

Information Framework for Forest Reporting

An Initiative by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) *to streamline forest-related reporting to international processes and to reduce reporting burden on countries*

Project Outline
by the CPF Task Force on Streamlining Forest-Related Reporting
Endorsed by CPF on 2 May 2004

Project goal: Accelerate progress towards sustainable forest management through improved decision-making arising from better access to and coordination of information within and between international forest-related processes.

Introduction

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) has addressed the high workload on countries in reporting to inter-governmental fora and concluded that there is a potential to streamline reporting requests to reduce the reporting burden on countries. Specifically at its first and second sessions¹:

- UNFF requested “*the CPF and its member organizations to reduce duplication in the reports required from countries by its member organizations*”.
- UNFF invited “*CPF members to streamline reporting requests and, to extent possible, to synchronize their reporting cycles so as to reduce reporting burden on countries*”.

CPF, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests², is a partnership of 14 major forest-related international organizations, institutions and secretariats. It was established to:

- support the work of the UNFF and member countries;
- enhance cooperation and coordination on forest issues.

Based on the above invitation from UNFF, the CPF established a task force³ to propose ways to reduce the forest-related reporting burden, for example, through reducing and streamlining reporting requests, synchronizing reporting cycles, harmonizing data collection methods, increasing data comparability and compatibility, and facilitating the accessibility and flows of existing information.

The task force has reviewed⁴ the existing forest-related reporting requirements and processes of major international bodies, identified obstacles and opportunities for reducing reporting burden and established a portal on forest-related reporting (www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar) for easy access

¹ Paragraph 9c of UNFF resolution 1/3 (UNFF E/2001/42 (Part II)–E/CN.18/2001/3 (Part II); and section E of UNFF resolution 2/2. (E/2002/42 and E/CN.18/2002/14).

² See www.fao.org/forestry/cpf for further information on the CPF.

³ See www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar for further information on the CPF task force, which consist of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO); Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF); Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); United Nations Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

⁴ International Forest-related Reporting: a Review and Comparative Analysis. CPF Task Force Working Paper. March 2004. Available at www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar.

to reports submitted to CPF members and the corresponding reporting formats. Building on these results, the current proposal outlines a project designed to further improve access to reported information with the objective of streamlining forest-related reporting and reducing reporting burden. To this end, the task force also stresses the importance of harmonization of definitions.

Information Framework for Forest Reporting⁵

National forest-related reporting is requested by several conventions, agreements, intergovernmental agencies and non-legally binding processes. Reports vary in scope, periodicity and content.

Although it is difficult at this stage to envision a single request (questionnaire) that can fulfil all requirements of all international processes, many other possibilities exist to streamline reporting and reduce burden, especially through improved information management. On the short-term, better information management would facilitate access to and use of existing information. On the long-term, this would create an environment for sharing information on forests that could reduce reporting burden, maximize the use and cross-referencing of the information and help identify trends over time. To help meet the need for better information management, this project aims to develop a common information framework for national forest-related reporting to international forest-related processes.

Reporting is defined here as country reports submitted to international bodies, including conventions and intergovernmental agencies. Initially the framework will include forest-related information reported to CBD, FAO, ITTO, UNCCD, UNFCCC and UNFF.

Easy access to information that is organized by broad thematic elements would assist countries to compile and manage information for reporting purposes, and could improve consistency in national information. Such access would also help organizations and instruments design information requests, prepare reporting schedules, and make better use of the reported information.

As identified by the CPF task force and as recognized by the UNFF *ad hoc* expert group on monitoring, assessment and reporting⁶, the forest-related information reported to instruments and organizations falls into two broad categories:

- i) actions taken to implement international commitments; and
- ii) situation and trends in ecological, social and economic aspects of forests.

This framework would organize the information on actions and situation and trends according to the following seven thematic elements:

- (1) Extent of forest resources;
- (2) Biological diversity;
- (3) Forest health and vitality;
- (4) Productive functions of forest resources;
- (5) Protective functions of forest resources;
- (6) Socio-economic functions;
- (7) Legal, policy and institutional framework.

⁵ Based on: "Towards a Common Information Framework for Forest-Related National Reporting to International Processes" CPF Task Force on Streamlining Forest-Related Reporting, Interim report, 6 December 2003.

