



INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

EVALUATION REPORT

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFFS):

“The UNFF Secretariat provides effective support to the intergovernmental process, but sustainability is at risk due to expanding work programme and heavy reliance on extra-budgetary funds”

12 May 2011

Assignment No.: **IED-11-007**

INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

FUNCTION

“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organisation. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organisation;” (General Assembly [Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the on the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat:

*“The UNFF Secretariat provides effective support to the intergovernmental process,
but sustainability is at risk due to expanding work programme and heavy
reliance on extra-budgetary funds”*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) of the [Office of Internal Oversight Services \(OIOS\)](#) evaluation of the programmatic responsibilities of the [United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat \(the UNFF Secretariat\)](#), which was undertaken as part of a [General Assembly](#) endorsed evaluation of the [Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(DESA\)](#).

This evaluation assessed the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness (including impact) of the UNFF Secretariat. It considered DESA’s Strategic Framework and budget for the 2010-2011 biennium as the primary benchmark against which to measure the performance of the Secretariat, and also reviewed data from the past three biennia.

In conducting this evaluation, OIOS used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including a document review, staff and stakeholder interviews, staff and stakeholder surveys, field missions and direct observation of intergovernmental meetings. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the norms and standards for evaluation established by the [United Nations Evaluation Group \(UNEG\)](#).

The UNFF Secretariat fulfilled a crucial role with regard to sustainable forest management in the United Nations system. It provides substantive secretariat support to the [United Nations Forum on Forests \(the Forum\)](#), a global policy body on forests with universal membership of all 192 Member States, as well as to the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and other intergovernmental bodies, a function not filled by any other entity in the United Nations system. The UNFF Secretariat has also been effective in enhancing the intergovernmental process by facilitating the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders in that process.

The Secretariat has also been effective in increasing its visibility in the forest arena and in coordinating its activities with other forest-related entities by, for example, organising the International Year of Forests.

The mandate of the UNFF Secretariat is broadly defined and covers a wide range of issues. As a result, the work programme of the Secretariat has been expanding to include additional issues, such as forest financing. This broadening of the scope of the office’s work has resulted in stretched resources, and it is increasingly relying on

temporary staff funded by voluntary contributions. Due to its small size good practices and lessons learned have not systematically been captured, maintained and disseminated.

OIOS therefore makes four recommendations to the UNFF Secretariat, including:

⇒ In collaboration with the Office of the Under-Secretary General of DESA, conclude the on-going revision of the current Secretary-General's Bulletin [ST/SGB/1997/9](#) to reflect the structure, functions and responsibilities of the UNFF Secretariat as a distinct subprogramme;

⇒ establishing an internal knowledge management mechanism;

⇒ reviewing the strategic framework of the UNFF Secretariat to make it a more meaningful and strategic document that can guide and adequately measure the performance of its work; and

⇒ developing an action plan for identifying and implementing secondment arrangements with partner entities including member organisations of the CPF.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CPF	Collaborative Partnership on Forests
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
EA	Expected Accomplishment
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IED	Inspection and Evaluation Division
IFF	Intergovernmental Forum on Forests
IMDIS	Integrated Management and Document Information System
IoA	Indicator of Achievement
IPF	Intergovernmental Panel on Forests
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
RB	Regular Budget
SGB	Secretary-General's Bulletin
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests (“the Forum”)
UNFFS	United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat (“the UNFF Secretariat”, “the Secretariat”)
UN-REDD	United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries
XB	Extra Budgetary

I. Introduction

1. The [Inspection and Evaluation Division \(IED\)](#) of the [Office of Internal Oversight Services \(OIOS\)](#) identified the [Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(DESA\)](#) as a priority programme for evaluation based on a strategic risk assessment exercise carried out in 2008. The forty-ninth session of the [Committee for Programme and Coordination \(CPC\)](#) selected that evaluation to be presented for consideration at its fifty-first session.¹ The selection was formally mandated by the ensuing General Assembly [Resolution 64/229](#) on Programme Planning.
2. The present evaluation of the [United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat \(UNFF Secretariat\)](#) is being issued to DESA, along with assessments of all of the Department's divisions and offices, including its Executive Direction and Management, as an internal management report. It was undertaken as part of the larger DESA evaluation.²
3. In accordance with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (PPBME)³, the overall objective of the evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness (including impact) of the UNFF Secretariat.
4. This evaluation considered DESA's Strategic Framework and budget for the 2010-2011 biennium as the primary benchmark against which to measure the performance of the Secretariat and also reviewed data from the past three biennia.
5. This final report incorporates revisions based on comments received through ongoing dialogue with the UNFF Secretariat during the drafting process. The Secretariat's final comments are appended in full, as per General Assembly [resolution 64/263](#).
6. OIOS expresses its strong appreciation for the collaboration and cooperation offered by the UNFF Secretariat and DESA management and staff in undertaking this evaluation.

II. Methodology

7. In conducting this evaluation, OIOS utilised a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, drawing on data from the following sources:
 - i. A **document analysis** of DESA's strategic framework and other programme documentation; monitoring and reporting information from IMDIS, General Assembly resolutions; and prior evaluations, studies and audit reports;
 - ii. **Interviews** of all three UNFF Secretariat managers and of a stratified random sample of three Secretariat staff;

¹ [A/64/16](#), Report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, July 2009; paragraph 41.

² Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the programme evaluation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) [E/AC.51/2011/2](#).

³ [ST/SGB/2000/8](#).

- iii. **13 interviews of stakeholders** (including government officials, civil society organisations, academics, and staff and management from the United Nations System), conducted in New York and over the phone;
- iv. **Field missions** to Thailand, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa;
- v. **A web-based survey of all UNFF Secretariat management and staff;**⁴
- vi. **A web-based survey of a non-random sample of UNFF Secretariat stakeholders;**⁵
- vii. An earlier **web-based survey of all UNFF Secretariat management and staff**, conducted in 2009 for the OIOS inspection of DESA’s Human Resources and Management practices;⁶
- viii. **Observations of meetings** during the ninth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) from 24 January to 4 February 2011.

8. The evaluation results are derived from a combination of documentary, testimonial and analytical evidence. Data were triangulated to strengthen the robustness of the evaluation.

9. At the request of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Task Force on Human Rights and Gender Equality, the evaluation participated in the pilot of a handbook currently being developed to assist evaluators to incorporate human rights and gender equality into evaluations in the United Nations system.

10. The evaluation had two main limitations. First, the stakeholders interviewed were purposively selected from a list of stakeholders provided by the UNFF Secretariat and may not be representative of the universe of stakeholders. Secondly, the relatively low response rate achieved in the staff survey does not lend itself for being fully representative for all Secretariat staff.

III. Background

Predecessors of the UNFF

11. Since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, also known as the “Earth Summit”, the development of a coherent set of policies to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests emerged as a separate and distinct priority area of activity on the United Nations environment and development agenda. In its decision 1995/226, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) created the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) in response to the

⁴ The survey was sent to 14 staff members and 3 responded, yielding a 21 per cent response rate.

⁵ The survey was sent to 62 stakeholders and 28 responded, yielding a 45 per cent response rate.

⁶ The survey was conducted for the OIOS Inspection of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Human Resource and Management Practices, IED-09-007. It was sent to 8 staff members and 4 responded, yielding a 50 per cent response rate.

