

Second Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on Forests and Forest Sector in the African Region

Alhassan Nantogmah Attah

February 2022

Prepared for the 17th session of the
United Nations Forum on Forests

The sixteenth session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF16) in April 2021 requested the Forum secretariat, in collaboration with members of the Forum, CPF member organizations and stakeholders, to conduct an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector, and to present it to the Forum at its seventeenth session in May 2022. To conduct this second assessment, the UNFF Secretariat commissioned a series of assessments in different regions and subregions.

Challenges, strategies, recovery measures
and best practice for reducing impact of
COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the individuals who have contributed to undertaking this research, and to producing this report.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Njeri Kariuki and Peter Gondo for their invaluable support and being accessible during the preparation of this report.

My appreciation to other colleagues that prepared the sub-regional reports, namely Marie Mbolo

AfDB African Development Bank
AU African Union
CIFOR Center for International Forestry Research

UNFFS	United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat
WHO	World Health Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WB	World Bank
WILPF	Wome "

COVID-19 has demonstrated the cost of imbalances between people and nature. The impacts on human health and the global economy have been severe, creating a public health crisis and economic conditions that are shattering many businesses, particularly those in the informal sector who are dependent on daily incomes for their livelihoods. Millions of people have been put out of work, global supply chains disrupted and fiscal capacity and safety nets severely strained.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to create uncertainties on the economic recovery in the Africa region. Measures put in place by countries, regional organizations and multilateral bodies as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19 presents both challenges and opportunities for the forests and forest sector.

It is in the light of this that United Nations Forum on Forests at its sixteenth session (UNFF16) held in April 2021 requested the UNFF Secretariat collaborate with CPF members, inputs from members of the Forum, to conduct an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact on forests and to present the report to the forum at its seventeenth session (UNFF17). This builds on the earlier study on the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector undertaken in 2020.

This report is a synthesis of five-subregional reports, namely, Central Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa. The report identifies and elaborates on:

- a. An assessment of challenges faced by countries in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector.
- b. The strategies and recovery measures being adopted by countries in combatting the impacts of COVID -19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector.
- c. Best practises adopted by countries and other stakeholders for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector.

Although it has elements of UNFF16 suggestions reflected, these suggestions did not necessarily feed into Morocco's development of its forest strategy (Morocco Forest Strategy 2020-2030) that seeks to strengthen competitiveness and sustainability of the forest sector.

In Southern Africa the main strategy which accounted for 44% of the respondents employed in most countries in the sub-region to address economic impact challenges of COVID-19 was in accessing funding grants from bilateral donors. This was more visible in in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Most of such funding was mainly for conservation and ecotourism related activities. Additionally, a key strategy instituted by the South African government and the private sector to address the impact and social challenges of COVID-19, was paid leave. Paid leave was the most common (41% of respondents) intervention in Southern Africa (Chirwa, unpublished).

In the East African Comm

Promote and encourage strategies that boost legal and sustainable products and nature-based solutions to counter any short and longer-term shocks to livelihoods, particularly for more vulnerable people in rural societies who depend on income from land use

Forest dependent communities should be supported through social protection, livelihood options as well as capital investments such as seeds and income generating activities.

The most vulnerable and marginalized groups such as forest communities and indigenous people have specific challenges and needs, and these must be addressed in recovery plans and policies.

Technological solutions are emerging as opportunities for the forest sector in terms of training, communication, and use of unmanned area vehicles (UAV) for forest monitoring.

Need to build capacity to migrate to the digital age in monitoring and evaluation of forest resources and promoting investments in this area.

Create a mechanism/platform for disseminating information. In this regard, the Forum may wish to consider conducting case studies on the extent to which countries take forward for implementation suggestions/recommendations made by the Forum

a. An assessment of challenges faced by countries

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have enormous disruptions to human lifestyles, livelihoods supply chains and economic systems around the world. It has resulted in massive public health crisis, short-term economic recession and forced many companies to close their operations or at best to work at reduced capacity. This has put millions of people out of work and strained fiscal capacity and safety nets (Hammoudi, 2021). Many countries lifted the restrictions on movement after the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines, and business environments improved marginally. The pandemic, as at the time of finalising this report had come through its 3rd phase bringing along new hardships.

