



STREAMLINING FOREST-RELATED REPORTING

Report of the Collaborative Partnership on Forest Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting

16-17 APRIL 2012

FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy



CPF
Collaborative Partnership
on Forests



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Streamlining Forest-related Reporting
Photo: FAO database

INTRODUCTION

From April 16 to 17, 2012, the Task Force of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF TF)¹ on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting met in FAO, Rome. The meeting included representatives of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), United Nations Forum on Forest (UNFF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Two Task Force institutions could not participate: the International Tropical Timber Organization and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

The meeting was hosted by the FAO which serves as Task Force Chair as agreed during an informal meeting of the Task Force in September 2011 (as part of the Forest Resources Assessment Expert Consultation meeting).

In support of the TF mandate, the overall objective was to identify ways and means to reduce country reporting burden and improve the quality of data and analysis, and in this context, the meeting sought to accomplish the following specific objectives:

- Provide an update to CPF TF members on progress made on joint data collection through the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire produced by FAO and regional data collection partners.
- Update on CBD, UNFF, UNFCCC, ITTO, and UNCCD plans to harmonize country reporting requirements (variables and timing) to their respective bodies.
- Explore the potential of the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire for streamlining forest related reporting, and the contributions of intergovernmental bodies (the CBD, UNFF, UNFCCC, ITTO, and UNCCD) to support joint data collection and analysis.

The objectives and agenda for the meeting were prepared and agreed among Task Force members in February 2012.

¹ <http://www.cpfweb.org/73036/en/>

1 ■ SHARING OF EXPECTATIONS

The first part of the meeting allowed participants to describe their expectations regarding the Task Force and the role of the members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. Key aspects like the potential of the TF, the essential role of the FRA as facilitator among the different parties involved in reporting processes, the need to work at country level and the development of a reporting portal were highlighted.

The Parties to the CBD have been required to submit their 5th national report by end of March 2014. Countries are asked to report on progress towards the “Aichi Biodiversity Targets”. Many of them are related to forest. The CBD Secretariat (SCBD) would like to see how to share data and analysis with FRA and other reporting processes to reduce reporting burden. The ideal scenario would be FRA helping different parties to make reporting easier by providing essential data.

CBD COP 10 requested to the SCBD to work with FAO to analyze how forest biodiversity monitoring and reporting could be improved. The SCBD worked on some suggestions on how to improve various aspects of forest biodiversity monitoring, and has developed a background report on this topic, available on www.cbd.int at document UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/16/INF/25.

UNFFS reiterated need for further work on streamlining of forest related reporting to reduce the reporting burden on countries, limit the inconsistencies between different reporting on the same topics and reduce the costs and efforts of data collection.

The TF serves as a good platform for exchange of information, identification of overlaps in reporting and elaboration of adequate steps in the areas where streamlining is feasible. It could also provide a forum for finding ways to monitor and report on challenging socio-economic forest related data such as livelihoods, full contribution of forest sector to GDP, services provided by forests.

UNEP-WCMC sees great potential in this TF, acknowledging the value of the forest reporting portal that the TF developed, hoping that it could be revived and recognizing that since 2004 things have moved forward.

UNFCCC suggested that member organizations of the TF should act as a platform to facilitate/ to support the work at country level. Since the COPs at Cancun and Durban, there are additional reporting requirements relating to mitigation and adaptation to climate change, in addition to forests. At the moment there is no specific reporting for REDD+ as it is still being considered in the UNFCCC process, although countries are reporting to their respective partner organizations/ donors about progress on REDD+.

2 ■ TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

This part of the meeting was assigned to the discussion of the Terms of Reference of the Task Force and the possible revision of the membership. Meeting participants decided to update the ToR context and the time schedule

The participants proposed to update the ToR; the context and the time schedule (while leaving the mandate and objectives unchanged).

It was decided to work on two tables:

- 1) Activities of the TF until 2015 (working plan of the TF) and
- 2) Milestones until 2020 that can include the meetings like Rio+20, the different COPs, UNFF, etc. This will help to keep in mind the different reporting cycles.

The TF outputs will be presented to the CPF meeting planned for 20 June, 2012. The UNFF volunteered to update the Task Force ToR for consideration by TF members.

