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**FAO European Forestry Commission matters: FAO's work  
on biodiversity****Food and Agriculture Organization  
European Forestry Commission****Fortieth session**

Geneva, 4-7 November 2019

**FAO's work on biodiversity****Note by the Secretariat***Summary*

The purpose of the paper is to provide information on FAO's work on biodiversity, including the recent session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the development of the FAO strategy on biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors.

Delegates will be invited to provide guidance to the related work of members and FAO.



## I. Introduction

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development puts biodiversity at the centre of many economic activities, particularly those related to the agricultural sectors. It calls for the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem services into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and the promotion of fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed.
2. FAO's Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture is the only intergovernmental body, which specifically addresses all components of biodiversity of relevance to food and agriculture. With 178 countries and the European Union as its members, the Commission's main objective is to ensure the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from its use, for present and future generations.
3. The 2016 UN Biodiversity Conference, held in Cancun, Mexico, called for the mainstreaming of biodiversity across all agricultural sectors as well as the tourism sector.<sup>1</sup> It invited FAO and its Governing and Statutory Bodies to consider and support the development and implementation of relevant measures, guidance and tools in this regard, and welcomed FAO's initiative to act as Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform.<sup>2,3</sup>
4. This document reports on the forest-relevant outcomes of the 17<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (18-22 February 2019) and on progress made in the development of an FAO strategy on biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors as requested by FAO's Technical Committees including the Committee on Forestry<sup>4</sup>.

### A. Background

5. Biodiversity forms the basis of all agricultural sectors and is key to food security and nutrition. In many places, indigenous and local communities and small holder farmers are key guardians of biological diversity. Biodiversity is needed to sustainably produce enough nutritious food in the face of challenges, such as climate change and growing populations with changing diets. A large number of the world's poor rely directly on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and their livelihoods are affected by biodiversity loss. However, in some cases, gains in economic development have been achieved at the expense of biodiversity, putting at risk prospects for food security and nutrition, and resilient livelihoods in the long-term.
6. The agricultural sectors have the potential to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. However, the growing demand for food and agricultural commodities will increase the pressures on biodiversity unless those pressures are appropriately addressed. When managed sustainably, agricultural sectors support provisioning of ecosystem services. As demand for agricultural products continues to grow worldwide, the role of the agricultural sectors in biodiversity conservation becomes even more significant.
7. Biodiversity is already a well-recognized element of forestry. The concept of sustainable forest management (SFM), which has evolved over time, now guides the development and implementation of policies and practices to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental values of forests. The role of forests in maintaining biodiversity is also explicitly recognized by the *UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030*<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> CBD/COP/13/24.

<sup>2</sup> CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/3

<sup>3</sup> COFO/2018/5.3

<sup>4</sup> COFO/2018/5.3

<sup>5</sup> A/RES/71/285

8. “Mainstreaming” of biodiversity has been interpreted and defined in various ways. One useful definition is that by the Global Environmental Facility’s (GEF) Scientific and Advisory Panel (STAP)<sup>6</sup>, which describes it as: “*the process of embedding biodiversity considerations into policies, strategies and practices of key public and private actors that impact or rely on biodiversity, so that it is conserved and sustainably and equitably used both locally and globally*”. FAO understands that mainstreaming biodiversity across the agricultural sectors involves prioritizing food and agriculture policies, plans, programmes, projects, and investments that have a positive impact on biodiversity at the ecosystem, species and genetic levels, as well as ecosystem services, which are essential for the sustainability of the agriculture sectors. This involves enhancing the sustainable use of biodiversity for food and agriculture in agro-, forest and marine ecosystems, and minimizing the impact of the agriculture sectors on all ecosystems.<sup>7</sup>

## **B. Forest-relevant outcomes from the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**

9. The 17<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Commission) took place in Rome on 18-22 February 2019.<sup>8</sup> It considered a number of both cross-cutting and sector-specific issues based on recommendations by its Intergovernmental Technical Working Groups and other expert groups, including guidance provided by the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Forest Genetic Resources (8-10 May 2018).<sup>9</sup>

10. The Commission welcomed *The State of the World’s Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (SoW-BFA)*<sup>10</sup> as an important milestone for the UN Decade on Biodiversity and as a valuable contribution to the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. It also considered a document on draft needs and possible actions in response to SoW-BFA and requested the Secretary to convene, subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, an open-ended meeting of the Group of National Focal Points for Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture to revise the document, for consideration by the Commission at its Eighteenth Session in 2021, with the motivation to have it adopted as a Global Plan of Action on biodiversity for food and agriculture by the FAO Conference at its Forty-second Session.

