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# COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

## TWENTY-THIRD SESSION

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### STATE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS 2016: FORESTS AND AGRICULTURE - LAND USE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

#### I. Introduction

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were agreed by world leaders in September 2015, constitute a strong commitment to move the world onto a sustainable and resilient path of development. The Agenda 2030 emphasizes the integrated nature of the SDGs and the crucial importance of their interlinkages.

2. The significant role of forests in achieving the SDGs was highlighted at the XIV World Forestry Congress, held in Durban, South Africa in September 2015. In its Durban Declaration, the Congress set out a vision for forests and forestry, emphasizing, inter alia, that integrated approaches to land use provide a way forward for improving policies and practices to address the drivers of deforestation and conflicts over land use; capitalize on the full range of economic, social and environmental benefits of integrating forests with agriculture; and maintain multiple forest services in the landscape context.

3. The State of the World's Forests 2016 examines how this vision can be realized, focusing on the conversion of forests to agriculture and the conversion of agricultural land to forest. Agriculture is still the most significant driver of global deforestation. Given the importance of both agriculture and forests to the planet's future, there is an urgent need to promote positive interactions between these two land uses.

#### II. Trends in Land use change

4. The relationship between population growth, increased demand for arable land and forest loss dates back thousands of years, and forests have sometimes re-established naturally as deforestation pressures have eased. Deforestation was most prevalent in the temperate climatic domain until the late nineteenth century and is now greatest in the tropical climatic domain with a net forest loss of 7 million hectares per year in 2000–2010 and a net gain in agricultural land of 6 million hectares per

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year. The greatest net loss of forests and net gain in agricultural land over the period was in the low-income group of countries, where rural populations are growing.

5. In the tropics and subtropics, large-scale commercial agriculture accounts for about 40 percent of deforestation, local subsistence agriculture for 33 percent, infrastructure for 10 percent, urban expansion for 10 percent and mining for 7 percent. There are significant regional variations, however; for example, commercial agriculture accounts for almost 70 percent of the deforestation in Latin America but for only one-third in Africa, where small-scale agriculture is a more significant driver of deforestation.

6. Underlying factors affecting forest conversion include population growth and changing food consumption patterns; agricultural developments, such as changing markets, technological improvements and active policy interventions; land-tenure security; and the governance of land-use change.

7. Forest losses in 2010–2015 (most of which was natural forest) were offset partially by a combination of natural expansion, often on abandoned agricultural land (2.2 million hectares per year), and the establishment of planted forests (3.1 million hectares per year).

### **III. The governance and management of land use change**

8. Although most countries have formal policies for their forest and agriculture sectors, linkages between these policies are generally weak. Despite acknowledging the importance of a coordinated and consistent approach to land-use policies, relevant policy documents provide little information on how this is to be done, and relatively few show clear evidence of coordination between agriculture- and forest-related interests. There is an increasing need for coherent policies on land-use change between forest and agriculture in light of recent international agreements, such as the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

9. Legal frameworks for the conversion of forest to agricultural land are often complex, and informal local practices may have a strong influence where law implementation and enforcement is weak. The role of customary law, based on traditional rights, is especially important for vulnerable groups.

10. Forest loss is a feature of many low-income, food-deficit countries where government investment in agriculture and forestry is low. Countries that promote agricultural investment and adding value, and provide enabling infrastructure, have addressed the problem of forest loss more effectively than those with low investment. Direct public investment is increasingly focused on environmental and social protection programmes and other public goods (such as research and development), and there is increasing emphasis on creating enabling environments for private-sector investment.

### **IV. Making room for forests and food security**

11. Agriculture and forestry are often perceived as conflicting land uses, with agriculture being the direct driver for an estimated 80 percent of global deforestation. However, 23 countries have shown over the past 25 years that increasing agricultural production and improving food security does not have to come at the expense of forests. Food security can be achieved through agricultural intensification and other measures such as social protection, rather than through expansion of agricultural areas.

12. An in-depth analysis of seven of the 23 countries revealed that economic reforms can help increase food security while also maintaining or increasing forest cover. Common factors that have contributed to increasing both food security and forest area include the importance of favourable economic conditions; policies that consider the agriculture and forest sectors in a balanced way and

recognize the full economic, social and environmental benefits of forests; a market-oriented agricultural policy that includes social and environmental safeguards; policy instruments that promote increased agricultural productivity and sustainable forest management; an effective legal and institutional framework; adequate funding for implementation; devolving forest management rights to local communities; and promoting integrated land use. Approaches for integrating land uses and landscape management include strategic land-use frameworks, collaboration among agricultural and forest institutes on research, development and extension, strengthening of farm–forest links, and the promotion of agroforestry.

