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# ASIA-PACIFIC FORESTRY COMMISSION

## TWENTY-NINTH SESSION

**Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia**  
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**(virtual meeting)**

## GLOBAL FOREST RESOURCES ASSESSMENT 2020: STATE OF FORESTRY IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

### Executive Summary

The FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) has since decades contributed to the compilation, analysis and reporting on the world's forest resources at national, regional and global levels. FRA supports the work and monitoring of many international processes and goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

Parallel to the country reporting process, FAO initiated a global Remote Sensing Survey. Its first results were published in the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference and the full report will be released at the XV World Forestry Congress. Also, the next assessment, FRA 2025 is under preparation, with the further development of the FRA platform supporting user-friendly digital data entry, as well as the elaboration of improved guidance and tools for more consistent reporting on forest characteristics, including on primary forests. The scope and the reporting content will be discussed in the FRA 2025 Expert Consultation in mid-2022.

According to the results of the most recent assessment, FRA 2020, the forest area in the Asia-Pacific Forest Commission (APFC) region has increased quite substantially, by 31.3 million hectares over the period 1990-2020. However, gains in forest area are spread unevenly, with nine APFC member countries reporting gains in forest area, but 17 countries reporting a decline in forest area during this period. The area of primary forests in APFC member countries has declined by 15 percent since 1990, while the area of planted forests has increased by 83.6 percent. Forests under management plans also increased and now account for about 375 million hectares or 50 percent of the region's forest area.

### **Suggested action by the Commission**

The Commission is invited to:

- Continue their active participation in the FRA process through in-kind contributions to the work on improved reporting on primary forests and other forest characteristics;
- Collaborate with FAO and partner institutions to further improve the FRA process and its data collection, analysis and dissemination processes;
- Reflect on recent developments in the region and consider new developments in member countries that may be of particular significance and interest to other countries.

The Commission may wish to request FAO to:

- Continue improving the FRA platform to support easy and transparent reporting on forest resources, their management and uses;
- Continue the work on improved reporting on primary forests and report the first results of the work in the 26th Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO);
- Complete the FRA Remote Sensing Survey and continue capacity development on remote sensing.

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## **I. BACKGROUND**

1. The FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) is the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment of global forest resources, their management and uses. Over the past decades, FRA has contributed to the compilation, analysis and reporting of official, consistent and reliable information on the world's forest resources to inform society of their status and trends at national, regional and global levels. In addition to its regular functions, FRA collects data for and reports on two of the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 – Life on Land. FRA data also support the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Rio Conventions – Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) – and contribute to monitoring progress towards the Global Forest Goals (GFG) of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests, 2017-2030 (UNSPF).

2. FRA is a country-driven process, which is based on official statistical data reported to FAO by Members. The work of FRA is guided by the FAO's governing and

statutory bodies and by a dedicated Advisory Group and it receives technical guidance and support from international specialists through expert consultations organized by FAO at regular intervals.

## **II. FRA 2020 COUNTRY REPORTING PROCESS**

3. The FRA 2020 process started in 2016 with a request to nominate national correspondents for the process. An expert consultation organized in Joensuu, Finland in June 2017 provided initial guidance on the scope and content of the assessment. The country reporting was launched at a global meeting in March 2018 in Toluca, Mexico, which brought together more than 160 participants from over 90 countries.

4. Following the global launch, nine regional and sub-regional workshops were organized during the period of April–December 2018 to further support countries in compiling and finalizing the FRA 2020 country reports.

5. FRA 2020 data collection and review processes were carried out in close collaboration with the national correspondents, partners of the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ)<sup>1</sup> and altogether more than 700 national and international experts contributed to the process.

## **III. FRA REMOTE SENSING SURVEY**

6. Parallel to the country reporting process, FAO initiated a global Remote Sensing Survey (RSS) with two main objectives: (i) to improve the capacity of countries to use the latest remote sensing data and products to monitor their forests; and (ii) to derive independent regional and global estimates of forest area and forest area change.

