and the proposed preparation of a matrix to demonstrate progress by partners in implementing the relevant provisions of [ECOSOC resolution 2024/15](#) on UNFF19.

Contributions of the CPF and its Member Organizations and Progress on the Implementation of its Workplan: CPF Chair Zhimin Wu, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), presented on the main activities of the CPF and the preparation of the CPF Work Plan for 2025-28, which focuses on addressing gaps and accelerating progress toward SFM. Noting that forest loss remains "a great challenge," he called for deriving an increased proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests and for building value chains that contribute to job creation. He noted that future areas of focus for the CPF include monitoring and tracing wood flows and addressing the fragmentation of financing for forests.

Contributions of Regional and Subregional Organizations and Processes: Liliana Annovazzi-Jakab, UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), highlighted the significance of boreal and temperate zone forests and their vulnerability to climate change. She reviewed UNECE's work in urbanized areas, including planting 20 million trees in cities and encouraging circular bioeconomy approaches to wood in fashion and construction.

Ndapanda Kanime, SADC, highlighted the essential role of dryland forests in preserving biodiversity, supporting livelihoods, and addressing climate change and urged Forum members and other donors to support subregional and regional organizations focused on drylands SFM.

Contributions of Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and the philanthropic community, to achieving the thematic priorities; and progress on Major Group workplans: Mia Crawford, Farmers and Small Forest Landowners Major Group, reporting on the Expert Group Meeting of the Major Groups, described the “milestone” achievement of the International Arrangement on Forests Major Groups Internal Coordination Mechanism (IAF MG-ICM), a self-organized stakeholder platform designed to strengthen the capacity of civil society and forest stakeholders to contribute to the implementation of the UNSPF.

During the general discussion, JAMAICA thanked various partners for supporting inclusive, cooperative, well-financed, and nature-based forest solutions in his country. The EU stressed the importance of the CPF and welcomed a new initiative on biodiversity mainstreaming and complementarities between the GBF and the GFGs.

MEXICO underscored the importance of ensuring equitable access to funding for developing countries and local communities, including women and Indigenous Peoples. They supported the promotion of small-scale agroforestry to increase the climate resilience of communities. ZIMBABWE stressed the importance of community-based natural resource management, noting that without including people at the grassroots level, countries will be unable to effectively manage forests.

INDIA highlighted their efforts to promote a Science Hub initiative to enable capacity building and skill development among stakeholders. MALAYSIA encouraged the CPF to increase access to technical training and capacity building. BOTSWANA acknowledged the work of the FAO in their assistance with land degradation monitoring systems and baseline data that guided the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) target setting under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

On the joint initiative between FAO and the Centre for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF), NEW ZEALAND asked if the contributions of forests in maintaining food production landscapes will be considered, explaining that in New Zealand forests help promote soil and water retention, thus supporting food security. BRAZIL asked that activities under the new work plan be balanced between timber and non-timber wood products.

SWITZERLAND, noting a “drastically shrinking” UN budget, recommended that the Secretariat produce a matrix of what measures are being implemented, by whom, and their costs and deliverables.

The PHILIPPINES and ECUADOR highlighted the development of satellite land-monitoring systems to, *inter alia*, prevent forest fires, ensure “investment-ready, risk-managed” forest landscapes, and serve as an early warning system for illegal logging. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION called for cooperation among boreal countries.

The CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA (CITES) underscored a commitment to working toward shared goals

for forests through the regulation of trade. The INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL TIMBER ORGANIZATION (ITTO) offered to share expertise from 1,400 projects it has funded to promote SFM in tropical forests. FOREST EUROPE reaffirmed support for the UNSPF through the use of criteria and indicators and a shared framework for monitoring progress. The INTERNATIONAL BAMBOO AND RATTAN ORGANIZATION called for more funding to prepare delegates for UNFF meetings.

Interlinkages between the GFGs and targets and the SDGs under review by the HLPF in 2025 and 2026, the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the GBF, the UNCCD, including the LDN Target Setting Programme, and other international forest-related developments: On Tuesday, Vice Chair Andrés Napuri Pita (Peru) opened the agenda item. Lotta Tähtinen, Director, Office for International Support and Coordination, DESA, highlighted linkages between the GFGs and the SDGs, stressing their importance in offering pathways for leveraging co-benefits and enabling holistic progress toward implementation.

Daniela Kleinschmit, President, International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), recalled the 26th IUFRO Congress and welcomed participants to the next one in Nairobi in 2029.

Jamal Annagylyjova, CBD Secretariat, gave an overview of the outcomes from the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP16), stressing that forests “lie at the heart” of the GBF. She noted they have so far received 49 National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), all containing forest-related elements. Daniele Violetti, UNFCCC Secretariat, highlighted key COP29 outcomes, including new climate finance goals of USD 300 billion annually by 2035, which he said will help parties implement climate actions, including forest-based solutions. Sasha Alexander, UNCCD Secretariat, recalled progress from COP16, highlighting a decision that urges parties to conserve naturally tree-covered areas and halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation.

Aziz Abdulkhakimov, Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change, Uzbekistan, and Rosalie Matondo, Minister of Forest Economy, Congo, spoke about the significance of UNGA [resolution 78/320](#) for fostering SFM and of UNGA [resolution 79/283](#) for designating 2027-2036 as the UN Decade for Afforestation and Reforestation.

Garo Batmanian, Director General of the Brazilian Forest Service, briefed members on the status of the TFFF initiative to be presented at UNFCCC COP30 in Belém and underscored its innovations, including results-based payments, funds earmarked for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and a public-private blended finance model.

During general discussions, many countries highlighted national actions. PERU discussed his country’s efforts to integrate efforts on climate change, REDD+, biodiversity, forest conservation, SDGs, and combating desertification. ETHIOPIA highlighted the role of forests in its Climate Resilient Green Economy initiative. JAMAICA discussed how an effort to protect an endangered bird’s tree habitat in eastern Jamaica was a good example of high-impact and high-synergy projects.