Earth Summit's concern about forest as a key sustainable development issue.⁷ The IPF was tasked to promote multidisciplinary action at the international level consistent with the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests (Forest Principles), adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

12. In 1997, following the United Nations five-year review of the Earth Summit goals, the IPF evolved into the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). The IFF's work programme included: (i) facilitating the implementation of the proposals for action of the IPF and reviewing, monitoring and reporting on progress in the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests; (ii) considering matters left pending and other issues arising from the programme elements of the IPF process; and (iii) establishing international arrangements and mechanisms to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.⁸

13. Between 1995 and 2000, the IPF/IFF formulated 270 proposals for action for the promotion of the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. Even though these proposals were not legally binding, Member States committed themselves politically to implement them.⁹

Role of the UNFF Secretariat

14. In October 2000, the ECOSOC, by its resolution 2000/35, established the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), with full membership of all Member States, as the centrepiece of a new international arrangement on forests. The UNFF was mandated to carry on the work building on the processes of the IPF and the IFF. The Multi-Year Programme of Work and the Plan of Action, as adopted by the Forum, forms the basis of tasks and activities.¹⁰

15. By that same resolution, the Secretary-General was mandated "to establish a compact secretariat, comprised of highly qualified staff, constituted in accordance with established rules and procedures of the United Nations and strengthened through staff from secretariats of international and regional organisations, institutions and instruments, to support the work (...)" of the UNFF.¹¹ Such contributions were voluntary and dependent upon the budgets of governing bodies of individual CPF member organisations.

16. The initial mandate of the UNFF Secretariat included:

- To provide for continued policy development and dialogue among Governments, international organisations, including major groups, as identified in Agenda 21;
- To facilitate implementation of forest-related agreements and foster a common understanding on sustainable forest management;

⁷ ECOSOC decision 1995/226 from 1 June 1995.

⁸ <http://info.k4health.org/pr/m15/m15chap6.shtml>.

⁹ <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/session.html>.

¹⁰ See <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/multi-year-work.html> and E/2001/42/Rev.1, E/CN.18/2001/3/Rev.1.

¹¹ ECOSOC Resolution 2000/35, para. 10.

- To enhance cooperation and international coordination with various partners, such as the work of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests;
- To address forest issues and emerging areas of concern in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner; and
- To promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests with the view to strengthen long-term political commitment.¹²

17. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Non-Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests (Forest Principles), chapter 11 of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests process formed the framework of reference for these functions.

18. In its role as the Secretariat to the Forum on Forests, the UNFF Secretariat currently has the following principal inter-sessional functions and activities:

- (a) To facilitate implementation of forest-related agreements and foster a common understanding on sustainable forest management;
- (b) To provide for continued policy development and dialogue among Governments, international organisations, including major groups, as identified in Agenda 21 as well as to address forest issues and emerging areas of concern in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner;
- (c) To enhance cooperation as well as policy and programme coordination on forest-related issues;
- (d) To foster international cooperation and;
- (e) To monitor, assess and report on progress of the above functions and objectives;
- (f) To strengthen political commitment to the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests;
- (g) To enhance the contribution of forests to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and to the implementation of the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, bearing in mind the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development;
- (h) Encourage and assist countries, including those with low forest cover, to develop and implement forest conservation and rehabilitation strategies, increase the area of forests under sustainable management and reduce forest degradation and the loss of forest cover in order to maintain and improve their forest resources with a view to enhancing the benefits of forests to meet present and future needs, in particular the needs of indigenous peoples and local communities whose livelihoods depend on forests;

¹² Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, [A/58/6 \(Sect. 9\)](#).

- (i) Strengthen interaction between the United Nations Forum on Forests and relevant regional and sub-regional forest-related mechanisms, institutions and instruments, organisations and processes, with participation of major groups, as identified in Agenda 21 and relevant stakeholders to facilitate enhanced cooperation and effective implementation of sustainable forest management, as well as to contribute to the work of the Forum.
- (j) Review the implementation of the forest instrument and the progress towards achieving the global objectives on forests.¹³

19. In 2006, through ECOSOC resolution 2006/49, the Forum (UNFF) received new mandates, such as: (i) enhancing the contribution of forests to the achievement of the MDGs; (b) encouraging and assisting countries to develop and implement forest conservation and rehabilitation strategies; and (iii) strengthening interaction between the Forum and relevant regional and sub-regional forest-related mechanisms and entities, including with participation of major groups.¹⁴

Resources and organisational structure

20. The UNFF Secretariat is one of the newest entities of DESA. For the 2010-2011 biennium, the UNFF Secretariat budget accounted for \$ 6,465,300, funded 53 per cent by regular resources and 47 per cent by extra-budgetary resources. This included a total of 8 approved regular budget and 6 extra-budgetary posts for the 2010-2011 biennium. Compared to the 2008-2009 biennium the total budget increased by 7 per cent and 3 extra budgetary posts. Further, after the approval of the 2010-2011 budget, two additional XB posts were established, which brought the total number of staff to 16 (8 RB and 8 XB).

21. During the 2010-2011 biennium, the UNFF Secretariat accounted for 2.4 per cent of total DESA staff resources, and comprised 2.1 per cent of the total RB and XB resources allotted to DESA. The resources slightly increased over the past biennia, but the Secretariat still remains the smallest entity of DESA (see table 1 below).

Table 1: UNFF Secretariat Resources 2008-2011

Year	2008-2009	2010-2011	Total DESA 2010-2011
Regular Budget Resources	\$ 3,105,500	\$ 3,451,300	\$ 168,444,300
XB resources	\$ 2,933,600	\$ 3,014,000	\$ 133,929,000
Total Budget	\$6,039,100	\$6,465,300	\$ 302,373,300
Staff RB	8	8	-
Staff XB	3	6	-
Total Staff	11	14	581 (RB and XB)

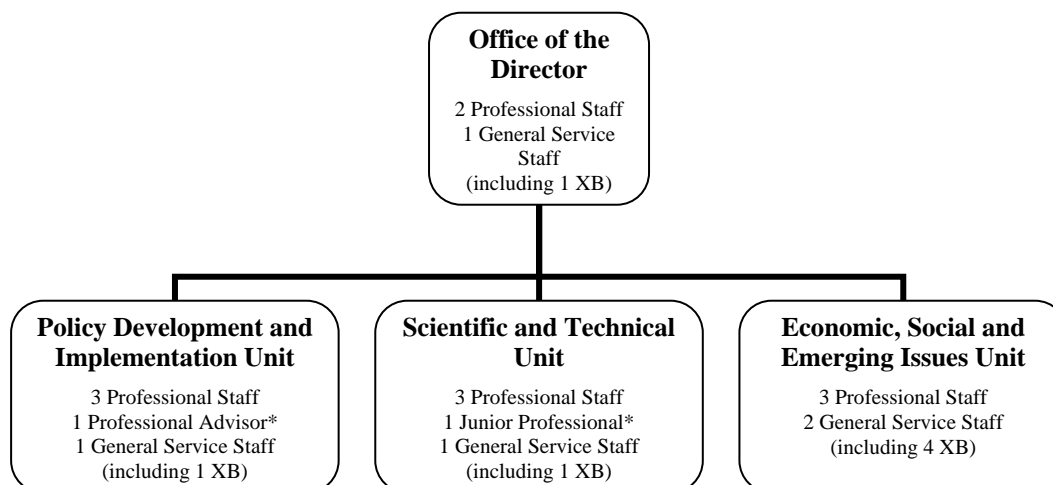
Source: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, 2008-2009, and 2010-2011 Subprogramme 9, Sustainable forest management, [A/60/6 \(Sect.9\)](#), [A/62/6 \(Sect.9\)](#) and [A/64/6 \(Sect.9\)](#)

¹³ E/2007/42, E/CN.18/2007/8.

¹⁴ E/2006/INF/2/Add.1, Outcome of the sixth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

22. The UNFF Secretariat is headed by a Director accountable to the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs (USG-DESA). In addition to the Office of the Director, the Secretariat is organized in three units: (1) the Policy Development and Implementation Unit; (2) the Scientific and Technical Unit; and (3) the Economic, Social and Emerging Issues Unit.

