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NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION

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FOREST RESOURCES ASSESSMENT FOR NEAR EAST AND NORTH AFRICA 2020 IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Executive Summary

FAO, at the request of the Members, regularly monitors the state and trends of the world's forest resources through the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA). The FRA relies on national reports for a wide range of variables related to the extent of forest resources, their condition, management and uses. The latest edition of FRA reports is the FRA 2020 that was published in 2020.

In the context of the FRA 2020, FAO commissioned the report *Near East and North Africa Forest Resources Assessment 2020 – Extent, Change and Trends*¹. The regional report covered all the indicators used by the FRA 2020, to generate information on the extent, changes and trends in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) forests. The report findings were based mainly on national reports submitted by the NENA countries to FRA 2020.

According to the report, the forest area of the region was 41.5 million hectares in 2020. The forest area continues to decrease with a reported net loss of 2.8 million ha of forest between 1990 and 2020.

While NENA still has data gaps, the knowledge about forest resources in the region continues to improve. Main areas of further improvements are the completeness and consistency of the reporting both in terms of geographical coverage and reporting content.

Suggested action by the Commission

The Commission may wish to invite the Members to:

- Designate National FRA Correspondents for future assessments, when requested, with the aim to ensure complete national submissions to future FRA's from all countries of the region.
- Increase knowledge of forests by updating national land cover maps and conducting National

¹ FAO. 2020. Near East and North Africa Regional Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) 2020 – extent, change and trends. FAO regional Office for the Near East, Cairo. Under publishing.

Forest Inventories (NFIs) in countries where forest-related data are outdated or lacking.

- Raise awareness of the importance of reversing forest cover loss as well as degradation of forests and other lands in the region, and the function of FRA reporting in monitoring progress towards agreed international goals and targets.

The Commission may wish to request FAO to:

- Continue building national capacity for harmonized FRA reporting, improve reporting on forest characteristics and to continue developing the FRA data platform.
- Continue and further strengthen support for national forest inventory and mapping in the region.
- Explore ways of improving forest data through regional collaboration on thematic mapping and monitoring and through possible linkages to other data-sources.
- Provide further analyses and outlooks on the status and use of the forest resources in the region, building on the FRA and other relevant data, to support related decision-making.

I. Introduction

1. FAO, at the request of the Members, regularly monitors the state and trends of the world's forest resources through the Global Forest Resources Assessment Programme (FRA). The FRA relies on national reports for a wide range of variables related to the extent of forest resources, their condition, management and uses. Accurate information on forest resources is needed for several reasons, including strategic planning purposes, monitoring progress towards national development goals and reporting to international processes and agreements, including monitoring progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. The most recent edition of FRA report is the one published in 2020. FRA 2020 provides a comprehensive update on the world's forest resources, covering all the thematic elements of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM). More information on FRA 2020 is found in the following link: <http://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/en/>

3. In the context of FRA 2020, FAO commissioned the report *Near East and North Africa Forest Resources Assessment 2020 – Extent, Change and Trends*². The regional FRA 2020 report covered all the indicators used by the FRA 2020, to generate information on the extent, changes and trends in Near East and North Africa (NENA) forests. In addition, the report highlighted major reporting challenges that countries are encountering and the data and capacity gaps in their national reports and suggested some areas of improvements in the reporting process. The report findings were based on national reports submitted by the NENA countries to FRA 2020 and other related FAO sources.

4. This note summarizes the key findings of the regional report, identifies the main data gaps and challenges and proposed means to consolidate the country reporting process going forward. For country-specific details, please refer to the regional report and the FRA platform³.

II. Status and trends of forest resources

5. The NENA region accounts for 10 percent of the world's land surface and 6.4 percent of the global population, but contains only 1 percent of the world's forests (41.5 million ha).

² FAO. 2020. Near East and North Africa Regional Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) 2020 – extent, change and trends. FAO regional Office for the Near East, Cairo. Under publishing.

³ <https://fra-data.fao.org/>

6. Forests cover 2.95 percent of the land area in the NENA region and other wooded land (OWL) 2.35 percent. At global level, 31 percent of the land area is forest. On average, there is 0.08 ha forest/person in the NENA region, which is 16 percent of the global average of 0.52 ha forest/person. Within the NENA region, national forest covers vary from 0 to 14 percent and from 0 ha to 18.4 million ha. Most of the forests of the region are naturally regenerating (92 percent) and the remaining (8 percent) is planted forests. In addition, the region has 33 million ha of other wooded land.