Source: Africa CDC, 2021

Countries in the region with the highest rate of daily infection (7-day average) are shown in Table 1.

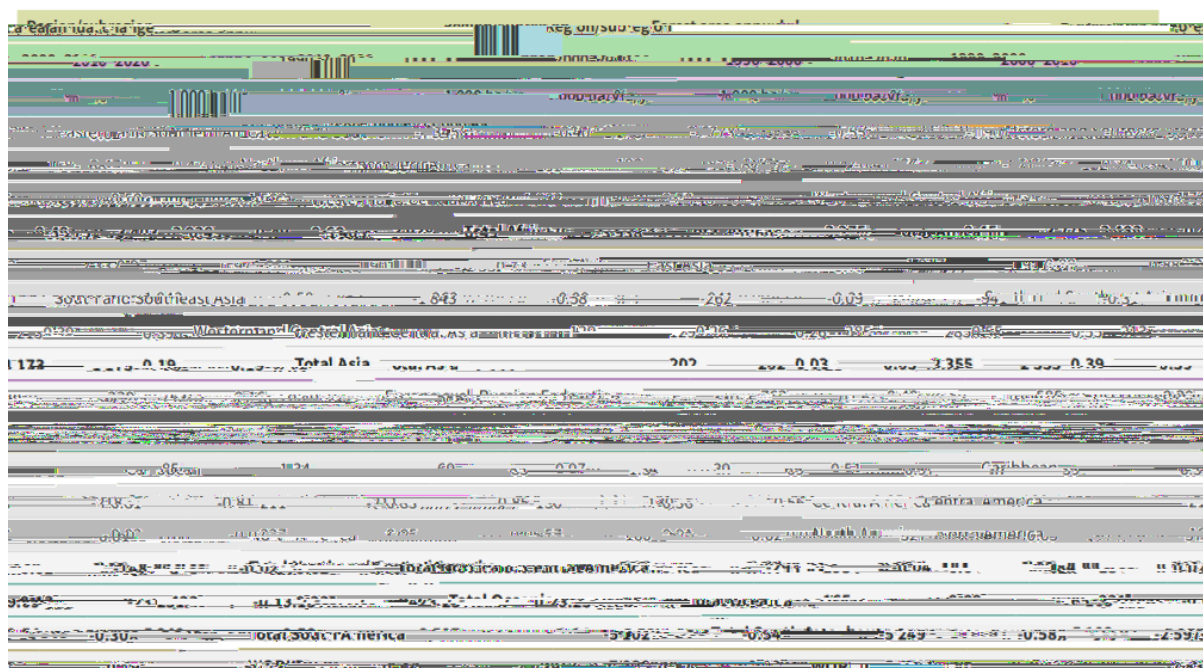
South Africa	19,299
Zimbabwe	

Legend: Central Africa West Africa East Africa
 North Africa Southern Africa

Source: Africa CDC, 2021

Forests cover about one third of the global land area and are home to most of the earth's terrestrial biodiversity. Over one billion people depend to some extent on food from forests, and 2.4 billion rely on wood fuel to meet their basic energy needs⁵. Forests provide many services that are often undervalued and their contributions to national GDPs not recognised. This limits the role forests can play in a green post COVID-19 recovery.

Africa has the largest annual rate of net forest loss in 2010–2020, at 3.9 million ha, followed by South America, at 2.6 million ha (FAO 2020). The rate of net forest loss has increased in Africa in each of the three decades since 1990. The annual rate of net forest loss over 3 decades is shown in Table 2.



