Cambodia covers 181,035 square kilometres of tropical territory and according to official statistics, Cambodia’s forests stretch over 10.1 million hectares or 56 percent of its land area, which counts among the largest proportions in South East Asia.

Yet Cambodia also has one of the worst deforestation rates in the world: over 600,000 hectares of forest, or about 1.2 percent per year, were lost in the last five years alone.

High demand for firewood and charcoal, illegal logging, unsustainable cycles of cultivation and weak law enforcement drive this rapid deforestation and degradation which is leading to a loss of biodiversity and land erosion, while flash floods could become frequent. Conversion of land is primarily caused by commercial agriculture and extraction industries, adding pressure on Cambodia’s forestry sector. These trends constitute a threat to the many communities who directly or indirectly depend on the forests for their livelihoods. These communities are already amongst the poorest and most vulnerable in Cambodia.

The deforestation and forest degradation that have been recorded in recent years are significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). To slow and possibly reverse this trend, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) joined the initiative under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+).

The “+” refers to the will to not only reduce emissions but also to conserve and enhance carbon stocks and to sustainably manage forests. Under the UNFCCC-REDD, parties have developed mechanisms for industrialized nations with high emissions to provide financial and technical support to developing countries in order to reduce emissions.

The REDD+ mechanism is foreseen to contribute to the reduction of forest sector emissions starting in 2020.

National Forest Inventory for REDD+ and beyond

Without a transparent system for ground information and land use change data, Cambodia cannot start benefitting economically from the REDD+ activities under the UNFCCC.

In the 1960s, FAO worked with the RGC to conducting its national forest surveys. In the past two decades, FAO has continued to support the Government in improving available data on its forests. Better data makes for more informed management decisions and
allows for the tracking of biomass, stand quality, land use changes. However, a complete inventory of the forests of Cambodia has never been undertaken.

A reliable national forestry inventory (NFI) would constitute a baseline to allow the RGC to strengthen its Measuring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system for GHG emissions which FAO has helped to establish as part of a larger initiative to prepare for participation in the REDD+ mechanism. A credible MRV system is essential for Cambodia to benefit from its efforts to reduce the GHG emissions of the forest sector.

More generally, an NFI is necessary to provide the RGC with an accurate snapshot of the size, species, health, value and carbon content of the country’s forests.

An NFI could therefore provide indispensable data on the state and trends of forest resources and on the goods and services they provide. This would provide evidence of the economic and social role of forests and their resources for poverty reduction and food security and would inform policy and management decisions.

**FAO’s support to the designing of a multipurpose NFI**

In 2012 and 2013, through its Technical Cooperation Programme, FAO supported the design of the first multipurpose NFI in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Ministry of Environment.

FAO provided technical support to develop the methodology for the NFI, prepared training material and manuals, and provided training to a core group of staff from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Ministry of Environment as the initial steps towards the systematic sampling of thousands of sites across Cambodia.

In order for the RGC to carry out a nationwide forestry inventory, the development of a strong framework was necessary. This objective was accomplished by three main activities: 1) setting up a platform to foster and promote dialogue among stakeholder groups in sustainable forest management, thus encouraging the sharing of technical knowledge; 2) designing a robust and transparent multipurpose NFI system that meets the reporting requirements of the UNFCCC and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; and 3) developing training manuals and data sheets.

During the course of the design, FAO’s experts reviewed the existing forest inventory methods used by the RGC, NGOs and other stakeholders in order to base the design on existing methods to the extent possible, but also brought to bear international best practices.

Field manuals and datasheet were produced and field tested for their “user-friendliness” by the core team whose members have been enabled to build capacity amongst government officials and other relevant stakeholders who would be involved in the NFI.

**Next steps**

The framework is now in place for the implementation of the first NFI in Cambodia. The budget that has been estimated to be required for carrying out this exercise is USD 6 million for a period of three years. The source of funding remains to be identified.

A delay in the implementation of an NFI by the RGC would affect the development of its national MRV system and, thus delay financial compensation through the REDD mechanism. This compensation would provide an incentive to reduce the current rates of the country’s deforestation and to manage the forestry resources in a sustainable manner.