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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES ON NATIONAL FOREST MONITORING

SECRETARIAT NOTE

Background

1. During the Twenty-First session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO 21), member countries recommended that FAO continue to support countries efforts to strengthen national forest information systems and requested FAO to “work in close collaboration with member countries and relevant organizations to prepare a set of voluntary guidelines on national forest monitoring, which takes into account the requirements for REDD+ reporting and is in line with the principles and goals of the Forest Instrument”¹.
2. The preparation process started immediately after the request from COFO 21, with preparation of a route map and development of an overall structure for the document. A two phase approach was identified for the process. Phase I comprised the development of section I and II including definitions relating to national forest monitoring, and the scope and the principles of the guidelines; Phase II comprised a compilation of good practices and technical recommendations on national forest monitoring.
3. COFO 22 endorsement of section I and II prepared in Phase I was an important step and milestone in the preparation process provided key guidance in preparation of the final version of the document. These two preliminary sections provide background, the definition of forest monitoring and the principles for a national forest monitoring system which are key elements guiding the technical recommendations and further development of the document.
4. The preliminary sections of the voluntary guidelines define national forest monitoring as a comprehensive process that includes the collection, analysis and dissemination of forest-related data and the derivation of information and knowledge at regular intervals to allow monitoring of changes over time, and which focuses on national level data and information on forests and trees outside forests, their

¹ FAO (Food And Agriculture Organization of The United Nations). 2012. Report on the Committee on Forestry, Twenty-First Session: COFO 2012/REP paragraph 50, page 7. Rome, Italy. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/026/me988e.pdf>

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condition, values and uses. The timely, relevant and reliable information obtained supports forest-related decision making at national and sub-national levels.

5. Fourteen principles were introduced in these sections: country ownership and responsibility; legal basis; national forest monitoring needs - a landscape view; national forest monitoring should be institutionalized; research infrastructure and capacity building should be taken in consideration; it needs to be a participatory discussion process among national stakeholders on the scope and objectives of forest monitoring; national forest monitoring must satisfy national level information needs; there should be integration of and consistency with existing information sources; a flexible approach in order to integrate emerging issues and allow for periodic revisions; national forest monitoring should follow a multi-purpose approach; the feasibility including cost-efficiency should be taken in consideration; it should include a well-defined data and information sharing policy; has credibility through transparency and quality; and promote collaboration at international level.

6. This note provides an overview of the process to date and the next steps to finalize the document.

Progress to date and next steps

7. The development and dissemination of the voluntary guidelines on national forest monitoring was included in FAO's new strategic framework and the programme of work for the present biennium under Strategic Objective 2: Increased and improved provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner, output 2.4.2: methodologies, norms, standards, definitions and other tools for the collection, management, aggregation and analysis of data are formulated and disseminated.

8. The two preliminary sections were endorsed by the 22nd session of COFO. Preparation of these two sections included inputs from FAO member countries and relevant organizations, based on discussions, feedback and exchanges during the previous six Regional Forestry Commissions (2013-2014), FRA regional meetings and various technical meetings held during 2013 and 2014, and inputs from several member countries during COFO 22.

9. Section III is currently being finalized by FAO in collaboration with international experts. The section is based on a thorough literature review as well as on inputs provided in international workshops and technical meetings, which have taken place in 2014 and 2015. Valuable contributions and advice have also been received from many institutional stakeholders.

10. During the first three weeks of October 2015, an online consultation on the final section was open for consultation to wide number of experts, allowing them to contribute and share opinions which will be taken into consideration during the final stage of preparation of the document. This process allowed broader awareness raising and buy in on the voluntary guidelines by national stakeholders. The online consultation and the draft version of the document is available at <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/forum/discussions/forestry>.

11. As a final step of the preparation of the guidelines, a face-to-face meeting took place in November 2015 to gather feedback from international experts and potential users of the voluntary guidelines.