7. Between late 2018 and mid-2021, FAO organized 35 FRA RSS workshops and trained 901 national experts from 130 countries on remote sensing and the use of the FRA remote sensing survey methodology. Participants analysed more than 400 000 sample sites for land use and land use changes. Almost half the participants (427 people) were trained in virtual workshops using e-learning materials and other digital tools since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. The first results of the FRA 2020 RSS were launched during the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow. Full results will be presented during the XV World Forestry Congress in Seoul in May 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to FAO, the CFRQ partners include International Tropical Timber Organization, FOREST EUROPE, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Observatory of Central African Forests and the countries of the Montréal Process.

#### IV. THE WAY FORWARD

9. A new user-friendly digital data entry, review, analysis and dissemination platform for FRA provides an excellent basis for the next assessment, FRA 2025. As the platform already hosts all data and metadata reported by the countries to FRA 2020, its use in the next reporting cycle will significantly reduce the reporting burden and time needed for the data entry and review. Hence, the use of the platform will release resources for improving further the reported data and metadata.

10. The platform functionalities will be further developed based on inputs provided by FRA national correspondents, collaborators and other users. The foreseen enhancements include functionalities for easier and more consistent reporting, as well as improved sharing of geospatial data and products. In addition, the system will be adjusted to meet the needs of a flexible reporting process that will allow more frequent voluntary updates of key indicator values, in line with the request of the 25th Session of COFO.

11. Based on a request at the same session of COFO, FAO has initiated the development of improved guidance and tools for more consistent reporting on forest characteristics. The work on improved reporting on primary forests was initiated successfully in the boreal biome and it now continues in the tropical domain. APFC countries have participated actively in this process, including in the initial February 2020 online consultation. Australia hosted an online workshop, “Improving reporting on tropical and subtropical primary forests in Asia-Pacific region” in November 2021, which was attended by participants from 12 countries.

12. Further streamlining and harmonization of FRA with other forest resource-related data collection and reporting processes will be sought through strengthened collaboration with the CFRQ, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, the Rio Conventions and parties involved in the 2030 Agenda-related data collection and reporting processes.

13. Finally, the scope of the next FRA will be carefully reviewed to further reduce potential duplication and enhance synergies with other data collection processes. The scope and the reporting content will be discussed in the FRA 2025 Expert Consultation in mid-2022.

#### V. FRA 2020: KEY FINDINGS OUTLINING THE STATE OF FORESTRY IN APFC MEMBER COUNTRIES

14. The FRA 2020 products include Key Findings (also available as an interactive Digital Report), a comprehensive Main Report, as well as country reports and an open-access FRA database including all the data and metadata reported by the countries. All FRA products are available at <http://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/en/>. The open-access platform can be accessed directly at <https://fra-data.fao.org>.

##### Forest area

15. The total global forest area is 4.06 billion hectares (about 31 percent of the global land area). The total forest area in Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission member

countries<sup>2</sup> in 2020 was 751 million hectares, 18.5 percent of the global forest area. Among the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission member countries, China, Australia, Indonesia and India are among the ten countries with the largest forest area, globally.

### **Forest area changes**

16. The world's forest area declined by 47.4 million hectares between 2010 and 2020, continuing a long trend of declining forest area. Since 1990, a net area of 177.5 million hectares of forests have been lost; an area approaching the land area of Indonesia. However, the APFC member countries countered this trend, with net forest area increasing by 31.3 million hectares between 1990 and 2020. In the most recent decade (2010 to 2020) forest area in APFC member countries increased by 13.8 million hectares. The increase in forest area in Asia and the Pacific compared with the rest of the world has also increased the region's share of global forests; to 18.5 percent in 2020, compared with 17 percent in 1990. However, the distribution of forest area changes in the Asia-Pacific region is uneven. Between 1990 and 2020, nine countries in the region reported increasing forest areas (Australia, Bhutan, China, Fiji, India, Nepal, New Zealand, Thailand and Viet Nam). During the same period, 17 countries reported a decline in forest area, while five countries reported no change. In the countries reporting declining forest areas, 46.9 million hectares of forests were lost between 1990 and 2020.