Source: FAO, 2020

Trends in forest cover by region for the period 1990-2020 can be seen in Figure 4, which shows total forest area by decade and region. Africa and South America had the highest net loss of forest area in the most recent decade (2010-2020). Global forest area declined by about 178 million hectares in the period 1990 to 2020⁶. Annual net loss of forest has shown a decline from 5.17 million hectares in the period 1990-2000 to 4.74 million hectares in the period 2010-2020. Trends in forest cover by region for the period 1990-2020 can be seen in Figure 4, which

⁵

⁶ [Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 \(fao.org\)](https://www.fao.org/global-forest-resources-assessment-2020)

shows total forest area by decade and region. Africa and South America had the highest net loss of forest area in the most recent decade (2010-2020).

Supply chains continue to be adversely affected impacting on exports of timber and imports of forest products, spares and machinery due to COVID-19 measures.

Governments with the support of the private sector and civil society organizations have collaborated in their effort to mitigate challenges of COVID-19 and the resulting economic .and the resulting economic

platforms for continuous cooperation, education, training, and communication. There are reports of wood-based companies shifted from their usual products into producing medical equipment, respirators and face masks for health care workers and sale to the public.

The private sector was very much involved in contributions for the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and awareness creation activities in the countries in the region. For instance, in Ghana (West Africa) the private sector recognised the challenge to government and stepped in to make contributions for the purchase of PPEs and fund a 100-bed infectious diseases centre that was built using mainly Ghanaian experts within a period of 12 weeks (Adam, 2020)

Civil society organization were particularly affected by restricted working through lockdowns as many of them are directly related to field work and exchange with local communities and indigenous peoples. SODEIT Global Support Centre united 800 professionals and UN online volunteers from across the world to safeguard vulnerable communities in Cameroon during the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization is also fundraising money to supply PPEs and face masks for communities and providing credible COVID-19 information to keep them safe. The Black Coffee Network provided information assistance for people of Kenya by translating the announcements of the Ministry of Health into local languages. The sanitizers donated by the government were spread to vulnerable groups by volunteers.

With reports on the increase of gender-based and domestic violence in the region, for example in Nigeria due to the Covid-19 lockdown, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Nigeria has worked to support victims and families particularly vulnerable in these difficult times. Their work has been in raising awareness on domestic violence during the lockdown. A sensitization radio program has been ru Tf7l y4-274e4-2W-5(ILP)-3(e4-240(to4x)-dd4(er)-3(es)-

This section presents the challenges faced by countries in addressing the impact of COVID 19 on forests and the forest sector. In recapping from the first impact study in 2020 commissioned by the UNFFS⁷, key challenges identified in the five sub-regions of Africa are shown in Table 3.

	Job loses; business closures (25%) ⁸ ; low market demand; reduction in cash flows
	Mobilising domestic resources; weak forest governance; weak institutional capacities; low funding to forestry; weak regulation
	Job loses; business closure; decline in worker productivity; lack of cashflow
	Decline in markets for forest products; working from home; low use of technology; lower cash inflows;
	Higher production cost; Job losses; lower cash inflows; limited stakeholder engagements; Shipping and logistics difficulties

The challenges faced by forests and the forest sector also offered opportunities for the sector to be positioned to play a key role in effecting a transformative change for a green post COVID-19 recovery. These challenges alongside others emerging from the literature reviewed, survey of responses and key informant interviews are addressed in this section using the three pillars of sustainability (Economic, Social and Environmental) whi challenges faced by



Source: CIFOR/Axel Fassio, 2021

In Southern Africa, the single most important social challenge (44% of respondents) is the inability to conduct field work due to travel restrictions (Chirwa, unpublished). The travel restrictions have resulted in job losses arising out of retrenchments in both the formal and informal sectors. These restrictions and stay at home measures/interventions prevented many employees from conducting their daily work activities and therefore adversely affecting their ability to earn decent incomes in the period.