Table 2: UNFF Secretariat structure



* The Inter-regional Advisor is not included in the budget of UNFF Secretariat, the post is part of DESA's Capacity Development Office; the Junior Professional is government-sponsored, thus not part of the Secretariat's budget.

Source: OIOS, based on information provided by the UNFF Secretariat

IV. Results

A. The UNFF Secretariat has been delivering effective substantive support to the intergovernmental processes on forests

Most UNFF Secretariat outputs focused on substantive support activities

23. The UNFF Secretariat has been effectively performing its primary function - that is, to provide substantive secretariat support for the Forum, as well as policy advice to the ECOSOC and the General Assembly on issues, initiatives and activities relating to forests. This includes the preparation of official reports, logistical preparation, planning and organization of various events, initiatives and activities related to forests, and supporting the effective functioning of the UNFF Bureau in running the sessions. IMDIS data indicated that the majority of Secretariat outputs over the past three biennia focused on substantive servicing of meetings, the preparation of parliamentary documentation and other related areas of work, such as the preparation and organization of expert group meetings. Outputs in these three areas combined represented between 49 per cent and 60 per cent of the work carried out by the UNFF Secretariat during the current and the past two biennia (see table 3 below).

24. This primary function - providing substantive support services to the Forum - is also reflected in the work load data for the Secretariat. According to IMDIS data, about 60 per cent of UNFF Secretariat total work months have been dedicated to this function over the past two biennia. (See table 3 below).

Table 3: Programme outputs and work months 2006-2011 of the UNFF Secretariat

	<i>No. of outputs implemented</i>			<i>Work Months taken to implement outputs</i>		
	2006-07	2008-09	2010-11*	2006-07	2008-09	2010-11**
Subprogramme 9						
(1) Substantive servicing of meetings	104	83	70	46.5	25.5	0
(2) Parliamentary documentation	21	32	27	70	74.5	0
(3) Expert groups, rapporteurs, depository services	8	10	6	24	18.5	0
Percent of total outputs	60%	49%	55%	61%	59%	0
(4) Recurrent publications	19	19	18	13	6	0
(5) Non-recurrent publications	5	5	4	23.5	11.5	0
(6) Other substantive activities	55	94	67	35	52.5	0
(7) Advisory services	7	10	2	15	11	0
(8) Training courses, seminars and workshops	2	1	1	1.5	1	0
TOTAL OUTPUTS	221	254	195	228.5	200.5	0

*Estimated outputs for 2010-2011.

** Information not yet available in IMDIS.

Source: IMDIS data, accessed by OIOS on 8 December 2010

Most UNFF Secretariat stakeholders were satisfied with the support received

25. The majority of stakeholders interviewed by OIOS assessed the effectiveness of the support to intergovernmental processes provided by the Secretariat positively. In the stakeholder survey, the majority (69 per cent) expressed being very satisfied or satisfied with the substantive support provided to the intergovernmental meetings they attended. Similarly, respondents rated the UNFF Secretariat's staff responsiveness very positive, with over 96 per cent saying it was excellent or good. The quality of substantive and technical expertise of the Secretariat staff was also assessed excellent or good by the majority of stakeholder survey respondents.

26. Nevertheless, most stakeholders interviewed indicated that secretariat staff were stretched considering their workloads. While they did not see the need for the Secretariat to grow in terms of number of staff, they did suggest increasing the number of staff in the office by relying on secondments from other organisations. However, secondments from other organisations, as UNFF Secretariat experience has shown, are subject to approval of their respective governing bodies and require a budget from the contributing organisations.

UNFF Secretariat support to the intergovernmental process fulfilled a unique niche

27. In interviews, stakeholders also expressed their appreciation for the value added by the Secretariat in its role as a gateway through which to address Member States on forest issues

during the sessions of the Forum. One interviewee summarized: “The main achievement of the UNFF Secretariat is that it provides a universal forum which brings together all United Nations Member States and other stakeholders to discuss issues of common concern”. Similarly, stakeholder survey data indicated that the majority (70 per cent) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “the work of the Forum fills a unique niche, not served by any other entity in the United Nations system.” Furthermore, most of the stakeholders interviewed expressed the view that the UNFF Secretariat mandate was highly complimentary to the work of other organisations active in the field of forests, and did not identify any concrete overlap.

28. A comparison between the mandate of the UNFF Secretariat and those of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Global Environment Facility (GEF) showed no immediately evident overlap. The role of the Secretariat concentrated on the intergovernmental process, outreach and coordination among forest stakeholders, while the agencies’ responsibilities more clearly focused on the operational implementation on the ground. The current UNEP Secretary-General’s Bulletin (SGB) also contained language indicating its support of the UNFF.¹⁵

The UNFF Secretariat was critical in supporting agreement and follow-up to the “Forest Instrument”

29. In that context, the role of the UNFF Secretariat with regard to the “Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests” was also frequently pointed to by stakeholders. Informally called the “Forest Instrument”, it has been considered a landmark agreement by forest stakeholders. In 2007, for the first time ever, all UNFF members (and thus all 192 United Nations Member States) had agreed to adopt an international agreement for sustainable forest management, which was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly.¹⁶ The purpose of this instrument is:

- (a) To strengthen political commitment and action at all levels and to implement effective sustainable management of all types of forests and to achieve the shared global objectives on forests;
- (b) To enhance the contribution of forests to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, in particular with respect to poverty eradication and environmental sustainability; and
- (c) To provide a framework for national action and international cooperation.¹⁷

30. Almost all staff of the UNFF Secretariat and stakeholders interviewed referred to the “Forest Instrument” as the biggest achievement of the Forum and therefore of the UNFF Secretariat. They explained that major impetus had been given to foster international cooperation and national action in order to reduce deforestation, prevent forest degradation, promote sustainable livelihoods and reduce poverty for forest-dependent peoples.

¹⁵ See [ST/SGB/2006/13](#).

¹⁶ [A/RES/62/98](#).

¹⁷ See <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/index.html>.

31. Subsequently, the UNFF Secretariat has been tasked to support Member States to implement the commitments made under the “Forest Instrument” and to monitor their progress. Starting in 2008, the secretariat has been receiving voluntary reports submitted by Member State representatives and stakeholders on their implementation of the “Forest Instrument” and on progress towards the global objectives on forests. With this information, the Secretariat has been preparing Secretary-General’s reports to UNFF since 2009.¹⁸ These reports summarize the most recent information from Member States and other sources and to provide an evaluation on progress made since the adoption of the Forest Instrument. The latest report presented the situation in sixteen countries, including eleven developing countries or countries with economies in transition and five developed countries.¹⁹

32. Through its support to Member States in implementing the non-legally binding instrument on forests, the UNFF Secretariat also contributed to progress on the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In particular, the secretariat has been involved in supporting initiatives with regard to the MDGs on environmental sustainability and poverty reduction, through participating in the Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators, contributing to DESA publications on MDG progress, specifically on MDG7, and providing input to the MDG Advocacy Group. At the MDG Summit in September 2010 in New York, world leaders recognized the importance of the “Global Objectives of Forests” for the achievement of the MDGs and reflected this in the Summit outcome document.²⁰ This underlined the role and contributions of the Forum and through that of the Secretariat to MDG-related issues.

The UNFF Secretariat has contributed to greater inclusion of the Major Groups in the intergovernmental process

33. Many governmental and non-governmental stakeholders interviewed and surveyed positively highlighted the ability of the UNFF Secretariat to convene a diverse and representative set of actors. They stated that providing a platform for dialogue and serving as catalyst for contributions by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society at the international level was a comparative advantage offered by the Forum and facilitated by the secretariat. A stakeholder volunteered, for example: “The UNFF is one of the best platforms that allows for intervention of NGOs and civil society. Most of the other forums and meetings normally do not very well organise interventions of NGOs, so this affects their [the NGOs’] interventions. So comparatively, NGOs have a better chance in being involved in shifting policy under the UNFF.” Another stakeholder shared: “Forest agencies that work at the national level feel that there is a voice at the highest level that can be used to get the forest issues across. That empowers them.”

