

**Informal inter-agency meeting on indicators to monitor progress towards
SFM and forest-related SDG indicators
2 United Nations Plaza Building, New York, USA
29. April 2016, 09:30-14:30, Room DC2-2330**

Draft meeting minutes

Participants:

- UNFF secretariat: Manoel Sobral (opening), Tomasz Juszcak, Peter Gondo, Ryosuke Ujihashi
- FAO: Ewald Rametsteiner, Peter Csoka
- UNFCCC secretariat: Jenny Wong
- UNCCD secretariat: Sasha Alexander
- FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit: Rastislav Rasi
- ITTO secretariat: Takeshi Goto
- Montreal Process Working Group: Andres Meza, CONAF, Chile
- IUFRO: Alexander Buck, John Parrotta
- UN DESA: Yongyi Min
- Independent experts: Christopher Prins, Stephanie Caswell

The meeting was chaired by Ewald Rametsteiner, FAO.

1. Welcome and introduction

Mr. Manoel Sobral, Director of the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat, welcomed the participants of the meeting, highlighted the long history of work on indicators prior to and particularly in the follow-up of the UNCED “Rio” Conference in 1992. He pointed out that criteria and indicators (C&I) have a key role of in promoting sustainable forest management (SFM) and in demonstrating contributions of forests to the Sustainable Development Goals. Mr Sobral emphasized that indicators and related monitoring and reporting will continue to play a key role in the work of UNFF. He highlighted that Member States at UNFF11 recognized that monitoring, assessment and reporting and C&I are an integral part of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) and its Strategic Plan (2017-2030), as stated in the ECOSOC Resolution 2015/33.

Mr. Peter Csoka, FAO, welcomed the participants on behalf of FAO’s Forestry Department, pointing to the timeliness of discussions on the topic, given the important global policy decisions taken on forests and on sustainable development in 2015. He noted that FAO’s Committee on Forestry will formally address some related aspects in its session in July 2016, and referred to the upcoming start of preparations for a future Forest Resources Assessment 2020.

Mr. Ewald Rametsteiner introduced the objectives of the meeting, as per the draft agenda (see attachment 1):

- a) Provide information on the work of the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDGs (IAEG-SDG)
- b) Discuss the draft background paper on “Monitoring progress towards SFM”, in view of the decisions of the UN Statistics Commission on the SDG15.2 indicator and the IAEG-SDG3 meeting.
- c) Discuss possible work on forest indicators and SDGs and any other C&I and MAR related aspects as deemed relevant

The expected outcome of the meeting was a summary of the specific needs for further action and possible next steps on the items b) and c) above.

He suggested that the same approach and format be followed as suggested and agreed at the initial inter-agency meeting on the topic during the World Forestry Congress in September 2015, i.e. that this be an informal meeting focusing on technical level discussions.

2. Short update on the work of IAEG-SDGs meeting results relevant to SGD15

Ms. Yongyi Min, DESA, presented the process to develop the initial set of SDG indicators from June 2015 to March 2016, the decision of the 47th UN Statistical Commission in March 2016 and the work ahead to implement the global SDG indicator framework as decided by the UN Statistical Commission. She presented the outcome of 3rd IAEG-SDG meeting in March 2016 including the work plan and next steps, particularly with regard to the “Tier system” and sub-groups established by the IAEG. Ms Min pointed to the implications with regard to work on SDG 15.2 (a “Tier III” indicator) with regard to substance and deadlines. She informed the group that adoption of the global indicator framework by ECOSOC and the General Assembly in September 2016 and that IAEG-SDG4 will be held in October 2016, finalizing the Tier System. The plan foresees limited revisions of selected indicators to be undertaken in 2017. A broader review and revision of indicators is foreseen in 2020 and again in 2025. She also clarified the function of “custodian agencies” (FAO in the case of SDG15.2).

The following points are key implications of the IAEG-SDG regarding further work:

1. on work related to SDG 15.2:

- by 29th July 2016 a detailed work plan is to be submitted by custodian agencies / international agencies to IAEG-SDGs on how to develop the Tier III SDG 15.2 indicators; the initial work plans submitted will be reviewed and finalized by 15. September, in preparation to IAEG-SDG4.
- IAEG-SDGs members will be requested to provide scenarios on data flows from national to international level, request to be sent by around 30 April 2016

2. On other possible forest-related SDG indicator work:

- 3 working groups will be established under the IAEG-SDGs (interlinkages between indicators, statistical data and metadata exchange, geospatial information). This is potentially relevant with regard to interlinkages between forests and SFM and other SDG indicators.

The presentation given is in Annex 2.

3. Indicators for “Monitoring progress towards SFM”

Mr. Christopher Prins presented the main background paper to the meeting “Monitoring progress towards sustainable forest management, through a set of indicators or an index: some suggestions”.