LIBERIA highlighted its efforts to create protected areas and its commitment to reforest 2,000 hectares annually. NEW ZEALAND shared its recent decision to ban farm-to-forestry conversions to

prevent highly productive land from entering trading schemes for carbon pricing. INDONESIA highlighted national efforts to enhance forest carbon storage and tackle land degradation through ecosystem restoration and rehabilitation.

INDIA emphasized the need for global action on forest governance, with MEXICO highlighting the importance of building bridges between multilateral processes and national efforts. MALAYSIA lauded the TFFF as a mechanism for mobilizing forest financing and highlighted its Forest Conservation Certificate and Forest Carbon Offset mechanism as ways of mutually supporting biodiversity and the SDGs. Noting the interlinkages between the GFGs and the aims of other forest-related processes, the UK underscored the need to improve synergies, guard against duplication, and integrate forestry into National Adaptation Plans and NBSAPs.

SADC welcomed discussions on interlinkages between the GFGs and SDGs under review by the HLPF, noting that forests contribute to climate action, provide ecosystem services, and support biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods. Reaffirming “our collective responsibility to preserve forests not only as resources, but as shared legacies and vital solutions to global challenges,” TÜRKIYE said the GFGs are crucial for biodiversity, climate stability, and achieving the SDGs.

The US opposed including any reference to climate change, its impacts, or the Paris Agreement in the UNFF20 Chair Summary and urged the UNFF to delink its efforts from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

Noting that “anthropocentric and mercantilistic solutions” are not the only way to confront “the imminent collapse of global ecosystems,” BOLIVIA called for a plurality of approaches to, and instruments for, protecting forests, with particular attention to those of Indigenous Peoples. BRAZIL highlighted the “indispensable role” women play in SFM, land conservation, and rural development. ECUADOR called for holistic forest management with contributions from all sectors of society, and welcomed innovative financing mechanisms to ensure woodlands remain in place.

Noting that nearly 30% of its forests have been damaged by ongoing hostilities, UKRAINE described its efforts to protect and expand forests not simply for environmental reasons, but as an “act of resilience and commitment to the SDGs” in the face of war. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION replied by objecting to “unfounded accusations” and the “politicization” of technical discussions.

FAO highlighted that agroforestry transformation holds solutions to the interlinked challenges of climate change, food and water insecurity, land degradation, and biodiversity loss. The INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP argued that some mechanisms for environmental protection, such as REDD+, have not been effective, and asked the Forum to recognize the governance of Indigenous Peoples as an effective instrument for forest preservation.

INDIA and others commended UNFF for setting up the Forest Pavilion at UNFCCC COP29. The EU, NORWAY, and the US opposed the Secretariat’s proposal to make the Forest Pavilion at UNFCCC COPs a recurring initiative. In response, Biao stressed that resources for the Pavilion had not come from the UNFF Trust Fund, but from stakeholder donations. She said that the Pavilion is an important tool for enhancing and fostering synergies and cohesive action.

Implementation of the UNSPF Communication and Outreach Strategy and the International Day of Forests (IDF) 2025: Vice Chair Maria Sokolenko (Russian Federation) opened this agenda item on Tuesday. The UNFF Secretariat gave an overview of their work to expand the reach and amplify forest messages across platforms and audiences ([E/CN.18/2025/2](#)).

MALAYSIA highlighted that IDF celebrations help raise public awareness of forests and encourage more people to protect nature. PERU underscored the importance of IDF celebrations for promoting direct actions for forest conservation and restoration.

SAUDI ARABIA, SOUTH AFRICA, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, the DRC, CÔTE D’IVOIRE, MONGOLIA, and several others described activities on the 2025 IDF to raise awareness of the vital role forests play in improving food security and curbing the global climate crisis. The CPF announced the 2026 IDF theme as “Forests and Economies.”

SWITZERLAND praised the UNFF’s advocacy on behalf of forests at the global policy level and through initiatives such as a newsletter. The EU, AUSTRALIA, and the UK welcomed the UNFF’s work on communication and outreach but underscored financial realities and called for cost-effective solutions that maximize benefits.

Regarding the Forest Pavilion at UNFCCC COPs, the EU called for flexibility, while the UK cautioned against having it as a recurring feature. SADC, supported by GHANA, welcomed the possibility of making the Forest Pavilion an ongoing initiative and, with NEW ZEALAND, stressed the importance of “maintaining hard-won momentum” at the coming COP. CANADA said that the Forest Pavilion at COP29 was important for bringing in new partners and stakeholders, with youth playing a major role. She said that having a forest presence at the COPs is vital to continue promoting forests as a nature-based climate solution.

FAO highlighted the recently launched Forestry Innovation Prize, a global competition designed to encourage youth-led innovation to address critical gaps in forest sector sustainability. The CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP warned that achieving SFM by 2030 is not attainable without involving “those who will manage forests tomorrow.”

Panel on valuing forest ecosystems in national policy and strategy: UNFF Secretariat Director Biao opened the session by saying the best way to promote SFM is to put a value on the many ecosystem services forests provide. She noted efforts to quantify those services to inform policy, including The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) initiative launched in 2006 and the UN System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Ecosystem Accounting (EA) statistical standard adopted in 2021.

Rosalie Matondo, Minister of Forest Economy, Congo, shared her country’s experiences in SFM and integrating development with forestry policy. She noted Congo’s efforts to incorporate natural capital into national budgets and increase the use of payment for ecosystem services (PES). Ilaria Di Matteo, DESA, explained the evolution of the SEEA EA standard, noting that by 2024, 53 countries had adopted it. She enumerated the benefits of adopting the standard and listed lessons learned from SEEA implementation, including the importance of institutionalizing the standard to ensure it is an ongoing, versus one-off, approach.