¹⁸ [E/CN.18/2009/2](#) and [E/CN.18/2011/2](#).

¹⁹ E/CN.18/2011/2. The following countries have made submissions: Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, Cyprus, El Salvador, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Jamaica, Mexico, Mozambique, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Slovakia and Switzerland.

²⁰ The Global Objectives on Forests are: (1) to reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide; (2) to enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits; (3) to increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide; and (4) to reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management. For further details, see: ECOSOC resolution 2006/49, para 3.

34. In fact, the Forum has been encouraging the participation of a wide range of forest related stakeholders in its sessions, in addition to the 192 Member States of the United Nations. These stakeholders are classified in nine “Major Groups”, as called for in Chapter 23 of Agenda 21. Currently, there are 745 accredited forest-related organisations affiliated to one or more of the Major Groups.²¹ These organisations are involved in different aspects of forests (see table 4 below).

Table 4: Distribution of forest-related organisations among the nine Major Groups

Major Groups	
All forest related organisations	745
Children and Youth	32
Farmers and Small Forest Landowners	21
Forest Business and Industry	16
Forest Workers and Trade Unions	3
Indigenous People	43
Local Authorities	4
Non-governmental Organisations	491
Scientific and Technological Community	123
Women	12

Source: <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/>

35. The Secretariat has contributed to this greater involvement of the major groups. It has organised and facilitated multi-stakeholder dialogues as regular part of the Forum sessions, for example by receiving papers and comments from Major Groups representatives on relevant agenda items several months before the actual UNFF sessions and thereby facilitating pre-negotiations among these diverse groups. Additionally, the efforts and support by the secretariat, such as the provision of advice on the intergovernmental process, resulted in a Major Groups initiated symposium in Accra, Ghana in July 2010 that focused on building consensus among the Major Groups prior to the session of the Forum. This was the first ever initiative in support of UNFF, initiated by Major Groups, and it provided an opportunity for Major Group representatives from thirty countries to develop their contributions and policy recommendations for the ninth session of the UNFF. The outcome of the meeting was a decision by Major Groups to coordinate their contributions for the Forum session and prepare three joint discussion papers on the sub-themes for consideration by the Forum, a major achievement considering their diversity. Stakeholders also voiced their strong appreciation for the UNFF Secretariat in lending non-governmental actors a voice by giving civil society organisations the opportunity to address important issues on forests and convey them directly to Member States during the sessions of the Forum.

²¹ See <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/>.

Mainstreaming gender and human rights into the Secretariat's work was mixed

36. With regard to mainstreaming of gender into the substantive work of the secretariat, as mandated for all programmes through General Assembly Resolution 52/3/Rev.1, the results have been limited. While a majority of UNFF Secretariat staff survey respondents and interviewees, as well as stakeholders surveyed, rated the secretariat effective in mainstreaming gender, there were only very few concrete examples of such activities. Several staff members referred to the fact that Women and Youth were Major Groups that participated in the UNFF process. Other examples included a panel discussion organised by the secretariat on fire wood that included gender aspects; the secretariat also started coordinating with the Peace Building Support Office on the link between women and forests related to peacekeeping.

37. Both staff and stakeholders could not offer any specific examples of how the UNFF Secretariat incorporated a human-rights-based approach into its work, as called for by the reform agenda of the Secretary-general and as endorsed by member States in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.²²

B. The UNFF Secretariat has been effective in coordination and outreach to stakeholders

38. The Secretariat has effectively been promoting the sustainable management of all types of forests through enhancing cooperation and partnership with an increasing number of international, regional and sub-regional organisations. According to its stakeholders, the Secretariat has been very engaged in coordination efforts while it has also successfully managed to establish and maintain good relationships with major international organisations working on operational aspects of sustainable forest management, such as FAO, UNEP, the GEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and many others. For example the UNFF Secretariat is engaged with FAO and the National Forest Policy Facility to develop and implement national forest policy and legislation on financing for forests.

The dual secretariat role for both the UNFF and CPF has been a useful catalyst to enhance coordination between these two bodies

39. Further to its roles as a member and Secretariat to the Forum, the UNFF Secretariat is also a member and serves as the secretariat to the CPF, which has been another important coordination vehicle for the work of the Forum. According to interviews with a few CPF member entities, the CPF has become considerably more active through the involvement of the UNFF Secretariat. This dual secretariat role has also offered an important and unique catalyst role for both bodies: via the CPF, the Forum has been at the forefront on forest-related initiatives debated among CPF members, mainly United Nations entities. And through the Forum, the Secretariat has been kept informed about related intergovernmental policy discussions and negotiations. Accordingly, the Secretariat has been able to provide valuable advice to members (Member States) and other players, including civil society representative (Major Groups) and vice-versa.

²² [A/RES/60/1](#) paragraph 126.

40. During the ninth session of the Forum, OIOS observed close collaboration between UNFF Secretariat and CPF members. For example, during meetings about the introduction of the International Year of Forests 2011 (“Forests 2011”), several CPF members participated to raise awareness on sustainable management, conservation and development of all types of forests. Also, members of both the Secretariat and the CPF frequently referred to and acknowledged mutual support and achievements in their interventions and had set up joint information displays on various forest topics.

The UNFF Secretariat has increasingly been engaged with coordination at the regional level

41. In the past years, the Secretariat also sought to facilitate and channel inputs from regional and sub-regional organisations to UNFF discussions. Through the Secretariat, a number of specialized regional and sub-regional organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the African Forest Forum or Forest Europe have also been involved as observers in the UNFF sessions. According to interviews with some of these stakeholders, the Secretariat has been committed to coordinating with regional groups that work on forest issues. As a result, at the ninth UNFF session, 31 regional groups have commented on the work programme of the Forum through the Secretariat.

42. Another example of sub-regional coordination was the 2009 sub-regional capacity building workshop on Forest Biodiversity and Climate Change for South and South-East Asia, organized by the secretariat together with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the National Parks Board of Singapore. The UNFF Secretariat participated in a workshop to strengthen the capacity of national focal points of UNFF, CBD, the United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC) and country designated experts on the potential contribution of conservation and sustainable use of forest biodiversity to climate mitigation and adaptation measures.²³ Similarly, the Secretariat has been exploring ways to further strengthen the support provided to non-governmental actors represented by the nine Major Groups. In recent years, these efforts have led to more independent coordination among these groups.

The visibility of the UNFF Secretariat has been increasing

43. Stakeholders generally perceived that the Secretariat, under the current leadership, has been proactively trying to reach out to other organisations. For example, according to some stakeholders, the preparation and launch of the International Year of Forests was planned very professionally, incorporating a logo, comprehensive media campaign and several key events; and in the first four months since the launch of the Year, the International Year of Forests website has attracted 203,191 visits, which accounted for 634,661 page views. As a result, it not only contributed to higher visibility of the UNFF Secretariat within the system and among Member States, but benefited sustainable forest management efforts by governments, NGOs and other partners. These efforts have also resulted in the willingness of donors to invest in the Secretariat. For the 2009-2010 biennium the Secretariat’s budget almost doubled due to voluntary contributions.

²³ See <http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/for/wscb-fbdcc-01/official/wscb-fbdcc-01-02-en.pdf>.

44. The UNFF Secretariat website has also increased visibility and outreach. According to staff of the Secretariat, the website constitutes the main tool of communication with all types of stakeholders. The usefulness of the website was also rated highly by stakeholders in interviews; the stakeholder survey revealed that 76 per cent were either very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of the website.