Many countries in the region have put in place social protection programmes to address increasing poverty and vulnerability. However, these mostly cover urban populations, and do not always extend to rural and forest dependent populations. In North Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the need for countries in the region to have adaptive, inclusive and sustainable social protection systems, to avoid the continued erosion of the social contract with the state and, with all its repercussions on peace and socio-political stability. A challenge for many countries in the Northern Africa sub-region would be how they revive their economies and find solutions to rebuild the social contract and ensure equitable, transparent and sustainable social protection systems for all (Hammoudi, unpublished).

The time and duration of the social challenges were untimely in most of the East African Member States. Disaster preparedness and resource allocations in many of these countries were challenged because many of the national budgets were not in place at the beginning of the pandemic (Malugu, 2021) and may have impacted on the ability for governments to put in place effective social intervention measures.

Within the EAC region, forest operations especially in forest plantations that required a high number of casual labourers for silvicultural activities (tree nursery operations, tending operations), and logging, encountered difficulties due to travel restrictions and social distancing policies which resulted in the loss of jobs as fewer workers were required to undertake these operations.

Socially, the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted the forest and tree-based livelihood options for the forest dependent people. COVID-19 pandemic posed a major threat to local communities as well as critically and vulnerable indigenous people like the Batwa in Uganda. Environmental disasters and climate change effects, drove the poor to extreme poverty and food insecurity in the East Africa sub region. This also led to impacts on illegal activities such as hunting for bushmeat, fuel wood and timber (Malugu, 2020, Attah 2020). The World Bank in 2020 projected that about 1 million people in Tanzania could slip into poverty due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic⁹.

Generally, in West Africa, the COVID-19 physical restrictions obstructed most of forestry and ecotourism businesses including research and monitoring activities; halted capacity development and extension services; impacted forest development work; and increased incidences of illegal logging, poaching and trafficking of wildlife. Due to the demand for daily protein requirements forest communities may undertake hunting of wildlife for household consumption and also for the bush meat trade to enhance incomes of households in these trying times of the pandemic. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) indicates that COVID-19 pandemic continues to increase the risk of food insecurity and malnutrition for 50 million people in the sub-regional block (Gbadegesin and Olajire-Ajayi, 2020).

The most significant socio-economic challenges already experienced by forest sector businesses and forestry departments a year after COVID-19 pandemic relates to disruptions to employment, the return of the urban population to rural areas, poverty, inequality gaps, and food insecurity. In this regard women and the youth are most impacted on. For instance, in

Forest-based ecotourism was highly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in almost all the sub-regions in Africa, but particularly in East Africa and Southern Africa. The travel restrictions, curfews, and restrictions in gathering, social distancing measures etc. had an effect on visitor numbers to the forest nature-based tourist sites. It has caused closure of the ecotourism activities and hence resulting in loss of income and jobs in the forest sector. This also impacted on hotels, and other hospitality businesses. The spill-over effect of loss in the local economy was experienced by adjacent communities living closer to the forests with high ecotourism potentials (Shoo et al., 2021).

The travel restrictions also affected the movement of goods and services within the Southern Africa sub-region and internationally at border posts and seaports, respectively. In many occasions this resulted in heavy traffic and delays at the border crossings (Figure 10).



Source: Chirwa, 2021

Chirwa, 2021 cites Julius et al., (2020), highlight the challenges faced by the Namibian government in addressing the impact of COVID-19. The Namibian government-imposed restrictions on non-essential travel to countries affected by COVID-19, indefinitely suspending tourism travel, work visas and immigrant visas. According to the findings, the impact of the lockdown measures on the various sectors in the primary, secondary, and tertiary industries resulted in a loss of GDP of between 5 and 7.5 billion Namibia dollars (USD314million to USD472million).

The economic challenges arising from addressing the impacts of COVID 19 were noted and these were significant to all countries and were felt differently across the sub region. Balance of trade for exports and imports related to forest produce were highly affected as well as the domestic forest-related trade in the EAC member states. As diminishing export was realized by mid-2020, it decelerated the domestic business environment due to decline in export demands caused by restrictions in travel and transportation at regional and international routes. Restrictions in movement of cargo vessels caused stockpiling of timber and processed and semi-processed wood products in ports.