UNFF Secretariat Director Biao introduced six panelists to speak on implementing ecosystem accounting and other market-based mechanisms for conserving and sustainably managing forests.

Noting that almost a quarter of India's land mass is under forest cover, Raghu Prasad, Ministry of Environment, India, spoke about valuing these ecosystems using the SEEA EA framework. He presented two Indian states as contrasting case studies: Uttarakhand, with a Himalayan topography, and Rajasthan, featuring dryland forests. He said the SEEA EA framework was used to compile ecosystem accounts in each state, revealing forest systems as "highly undervalued" for their provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services. He noted the difficulty of assessing certain ecosystem services, such as air or water purification, for which there is no market price, and of evaluating cumulative benefits accurately, given the complexities of ecosystem functions. He urged countries to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystems into policy planning and implementation.

Sheam Satkuru, Executive Director, ITTO, described her organization's work in promoting nature's true economic value. She noted that PES can boost SFM and alleviate poverty by incentivizing forest owners to reduce deforestation and restore degraded lands. She highlighted projects by ITTO in Guyana, Costa Rica, Ghana, Benin, Cambodia, and Mexico that sought to enhance the capacity of local communities and forest administrators to effectively implement community forest programmes. She said key ingredients for PES include: long-term innovative financing mechanisms, investments in systemic changes, clear regulations, recognition of tenure and property rights, stronger research and evidence, and cross-sectoral coordination. She stressed the need for internationally accepted accounting systems, but said different types of accounting systems might be needed for different ecosystems.

Eli Fenichel, Yale University, presented on incorporating natural capital and ecosystem services into national economic accounting systems. He said challenges include organizing data and clarifying case studies to structure how to think about valuation. Among the opportunities he listed were the chance to pool international resources to organize data, as well as the chance to improve budget forecasts and assess debt by identifying economic questions where natural resource and environmental data matter. He noted that when we leave forests off balance sheets, except in terms of the labor exerted in them or materials removed from them, "it's as if forests themselves don't exist or matter." He concluded by underscoring the need to mainstream nature in our economies: "It's about changing the way you make budget allocations, and when those budget allocations pay for themselves."

Priya Shyamsundar, The Nature Conservancy, said the mission of her organization is to "conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends." She gave examples of a project to incentivize landowners in Brazil to keep forests intact or reforest degraded land by paying them from the cost savings of not needing water treatment plants in the watershed. In another example, she described how conserving big fauna in Africa can pay off in carbon markets: because elephants allow trees to grow larger, increasing ground forest carbon, they are worth USD 25.9 billion to carbon markets over 30 years, whereas poaching results in lost carbon services. She also gave examples of index-based insurance payouts to disincentivize tropical deforestation, which she said can result in

nearly 4.9 million people losing 0.5 hours of safe working time per day, and of nature bonds that finance the conservation of biodiversity in the Amazon.

During interactive discussions, FINLAND, EU, JAPAN, CHINA, and NEW ZEALAND shared experiences from incorporating ecosystem accounting into national policies through a variety of mechanisms. MALAYSIA and NEW ZEALAND highlighted challenges in data availability, institutional coordination, the fragmentation of criteria and indicators for valuing ecosystem services, and ensuring the inclusion of marginalized groups, including Indigenous Peoples.

Following questions on the mainstreaming and scaling up of ecosystem services accounting, Fenichel explained that much progress has been achieved in terms of appreciating the macroeconomic implications of nature, and that national programmes will roll out differently from country to country in relation to relevant ecosystems.

Means of implementation, including operations and resources of the GFFFN: On Wednesday, Vice Chair Java Momeni (Iran) opened this agenda item. The UNFF Secretariat introduced the document ([E/CN.18/2025/4](#)), noting countries continue to face various challenges, including a lack of comprehensive data, complex funding processes, and a fragmented financing landscape. UNFF Secretariat Director Juliette Biao announced that the impasse on establishing a new office for the GFFFN in Beijing is close to being resolved, underscoring that the office will be paid for with external resources from the host country.

During general discussions, countries emphasized the crucial role of forest financing for achieving the GFGs. PERU said the availability of international funding remains inadequate. SOUTH AFRICA stressed that "we cannot hope to increase the pace of UNSPF implementation without the provision of new and additional resources."

Noting that the UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD all support forests as a nature-based solution, the DRC called for more resources to protect these ecosystems. BRAZIL pointed to the TFFF as a source of additional resources for developing countries who lack sufficient, predictable, and easily accessible finance for SFM.

The EU underlined the need for synergies with climate and biodiversity financing. SADC noted that the stringent requirements and conditions attached to funding are deterring access for countries and undermining their efforts to finance forest projects.

COSTA RICA welcomed support and training on SFM provided to various countries but called for more funding to economically compensate developing countries for "the existence of huge forests that have huge maintenance costs."

Regarding the GFFFN office in Beijing, the US noted that they did not support its establishment, asking that resources instead be directed to the New York office. BOTSWANA expressed support for the new Beijing office.

SWITZERLAND encouraged the Secretariat to continue strengthening partnerships to broaden outreach, noted the GFFFN would benefit from close engagement with the CPF and, with JAPAN and EU, questioned the value of creating a "one-stop shop" global data hub given current financial constraints.

The UK cautioned against taking on additional uncosted commitments like a global data hub without a full evaluation of current work under the GFFFN Clearing House, and requested

more focus on improving existing activities and initiatives. UNFF Secretariat Director Biao clarified that the proposed data hub is in an early exploratory phase and noted that mobilizing financial flows is harder without accurate data.

Panel on the significance of a global hub on data, information and knowledge on forest financing opportunities and best practices, and the role of the GFFN Clearing House: UNFF Secretariat Director Biao opened the session. Maureen Whelan (Canada) moderated the panel.