3 ■ UPDATE ON THE JOINT DATA COLLECTION PLANNED THROUGH THE COLLABORATIVE FOREST RESOURCES QUESTIONNAIRE (CFRQ)

The FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment program informed participants about progress on the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ)

The partner organizations participating in the CFRQ are FAO, ITTO, OFAC, UNECE and Forest Europe. The three main purposes of the CFRQ are:

- 1) To contribute to reducing reporting burden. Countries that report to more than one of the organizations will benefit from the CFRQ,
- 2) To harmonize the data. This is done through the identification of core variables that are used by all the consortium partners,
- 3) To improve efficiency among partner organizations.

Participants were interested in the process of the CFRQ. It was explained that the CFRQ is not separated according to the thematic elements of SFM although the questions are related to the thematic elements and that the CFRQ does not fulfill any of the partners complete data needs.

Concerning the criteria to select the variables, it was clarified that organizations looked at the overlaps and identified common variables to all of them (list A), variables with potential (B) and the others which were not possible to collect jointly (list C).

The CFRQ will be sent to all countries because each country reports to at least one of the consortium partners. Participants also asked about the timing of the CFRQ with the FRA process. It was explained that the questionnaire will most likely be sent out in January 2013 along with the FRA country reporting documentation.

4 ■ PRESENTATION OF ACTIONS TO HARMONIZE CONVENTION AND OTHER INTERGOVERNMENTAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS (TF MEMBERS)

In this session, the participants discussed their actions toward reporting harmonization. Good examples of initiatives in selected countries were given. The crucial role of FRA as a source of data for reporting to other relevant forest related processes like the CBD and REDD+ was highlighted. Participants also emphasized the need to work with the different focal points at country level and that FRA should take the lead. New opportunities of streamlining reporting, like the reporting on safeguards were identified

UNEP-WCMC is basically working on four relevant projects and approaches (http://www.unep-wcmc.org/harmonization-of-reporting_491.html):

- **FNR Rio project: UNEP/GEF, Rio Conventions:** this project focuses on the improvement of the cost and resources effectiveness for reporting to Rio Conventions. It concentrates on the strengthening of the synergies for reporting to the Rio Conventions at national level and on eliminating the duplication in reporting processes. The project works with six pilot countries (least developed countries and SIDS). The project has conducted workshops and consultations at country level to understand conventions implementation and reporting processes. On request by the GEF, the project also tests a joint reporting format for the Rio Conventions in the pilot countries.
- **Biodiversity-related conventions:** UNEP-WCMC works with the biodiversity-related conventions at two levels. Country level to improve coordination and collaboration and at the global level on the following options for streamlining reporting: identify convention information needs, agree on terms and definitions, agree on who collects what, share information management systems and online reporting tools and share targets and indicators for the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and inform reporting formats.
- **Marine instruments in European Union:** this initiative by the European Commission aims to achieve a coherent reporting framework for marine issues for EU Member States, avoiding duplication and inconsistencies.
- **Online reporting:** IT has progressed and there are so many options and existing tools for online reporting. UNEP-WCMC has developed an online reporting tool that can be used by any MEA or instruments; it has been used by the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement and has been adopted by the Convention on Migratory Species. See MEA Information & Knowledge Management Initiative – www.inforMEA.org.

The results of the FNR_Rio project will be presented by UNEP and GEF during the Conference of Rio+20. A follow up of the project is planned. The option to renew the CPF portal is mentioned.

It was clarified that Conventions do not have the mandate to collect data jointly so the joint reporting is done through GEF. Participants agreed that strengthening of the process at national level is the priority.

The SCBD did a drastic shift concerning reporting. The purpose of the 5th National Report (due 31 March 2014) is to assess the progress of the countries toward the "Aichi Biodiversity Targets". The 5th report is more narrative and was reduced to 12 questions from a much longer questionnaire in the previous national reporting cycles. Reducing country reporting burden was a main objective of this change.

With the new format, countries can now refer directly to the data and results of relevant data collection processes at national level.

For example, countries would need to refer to FRA to answer some of the 12 questions, such as *'How effectively has biodiversity been mainstreamed into relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies, plans and programmes?'* Therefore FRA has become an essential source of data and analysis for the CBD, at national and global level.

SCBD will offer a series of capacity building workshops on national reporting in the course of 2013. It would be beneficial if FRA national correspondents could also participate, or at least be informed about the workshops, and if some information on FRA could be disseminated at the workshops.

UNFFS provided information on the project: "Strengthening National Reporting in Support of the Implementation of the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests" which is currently being carried out jointly with FAO. It is a four-year project which follows the request from the ninth session of the UNFF to its Secretariat to prepare a streamlined reporting format, in consultation with countries and members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF).