In the East Africa subregion, the trade in timber and timber products was affected by the travel restrictions and social distancing measures. The restrictions and social distancing measures introduced in the sub-region caused a crash, particularly in businesses that entirely depended on imports from within and outside the sub-region. The measures and the reduction in import levels created a loss of a substantial amount of foreign currency, and also placed employment within forest industries, forest plantations, government forest administration and those self-employed in forest-related activities at risk (Attah, 2020; Malugu, 2020). Within the EAC region, forest operations especially in forest plantations that depended on a high number of casual labourers for activities such as silvicultural activities (tree nursery operations, tending operations), and logging, encountered difficulties due to the restrictions on travel and social gathering. This resulted in job loss and financial challenges to family's dependent on the forest sector.

The travel restrictions have also meant that the price of food items have been on the increase in the different sub-regions in Africa.

The containment measures that were rolled out very quickly in the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region saved lives. They however impacted adversely on economic activities in the region¹⁰. COVID-19 is estimated to have pushed close to 18 million people into poverty in the MENA region. There has been the loss of livelihoods, jobs, closures of schools and markets and weakened communities and businesses (Belhaj, 2021).

Harvesting operations for cork, a non-timber forest products were

pandemic potential (Bloomfield, 2020; Brancalion et al., 2020). Studies focusing on various parts of Africa such as Côte d'Ivoire in the West African subregion, have investigated, and underscored how the loss of tropical forests had elevated the risk of physical interactions between people and wild primates and the viruses they carry (Mossoun et al., 2015; Bloomfield et al., 2020). However, many governments including those in the West African subregion responded to the COVID-19 pandemic first with health measures to reduce the spread of the virus, and second with measures to reduce its socio-economic impact. Addressing Environmental challenges appears not to have been the focus of governments or the subregional bodies. Indeed, there is an upsurge in deforestation across various regions of the globe during the pandemic (Daly, 2020).

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the use of wild plants and other herbal-based medicinal products around the West Africa sub-

remain high. This will affect the ability of NGOs to provide support to the forest and conservation sectors (Kideghesho et al., 2021) and also addressing the livelihood related issues.

In Southern Africa, the main challenge that impacted on the environment was the low availability of labour leading to reduced field operations as a result of the social distancing measures that were in place. The reduction in labour numbers resulted in job losses and persons who lost their jobs during the pandemi

UNFF16 deliberated on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on forests and Member States agreed on the way forward. Box 1 highlights the key elements in the Co-Chairs summary on suggestions for the way forward and the section will explore the extent to which these suggestions were taken forward by countries/regional bodies in developing strategies and recovery measures for addressing impact of COVID-19 on forests. Governments in the region have responded with different strategies to limit the spread of COVID-19 and implement measures to promote economic stability. The reports from the different sub-regions in Africa reflect a focus on fiscal policy responses and strategies to address the health and economic challenges. Measures/strategies were not targeted specifically at forests and the forest sector *per se*. So, although the elements in Box 1 would have been a good starting point to consider in the development of strategies and response measures for the forest sector in the Africa, the survey and Key Informant Interviews did not reflect this. Due to the emergency situation in health and economy caused by the pandemic, member countries in the region coordinated their implementation of recovery measures and responses with public health and the economy being the main focus.

In Africa while there have been some short term COVID-19 response strategies, some progress is being made in putting in place longer term response strategies for recovery. However, these strategies have targeted the health sector rather than the forest sector or drawing on the suggestions of UNFF 16 policy recommendations. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) Director General requested all co

Morocco stands out as a country that has taken advantage of the COVID-19 crisis to launch an ambitious program of transformative reforms (Morocco Economic Report – WB – Spring 2021). These include: (i) the creation of a Strategic Investment Fund (the Mohammed VI Fund) to support the private sector; (ii) the overhaul of the social protection framework to boost human capital; (iii) the restructuring of the vast network of Moroccan public companies, including the Department in charge of forests