Keynote speaker Tuukka Castrén, World Bank, stressed the importance of getting a clearer picture of the diversity of forest finance to better identify opportunities. He highlighted that, according to World Bank data, 40-45% of the USD 120-150 billion in current annual forest financing is from private domestic sources (commercial loans and private equity), 35-40% from domestic public sources, 2% from public international sources (ODA), and the rest from private international sources (such as banks, NGOs, and philanthropic organizations.). He urged members to work together to improve and share data, and for the UNFF, CPF, and partners to work together on strategies to:

- unlock finance for small-scale operators;
- mobilize private investments at scale;
- strengthen domestic public finance and policy coherence; and
- deploy ODA to unlock private capital.

Katalin Solymosi, Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Germany, observed that forest financing is quite complex, still evolving, and highly fragmented. She suggested that “the data exists, it is simply hard to access and not structured and presented well, hence the need for the Hub.” She suggested looking at financing opportunities in other sectors, such as agriculture, for forestry components such as reducing deforestation or promoting agroforestry.

Garo Batmanian, Director General, Brazilian Forest Service, urged GFFN to structure its information to reflect the many forms that forest financing can take and the diversity of forest finance recipients, such as the private sector. Batmanian said the global hub should serve as a one-stop shop, since existing data on forest financing is diffuse and difficult to locate.

Pascal Martinez, Global Environment Facility (GEF), noted that forests are a crosscutting theme in the GEF portfolio, and not a focal area like climate or land degradation. He said that while realizing the global hub might be challenging and require significant resources, “it is needed.” He suggested collaborating with CPF member organizations to mobilize the needed resources.

Fritjof Boerstler, FAO, said data on forest financing is incomplete because it is difficult to obtain. He outlined ways FAO is working to fill data gaps and related FAO knowledge management efforts. Boerstler highlighted FAO technical assistance in developing pipelines of investable projects and organizing “matchmaking events” between forestry and restoration businesses and the finance sector.

Thomas Clarke, Asian Development Bank, stated that forest-based solutions remain largely untapped due to the significant challenges in mobilizing finance, especially from the private sector. He said that by implementing a strategic mix of approaches, sensitive to unique local environments, governments can reduce financial flows to harmful practices and enable them to forest-positive activities.

During interactive discussions, participants asked the panelists questions on a range of topics, including: training programmes for developing finance proposals; the contributions of small-scale forest producers; and generating enough finance from carbon credits to help communities address climate adaptation and resilience.

Regarding training programmes, Batmanian reflected on the high cost of consultants, but suggested promoting South-South collaboration in relation to training opportunities. UNFF Secretariat Director Biao noted they had to cut down on providing training due to financial and capacity restraints, but were exploring opportunities through partnerships.

On small-scale forest producers, Castrén said that precise numbers were hard to obtain due to the often informal nature of the small-scale forestry sector. He reflected on the possibility of doing case studies in countries and regions where numbers are reliable.

On carbon credits, Martinez underscored the complexity of the issue and highlighted that although the GEF does not finance carbon markets, they can support the creation of conditions that enable countries to make the most of financing opportunities.

Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting (MAR): On Wednesday, Vice Chair Sokolenko introduced the agenda item. The UNFF Secretariat introduced the document ([E/CN.18/2025/5](#)), highlighting that the next GFGs Report would assess “where we are in terms of progress or lack of progress” in achieving the GFGs. He encouraged countries to submit voluntary national reports (VNRs) early and said the quality of the next GFGs Report will depend on the quality and quantity of VNRs submitted, noting that in the last round, the Secretariat only received 52.

Report on the outcome of global workshop on capacity building for reporting: Avhashoni Renny Madula (South Africa) reported on outcomes from a capacity-building workshop on national reporting to the Forum, which took place from 18-20 March 2025 at the UN Office at Nairobi and was organized by the Secretariat in collaboration with FAO.

He said key takeaways from those discussions were the need for cooperation among institutions that collect data on forests, and the need to use information collected for UNFF to revise and update national policies and strategies. Challenges identified by workshop participants included lengthy procedures for data collection and the lack of data and definitions for certain goals, in particular GFG 2 and 5.

He highlighted suggestions for members in preparing reports:

- communicate with and involve relevant stakeholders, including NGOs, the private sector, and local communities;
- establish a mechanism for engaging in person and online;
- provide appropriate protocols for data sharing; and
- identify main data sources, such as forest inventories, national actions and activities related to forestry, and relevant government websites.

Global Core Set of forest-related indicators: Steve Walter, FAO, presented a progress report on the Global Core Set (GCS) of forest-related indicators, noting they were developed as part of a joint initiative with the CPF on harmonizing forest-related reporting for various processes and conventions, including the UNSPF, the 2030 Agenda, and the Rio Conventions (CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC). He noted that of 21 indicators covering all seven elements of SFM, FAO provides data through the Global Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) for 15 of them. He said work continues addressing challenges

related to data and methodologies for tier 3 indicators, including on a global definition of forest degradation. Related to GCS indicator 13, he said they were defining forest-proximate people by using a combination of data on tree cover, population density, and poverty data sets. He commended the Secretariat for transitioning to digital reporting for the GFGs and highlighted the forthcoming release in October 2025 of FRA 2025.

During general discussions, many delegations recognized the importance of VNRs for producing the GFG Report and indicated their intention to submit theirs by the June 2025 deadline. AUSTRALIA, MEXICO, and the REPUBLIC OF KOREA expressed appreciation for the revised VNR template.

The EU, AUSTRALIA, and the REPUBLIC OF KOREA underscored the importance of the GFG Report. AUSTRALIA, CANADA, and the US urged for keeping the GFG Report short, concise, and focused. MALAYSIA and the EU expressed concern about forest-related reporting demands and urged for redundancy in reporting requests.

GHANA and SADC expressed appreciation for the workshop and urged for more similar capacity-building work. MEXICO and CHINA urged for strengthened cooperation and technical assistance to enhance national capacity in preparing VNRs.