This paper was developed as agreed at the informal inter-agency meeting held during the World Forestry Congress, with input from the agencies involved in the collaborative effort. The paper reviews the different approaches to monitor progress towards SFM that were practically applied by different international bodies and processes and experience made. Based on these, the paper proposes four options to consider for “monitoring progress towards SFM”. It includes the actual SDG 15.2 submission as one option but also considers other indicator and reporting processes outside the

SDG indicator process. The process for developing the paper provided the basis for developing the IAEG-SDG proposal on 15.2.

In the ensuing general discussion it was emphasized that most of the proposed options were “inward looking”, not taking into account interrelations with other sectors (e.g. deforestation, policy decisions affecting forests), and not necessarily succeed in balancing “people” and “forest” aspects, now aggravated by the emphasis put on “people” by the SDGs. Several participants made reference to a rare “window of opportunity” that is here now. For the way forward, it was suggested to discuss this broad topic in three interrelated contexts:

- SDG 15.2, requiring focused work and immediate attention (by July 2016)
- Developing a streamlined set of indicators to monitor progress towards sustainable forest management, applicable at the global level, for instance in the context of UNFF Strategic Plan 2017-2030 or FRA2020, adaptable to needs of different processes
- Improving the use of existing C&I in a broader context (no time limit)

On **SDG15.2**, five main questions were discussed, resulting in the following overall understanding:

- given the plans and timelines of the SDG indicator process it was widely seen as desirable to work with the existing proposal (as contained in the background paper, incl. the metadata sheet as published by the IAEG-SDG), and bring lessons forward for the SDG indicator review scheduled for 2020. This could include further exploration of issues related to measuring “progress towards SFM” as compared to “area of sustainably managed forest”.
- participants clearly preferred not to aggregate the individual sub-components to a single index. Dashboards or other options for non-aggregated reporting should be developed and proposed. Given that aggregation seems to be the main obstacle to classifying SDG15.2 from Tier III to Tier I, it was broadly seen as fully justified to suggest a re-classification of 15.2 as Tier I indicator: all four components have an established methodology and data are available.
- deletion of any sub-component was not supported, even if the first sub-component (“Annual average percent change in forest area over most recent available 5 year period”) is seemingly identical with SDG indicator 15.1.1. It was recommended to clarify the differences between this first sub-component and 15.1.1. A range of comments was given on the remaining three sub-components with regard to possible further fine-tuning and more detailed specifications (e.g. ensuring consistency with soil sub-indicator of SDG 15.3 in sub-component 2, revisiting concept (“primary management objective”) and making reference to IUCN classes in the biodiversity-related sub-component 3, working out ways to specify “forest management plans” in sub-component 4, clarify potential overlaps between sub –component 3 and 4 etc.)
- it was suggested to test proposals with country data (from FRA2015), and to develop a more detailed technical specification document at this stage

The following ***follow-up actions and next steps*** on SDG15.2 were recommended:

- FAO, as custodian agency, to continue to lead the collaborative process to further develop SDG15.2, in particular
 - delete the proposal on aggregation of sub-components In the SDG15.2 metadata sheet and replace with a proposal for reporting on sub-components (dashboard or other)
 - provide justification and explanation on sub-component 1 to clarify need and difference to SDG 15.1
 - lead fine-tune wording and specifications of individual sub-components and provide a revised, fine-tuned specification proposal at the next meeting of the group [it was understood, but not

explicitly mentioned, that this be a participatory process such as the process used to develop SDG15.2]

- if possible, test specifications of sub-components with existing country data
- to consider holding a 3rd informal inter-agency meeting on the topic during COFO/WFW 18-22 July 2016 and present the result

On **developing a streamlined set of indicators to monitor progress towards sustainable forest management** applicable at the global level, the group highlighted in particular links to reporting formats developed in the context of UNFF (see Agenda item 4 discussion) and FRA2020. The work on designing FRA2020 will start in 2016/17, with guidance from COFO. While FRA2020 has multiple objectives and is managed through a separate process, the group felt that a window of opportunity exists for FRA2020 to also consider some of the general comments made in the discussions. This includes the issue of addressing impact of other sectors, highlighting relevance of policies and actions of other sectors, and emphasizing “people” aspects. The FRA2020 process could also consider options to expand on the 4 (“core”) sub-components of SDG15.2 to measure progress towards SFM, as outlined in the background paper. FRA2020 was also seen as highly relevant to the discussion on indicators in the context of forests & SDGs (see Agenda item 4.). Building close links between the inter-agency group that worked on the SFM and forest-SDG indicators and the responsible persons for FRA 2020 was seen as desirable.