7. Despite its limited area, forest in the NENA Region continues to decrease with increasing net loss from 0.4 percent/year (1990-2000) to 0.56 percent/year (2015-2020). The region reported a net loss of 2.8 million ha forest (-6 percent) between 1990 and 2020 - an average reduction of 95 000 ha per year which is driven mainly by land-use changes in Sudan. At global level, the world is still losing forest but at a slowing rate, from 0.29 percent/year (1990-2000) to 0.12 percent/year (2010-2020).

8. Between 1990 and 2020, the reported area of forest in the NENA Region designated to primary management objectives increased by 146 percent.⁴ This was mainly brought about by the increase in forest area designated for production (22 percent), forest area designated for biodiversity conservation (62 percent), and that designated for multiple use (38 percent), while forest area designated for soil and water protection decreased by 23.5 percent.

9. Forest Policies, legislations and regulations are in place at national level in almost all NENA countries with significant forest resources. Half of the reporting countries have existing platforms to allow for stakeholder participation in forest policy development at national and subnational levels. Traceability systems for wood products are not common.

10. The value of non-wood forest products (NWFPs) reported for the NENA Region for 2015 was 347.4 million USD (4.5 percent of the global total). With NENA forest area standing at 1 percent of the global total, this is an indication of the importance of NWFPs in the Region. Plant-based NWFPs of the NENA Region account for 74 percent of the value with raw materials for food, medicine and aromatic products, being the largest category. The NWFP data from the NENA Region does not allow for solid quantitative analysis, but indicates the relative importance of products.

11. FRA 2020 data are used to monitor progress at country level towards SDG 15.1.1 (Forested area as a proportion of total land area) and SDG 15.2.1 (Progress towards sustainable forest management). For the NENA Region as a whole, the trajectory for achieving SDG 15.1.1 is negative. This is due to the continued net loss of forest area in the Region, driven mainly by land-use changes in the Sahel. No attempt has been made to evaluate SDG 15.2.1 sub-indicators at regional level due to missing values at country level.

III. Data gaps and challenges associated with the country reporting process

12. The quality of the data reported to FRA 2020 was assessed through a Tier system⁵. For the NENA region, more than half of the NENA countries are at the lowest Tier level for area status and change indicators. However, they represent only 5 to 6 percent of the NENA forest area. Countries where forestry is of economic importance have typically conducted one or more National Forest Inventories (NFIs) and will be at Tier 2 or 3.

13. Seven out of 20 countries (representing 3.7 percent of the forest area of NENA) did not submit national reports to FRA 2020, compared with 47 out of 236 countries and territories at global level. Data from these countries had to be provided by FRA desk studies.

⁴ **Primary designated management objective:** The main intended purpose for which a forest is managed and used. To be considered “primary”, the management objective must be significantly more important than other management objectives. Designation of primary management objective does not exclude provisions for other benefits or values from the forest.

⁵ Mst Karimon Nesha *et al* 2021 *Environ. Res. Lett.* 16 054029: <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abd81b/pdf>

14. The data for forest area are complete, however the remaining 20 variables all display some extent of missing values. Missing values can lead to an underestimation of regional totals. Simultaneously, missing values and incomplete time series can render difficult the task of describing trends over time. Furthermore, in the absence of solid inventory data, there is a tendency of repeating the reported estimates from one FRA to the next.
15. There is weak data on certain land-use categories. For instance, Primary forest is identified and reported by three countries only, which could be an indication that they are not well known. From a biodiversity perspective, it is important to identify and protect any remnant pockets of primary forests/vegetation. Similarly, only two national FRA 2020 submissions are complete with respect to Other Land with Tree Cover (OLWTC). Knowledge of OLWTC is important for a number of reasons, including being an accessible, legal and growing source of wood.
16. On average the reference years of the area data for FRA 2020 in NENA is 2009. For growing stock based on NFIs, reference years vary from 1980 to 2017. Some inventory data only cover part of the national forest area/certain forest types.
17. The majority of NENA countries reported forest area and growing stock based on pre-2013 data sources or expert assessments. Few countries have series of comparable national forest inventories. Additional challenges to national reporting are that variables related to forest products & services and forestry employment are only partially covered by national statistics due to widespread informal uses.
18. FRA 2020 received country reports from 13 out of 20 countries of the NENA region, indicating a need for FAO to continue its support to build capacity for collection of information related to national forest resources as well as for the national reporting processes.
19. Other challenges include different interpretation of variables (e.g. NWFPs and forest degradation), changes over time in national methodologies, definitions and data sources, and difficulties in assessing production and value addition data, as only formal production and trade appear in official statistics.
20. With the support of FAO, the countries of the NENA region continue to make progress towards improved information on the state and extent of forest resources. Currently, with the technical support of FAO, National Forest Inventories (NFIs) are in progress in Lebanon, Sudan and Tunisia.