MALAYSIA and the EU expressed appreciation for the work on the GCS of forest indicators. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION noted that many of these indicators use “ill-defined terms” and emphasized the voluntary nature of the indicator methodologies developed by FAO. The US raised concerns about efforts to develop a GCS indicator on forest employment, saying the current proposal would not reflect all the jobs associated with forests in his country.

CANADA and NEW ZEALAND highlighted their co-lead efforts under the Montreal Process to develop a common definition, criteria, and indicators for forest degradation and offered to share information on that effort. The US expressed appreciation for FAO efforts to develop a common definition of forest degradation.

Progress in the Implementation of the Outcomes of the IAF Midterm Review

On Thursday, Vice Chair Momeni opened the agenda item. Consultant Stephanie Caswell presented the [Information paper](#) on the workload, needs and gaps of the UNFF Secretariat. The paper, *inter alia*, reviewed the expanding Secretariat activities in core work areas and as the CPF Secretariat, reflected on current staffing situations and workload implications, and offered suggestions for addressing issues.

Caswell noted a steady increase in the Secretariat’s activities in seven core areas:

- servicing for annual sessions;
- developing and supporting the UNSPF;
- managing the GFFFN and its Clearing House;
- expanding MAR activities;
- contributing to the 2030 Agenda and providing inputs to the HPLF process;
- developing and carrying out the UNSPF Communication and Outreach Strategy; and
- enhancing collaboration on forest-related issues, including with the Rio Conventions.

She also observed that many Member States may not be fully aware of the time and effort the Secretariat spends on its role as CPF Secretariat. She stressed that despite the increase in workload, the Secretariat remains under capacity, forcing it to rely on the Trust Fund to finance annual contracts for additional core staff members to complete its tasks.

She pointed out that [ECOSOC resolution 2024/15](#) contained over 120 actions, many directed at the Secretariat, including in areas where it is already under capacity. These added activities, she said, will further the Secretariat’s reliance on extrabudgetary staff and impact essential cross-cutting functions. She stressed that continued and increased reliance on the Trust Fund to support core staff is not sustainable; donor priorities can and do change, and this causes uncertainty for staff, creates stressful work environments, and impacts on deliverables.

In her recommendations, Caswell proposed adding five regular budgetary Secretariat posts, increasing the regular budgetary operating costs for SFM, and developing a programme budget implications (PBI) recommendation at UNFF21 based on UNFF20 discussions and the findings of the Information paper.

During general discussion, the PHILIPPINES commended the Secretariat for their work in supporting members and facilitating coherence across international forest-related processes. MALAYSIA suggested exploring the possibility of transitioning the UNFF to a Convention-based model, saying that a lack of binding commitments was limiting the Forum’s ability to drive impactful reforms.

AUSTRALIA suggested clarifying what are clear directives versus invitations in the UNFF19 omnibus resolution. SWITZERLAND said that suggestions to increase the UNFF Secretariat by five regular budget staff must be reevaluated considering the UN liquidity crisis, and suggested prioritizing core functions of the UNFF. The EU, supported by SWITZERLAND, highlighted the need for cost-efficiency measures and suggested continuing discussions on workloads and gaps at UNFF21 to allow more time for input.

The UK warned UNFF to “guard against expanding activities.” She encouraged the Secretariat to generate options on which activities could be “stopped, changed, or done differently” for consideration at UNFF21, and called for more resource allocation under DESA for UNFF.

The US encouraged Member States to support the UNFF Trust Fund, warning that although the US had been its largest contributor in the past, “future contributions are not guaranteed.” She suggested providing new direction to the Secretariat on allocating resources at UNFF21 and called for reducing meetings and nonessential travel “effective immediately.”

JAPAN said regular budget staff increases need more consideration, and suggested the Secretariat focus more on extrabudgetary staff and voluntary contributions.

The WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS MAJOR GROUP, also on behalf of the FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (FSC) CANADA, and the NGO MAJOR GROUP, highlighted how FSC certification directly addresses GFG 3 and can de-risk investments into the forest sector and be used to scale impact. He supported increasing the staff capacity of the Secretariat and having a Forest Pavilion at COP30, offering in-kind support to these ends.

UNFF Secretariat Director Biao highlighted the “strenuous” efforts the Secretariat has put into mobilizing extrabudgetary resources to fulfill their mandate. She said that the Secretariat will continue to “look for any means to ensure efficiency while responding to the increasing requests of the Member States,” but stressed that while their mandate has continued to grow, “the capacity gap has not been addressed.”

Forum Trust Fund

On Thursday, the Secretariat introduced the document ([E/CN.18/2025/6](#)), reporting 2024 contributions from seven Member States and three international organizations totaling USD 1,184,378. He also acknowledged assistance from three entities in organizing the Forest Pavilion at COP29. He observed that while the Forum’s mandates and outputs have expanded since its inception, its regular budget allocations have not kept pace, creating persistent challenges and frequent reliance on voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund. He cautioned that any decline in voluntary contributions would affect the Fund’s ability to finance developing country participation at Forum meetings.

Several delegates urged more countries to contribute to the Trust Fund.

The EU said that given the current financial context, the Secretariat should seek to widen the contributor base for the Trust Fund to include more non-traditional sources. CHINA also urged the Secretariat to explore “innovative options” to attract resources.

The US suggested that if the UNFF Secretariat is having staffing problems because of regular budget restrictions, DESA should consider rebalancing its staff to allocate more to the UNFF Secretariat. The UK suggested the Secretariat should not scale up activities until funding can be secured through the regular budget.

BRAZIL and CHINA expressed concern that the balance of Forum participation might be harmed without more resources. BOTSWANA and SOUTH AFRICA stressed that the Trust Fund was not only essential to developing country participation at the Forum, but also technical assistance and many GFFN activities.