The following ***follow-up actions and next steps*** were suggested:

- FAO to clarify plans and roadmap for the preparation of FRA2020
- To consider putting initial discussions and exchange of views on FRA2020 on the agenda of the suggested 3rd informal inter-agency meeting

4. Possible work on forest indicators and SDGs and other C&I and MAR related aspects

Mr. Christopher Prins presented the short background paper to the agenda item “Forests and the forest sector in the SDG indicator framework”. This paper is intended to continue discussion on the link between forests and SDGs, and the role of indicators. This includes questions such as: How should the forest sector (international agencies) respond to the challenge of monitoring the progress of the SDGs? How can the forest sector benefit from the improved information which will become available through the SDG monitoring process? The paper presented initial suggestions on these questions, as an early step in the forest sector’s response to the challenge of the SDGs. It builds on the initial draft set of 15 global forest indicators related to SDGs and the Global Objectives on Forests as developed informally by an inter-agency group in spring 2015 and presented at a side event at UNFF11 and at the World Forestry Congress. It takes into account the many developments for the SDG monitoring system since then.

In the ensuing discussions it was underlined that thinking through the questions more broadly and with relevant agencies and bodies involved has the potential to avoid fragmentation of approaches, particularly if such (necessarily open and flexible) processes are in line with time lines of both SDG work and work of key other bodies concerned with indicators, monitoring and reporting. The Collaborative Partnership on Forests was seen as a potentially useful arrangement for this purpose. Also, a specific session at COFO will discuss forest-related indicators for monitoring and reporting progress on the SDGs and will result in guidance provided by FAO member states.

Overall, it was seen as important to align processes of elaborating or suggesting indicators related to forests and SDGs closely with processes that set political priorities in the context of the IAF, aiming at

alignment of indicators with political priorities while at the same time supporting political processes with technical input on measurability and feasibility aspects. A window of opportunity was particularly seen regarding two established reporting mechanisms, both of which are to start development of reporting formats within the next 6-12 months:

- UNFF Strategic Plan and related monitoring and reporting: UNFF AHEG2 is scheduled for October 2016, and is to discuss main building blocks of a UNFF Strategic Plan for the IAF 2017-2030. This will include discussions on possible global goals and targets. This will also be an opportunity for member states to discuss the relation of the Strategic Plan with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SDGs and the IAF. The AHEG co-chairs expect to circulate draft building blocks/options for the strategic plan in July 2016. The final plan will be adopted by the Special Session of the Forum, in January 2017. Any targets or deliverables included in the plan will need a set of indicators for their measurement. In a separate but related exercise, the UNFF Secretariat has been tasked, based on the mandate given by ECOSOC in 2015, to propose a cycle and format for national reporting, to be discussed at UNFF12 in May 2017.
- FAO's Forest Resources Assessment 2020: see above

The following ***follow-up actions and next steps*** were suggested:

- To consider the topic in the context of the work of CPF, possibly in an upcoming CPF meeting/retreat
- To compile and share work plans and timelines of different relevant processes (UNFF, FAO FRA2020, CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD, regional C&I processes, other)
- To share information and encourage discussions on forest and SDG indicators in a wider context of experts, including in the upcoming "International expert workshop on strengthening collaboration on C&I to promote and demonstrate SFM", 1-3 May 2016, Ottawa
- To consider discussing the topic on the agenda of the suggested 3rd informal inter-agency meeting, discussing next steps in view of the information available by then and aiming at technical input to the UNFF process (AHEG2 and follow-up) and FRA2020 preparations.

Closing the meeting, Mr. Rametsteiner thanked the host, the UNFF Secretariat, for its strong support and the Government of Germany for the financial support provided through a project on strengthening C&I for sustainable forest management and their use. He thanked in particular the participants for their active and constructive contributions, looking forward to continuing the successful collaboration.

Annex 1: Agenda of the meeting

Informal inter-agency meeting on indicators to monitor progress towards SFM and forest-related SDG indicators

**29. April 2016,
2 United Nations Plaza Building, Room DC2-2330
New York, US**

The meeting will start at 09:30 in room DC2-2330

DRAFT AGENDA

1. Welcome and introduction (UNFFS, FAO)

2. Short update on the work of IAEG-SDGs meeting results relevant to SGD15

3. Indicators for “Monitoring progress towards SFM”

- Short presentation of the background paper, K. Prins
- Open discussion and decisions/recommendations on follow-up work and next steps

4. Possible work on forest indicators and SDGs and other C&I and MAR related aspects

- Introduction to start discussion on forest indicators and SDGs
- Tour –de-table perspectives on the topic (UNFF, CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD, FAO-FRA, UNDESA, other)
- Open discussion and decisions/recommendations on next steps

5. AOB

Annex 2: Presentation on Agenda Item 2



Global SDG Indicator Framework

Statistics Division, United Nations Department of
Economic and Social Affairs



Background

- From June 2015 to March 2016, following the mandate given by the General Assembly, the Statistical Commission through the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) worked very intensively on the development of the global indicator framework for the follow-up and review of progress made towards the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The process to develop the initial set of SDG indicators was inclusive, open and transparent, involved a large number of stakeholders, through many interactive consultations.
- A report of the work of IAEG-SDGs including the full list of proposed global SDG indicators was presented to the 47th Session of Statistical Commission in March 2016.