In the Southern Africa sub-region, a key strategy instituted by governments and the private sector to address the impact and social challenges of COVID-19, was paid leave. Paid leave was the most common intervention (41% of respondents) in Southern Africa (Chirwa, unpublished). Were feasible a strategy adopted by both the private sector and governments was working remotely. Working remotely was however limited to office-based work and not field work or outdoor activities that required travel/movement. This strategy was prevalent at the peak of the pandemic. However, as the daily infections declined then some field work was allowed to be undertaken. However, with the recent situation on the emergence of the Omicron virus infections in November 2021, it is expected that the social distancing and lock down measures could be reinstated in the Southern Africa sub-region to curb its spread. This would most likely impact on employment levels, livelihoods and incomes in the Southern Africa sub-region.

It is however worth stating that in addition to paid leave, other strategies used in the Southern Africa sub-region was the establishment of a temporary employment fund, reductions in working hours and working virtually to decongest buildings. Other measures adopted include the financial assistance to support households and firms. Countries with better fiscal space have increased their social protection expenditure to cushion the poorest households during the lockdowns. For example, South Africa set aside US\$ 160 million to support vulnerable businesses, US\$8.4billion for unemployment and insurance fund, tax subsidies for at least 75,000 SMEs with turnover of less than US\$2.7million. Senegal also established a Euro 2.1million response and solidarity fund¹⁷.

The use of these strategies in the different countries in the Southern Africa sub-region that were surveyed are contained in Table 4. Respondents to the online survey rated paid leave and working virtually as the most popular strategies adopted by countries in the Southern Africa sub-region

¹⁷ [Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on Africa's Economic Development \(unctad.org\)](https://unctad.org/publication/assessing-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-africa-s-economic-development)

Malawi	4	0	2	4
South Africa	5	5	1	3
Zimbabwe	4	0	0	0
Namibia	3	1	3	1
Mozambique	0	0	0	1
Zambia	6	0	2	6
ESwatini	0	1	1	1

Source: Chirwa, 2021

Clearly, there were no recovery strategies specific to the forest sector or the suggestions made for consideration by member states from discussions at UNFF16. For instance, Tanzania had an IMF approved loan of USD 567.25 million to support COVID-19 recovery. The loan will be used to revamping mostly hit sectors of the national economy like Education, Tourism

of the measures by the World Bank, European Union (EU), African Development Bank (AfDB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).



Apparently, none of the interventions directly took in account the UNFF16 suggestions as the basis for country actions on the ground. The primary focus of countries was on health and economic sectors. Hence the inability for countries to factor these into their recovery strategies. Alternatively, it could be possible that the recommendations/suggestion from UNFF16 were not well communicated beyond the forestry community - globally and locally.

In the West African report, the following were identified as effective strategic interventions and worth replicating in other countries:

effectiveness of the law enforcement agencies, a commonly cited factor in forest law and governance (Alemagi and Kozak, 2010; Cerutti and Tacconi, 2006). In South Africa and many countries with commercial plantations, forestry was declared an essential service. So some main strategies to address the environmental impacts are:

Declaration of forestry as an essential service

Remote monitoring and use of mobile devices

Use of law enforcement agencies.

In the context of this report a best practice can be defined as an accepted that is the most , in a way that yields and where the activity becomes the of achieving certain objectives. Best practices are established by bench marking a set of known activities – in this case COVID 19 response measures and strategies – against some agreed and relevant criteria. Best practices equip countries and stakeholders opportunities to learn from their own, and the experiences of others.

In the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, it is difficult to objectively assess the acceptability, efficiency, and outcomes of responses, measures and strategies given that these take a long

benefits of e-commerce and digital trade than can improve forest governance. For an example, the forest agency in Tanzania launched digital platforms (i.e. e-payments) that provided all services, such as online auction, harvesting licenses, including log tracking systems. There are several online models that are under development that resulted from the course of Covid 19 pandemic.