45. In interviews, stakeholders indicated accessing the website frequently as a reference tool to obtain up-to-date information on forest issues. They found it to be comprehensive, containing not only Forum-related information, but also updates on the international forest debate in general. Statistics collected by the Department for Public Information through the tool “WebTrends” on website hits also indicated a high record of annual website visits through direct link or referred to from other sites including the DESA website, oscillating between 107,058 and 147,430 hits per year between 2005 and 2010.

46. A small number of interviewees, however, found the website somewhat difficult to navigate, and some interviewees in remote locations expressed having occasional difficulties in downloading relevant documents and preferred to receive emails including attachments with latest UNFF Secretariat documentation.

<p>C. The UNFF Secretariat’s performance measurements are not very meaningful, and its roles and responsibilities are not reflected in all official mandate documents</p>
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Secretariat performance measurements in the strategic framework have limited utility

47. An analysis of the UNFF Secretariat strategic frameworks between 2006-2007 and 2012-2013 showed that whilst the overall substantive thrust of the objective, expected accomplishments (EAs) and indicators of achievements (IoAs) for the UNFFS have remained, there have been some adjustments, within current programme planning guidelines²⁴, to reflect evolving priorities. In recent biennia, more focus was added on partnership and collaboration activities. During the 2010-2011 biennium, the EA specifically added the regional level among its priority of partnership and collaboration activities. And for 2012-2013, a new expected accomplishment was added: “Increased awareness and political support for national-, regional- and global-level actions on sustainable development”. These changes captured the new prominence of partnerships and related support by the Secretariat at the various levels.

48. The IoAs were, however, formulated in a somewhat simplistic manner, not allowing for capturing progress and performance of the various EAs. For example, the IoA “the number of events related to the International Year of Forest (2011)” only captured quantitative aspects (see Annex 1) with no reference to how the quality of these events (EAs) was to be measured.

49. Further, the indicators chosen for the Secretariat are not clearly linked to the role of the secretariat, thus limiting their validity. For example, the IoA for measuring EA (b), “Increased

²⁴ Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, [ST/SGB/2000/8](#).

number of reports submitted by countries and other stakeholders on progress made in the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (...)” lacks a direct link to the work of the secretariat. It is not very precise in defining ‘increased’, and falls short of capturing the work of the UNFF Secretariat in monitoring, assessing and reporting on the implementation by Member States.

50. In recent years, the Forum has also been mandated by ECOSOC resolution 2000/35 (para 2a and 3cii) to work on forest financing. Through its support role to the UNFF, the Secretariat has therefore also focused increasingly on this issue. Most recently, at UNFF9, this resulted in establishing an Ad-hoc Expert Group on Forest Financing and an agreed set of activities on to pave the way for a possible UNFF10 decision on that topic.²⁵ The UNFF Secretariat is the lead entity within the CPF on forest financing and is leading the CPF Advisory Group on Finance, which according to the UNFF9 resolution has to carry out the requests that are made to the CPF on the issue of forest financing.

51. Nevertheless, the distinction between mandates given to the Forum vis-à-vis responsibilities of the *Secretariat* is not always clear to stakeholders. Some interviewees shared concerns with pro-active participation of the secretariat in substantive and emerging areas relating to forests. They expressed that they would prefer to see the Secretariat to mainly focus on its key function as the secretariat to the intergovernmental process. In their opinion, going beyond this was tantamount to going beyond that mandate, or as one of the stakeholder interviewees said: “If they (the UNFF Secretariat) grow, the risk is, of course, that they don’t know how and where to grow into. The temptation to find more funds and to implement own projects might be there, which would divert a lot of attention from the core issues.”

Currently the UNFF Secretariat is not reflected in the ST/SGB of DESA

52. The UNFF Secretariat has structurally been part of DESA since 2000 and has its own budget line in the Department’s budget fascicle. The secretariat’s roles and responsibilities were, however, not reflected in DESA’s current Secretary-General’s Bulletin [ST/SGB/1997/9](#). The SGB still in vigour is outdated; it tasks the Division for Sustainable Development with “Providing the substantive secretariat for (...) the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (...)”, the predecessor of the UNFF, a role that the UNFF Secretariat took over upon its creation over a decade ago.²⁶

53. The outdated SGB is currently being revised by DESA, and OIOS obtained a draft version of the revised SGB. That draft contained the relevant information about the role and functions of the UNFF Secretariat. However, in official mandate documents, the roles and responsibilities of the secretariat were only laid out in the strategic framework and related budget fascicles.

²⁵ Forest financing has been a standing item in the agenda of both the IPF and the IFF. ECOSOC resolution 2007/40 further decided to establish a UNFF Ad-hoc Expert Group to develop proposals for the development of a voluntary global financial mechanism for all types of forests; and the resolution of the special session of UNFF9 as well as the resolution of the ninth session of the UNFF further specified this activity (see 2009/11 and E/CN.18/SS/2009/2).

²⁶ [ST/SGB/1997/9](#).

D. While internal management was considered to be generally effective, resource issues and knowledge management have been challenging

Internal management was viewed positively

54. Many stakeholders interviewed by OIOS, when referring to the visibility of the UNFF Secretariat, mentioned its leadership as key, describing the leadership style as “very proactive” and “holistic”. One stakeholder said that the Secretariat had improved and that the current director was more proactive in reaching out to partners. Another explained: “We see more interaction than before.” While most stakeholders interviewed regarded the Secretariat, despite its small set-up, as having considerable visibility in the United Nations system and beyond, some attributed the success of the Secretariat in that regard to personality of leadership.²⁷

55. In the staff survey that was administered in the context of the OIOS human resources inspection of DESA in 2009, 100 per cent of all staff members of the UNFF Secretariat that responded rated the overall management of the secretariat as excellent or good.²⁸ In the same survey, 100 per cent also rated the staff moral in the UNFF Secretariat as excellent or good.

56. In the most recent staff survey conducted for this evaluation, staff members of the UNFF Secretariat also indicated positive assessments with regard to: decision-making in the division, internal communication within the Secretariat, staff roles and responsibilities, and reporting lines. Due to its small size, the secretariat has maintained a rather flat hierarchical structure. Through an internal focal point and back-up system, more than one staff member has been involved in each task, which allowed for continuous work flow and a certain degree of responsibility. In that context, several staff members at lower professional levels have also been exposed to strategic planning activities.

Resources have remained stable despite an increase in Forum mandates

57. The UNFF Secretariat was created as a compact secretariat that was supposed to be strengthened through staff sent to the secretariat on secondment by secretariats of international and regional organisations, institutions and instruments.²⁹ Initially, the Secretariat consisted of six staff members funded through regular budget resources. Although some support was provided to the Secretariat through secondments in the past, this has not happened to the extent needed to manage the regular workload of the secretariat.