## **V. Towards better governance of land use for forests and agriculture**

13. In order to meet global priorities, including those set out in the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, there is an urgent need to accelerate progress towards achieving sustainable agriculture, food security and sustainable forest management. This requires improving the governance and management of land-use change by taking a series of decisive and concrete measures:

14. Better cross-sectoral coordination of policies on agriculture, food and forests - High-level national economic, social and environmental policies should recognize the importance of sustainable agriculture, food security and sustainable forest management. Such recognition would constitute a first step in improving policy coordination, and would also help in identifying policy tensions so that further analysis of potential conflicts can inform political decisions on priorities.

15. Public investment in agriculture and forests - There is a need for concurrent public investment in sustainable agriculture and sustainable forest management as part of, or complementary to, wider rural development programmes. Such investment should focus on measures that catalyse private investment; improve processing, distribution and marketing infrastructure; promote innovation and best practices through research, development and extension; and develop the capacity of producer and community organizations. Social and environmental safeguards through, for example, cross-compliance measures should be put in place to mitigate potential adverse consequences of investments in agriculture and forests.

16. Using the right policy instruments to promote sustainable agriculture and sustainable forest management - In any given country, the choice of policy instruments to support sustainable land use should reflect the circumstances and be targeted accordingly. This requires careful analysis of the underlying causes and consequences of the identified problems, especially whether the main driver of deforestation is large-scale commercial commodity production or the expansion of small-scale subsistence farming. In the latter case, policy instruments, for example to improve farming practices and promote agroforestry, should be considered in the wider context of rural development, livelihood diversification and poverty alleviation programmes.

17. Improving tenure rights and the legal framework - Laws and regulations on land-use change should be clear and consistent with policy objectives. The legal framework should provide certainty on land tenure and the rights to the use of land and forest resources, in accordance with the principles set out in the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of Food Security.

18. Strengthening institutions and stakeholder engagement - Good governance requires effective institutions as well as a sound policy and legal framework. The institutional framework should encompass local communities, civil society organizations and responsible private-sector interests, as well as government departments and agencies. Consideration should be given to opportunities for devolving public-forest management rights to local communities and smallholders thus giving local people greater access to forest benefits. Gender considerations should be mainstreamed in national forest policies, programmes and institutions, which should actively promote the equal access of women to the ownership of land and other resources. Partnerships between the public sector, the

private sector and civil society should be encouraged as a way of promoting sustainable land management.

19. Promoting integrated land-use approaches and landscape management - Integrated land-use planning provides an opportunity to develop a strategic framework for balancing competing land uses among stakeholders. It requires technical data on land and natural resources as well as collaboration among relevant public bodies and the active engagement of stakeholders. Integrated management approaches such as agroforestry, agroecology, climate-smart agriculture and the adaptation of livestock grazing regimes should be promoted.

20. Providing more comprehensive information to meet evidence needs - There is a need for more systematic and comprehensive evidence at the global level on the effectiveness of governance, law enforcement and compliance mechanisms related to land-use change from forests to agriculture; and on the economic, social and environmental values of forests.

## **VI. Points for consideration**

21. Based on the findings of the State of World's Forests 2016, the Committee may wish to:

- a) Recognize that the sustainable management of both forests and agriculture, and their integration in land-use plans, is essential for achieving the SDGs, ensuring food security and tackling climate change.
- b) Invite countries to:
  - improve coordination between policies on forests, agriculture, food, land use and rural development for more effective regulation of land use change;
  - promote integrated land use planning as a strategic framework for balancing land uses at national, subnational and landscape scales;
  - use adequate policy instruments and boost investments to increase sustainable agricultural production and encourage sustainable forest management.
- b) Request FAO to support countries to:
  - develop integrated land use strategies that take into account the important role of forests in the water cycle, soil conservation, carbon sequestration and habitat protection, thus safeguarding their contributions to sustainable agriculture and food security;
  - strengthen governance of land use by improving tenure security for local communities and smallholders and encouraging partnerships with the private sector and civil society for sustainable forest and land management;
  - monitor and collect data on the effectiveness of governance mechanisms related to land use change affecting forests and on the social, economic and environmental values of forests.