11. The Commission also welcomed FAO’s activities on raising awareness of the contributions of genetic resources for food and agriculture to food security and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, and requested FAO to continue conducting such activities. Concerning access and benefit sharing (ABS), the Commission welcomed explanatory notes describing the distinctive features of different sub-sectors of genetic resources, including forest genetic resources, and encouraged countries to consider and make use of them when implementing their ABS measures. It also agreed that there is a need for further review of “digital sequence information” on genetic resources for food and agriculture, and for continued coordination with the ongoing process on this topic under the CBD and its Nagoya Protocol. Additionally, the Commission requested FAO to prepare a scoping study on the role of genetic resources in adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and its Working Groups to review this study.

12. The Commission took note of the *First Report on the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources*<sup>11</sup>. It invited countries to continue implementing this action plan and encouraged them to address the findings of the report. The Commission further adopted a funding strategy for the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/publications/Mainstreaming-Biodiversity-LowRes\\_1.pdf](https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/publications/Mainstreaming-Biodiversity-LowRes_1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> CL/161/3-WA2

<sup>8</sup> CGRFA-17/19/Report

<sup>9</sup> CGRFA-17/19/10.1

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/CA3129EN/CA3129EN.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> CGRFA-17/19/10.2/Inf.1

and Development of Forest Genetic Resources (Global Plan of Action)<sup>12</sup>, and endorsed voluntary guidelines for preparing a national strategy for forest genetic resources<sup>13</sup>.

13. The funding strategy has three objectives. Firstly, it aims to mobilize financial resources from existing multilateral financing mechanisms to the implementation of the Global Plan of Action by mainstreaming actions on the conservation, use and development of forest genetic resources into larger and holistic country-led actions that are designed to enhance the implementation of sustainable forest management and forest-based adaptation and mitigation measures for climate change. Secondly, the funding strategy aims to further mobilize financial resources from all possible sources for strategic and specific actions on forest genetic resources at national, regional and international levels. Thirdly, it promotes cooperation with ongoing forest financing initiatives, in particular the *Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN)* established by the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), to make available information on, and facilitate access to, existing and emerging funding sources.

14. The Commission requested FAO to continue coordinating and supporting the implementation of the Global Plan of Action, in collaboration with regional networks on forest genetic resources and relevant international organizations.

15. Concerning the preparation of *The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* (to be released in 2023), the Commission adopted the outline of the Second Report and its preparatory process<sup>14</sup>, as well as guidelines for preparing country reports<sup>15</sup>. It encouraged countries to initiate the collection of information and data for the preparation of these reports and called upon them to submit the reports by 30 June 2020. The Commission also requested FAO to initiate the development of a new global information system on forest genetic resources, subject to the availability of extra budgetary resources, to make the collected data easily accessible and useable.

16. In June 2019, through a Circular State Letter<sup>16</sup>, FAO invited countries to update by 31 August 2019, as necessary, the nominations for National Focal Points on forest genetic resources and to submit the country reports by 30 June 2020. Subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, FAO will organize, in collaboration with the regional networks on forest genetic resources and international organizations, regional training workshops for the National Focal Points to support the preparation of the country reports.

### **C. FAO strategy on biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors**

17. The Conference, at its 40<sup>th</sup> session, welcomed FAO's initiative to act as Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform; and requested FAO to facilitate, in collaboration with its partners, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other UN organizations, the integration in a structured and coherent manner of actions for the conservation, sustainable use, management and restoration of biological diversity across agricultural sectors at national, regional and international levels.

18. The Committee on Forestry, at its 24<sup>th</sup> session, supported FAO's initiative to serve as a Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform covering forestry, fisheries and agriculture, in an integrated manner, and recognized that the implementation of sustainable forest management is important for mainstreaming biodiversity in forestry. It further invited member countries to engage in the Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform to exchange on opportunities and constraints for biodiversity mainstreaming in forestry. It finally requested FAO to develop a

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<sup>12</sup> CGRFA-17/19/Report, Appendix D.