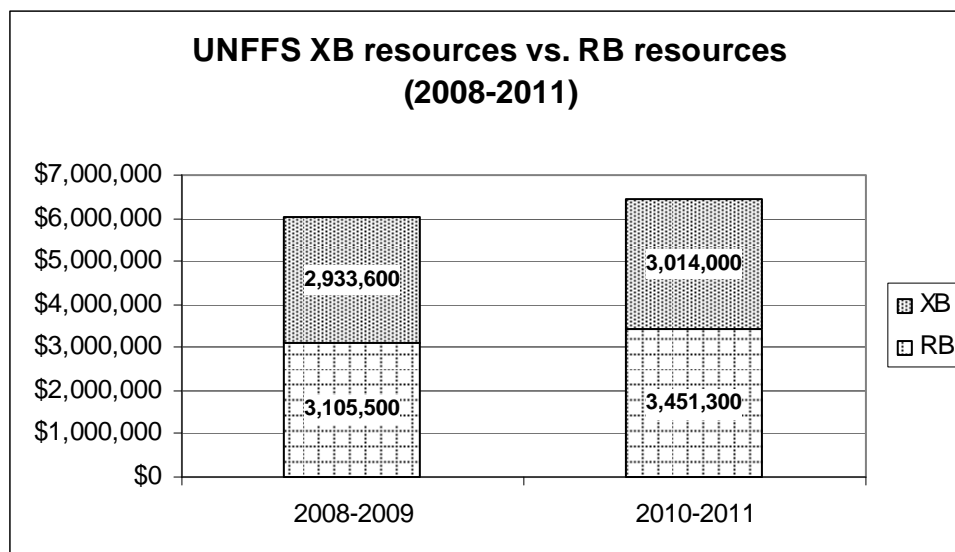
58. For the 2008-2009 biennium, the Secretariat budget consisted of 51 per cent regular budget and 49 per cent extra-budgetary funds, and for 2010-2011 the allocation was 54 per cent regular budget versus 46 per cent extra-budgetary contributions (see table 5 below).

²⁷ In some instances the paragraph numbers referred to in the comments received from UNFFS do not correspond to the paragraph numbers in the programme evaluation. Para 55 became para 54, para 62 became 61, and para 68 became 67.

²⁸ OIOS Inspection of DESA Human Resources and Management Practices staff survey, IED-09-007.

²⁹ ECOSOC Resolution 200/35, para. 10.

Table 5: Allocation of funds in the UNFF Secretariat



Source: OIOS, based on Proposed Programme Budgets for 2008-2009 ([A/62/6 \(Sect. 9\)](#)) and 2010-2011 ([A/64/6 \(Sect. 9\)](#)).

59. Further, since the UNFF Secretariat was established in 2000, the Forum it provides its services to added a number of mandates and work areas. For example, ECOSOC resolution 2006/49 asked for enhancing the contribution of forests to the achievement of the MDGs, encouraging and assisting countries to develop and implement forest conservation and rehabilitation strategies and strengthening the interaction between the Forum and regional and sub-regional forest mechanisms.³⁰ As a result, the scope of work broadened and the number of specific forest-related topics increased also for the Secretariat. However, the increase of Forum mandates has not been reflected in increased regular budget staff resources for the Secretariat.

60. The UNFF Secretariat has therefore relied heavily on staff recruited through extra-budgetary funds received by donor countries. During the 2010-2011 biennium for example, 6 out of 14 staff members were funded by voluntary contributions, including 5 in the professional category.

61. Also, Secretariat fundraising strategies were very effective and resulted in about 3 million USD voluntary contributions for the 2008-2009 and the 2010-2011 biennia. This represented almost a double increase of UNFFS' overall budget. The main donors, accounting for respectively 44 per cent and 35 per cent of the contributions, were the United Kingdom and the United States of America (see table 6 below). Regular reports are presented to ECOSOC informing about the trust fund contributions and the utility of the funds received.³¹

³⁰ [E/2006/INF/2/Add.1](#), Outcome of the sixth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

³¹ [E/CN.18/2009/15](#).

Table 6: Contributions to the UNFF Trust Fund (2010-2011) in USD

Contributor	Total	In per cent
Austria	74,000	5.3%
Finland	150,208	10.7%
Republic of Korea	20,000	1.4%
Switzerland	40,000	2.8%
Untied Kingdom	624,750	44.3%
Untied States of America	500,000	35.5%
Grand Total	1,408,958	100.0 %

Source: UNFF Secretariat

62. However, considering the volatility of voluntary contributions, the composition and medium-term planning of the secretariat through such a large amount of extra budget funds imposes a risk to the work of the secretariat.

Despite the work load, the staff moral in the UNFF Secretariat remained high

63. Secretariat staff explained in interviews that their workload resulting from additional UNFF mandates had increased and that they put in long hours. This was also perceived by many stakeholders. Nevertheless, almost all staff members of the UNFF Secretariat, who responded to the OIOS staff survey in 2009 strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement “overall, I enjoy a good work-life balance”.

64. In the same survey, staff strongly expressed their confidence in the way staff were selected in the UNFF Secretariat, and that it resulted in having the competencies and skills required for the implementation of the secretariat’s work. At the same time, several staff members also expressed some concerns with regard to staff development. Due to the limited number of posts in the secretariat and the very specialized nature of its work, career opportunities for upward movement remained marginal.

Knowledge has not been captured systematically

65. Due to the small size of the UNFF Secretariat, there has been no systematic approach to take stock of its work processes and procedures, including the capturing of good practices and lessons learned. In interviews, staff explained that knowledge and lessons learned were shared among colleagues more on an informal basis, but were not systematically captured or shared in writing. Similarly, in the recent staff survey, the majority of respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement “in my Division, lessons learned are effectively captured and shared with staff.” Furthermore, due to the limited number of posts in the UNFF Secretariat and the resulting limited opportunities for promotion, loss of staff through mobility or retirement could result in loss of institutional knowledge, thus necessitating strong knowledge management systems.

V. Conclusion

66. The UNFF Secretariat fulfils a crucial and unique role with regard to forest issues in the United Nations system. Over the decade of its existence, it has effectively supported intergovernmental decision-making regarding forest-related issues by providing policy advice, facilitating the implementation of forest-related agreements, by addressing forest issues in a holistic and comprehensive manner and by promoting the management and conservation of all types of forests. Through its position as Secretariat to the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), it convenes global dialogue among all 192 Member States, which is unique compared to other United Nations entities engaged in forest topics. Its role with regard to supporting the non-legally binding instrument on forests, which ultimately also engages political commitment by Member States to implement agreed policies on forests at the national level, is also of critical importance. Its specific expertise in forests related to the intergovernmental process also enables the Secretariat to provide important input and support to Member States, international organisations and other actors active in the forest arena.

67. The UNFF Secretariat has, because of expanding mandates of the Forum, been expanding its activities by including advocacy and outreach on forest topics which are being internationally debated, such as forest financing. On one hand, this has resulted in greater coordination and communication with United Nations entities operating on forests and it has generally helped the secretariat to avoid duplication with the work of other players. Also, despite its very small structure, the UNFF Secretariat has strongly increased the visibility of the Secretariat within and outside the United Nations system. On the other hand, some entities, including Member States, have raised concerns that the Secretariat is taking on additional areas of work that may be beyond its primary function of servicing the intergovernmental forest process.

68. The functioning of the UNFF Secretariat, DESA's smallest subprogramme, is effective, not least due to efficient and respected management of the secretariat. At the same time, knowledge management processes and procedures are lacking, and good practices and lessons learned are not systematically captured to ensure use in future situations. Considering the amount of temporary staff, adequate knowledge management is crucial.

69. The strong reliance on extra-budgetary (voluntary) contributions from Member States, mainly utilized for hiring additional staff, exposes the UNFF Secretariat to an important risk. Any mandate increase for the Forum represents additional workload for the Secretariat. This should also be reflected in an adequate resource structure, if the UNFF Secretariat shall remain an important actor in supporting and further implementing the international forest agenda.

VI. Recommendations

70. Based on the evaluation results, the following four recommendations are made to the UNFF Secretariat:

Recommendation 1 (see paras. 52-53):

71. The UNFF Secretariat, in consultation and collaboration with the Office of the OUSG-DESA, should conclude the on-going revision of the current Secretary-General's Bulletin ST/SGB/1997/9 to also reflect the structure, functions and responsibilities of the UNFF Secretariat as an established subprogramme of DESA.