Noting its support for the Forest Pavilion at COP29, the ASIAN FOREST COOPERATION ORGANIZATION expressed its commitment to impactful collaboration on forest issues going forward.

The MAJOR GROUPS said that the participation of NGO stakeholders in UNFF sessions is jeopardized by a lack of funding. She thanked countries that earmarked part of their contributions to funding Major Group participation and urged others to do so.

UNFF Secretariat Director Biao drew delegates’ attention to the looming 2030 deadline for achieving the GFGs and stressed that the Secretariat needs more support to help members achieve them.

Emerging Issues

Panel on Dryland Forests: On Thursday, Vice Chair Houmy opened this agenda item. Moderator Ndpana Kanime, SADC, invited panel members to exchange experiences and ideas for advancing the protection, conservation, and sustainable management of dryland forests.

Keynote speaker Liliana Annovazzi-Jakab, UNECE, enumerated the benefits and challenges of dryland forests. She discussed the efforts of the Trees in Dry Cities Coalition, for which UNECE serves as secretariat. Annovazzi-Jakab said the Coalition brings together

people to promote the exchange of experience and knowledge so that actors can learn from innovations spearheaded by others. She urged for greater use of such exchanges.

Oyunsanaa Byambasuren, Director General, National Forest Agency of Mongolia, observed that dryland forests are often overlooked in global agendas and highlighted Mongolia’s efforts to promote their sustainable management. Byambasuren discussed the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) Working Group on Dryland Forests that Mongolia chairs, bringing together 70 member countries to discuss the challenges facing these ecosystems. He also highlighted the Working Group’s role in advising FAO in managing the GEF Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes. He encouraged more countries to join the Working Group.

Najib Alsubhi, National Center for Vegetation Cover and Combating Desertification (NCVC), Saudi Arabia, outlined the Saudi Green Initiative (SGI) and National Greening Program and its goals of growing 10 billion trees, rehabilitating 40 million hectares of degraded land, and increasing protected areas to 30% of land and marine areas. He called on all Member States to:

- integrate dryland forests into national policies;
- promote SFM;
- empower local communities;
- mobilize investment and financial support for the restoration and sustainable management of dryland forests;
- foster regional cooperation and partnerships; and
- scale up nature-based solutions.

Baitshepi Babusi-Hill, Ministry of Environment, Botswana, shared best practices from sustainably managing dryland forests. She said Botswana had committed to planting 150,000 indigenous trees a year and to conserving at least 4,000 square kilometers of dryland forest ecosystems in protected reserves. She described the carbon trading framework that Botswana is developing to promote investment in low-carbon projects while tackling land degradation, and stressed the importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and agroforestry strategies to ensuring that local communities benefit. She identified overgrazing, invasive species, and accessing funding as key challenges to SFM in Botswana, and recommended:

- mainstreaming dryland forests into national climate, biodiversity, and land strategies;
- mobilizing finance from GEF, GCF, and related platforms;
- investing in education in land management, especially for women; and
- promoting regional cooperation on shared ecosystem management through transfrontier conservation areas.

Pascal Martinez, Forests and Wildlife Thematic Lead, GEF, observed that drylands are home to 2 billion people, many of whom rely on agriculture and forest products for their livelihoods. Noting that 72% of drylands deforestation results from human pressures, he presented the results of the GEF’s flagship “Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes,” which is helping 11 countries across Africa and Asia restore and rehabilitate dryland ecosystems while improving livelihoods. He said key lessons from this program included the importance of land tenure security, inclusive approaches, and natural capital accounting.

During interactive discussions, DRC, ECUADOR, EL SALVADOR, LEBANON, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, CHINA, PERU, MADAGASCAR and others shared experiences in

protecting, restoring, and sustainably managing dryland forests in their countries.

COLOMBIA highlighted the cultural value of dryland forests, and underscored threats stemming from unsustainable practices, climate change, intensive agriculture, infrastructure projects, and a lack of funding. BRAZIL highlighted a study showing that species richness can decline up to 70% under prolonged droughts, and highlighted the importance of integrated policies aimed at poverty eradication and the promotion of social inclusion.

ZIMBABWE talked about the need to ensure that women and youth are among the beneficiaries of projects, and PORTUGAL highlighted the UNCCD campaign, “Her Land. Her Rights,” which inspired a national network to help women catalyze the implementation of projects in rural areas and allow them to be local drivers of ecosystem recovery. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP asked countries to “put their money where their mouth is” to protect forests by providing funds for the necessary work.

FAO called for the adoption of adaptive and integrated strategies bringing together Traditional Ecological Knowledge and scientific, evidence-based solutions, as well as holistic, integrated, and cross-sectoral policies bringing together agriculture and forestry. He also highlighted their flagship programme, Grazing with Trees, which offers a roadmap of the benefits livestock provide in managing dryland forests and silvopastoral systems. ITTO shared their experience in implementing dryland forest projects, highlighting the importance of technical assistance to multiple stakeholders through projects with ministries and forest services working on the ground in collaboration with local communities.

Date, Venue and Provisional Agenda for UNFF21

On Friday morning, UNFF20 recommended to ECOSOC for adoption: decisions on the dates and venue for UNFF21 ([E/CN.18/2025/L.2](#)); the provisional agenda ([E/CN.18/2025/L.1](#)); and the draft report of the current session ([E/CN.18/2025/L.3](#)), with the understanding that Rapporteur Sokolenko would complete it with the assistance of the Secretariat. NEW ZEALAND suggested including time in the next session for CPF engagement during plenary.

The provisional UNFF21 agenda includes:

- policy discussions on the implementation of the UNSPF, including consideration of relevant proposals contained in the Chair’s summary;
- initial discussions on the final review of the effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forests in achieving its objectives;
- the UNFF Trust Fund; and
- emerging issues.