<sup>13</sup> CGRFA-17/19/10.2/Inf.3

<sup>14</sup> CGRFA-17/19/10.3

<sup>15</sup> CGRFA-17/19/10.3/Inf.1

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5229en/ca5229en.pdf>; <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5229fr/ca5229fr.pdf>;  
<http://www.fao.org/3/ca5229es/ca5229es.pdf>

biodiversity strategy, which includes a plan to mainstream biodiversity in the forest sector, and bring it to COFO for its consideration.<sup>17</sup>

19. The Council, at its 160<sup>th</sup> session, endorsed upon consultation of its Technical Committees, the “*development by FAO of a strategy on biodiversity mainstreaming across agricultural sectors, for consideration by the Programme Committee and Council, to be presented at the FAO Conference in 2019, in view of the preparation of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*.”<sup>18</sup>

20. The Council, at its 161<sup>st</sup> Session, stressed the need for further consultation with Members and, in this respect, noted that inputs were still being collected from FAO Members. In consideration of the above, the Council recommended that the Conference mandate the Council to consider and to adopt the Strategy before 2020.<sup>19</sup> The Council further requested that FAO increase the funding in the PWB 2020-21, through efficiencies and cost savings without negatively impacting the delivery of the agreed programme of work, or, if necessary, from the areas of technical de-emphasis to the extent feasible in order to mainstream biodiversity at FAO.<sup>20</sup> Following the Council's recommendation, the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the FAO Conference mandated the Council to consider and adopt the FAO Strategy on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors before 2020, following an inclusive consultation process.<sup>21</sup> A revised draft, incorporating comments received by Members, will be circulated to Members through a Circular State Letter.

21. Substance-wise, the Draft version of the FAO Strategy on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors<sup>22</sup>, subject to endorsement by the FAO Council before 2020, proposes four overarching goals, namely a) the sustainable use of biodiversity through landscapes and ecosystem approaches, b) conserve, enhance and restore biodiversity and ensure the continued provision of ecosystem services, c) promote sustainable food and agricultural systems that integrate biodiversity considerations throughout value chains, and d) enhance the contribution of biodiversity, and associated indigenous and local knowledge, to food security and nutrition, ending poverty and safeguarding resilience livelihoods.

22. The Draft Strategy further proposes four outcomes, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, i.e. that by 2030 (i) FAO's programmes, policies and instruments are strengthened by the integration of biodiversity, (ii) capacities of members are enhanced to develop and implement evidence-based policies, investments and programmes relevant to biodiversity and monitor and evaluate their impact, (iii) the important role of biodiversity for food security and nutrition and the agricultural sectors, is fully reflected in relevant international agreements and processes, and (iv) coordination and delivery of FAO work relevant to biodiversity is strengthened.

23. To operationalize the aforementioned goals and outcomes, the Draft Strategy proposes that FAO develop sectoral plans on mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors with the active participation of the regions, complemented by steps to strengthen internal delivery through the establishment of an inter-departmental technical working group on biodiversity mainstreaming, the review of relevant FAO strategies, and the identification of learning opportunities on biodiversity mainstreaming for staff.

24. One ongoing activity of FAO's initiative to act as Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform is the convening of multi-stakeholder dialogues. Following the *Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors in Rome (29-31 May 2018)*, a *High-Level Regional Dialogue on the Integration of Biodiversity in Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DRANIBA)* took place in Mexico (29-30 October 2018) and Bangkok (17-19 July 2019). The African Regional Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors is scheduled to occur in Kigali (9-11 October 2019). The Regional Dialogue for Europe and Central Asia is planned for late 2019 or early

<sup>17</sup> COFO/2018/REP.

<sup>18</sup> CL 160/REP, paragraph 6(o), 8(m) and 9(d)

<sup>19</sup> CL 161/REP, paragraph 18(e)

<sup>20</sup> CL 161/REP, paragraph 11(e)

<sup>21</sup> C 2019/REP, paragraph 48

<sup>22</sup> CL 161/3-WA2

2020. Discussions are underway with the Government of Jordan to potentially organize a Regional Dialogue for the Middle East in Amman.

## **II. Points for Consideration**

25. The Commission may wish to invite member countries to:
- (a) Mainstream biodiversity across agricultural sectors;
  - (b) Provide feedback on the draft biodiversity strategy;
  - (c) Implement international agreements relevant to biodiversity and forests, as well as the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources;
  - (d) Initiate the preparation of their country reports for The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources, and to submit them to FAO by 30 June 2020.
26. The Commission may wish to request FAO to:
- (a) Initiate, upon the adoption of the FAO Strategy on Biodiversity, appropriate follow-up actions including a plan to mainstream biodiversity in the forest sector, and report on progress made at the next appropriate session;
  - (b) Continue to report on forest-relevant work of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources and the preparation of The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources, to the Regional Forestry Commissions.
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