Recommendation 2 (see para. 65):

72. The UNFF Secretariat should put in place an internal mechanism to capture knowledge and institutional memory as well as good practices and lessons learned in order to retain its knowledge in a systematic and comprehensive manner. This could include setting up a database enabling staff to have ready access to important facts, sources of information and solutions related to their work.

Recommendation 3 (see paras. 47-51):

73. The UNFF Secretariat, in collaboration with OUSG DESA, the Executive Office of DESA and the Office of Programme Planning Budgets and Accounts in the Department of Management, should revise its strategic framework, in particular the validity and specificity of performance measurements. This should result in a more meaningful and accurate strategic framework for the period 2014-2015 that should be presented to the Committee for Planning and Coordination.

Recommendation 4 (see paras. 57-64):

74. The UNFF Secretariat should develop an action plan for identifying and implementing secondments arrangements with relevant partner entities, including the CPF member organisations.

Annex 1

Programme of work for the biennium 2010-2011 Sustainable forest management

Objective	
	Objective of the Organisation: to advance long-term political commitment to the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests at the global, regional and national levels and to promote the achievement of the internationally shared global objectives on forests, in particular, effective implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests

Expected Accomplishment		Indicator of Achievement
(a)	Effective international dialogue on sustainable forest management including events related to the International Year of Forests (2011)	(i) Increased number of decisions, reports and chairman's summaries on improvement of sustainable forest management at all levels (ii) The number of events related to the International Year of Forests (2011)
(b)	Enhanced monitoring, assessment of and reporting on the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and the progress towards the global objectives on forests	Increased number of reports submitted by countries and other stakeholders on progress made in the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and towards the achievement of the global objectives on forests
(c)	Improved international collaboration and coordination on forests through more effective and better knowledge on sustainable forest management among Governments, major groups, organisations, instruments and processes, including the activities of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests	Increased number of partnerships, collaborative activities and country, region and organisation-led initiatives undertaken to support the international forest policy dialogue

Source: Proposed Strategic Framework for the period 2010-2011, [A/63/6 \(Prog. 7\)](#).

Annex 2:

In this Annex, OIOS presents the full text of comments received from the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFF Secretariat) on the Draft evaluation report on the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat. This practice has been instituted as per General Assembly [resolution 64/263](#) following the recommendation of the [Independent Audit Advisory Committee \(IAAC\)](#). Overall, UNFFS concurred with our recommendations. The comments from the UNFF Secretariat on the draft OIOS report have been incorporated as appropriate into this final report.

Comments from the UNFF Secretariat on the draft report:

United Nations  Nations Unies
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR


TO: Mr. Yee Woo Guo
A: Acting Director
Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 6 May 2011

REFERENCE: DESA-11/00756

THROUGH:

S/C DE:

FROM: Juwang Zhu 
DE: Chief
Office of the Under-Secretary-General
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

SUBJECT: Draft report of OIOS on the UN Forum on Forest Secretariat

OBJET:

1. I refer to your memo of 28 April 2011 addressed to Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, transmitting the final draft report of OIOS on UN Forum on Forest Secretariat (UNFFS) and inviting comments on the final draft.
2. UNFFS expresses its appreciation for the evaluation and has requested the Office of Under-Secretary-General to transmit its comments (attached herewith) on the final draft.
3. On behalf of Mr. Sha Zukang, I would like to take this opportunity to thank IED/OIOS colleagues for your evaluation of UNFFS/DESA.
4. We will follow up on the results of the evaluation and the recommendations.

Thank you.

cc: Ms. Carman L. Lapointe
Mr. Byung-Kun Min
Ms. Sabine Becker
Ms. Jan McAlpine
Ms. Afsa Kemitale
Ms. Ursula Germann

**Comments by the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFFS)
on the OIOS Evaluation Report- 5 May 2011**

The UNFFS would like to thank OIOS for its thoughtful review of the United Nations Forum on Forests in relation to the UNFFS consultations with members of the Secretariat and with stakeholders engaged in the United Nations Forum on Forests. The Secretariat also appreciates the opportunity provided by OIOS to provide some points of clarification and additional background information to the review. What follows below are some additional points of information or clarification that may be useful for the clients of this review.

Cover page:

"The UNFFS provides effective support to the intergovernmental process, but sustainability is at risk due to expanding work programme and heavy reliance on extra-budgetary funds."

Comment: Sustainability can only be achieved through additional resources, including reallocated regular and extra-budgetary resources and staff secondments to the UNFFS.

Executive Summary:

Fourth paragraph: "...support to the United Nations Forum on Forests...."

Comment: Please note that UNFF is the primary global policy body on forests, with universal membership of all 192 countries, and UNFFS serves as the secretariat to this body.

Fourth paragraph: "Its main function was to provide substantive secretariat support to the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), as well as providing policy advice to other intergovernmental bodies, a function not filled by any other entity in the United Nations system."

Comment on fourth paragraph and paragraph 39: UNFFS role in CPF is not only in its role as the Secretariat to the CPF, but UNFFS has been an active member of the Partnership. The UNFFS has been viewed as being very effective in increasing the visibility of the Forum's policy resolutions and decisions in the international arena, and in effectively coordinating its work with other forest-related United Nations entities, within UN headquarters and with other non-UN entities on forest policy issues.

Last paragraph and paragraph 75: "...developing an action plan for identifying and implementing secondment arrangements with partner entities, including member organisations of the CPF."

Comment: As partially noted in the review, voluntary secondments from CPF member organizations was part of the concept of the UNFF when it formed the UNFFS, in addition to voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund of the UNFFS in order for it to carry out the work of the Forum, to complement a "small compact Secretariat". As noted in the review, however, this has not worked out as planned. The governing bodies of the CPF must provide both the mandate and the funding to agree and arrange for such secondments. In recent years, only one CPF organization, ITTO, has supported a secondment. In that instance, however, despite the GA resolution's specifying secondments from all CPF members, the management rules of the UN dictated that ITTO was viewed as being a non-UN organization, creating hurdles that made the secondment lengthy to arrange, narrow in the ability of the DI level individual to perform within the organization, and thus led to an extremely short secondment on only one year. The shortness of these secondments is an ancillary problem, when the UNFFS is depending on these professionals to implement the mandate of the Forum. However, the UNFFS is in active negotiation for

two secondments from two CPF member organizations which will help in part to address some of the issues in the review.

Paragraph 18:

“In order to achieve its main objectives, currently the UNFFS has the following principal activities... “

Comment: One of the principal functions of the UNFFS is to serve as the Secretariat of the UNFF. This needs to be reflected in the principal activities and functions of the UNFFS. Specifically, the UNFFS is to work intersessionally to develop the groundwork for the upcoming Forum meetings, to facilitate and catalyse work so that the Forum is well positioned to take informed decisions when it meets. The mandate includes a broad range of cross-cutting issues, as noted by the review, but in the two years between Forum sessions the Secretariat's priority is focused very much on the upcoming Forum session, as mandated by the UNFF. For example, in 2013 the priority theme to be addressed is Economic Development and Forests, and Forest Financing. The latter topic has been in dispute for many years within members of the Forum and UNFFS has worked with various partners, including the CPF, to prepare the groundwork for a positive outcome for this important session of the Forum.

Paragraph 22:

"The UNFFS is headed by a Director accountable ...the secretariat is organized in three units: (1) the Policy Development and Implementation Unit; (2) the Scientific and Technical Programme Unit; and (3) the Economic, Social and Emerging Issues Unit."

Comment: The second unit should be corrected to (2) Scientific and Technical Unit.

Paragraph 29:

“In that context ... it has been considered a landmark document by forest stakeholders...”

Comment: The UNFFS notes that the accurate term for the Non-legally binding Agreement on All Types of Forests should be "landmark agreement," rather than "landmark document”.