2. Use of e-platforms for digital financial services, training and education and creating awareness on COVID-19 as well as the processing of documentation for logging and the issue of export licenses. Additionally, I

strengthening their coping capacities in response to the pandemic and other future socioeconomic disruptions.

The most vulnerable and marginalized groups such as forest communities and indigenous people, have specific challenges and needs, which are often not addressed in recovery plans and policies. Measures would include developing specific plans that set out priorities for indigenous people and minority groups to participate and be engaged in “building back better”

number of jobs and level of economic activity including forest goods and services that the forest sector generates could make the case for the sector to access both domestic and international support and financing as a part of the response to COVID-19. In this regard, strong political commitment in support of the forest sector will be a requirement.

Recovery measures should be preceded by a strong education and awareness creation programme on the responses to pandemics. A subregional or regional approach will serve the process well and limit misinformation, particularly in this era with the growth of social media.

An effective approach is the integration of smallholders, communities and SMFEs in sustainable supply chains. Building strong partnerships and triggering better organization, cooperation, and coordination of forest value chains for poverty reduction is crucial. The COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity to help stakeholders to organize and promote more inclusive, integrated, diversified and shock-resilient value chains.

The post COVID-19 period will require financial and technical assistance to “build back better”. Given the budget limitations and restricted travel during COVID-19, these early indications of forest management challenges, especially major hikes in forest loss and

Africa CDC, 2021: Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak, [38264-doc-africa-joint-continental-strategy-for-covid-19-outbreak.pdf \(au.int\)](#), Accessed 10th December 2021

Africa CDC, 2021: <https://africacdc.org/download/responding-to-covid-19-in-africa-finding-the-balance-part-iv-and-calls-to-action/> Accessed 26th December 2021

Attah, A. N. 2020. Initial Assessment of the impact of COVID – 19 on sustainable forest Management. Available at: <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Covid-19-SFM-impact-Africa.pdf>

Belhaj, F, 2021: [Protecting All Those in Need: Learning from the COVID-19 Response in the MENA Region \(worldbank.org\)](#). Accessed 25th November 2021

Chirwa, P.W.; Kamwi, J.M.; Kabia, G.; Makhubele, L.; Sagona, W.; Matakala, N.; Gondo, P. 2021. The impacts of COVID-19 on the sustainable management of the forestry sector in Southern Africa. *International Forestry Review*, Volume 23(3): 298-308. <https://doi.org/10.1505/146554821833992785>

Fagbayibo B., Owie U.N. 2021: Crisis as Opportunity: Exploring the African Union's Response to COVID-19 and the Implications for Its Aspirational Supranational Powers

Options for It

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for Consultancy

the potential responses and measures for the recovery of the forest sector and enhanced contribution of forests to inclusive SFM was presented and to Forum members at the sixteenth session of the Forum¹⁹.

II. Mandate

During the high level round table at the sixteenth session of the UNFF (UNFF16) in April 2021, senior official from Members of the Forum and the United Nations welcomed the proposals contained in the note by the Secretariat on the impact of the pandemic on forests and the forest sector (E/CN.18/2021/7), the content of which had been derived from the studies on the initial assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on sustainable forest management. The participants in the high-level round table encouraged the implementation of the proposals at the national, regional and international levels²⁰. Based on the UNFF16 discussions, the Forum secretariat was requested, in collaboration with members of the Forum, Partnership member organizations and stakeholders, to conduct an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector, and to present it to the Forum at its seventeenth session²¹.

In light of the above, the UNFF Secretariat plans to conduct a global assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector, through commissioning several regional assessments. In this context, the UNFF Secretariat seeks to engage a highly qualified consultant to conduct a regional assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector in each of the following five UN regions, namely; Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin American and Caribbean, and

- b. the strategies and recovery measures being adopted by countries in combatting the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector and
 - c. best practices adopted by countries and other stakeholders for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector,
2. Presenting the draft assessment to experts and stakeholders in the respective region for review and finalization through virtual or electronic means and revise the draft assessment based on the results of these consultations.
- 3.

