Forest indicators in the Global SDG Indicator Framework

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The global SDG indicators process

- UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) responsible for developing SDG monitoring framework
  - Established an Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDG) to prepare an initial proposal and oversee this work
  - 28 countries as members, representing regions; International organizations only as observers
- 47th UNSC (March 2016) approved the global indicator framework “as a practical starting point”
  - 230 unique SDG indicators to monitor the 169 targets
  - Requested the IAEG-SDG to continue refining the indicator framework - the IAEG-SDG has since been focused on:
    ✓ Classifying indicators into 3 Tiers depending on the level of methodological development and data availability,
    ✓ Particular attention on Tier III indicators: work-plans for developing an internationally agreed methodology
    ✓ Identifying indicators where minor ‘refinements’ or more incisive ‘revisions’ may be needed, including possible additional indicators
Forest indicators included in the global list

- Out of the 230 SDG indicators, 3 forest-related indicators:
  - **15.1.1** Forest area as a percentage of total land area (Tier I)
  - **15.2.1** Progress towards sustainable forest management (Tier III)
  - **15.4.2** Mountain Green Cover Index (Tier II)
- FAO identified as “custodian” agency. As such, it is responsible for:
  - collecting data from national sources and reporting at global level
  - further methodological development and documentation
  - contributing to statistical capacity development
  - coordinating with other relevant stakeholders
- For indicator 15.1.1 (Tier I):
  - analysis of regional and global aggregates already reported in the 2016 SDG progress report
  - country data published on the IAEG-SDG website
Recent developments (4th IAEG-SDG, 15-18 Nov.)

• As custodian agency for 15.2.1, FAO has been working since April to finalize the methodology for this indicator.

• Work-plan submitted to the IAEG-SDG in June with the indicator classified as Tier III, due to the uncertainty over how to aggregate the different components:
  ➢ Sub-indicator 1 - Forest area annual net change rate
  ➢ Sub-indicator 2 – Above-ground biomass stock in forest
  ➢ Sub-indicator 3 – Proportion of forest area located within legally established protected areas
  ➢ Sub-indicator 4 – Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan
  ➢ Sub-indicator 5 – Forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme

• Based on the discussions at the 3rd IAEG-SDG, where countries had expressly rejected the use of composite indices, FAO proposed a ‘dashboard’ approach whereby each sub-indicator would be assessed separately using a traffic-light system.
Recent developments (4th IAEG-SDG, 15-18 Nov)

- Based on their assessment of the Tier III work-plans that agencies had submitted, at the 4th IAEG-SDG meeting, member countries selected a limited number of indicators to try to ‘fast-track’ their upgrade to Tier II status.

- FAO was invited to make the case for upgrading 15.2.1, in recognition of the fact that some of the sub-indicators are well established and have quasi-universal country coverage.

- As a result of FAO’s intervention, the IAEG-SDG decided to upgrade the indicator to Tier II status.

- Key difference between Tier II and Tier III status:
  - No need to establish a process to develop an internationally agreed methodology
  - Possibility of officially reporting global, regional and country data, as well as to include a storyline in the next SDG report.
Tier II status yes, but...

• Despite the upgrading of 15.2.1 to Tier II, the IAEG requested FAO to deliver a new proposal by mid-January
• The IAEG-SDG does not accept the title of the indicator and suggests to consider its respective components as standalone SDG indicators
• To implement these recommendations several issues to be solved:
  a) The first sub-indicator to be dropped, given that it is equivalent to 15.1.1
  b) The sub-indicator on forest certification would need to be reconsidered, as it does not fulfil key criteria for the SDG indicators: it is not policy-relevant, as does not reflect policies by national governments; it is not universally applicable.
  c) Overall, the social and economic dimension of sustainability are not well covered – there may be a need to consider an additional indicator.
  d) There will still be a need to combine the information at the time of reporting and craft a narrative about progress against the target.
The role of National Statistical Offices

• An overarching issue affecting all the forestry indicators is the non-involvement or even awareness of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in the reporting process.

• As for SDG monitoring, NSOs have been conferred an elevated role in coordinating the entire SDG reporting effort at country level and providing a quality assurance safeguard.

• At the IAEG-SDG, countries are represented by the Chief Statisticians or other senior officials from NSOs.

• It is therefore critical for data suppliers on forest indicators to establish closer links with the NSO:
  ✓ Data at global level could be reported through the NSO, or at the very least, the NSO should be copied in data transmission;
  ✓ A global written consultation could be organized to validate the methodology of 15.2.1, to which NSOs should be invited.
Some observations on the “core set of forest indicators” for Agenda 2030

- Global SDG indicators are meant to form a core set of comparable metrics that all countries should report on.
- They certainly can be complemented with additional thematic indicators to provide a more comprehensive assessment of a particular sector/phenomenon.
- However, additional thematic indicators should abide by the same key criteria as SDG indicators (policy-relevant, methodologically sound, measurable, feasible, etc.) and go through the same consultation process.
- Commitment not to overburden countries: adoption of new data sources/technologies should be encouraged (High resolution satellite imagery will likely be a game-changer for forest indicators).
FAO commitments: next steps

• FAO leading the methodological development of the forest-related indicators; New proposal submitted to the IAEG-SDG; Global consultation to ensure buy-in by countries and NSOs.

• FAO responsible for global data collection and reporting

• Initially two main types of capacity development activities are planned in 2017:
  ✓ E-learning courses: to raise awareness on what is expected from countries, and on what support FAO can provide. E-learning courses are meant to have a very broad outreach (all countries, not only data providers but also policymakers and other relevant stakeholders).
  ✓ Training workshops: to create a pool of experts that could subsequently assist other countries in their respective regions through South-South cooperation.

• FAO will also seek to mobilize additional funding in order to roll-out comprehensive regional training workshops and to provide technical assistance to countries for the adoption of the indicators.