Paragraph 43:

“For example, according to some stakeholders, the preparation and launch of the International Year of Forests was planned very professionally incorporating a logo, comprehensive media campaign and several key events. As a result, it not only contributed to higher visibility of the UNFFS within the system and among Member States, but benefited sustainable forest management efforts by governments, NGOs and other partners.”

Comment: The UNFFS, given the lead for the International Year of Forests, providing a facilitative and catalytic role for the IYF, aiming to promote the successful work of member states in their work with Forests and People and to provide a wider platform to bring a positive understanding of the multiple contributions of forests for all people of the world. The UNFFS did this with an extremely small extra budgetary contribution from two countries in the lead up to the launch of the Year, but used a strategy to broaden outreach through the assets and abilities of all partners to promote the year. However, it has been described as catalysing a positive and new atmosphere of cooperation between the CPF members, member states and non-government entities in promoting the IYF. It designed and promoted the logo of the Year which has been used in more than 800 organizations around the world. In the first four months

of since the launch of the Year, the IYF website has attracted 203,191 visits, which accounted for 634,661 page views.

Paragraph 47:

"The IoA's were, however, formulated in a somewhat simplistic manner, not allowing for capturing progress and performance of the various EAs. For example, the IoA "the number of events related to the International Year of Forests (2011)" only captured quantitative aspects (see Annex 1) with no reference to how the quality of these events (EAs) was to be measured."

Comment: This is a valid point. However, the UNFFS believe that a major problem lies in the design of the logframe guidelines, provided by the Department of Management which does not allow for measurement of the quality of work.

Paragraph 48:

"Further, the indicators chosen for the UNFFS are not clearly linked to the role of the secretariat, thus limiting their validity. For example, the IoA for measuring EA (b), "Increased number of reports submitted by countries and other stakeholders on progress made in the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (...)" lacks a direct link to the work of the secretariat. It is not very precise in defining 'increased', and falls short of capturing the work of the UNFFS in monitoring, assessing and reporting on the implementation by Member States."

Comment: UNFFS agrees. The UNFFS, however, does not have much control over these indicators, as the structure of the logframe is not designed to capture the work done by the secretariat. In addition, the final indicators are always decided on by the CPC."

Paragraphs 50:

"In recent years, the UNFF has also been mandated by ECOSOC resolution 2000/35 (para 2a and 3cii) to work on forest financing. Through its support role to the UNFF, the UNFFS has therefore also focused increasingly on this issue. Most recently, at UNFF9, this resulted in establishing an Ad-hoc Expert Group on Forest Financing and an agreed set of activities on to pave the way for a possible UNFF10 decision on that topic."

Comment: Please note that the correct reference number for the ECOSOC resolution is 2000/35. Of course, one of the principal functions of the United Nations Forum on Forests, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/35, paragraph 2 (a), 3 (c) (ii) is to work and agree on actions on forest financing. Resolution 2007/40 further decided to establish UNFF ad hoc expert group to develop proposals for the development of a voluntary global financial mechanism/portfolio/approach/forest financing framework for all types of forests. The resolution of the special session of the UNFF9, held on 30 October 2009, (E/2009/11-E/CN.18/SS/2009/2), and the resolution of the ninth session of the UNFF held in January/February 2011 (under item 11, - means of implementation.) In addition to its role as the secretariat of the Forum, the UNFFS has been given specific mandates by the Forum to work on forest financing. The most recent legislative mandates of the Forum on forest financing (resolution of the special session, and resolution of the UNFF9) contain specific requests address to the UNFFS directly, or indirectly through the CPF to work on forest financing. It is worth-mentioning that UNFFS is the lead agency within the CPF on forest financing and is leading the CPF Advisory Group on Finance, which according to the UNFF9 resolution has to carry out the requests that are made to the CPF on the issue of forest financing.

Paragraph 51:

"Nevertheless, some stakeholder interviewees shared concerns with proactive participation of the secretariat in substantive and *emerging* areas relating to forests. They expressed that they would prefer to see the UNFFS to mainly focus on its key function as the secretariat to the intergovernmental process. In their opinion, going beyond that mandate, or as one of the stakeholder interviewees said: "If they (the UNFFS) grow, the risk is, of course, that they don't know how and where to grow into. The temptation to find more funds and to implement own projects might be there, which would divert a lot of attention from the core issues."

Comment: The above statement is based on lack of knowledge about the mandate and the scope of the work of the Forum and its secretariat. There is no "own projects" by the UNFFS. The project is implemented under the UNFF Facilitative Process, established by the resolution of the special session of the UNFF9, and many of the CPF member organizations are involved in its implementation.

Paragraph 55:

"While most stakeholders interviewed ... with one stakeholder indicating: "The director comes with big understanding of the issues, she has a lot of charisma, a presence, but it (the UNFFS) is a bit of a one-person show (...)". In this respect, some stakeholders raised the concern that at next juncture of recruitment process for director position a vacuum may again arise, and that a timely vacancy management process be ascertained".

Comment: The leadership of the UNFFS, despite its small size, includes a number of experienced forestry and forest policy experts. In the last few years, the Director has worked with a small management team which provide major input to and lead in specific areas, coordinating within both their units and, in terms of issues, in coordinating between units. As the review noted, the Secretariat is highly productive and this could never be the result of one individual's work. Beyond the senior staff on the Secretariat, the mid-level professionals and support members of the UNFFS team must of necessity take on significant roles in representing the organization and working on the topics mandated by the UNFF. In short, the successes identified by the OIOS review are due to the strength of the UNFFS team, not to any one individual. Having said that, however, UNFFS agrees that the size of the Secretariat makes it vulnerable when turnover occurs at any level and advance planning should be carried out to move quickly to replace the leaders.

Paragraph 62:

"Also, UNFFS fundraising strategies were very effective and resulted in about 3 million USD voluntary contributions for the 2008-2009 and the 2010-2011 biennia. This represented almost a double increase of UNFFS' overall budget. The main donor, accounting for 73% of the contributions, was the United States of America. Regular reports are presented to ECOSOC informing about the trust fund contributions and the utility of the funds received."

Comment: While it is true that the US contributions constituted a large percent of the total contributions in the past, the situation has changed as illustrated in the table below reflecting US contributions at 35.5%.

Contributions to the UNFF Trust Fund (2010-2011) in USD

Contributor	2010-2011	Total	%
Austria	74,000	74,000	5.3%
Finland	150,208	150,208	10.7%
Republic of Korea	20,000	20,000	1.4%
Switzerland	40,000	40,000	2.8%
United Kingdom	624,750	624,750	44.3%
USA	500,000	500,000	35.5%
Grand Total	1,408,958	1,408,958	100.0%

Paragraph 68:

“Role...the secretariat, because of expanding mandates of the UNFF, has also been expanding its activities...such as forest financing...some entities, including Member States, have raised concerns that the UNFFS is taking on additional areas of work that may be beyond its primary function of servicing the intergovernmental forest process.”

Comment: Paragraph 68, in particular, its last part, is not based on statement or fact presented earlier in the report. UNFFS is the secretariat of the Forum and has the responsibility to provide substantive support to the Forum and report back to the Forum on the implementation of its decisions and other issues included in its multi-year programme of work. The UNFFS follows the guidance and mandates provided to it by the Forum. UNFFS mandates have been expanded by the Forum, as a result, evolving mandates of the Forum. Basically, UNFF decisions and resolutions contain a series of agreed actions/requests. These actions/requests are usually addressed to Member States, major groups, regional process and CPF members. UNFFS is a member of the CPF and, thus, has the responsibility to implement the Forum's requests to CPF as well. The UNFFS is also the secretariat of the CPF and, from this perspective, also coordinates response by the CPF to the UNFF requests. Apart from these, some specific actions/requests in the resolutions of the Forum are specifically addressed to the UNFFS.