Closing Session

On Friday morning, Chair Belen presented the Chair’s draft summary of the week’s discussions ([E/CN.18/2025/L.5](#)) to be submitted to ECOSOC, noting that factual corrections could be submitted in writing over the following week. Several members shared minor corrections in plenary that they planned to submit in writing.

In closing remarks, UNFF Secretariat Director Biao thanked delegates for their constructive engagement. She observed that the current global economic uncertainty and triple planetary crisis cut across all regions of the globe, impacting both developed and developing countries, and pointed to the fundamental role forests

can play in resolving these challenges. Biao thanked members for the opportunity to share the Secretariat’s vision and work, and said the contributions made at UNFF20 would improve the effectiveness of the Secretariat.

Chair Belen thanked Member States for their spirit of cooperation and strong commitment to “forests and our common future.” He praised the tenor of discussions at UNFF20, which he said were marked by an atmosphere of trust, friendship, and purpose, noting that “each of us spoke as independently as a tree standing tall and free, yet worked together in harmony like a forest.” Belen thanked the UNFF Secretariat, members of the Bureau, partners, other organizations, industry, and Major Groups, and said he looked forward to welcoming them back to UNFF21. Until then, he told everyone to “stay safe, stay strong, and may the spirit of the forest stay with all of us.”

He gavelled UNFF20 to a close at 10:51 am.

A Brief Analysis of UNFF20

“The UN Forum on Forests is your baby. If you want it to grow, you must feed it.”

So declared UNFF Secretariat Director Juliette Biao at the twentieth meeting of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF20), where delegates discussed how to mainstream sustainable forest management (SFM) when both resources and time are limited. The 2030 deadline for achieving the ambitious Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and realizing the shared vision of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) is fast approaching. UNFF19 in 2024 piled new mandates on a Secretariat already overburdened by human and financial constraints. At UNFF20, the first “technical” track of UNFF’s biennial work cycle, delegates took stock of progress in honing tools such as monitoring, assessment, and reporting (MAR), considered ways to better facilitate forest financing and exchange best practices, and more. But in all discussions, the main question at UNFF20 was how to do more with less.

This brief analysis examines both hopeful and cautionary developments at UNFF20 and what they may mean for UNFF itself and for the world’s forests.

Seeing The Forest of Progress Through the Trees

Among the accomplishments celebrated at UNFF20 was a Forest Pavilion at the 29th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP29). The pavilion was established in response to past UNFF calls for the Secretariat to find ways to raise the profile of forests in other international processes. As a communications and outreach strategy, the COP29 Forest Pavilion was lauded as a “huge success,” one that showcased forests as a nature-based solution to the climate crisis.

Many UNFF20 delegates called for a Forest Pavilion to become a recurring feature at UNFCCC COPs and perhaps also at the COPs of the other two Rio Conventions, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Although some members expressed concern over the costs of making a Forest Pavilion a more permanent feature of one or more Rio Convention COPs, the Secretariat clarified that at COP29 the pavilion was funded by donations, not the UNFF Trust Fund or regular core budget, and expressed hope that this funding situation could continue going forward.

UNFF20 also noted progress in improving MAR in forestry. As many participants pointed out, “measuring progress is key to affecting improvement.” Steady progress was reported by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests’ (CPF) development of a Global Core Set (GCS) of forest-related indicators to simplify and harmonize forest-related data collection and reporting, while improving transparency, quality, and comparability. Participants also praised the new template for Voluntary National Reports (VNRs), the online platform for submissions, and recent technical assistance workshops on MAR. Many governments pledged to submit VNRs by the June 2025 deadline. The hope shared by all in the room is that more VNRs will be submitted this round, compared to only 52 in the last one. This would substantially improve the forthcoming GFG Report by providing more and better inputs that offer a sound base of data for evaluating where the world stands in implementing the UNSPF.

That said, delegates drew attention to remaining challenges in MAR. For example, work on the GCS of forest-related indicators is currently grappling with arriving at an agreed definition for “forest degradation.” Disagreement here largely stems from the many ways that degradation can be viewed: as reduced timber productivity through the eyes of a forester; a lower capacity to sequester and store carbon through the eyes of a climate scientist; the loss of biodiversity or key habitats through the eyes of biologists; or a loss of socio-cultural relations or subsistence economies through the eyes of communities living among them. The chosen definition will have large implications on how much forests are deemed degraded.

As for the VNR exercise, while praising the new, digitized format and filing system, several delegates called for further work on “reducing the reporting burden,” noting that some of the data reported to UNFF overlaps with that provided to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) for the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) issued every five years.

A third area of progress celebrated at UNFF20 came with the Director’s report, mandated by UNFF19, on the status of establishing the Beijing office of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN). First proposed seven years ago, the office had become a source of festering discord at Forum sessions over the years because of a lack of transparency in the hosting negotiations. Perhaps prompted by the need to report fully to the Forum, recent negotiations between UNFF and China have resolved most of the outstanding issues, and Director Biao expressed hope that the rest would be resolved in 2025.

UNFF20 also examined the case for, and the potential of, a proposed Global Hub on data and information regarding forest finance under GFFFN. The UNFF20 panel examining this possibility responded to critics of the proposal by showing that while it is true that “the data is already out there,” it is not easily accessible, well organized, or user friendly, and certainly not available in a single place. This, many panelists and participants agreed, is where GFFFN could play a significant role in facilitating financing for forests.

The Elephant Amidst the Trees

In spite of the points of progress and promise, a handful of Member States cautioned against straining the limited resources of the UNFF. Some governments cast doubt on the utility of a Forest Pavilion at future COPs. Others wondered if technical assistance should be left to FAO and its CPF partners. Some suggested that,

in light of resource constraints, the upcoming GFG Report should be short, concise, and focused. Still others cautioned against using resources for the Beijing office that could be diverted to the Secretariat in New York.