17. FRA 2020 also collected data on forest-related land-use change within countries, including areas of forest expansion and areas of deforestation. Since 1990, FRA 2020 reveals that an estimated 420 million hectares of forest has been lost worldwide through deforestation (conversion of forest to other land uses), but the rate of forest loss has declined substantially. In the most recent five-year period (2015–2020), the annual rate of deforestation was estimated at 10 million hectares, down from 12 million hectares in 2010–2015. Among APFC member countries, 107.1 million hectares have been lost to deforestation since 1990. However, as with the rest of the world, the annual rate of forest loss has declined substantially in the region (even though the loss of primary forests remains a concern); from 4.7 million hectares per annum in the 1990-2000 period, to 2.2 million hectares per annum in the most recent five-year period to 2020. While the area of deforestation in APFC member countries has been more than offset by areas of forest expansion, it is likely that overall forest biodiversity in the region has been reduced as a result of deforestation and increased area share of planted forests.<sup>3</sup>

### **Primary forests**

18. Despite an overall increase in forested area in the region since 1990, primary forests continue to decline in Asia and the Pacific. Among the 19 APFC member countries that reported on primary forest area to FRA 2020 primary forest area totals 86.1 million hectares, or 17.1 percent of the forest area in those countries. This is much lower than the global average of 32 percent. Among the 18 APFC member countries that have reported primary forest statistics for the complete time series (1990-2020) of the FRA, primary forest area has declined by 15 percent. Degradation and fragmentation further weaken the functionality and resilience of primary forest ecosystems; their capacity to

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<sup>2</sup> Excluding France, Russian Federation and United States.

<sup>3</sup> FRA identifies two broad categories of forest: naturally regenerating forest, and planted forest.

provide ecosystem services and to cope with external shocks. Hence, reversing these trends and halting primary forest loss and degradation should be a priority for all countries in the region.

### **Planted forests**

19. Globally, there has been a significant increase in planted forest area in the past 30 years. Since 1990, the world's total area of planted forests has increased from 170.1 million hectares, to 292.6 million hectares in 2020. In APFC member countries, the area of planted forests has also expanded rapidly; from 73.2 million hectares in 1990 to 134.4 million hectares in 2020, an increase of 83.6 percent. A significant proportion (45.9 percent) of the world's planted forests are located in APFC member countries. FRA 2020 differentiated between two sub-categories of planted forests; "plantation" and "other planted" forest. Plantation forest is defined as a kind of planted forest, characterized by intensive management, regular tree spacing and one to two species per management unit. This division into sub-categories provides additional data for, among others, wood supply analysis. Plantation forests in APFC member countries totaled 79.9 million hectares in 2020, accounting for 59.5 percent of planted forests.

### **Naturally regenerating forests**

20. Naturally regenerating forests include both primary forests and other naturally regenerating forests. Globally, the area of naturally regenerating forests has declined by 301 million hectares (7.5 percent), from 4.04 billion hectares in 1990 to 3.74 billion hectares in 2020. In APFC member countries, the area of naturally regenerating forests declined from 649 million hectares in 1990 to 619 million hectares in 2020. Only seven countries (Bhutan, China, Fiji, India, Japan, Nepal, and Viet Nam) reported increases in area of naturally regenerated forests in the period 1990-2020.

### **Forests under management plans and protected areas**

21. In addition to reduced rates of net forest loss and deforestation, FRA 2020 reported also other positive findings at the global level. The area of forest in protected areas has increased by 191 million hectares since 1990, and has now reached an estimated 726 million hectares (18 percent of the total forest area of reporting countries). In addition, the area of forest under management plans is increasing in all regions – globally, it has increased by 233 million hectares since 2000, reaching 2.05 billion hectares (54 percent of the total forest area of the reporting countries) in 2020. Among APFC members that reported on these variables, the forest area in protected areas increased by 55.9 million hectares over the period and now accounts for slightly less than 150 million hectares. The forest area under management plans also increased and now accounts for 375 million hectares in 17 countries that reported on this variable (these countries account for 92 percent of the region's total forest area).