Forum Secretariat is expected to develop a streamlined reporting format, in consultation with other members of the CPF to ensure simple voluntary national reporting for UNFF10 focused on the implementation of the Forest Instrument and a balanced reporting of all the four Global Objectives on Forests (GOFs).

A draft reporting format and guidelines to monitor progress on implementation of the Forest Instrument and the achievement of its four GOFs was developed within the framework of the project. The template was presented at five regional workshops organized jointly by the UNFF Secretariat and FAO: Bangkok, Thailand (10-12 October 2011), Nairobi, Kenya (13-15 December 2011), Accra, Ghana (6-8 February 2012), Beirut, Lebanon (11-13 April 2012) and Santiago, Chile (18-20 April 2012) and attended by UNFF focal points and FRA national correspondents. The draft template was also commented by the CPF members.

The current draft template and guidelines contain quantitative and qualitative indicators utilized in reporting to other related intergovernmental processes (FRA and ITTO). These indicators correspond primarily to Global Objectives on Forests 1 to 3.

There are gaps for assessing (a) the fourth Global Objective on Forests, (b) the contribution of forests to some relevant MDG targets (c) and some of the national policies and measures of the forest instrument. Therefore additional questions/ indicators were included which would provide a better assessment of progress achieved across the full scope of the instrument and its global objectives on forests. Additional indicators deal with forest financing and MDG targets related to poverty eradication and livelihood of forest dependent people.

UNFFS is aware that some of the questions will be very difficult, if not impossible to answer for UNFF10 in 2013. Nevertheless, by flagging and requesting the data now, countries can begin to direct their attention to the gathering of this information for reporting to UNFF 11 in 2015 when the Forum will address progress, challenges and the way forward for the international arrangement on forests.

The draft template will be further developed on the basis of comments provided at the five regional workshops and expert consultations.

UNEP-WCMC elaborated on the work at national level. According to the FNR_ Rio project results; coordination among different focal points have improved, they have learnt who the other focal points are and where they are based. The project is funding activities like meetings and training workshops. They have realized that specific arrangements in each pilot country are different. Organizations should be looking more at the understanding of country challenges.

The importance to give the opportunity to countries to share their experiences is stressed. FRA will be working on that too. The participants suggested to work at country level but with all the different focal points and that FRA should take the lead.

Information about the reporting on genetic forest resources is asked. This subject is important for the SCBD because it is related to ABS. It was also suggested to approach the country donors since they are financing different organizations to do the same activities.

UNFCCC highlighted that after COP 17 in Durban, there are additional reporting requirements for all developed and developing countries. Countries will have to submit biennial reports or biennial update reports, in addition to their national communications to the Convention. Developed country Parties will also continue to report on their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and removals from the land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector as part of the annual GHG inventories submission to the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol.

In Durban, a new set of modalities for reporting and accounting of emissions and removals from LULUCF activities were agreed for the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. In Durban, a decision was adopted on how REDD+ countries can provide information on how all REDD+ safeguards are addressed and respected.

In this same decision, REDD+ countries can submit their forest reference emission levels on a voluntary basis. This latter point is very important because countries could use some of the same data sent to FRA to establish their forest reference emission level. It is important that countries get started and improve on their forest data and information and reporting over time. The voluntary submission of the reference level and relevant information should be in accordance with the guidelines in decision 12/CP.17 and the submitted information should be transparent, complete and accurate.

Countries reporting to the UNFCCC may use FAO definitions. Most of the time countries have adopted FAO definitions and report according to this definition. IPCC guidelines state that countries can use their own national definitions to report to the Convention.

The SCBD is working on REDD+ biodiversity safeguards. They have been asked to look at possible indicators and mechanisms to see how REDD+ would affect indigenous peoples and local communities (decision X/36), and report to COP 11. While this is work in progress, a list of tentative indicators has been submitted for discussion at the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) at its sixteenth session (30 April to 5 May 2012), available on www.cbd.int as document UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/16/8.

Concerning safeguards; UNFCCC Parties have agreed that systems for providing information on how safeguards are addressed and respected could be built upon existing systems, as appropriate. The idea is to avoid duplication. The SCBD and UNFCCC have started to work together but not yet formalized. UN REDD and WB have their own frameworks to report on safeguards. The participants have identified that reporting on the safeguards is also an opportunity for collaboration in streamlining reporting.