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/webview/cpf/index.jsp?siteId=2823&sitetreeId=7692&langId=1&geoId=0>

⁶ Report of the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Approaches and Mechanisms for Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting. 8-12 December 2003, Geneva. (E/CN.18/2004/2). Available at <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/documents-unff.html#4>

These thematic elements, acknowledged by UNFF, are based on the criteria of the nine on-going regional/international processes on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, and were acknowledged by the International Conference on Criteria and Indicators in Guatemala in February 2003 (CICI 2003)⁷ and by the FAO Committee on Forestry in 2003⁸. In February 2004, the FAO/ITTO Expert Consultation on Criteria and Indicators⁹ recognized that these elements are important for facilitating international communication on forest-related issues.

Benefits of an Information Framework for Forest Reporting

The CPF task force has identified the following potential benefits of a framework for country information on forests to countries and organizations:

- better coordination among national focal points and among the reporting processes;
- easy access to compiled and organized country information;
- better use of the reported information;
- easier and more accountable preparation of future reports;
- enhanced consistency and comparability of information submitted to and used by various international instruments, organizations and processes;
- reduced overlap in information requests because reported information can be used for several purposes and across different processes; and
- improved prospects for synchronized information requests
- improved prospects for integrated information management systems in countries.

Project Implementation

The current project would be executed by relevant CPF members, under the guidance of a steering committee comprised of these CPF members and selected country focal points for national reporting. FAO, as the focal agency for “monitoring, assessment and reporting” issues within the CPF, is proposed as project coordinator. It is assumed that after three years the tasks of maintaining and further developing the framework will become part of the regular work of secretariats, organizations and countries, although coordination would need to continue among them.

Project Goal

Accelerate progress towards sustainable forest management through improved decision-making arising from better access to and coordination of information within and between international forest-related processes.

⁷ <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/Y8694E/Y8694E00.HTM>

⁸ <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/MEETING/007/Y9203e/Y9203e00.htm>

⁹ FAO/ITTO Expert Consultation on Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management, Cebu City, Philippines, 2–4 March 2004. <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/MEETING/008/J2123E/J2123E00.HTM>, <http://www.itto.or.jp>, <http://forestry.denr.gov.ph>

Objectives, Outputs and Indicators

Objective	Outputs/Progress indicators
1. Provide structured access to country reports to forest related processes, building on the two broad reporting categories (a) actions, and (b) situation and trends.	Web-based multilingual information service (framework), based on the current CPF portal, www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar .
2. Develop and maintain the contents of the information framework, drawing from existing reporting processes and country reports.	Country reports to key forest-related processes analysed, entered into the information framework, and made available through the CPF portal and other media.
3. In collaboration with countries, analyse coverage/ overlaps and consistency in reporting and make recommendations to international processes and countries.	Technical reports. Recommendations to CPF members, and through them, to their governing bodies.
4. Promote, through outreach and capacity building, the use of the information framework in future reporting efforts by countries, and in future decisions on reporting processes by international fora and their secretariats.	Increased communication and enhanced capacity at national level for the preparation of national reports. Increased communication at international level during the preparation of reporting requests.
5. Enhance the value and utility of the information framework through feedback from meetings of relevant working groups, including the CPF task force/project steering committee, criteria and indicator processes and national reporting focal points.	Recommendations from meetings of national reporting focal points and other relevant experts implemented, leading to improvements in information framework functionality and relevance.

Inputs

The following indicative budget is for a three year project to achieve the above objectives. This budget assumes low-cost arrangements for system and content development, i.e. that the information framework draws from existing information systems of the CPF members and the results of streamlining reporting¹⁰. A similar approach was taken for the establishment of the CPF portal, developed through in-kind contributions from the CPF task force partners. Involvement of country partners is essential. The project budget assumes continuing in-kind contributions by partner agencies as shown. Approximate personnel requirements are also indicated.

Project objective (amounts in thousand USD)	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	TOTAL
1. Provide structured access to country reports (4 person-years)	150	75	75	300
2. Develop and maintain contents (4 person-years)	200	100	50	350
3. Analyse reporting coverage and overlaps (1 person-year)	25	75	0	100
4. Promote framework use through outreach and capacity building (1 person-year)	50	150	200	400
5. Enhance framework utility through meeting feedback (0.5 person-year)	100	150	50	300
In-kind contributions (partner agencies)	300	400	500	1 200
TOTAL	825	950	875	2 650

¹⁰ Notably work done by the CPF task force and by UNEP-WCMC on harmonization of national reporting related to conventions dealing with biodiversity.