Decision of the 47th Statistical Commission

The Statistical Commission:

- Agreed as **a practical starting point with proposed global indicator framework** for Goals and targets of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, **subject to future technical refinement**.
- Requested IAEG-SDGs **to take into account specific proposals for refinements of indicators** made by Member States during the discussion.
- Recognized that development of robust, high-quality indicator framework is a **technical process that will need to continue over time**, including by making use of expertise in **other related expert processes**, and requested IAEG-SDGs to provide its **proposals and a plan for reviews** of indicator framework to 48th session of Statistical Commission.

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Decision of the 47th Statistical Commission (cont.)

- IAEG-SDGs to report back to the commission at its 48th session **on progress made especially on plans to develop methodologies for indicators in tier III**, including with work on definitions and standards to be agreed at international level for international comparability
- Emphasised that the **global indicators are intended for global follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda**. Indicators for regional, national and subnational levels of monitoring will be developed at the regional and national levels
- Emphasized that **national ownership is key to achieving sustainable development** and that national reviews are voluntary and country-led, will take into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and will respect policy space and priorities for all countries, including **LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and other countries in special situations**;

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Decision of the 47th Statistical Commission (cont.)

- Stressed that implementation of indicator framework will present a **challenge in many countries** and appropriate efforts to **strengthen national statistical capacities** will be needed, including by ensuring coordination between the IAEG-SDGs and the HLG; in accordance with ECOSOC resolution 2006/6 capacity building will be particularly important in **developing countries, especially African countries, LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and other countries in special situations**;
- Agreed that compilation of global indicators will be based to greatest extent possible on **comparable and standardized national official statistics**, provided **by countries to international statistical systems** and that when other sources and methodologies are used, these will be **reviewed and agreed by national statistical authorities** and **presented in a transparent manner**;

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Decision of the 47th Statistical Commission (cont.)

- Agreed that **coordination between national statistical systems and international organizations is important**, including to ensure transparency and efficiency in reporting, avoiding duplications, and that attention should be given to **strengthening reporting capacity of poorer countries**;
- Agreed that improving **data disaggregation is fundamental** for full implementation of indicator framework and to fully reflect principles of 2030 Agenda to ensure no-one left behind and stressed that efforts should be made to **strengthen national capacities in this area** and to **develop the necessary statistical standards and tools**, including by establishing a **working group** to work on data disaggregation.

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Implementation of Global SDG indicator framework

The first important step will be the assessment of the status of the indicators proposed. The indicators will be classified into three tiers:

- **Tier I:** an established methodology exists and data are already widely available;
- **Tier II:** a methodology has been established but for which data are not easily available; and
- **Tier III:** an internationally agreed methodology has not yet been developed.



Outcome of 3rd IAEG-SDG meeting: Work plan and next steps

1. Finalising tier system:

- IAEG-SDGs will review the current proposal of tier system and come back with comments and suggestions on Tiers I and II
- Secretariat will request agencies to provide the exact tools and reporting mechanisms from countries and the exact reference to agreements and the international standards
- IAEG-SDGs will review the revised proposals with additional information on Tier III indicators and will submit their comments
- IAEG-SDGs will finalise the initial tier system by 29 July



Outcome of 3rd IAEG-SDG meeting: Work plan and next steps (cont.)

2. Creation of

- **subgroup** of IAEG-SDGs (data disaggregation)
- **3 working groups** under the auspices of the IAEG-SDGs (SDMX, Geospatial information, and interlinkages)

3. The 3 working groups will be open to other countries, international organisations and stakeholders by invitation based on level of expertise and area of work

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Outcome of 3rd IAEG-SDG meeting: Work plan and next steps (cont.)

4. Once the process of adoption of the global indicator framework by ECOSOC and the General Assembly is completed, IAEG-SDGs will take into account the specific proposals for refinement based on Statistical Commission decision 1 (e)

5. Develop a plan for reviews of the indicator framework to present to the 48th session of the Statistical Commission.

6. Secretariat will request international agencies to submit detailed plans for developing Tier III indicators (29 July)

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Outcome of 3rd IAEG-SDG meeting: Work plan and next steps (cont.)

7. Review and finalise plans proposed by international agencies to develop methodologies for indicators in tier III (15 September)

8. Secretariat will request IAEG-SDGs members to provide scenarios on data flows from national to international level (30 April)

9. 4th meeting of IAEG-SDGs will be held in the fall of 2016.

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