5 ■ DISCUSSION ON HOW THE CFRQ CAN HELP TO STREAMLINE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS OF CONVENTIONS AND OTHER INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODIES

Participants emphasized the added value of the CFRQ, and advised to further expand the CFRQ for 2020 once experience has been gained from the initial effort. The need to move forward concerning the harmonization of the different reporting cycles was recognized

In 2008 the CBD Expanded Programme of Work on Forest Biological Diversity was reviewed. The CBD COP 10 came out with the adoption of a new Strategic Plan, (<http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>). Some targets are directly related to forests. Target 5 is halve the rate of deforestation by 2020 (and where feasible, bring it close to zero). Target 7: By 2020 areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity. Target 11: 17% of terrestrial and inland water and 10% of coastal and marine areas are conserved through a system of protected areas. Target 15: restore 15% of degraded ecosystems.

The SCBD noted that while ambitious, they believe these targets are achievable through a concerted effort of the UN system, Parties, the private sector and other stakeholders. For example, for Target 15 many countries are working on national restoration targets. In addition to these four directly forest-related Aichi Targets, it is clear that several other targets are also linked to forests, including Target 4 on sustainable consumption and production.

The SCBD supports the idea of initiating collaboration among the different focal points at national level. The SCBD uses many of the FRA definitions, although discussions on revising definitions (including the global definition of 'forest') continue under the Convention. At this stage, the SCBD is more focused on quality data and availability than on revising definitions.

UNFF highlighted the potential of the CFRQ and argued that it could one day also be used to report on progress of UNFF objectives and the NLBI.

Participants agreed on the importance of looking at reporting cycles of the different organizations and do efforts to streamline. UNFF expressed interest in streamline reporting cycle with FRA as has ITTO.

FAO explained two aspects of its work for FRA 2015:

- Support developing countries to integrate remote sensing into the country reporting process to improve the quality of the information.
- Support countries to reinforce their networks around country report, example; peer review during the preparation of the country report, to integrate other stakeholders like civil society organizations. FRA would like to support expand awareness of country reports at country level.

6 ■ REMAINING ISSUES AND OTHER MATTERS

In this session, the need to harmonize definitions was highlighted and it was agreed that FRA is best placed to address this challenge. In conclusion, the participants decided to establish a work plan that allows follow up on the CFRQ and the planning of the next steps for 2020.

The discussion continued with the idea of sharing information like the date of the different meetings/ capacity building activities that organizations are planning, also contact information of the different focal points. The TF agreed to explore the revival of the CPF Portal as a means of easy data sharing between TF members. Participants also discussed about the definition of natural forest. It was explained that UN-REDD Programme calculates the natural forest area by the addition of the primary forest area and other naturally-regenerated forest (in the glossary of the UN-REDD Programme - Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria).

The differences between definitions highlight the need to continue encouraging refinement to definitions and how they are applied.

Participants agreed that FRA is the best place to face the challenge of any further need to clarify or develop relevant definitions. At the same time there was a general agreement that, where possible, "reopening discussions" on forest related definitions should be avoided.

The CFRQ is already a step ahead toward harmonization for the FRA and regional data collection partners ITTO, OFAC, UNECE and Forest Europe. Finally, participants agreed to establish a work plan from now to 2015 and so to get lessons learnt from the CFRQ that can be used for the next FRA.

7 ■ NEXT STEPS AND ACTION PLAN

Proposed TF work plan for 2012 to 2015

Steps	Time schedule	Observations
1 2 page-summary of the data collection activities by the different CPF TF members plus a table with data collection deadlines	By end of May 2012	Members send info to FRA, LP to collate
2 Update of the ToR of the TF	By end of May 2012	UNFFS to update
3 Proposal to renew the CPF portal	By end of May 2012	LF/KM
3.1 Sharing information concerning the different capacity building activities/workshops/ meetings 3.2 Share information about project/ activities aiming at reducing reporting burden 3.3 Sharing the contact info of the different focal points		
3.4 Produce a joint list of the different focal points	August 2012	FRA
4 Organize side events/profit the different occasions to show the work of the TF specifically to the different focal points	COFO 2012; CBD, COP 11, 2012; UNFF 10, 2013; SBSTA UNFCCC, 2013	To be confirmed
5 Proposal of additional variables for the CFRQ for 2020	COFO 2014	To be confirmed
6 Joint meeting of the TF and the Consortium (CFRQ) for 2020	COFO 2014	To be confirmed

8 ■ LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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