UNFF has faced human and financial constraints for years. But the UNSPF provided ambitious mandates and UNFF19 added new ones, many in areas where the Secretariat was already under capacity. Just how under capacity was made clear in a first-ever informal assessment of Secretariat workload, needs, and gaps prepared by veteran forestry consultant Stephanie Caswell. Her assessment was grim. Her conclusion was that current conditions are unsustainable, with both staff members and potential outputs suffering.

Because of the current global financial context and the liquidity crisis facing the UN, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), where the UNFF Secretariat resides, the Secretariat has been forced to tap the Trust Fund (fed by voluntary contributions, and therefore not predictable) for temporary contracts to fill regular staff positions. But this practice will likely prove even more precarious in the future, given the US—the largest contributor to the Trust Fund in past years—warned that “future contributions are not guaranteed.”

This led to the suggestion from several participants that the Secretariat should explore “new, creative” ways to expand its contributor base, not only in terms of more governments, but also other international organizations, philanthropies, and the private sector. As Director Biao was at pains to point out at every turn, this is precisely what they have been doing. But as one delegate pointed out, the time and energy and expertise of the Secretariat would be much better spent on working to achieve their mandate, versus working to source enough funding for it.

The View Ahead

What do these challenges mean for the second “policy track” year of the UNFF biennium at UNFF21 in May 2026? That depends on a series of events over the next few months, starting with the upcoming June deadline for VNR submissions. If significantly more countries submit VNRs than last time, the theory goes, the GFG Report will be a more meaningful product, bringing into sharper (and perhaps painful) relief what is truly needed to achieve the 2030 GFGs. If the Beijing GFFFN office agreement is concluded in 2025, it will relieve a persistent source of irritation for many Member States. If the Forest Pavilion is held again at UNFCCC COP30, without tapping UNFF budget resources, and it again succeeds in conveying the message that forests are pivotal to solving climate change, conserving biodiversity, and combating land degradation, this may cement the value of this outreach vehicle and encourage its extension to other COPs. If Brazil’s Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF) launches as anticipated at COP30, it will provide a source of new funds for tropical SFM, shine a spotlight on these ecosystems specifically and, by extension, forests more broadly, and provide a new ally for the GFFFN.

If, if, if: a lot remains unknown. But what is certain, in the view of one seasoned delegate, is that the Secretariat needs some “wins” as they head into UNFF21, where the human and financial resources debate will likely loom even larger in the face of a shifting global order. At UNFF20, delegates had the chance to quietly take stock of

progress and consider what might be. At UNFF21, they will face the harsh realities of looming 2030 targets and uncertain capacities to meet them.

Upcoming Meetings

Sixth Global Conference on Climate & SDG Synergies:

The conference will explore strategies and actionable pathways for accelerating the synergistic implementation of climate action and sustainable development and driving transformative solutions for a more sustainable future. **dates:** 27-28 May 2025 **location:** Copenhagen, Denmark **www:** un.org/en/climate-sdgs-conference-2025

69th meeting of the GEF Council: The Council meets twice annually to develop, adopt, and evaluate the operational policies and programs for GEF-financed activities, and to review and approve the work program. **dates:** 2-6 June 2025 **location:** Washington DC, US **www:** thegef.org/events/69th-gef-council-meeting

UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies: The 62nd session of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) will prepare for COP30. **dates:** 16-26 June 2025 **location:** Bonn, Germany **www:** unfccc.int/sb62

HLPF 2025: The 2025 meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, under the auspices of ECOSOC, will convene under the theme “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind.” **dates:** 14-23 July 2025 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** hlpf.un.org/2025

IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025: The Congress is the largest gathering of nature conservation experts, leaders, and decision-makers in the world. It will help shape global priorities for nature conservation and climate change for the coming decades and beyond. **dates:** 9-15 October 2025 **location:** Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates **www:** iucncongress2025.org

CBD Subsidiary Bodies: The 27th meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), and the first meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and other Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity Related to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, will meet to prepare for COP17. **dates:** 20-30 October 2025 **location:** Panama City, Panama **www:** cbd.int/meetings

61st session of the International Tropical Timber Council: The Council is the ITTO’s governing body. It meets once a year along with the associated committees to discuss wide-ranging issues of interest to members, including those related to the legal trade of tropical timber and the sustainable management of tropical forests. **dates:** 27-31 October 2025 **location:** Panama City, Panama **www:** itto.int/events

Amazonia Climate Change Conference 2025: The 30th meeting of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP 30), the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 20), and the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 7) will convene. **dates:** 10-21 November 2025 **location:** Belém, Brazil **www:** unfccc.int/cop30

CITES COP 20: The 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 20) will convene to, *inter alia*, review progress in the conservation of species included in the appendices, consider proposals to amend the list of species, and recommend measures to improve the effectiveness of the Convention. **dates:** 24 November - 5 December 2025 **location:** Samarkand, Uzbekistan **www:** cites.org/eng/cop20

UNEA-7: The seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly will convene under the theme “Advancing sustainable solutions for a resilient planet” to send a strong message to accelerate solutions and effective responses for a safer and more resilient planet. It will be preceded by the seventh meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives from 1-5 December 2025. **dates:** 8-12 December 2025 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** unep.org/environmentassembly/unea7

UNFF21: The forum will review progress in the implementation of the UNSPF, including the outcomes of the MTR, inputs to the HLPF, and developments from other international forest-related processes. **dates:** 11-15 May 2026 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** un.org/esa/forests

For additional upcoming events, see: sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CPF	Collaborative Partnership on Forests
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOSOC	UN Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GFFFN	Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network
GFGs	Global Forest Goals
HLPF	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IAF	International Arrangement on Forests
IDF	International Day of Forests
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization
LDN	Land Degradation Neutrality
MAR	Monitoring, assessment, and reporting
MTR	Midterm Review
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFM	Sustainable forest management
TFFF	Tropical Forests Forever Facility
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNECE	UN Economic Commission on Europe
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFF	UN Forum on Forests
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNSPF	UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030