



MEASURING FOREST DEGRADATION

The challenge ...

Rates of deforestation and forest loss are regularly measured. Forest degradation – defined by international forest-related organizations as **the reduction of the capacity of a forest to provide goods and services** – is similarly important but more difficult to measure.

Beyond the core definition, perceptions regarding forest degradation are many and varied, depending on the driver of degradation and the main point of interest – biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, wood production, soil conservation or recreation, for example.

In the absence of agreed definitions and assessment methods few countries are currently able to report on the area of degraded forests or the degree of forest degradation.



Recent environmental goals and initiatives that rely on measurement of forest degradation

- United Nations Forum on Forests Global Objective 1, “Reverse the loss of forest cover and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation”
- Climate change initiatives for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) in developing countries
- 2010 Biodiversity Target of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which includes an indicator on ecosystem fragmentation and connectivity

Forest degradation and climate change

Implementing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) methodologies for measuring recent trends in carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation is a key focus of discussions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This study will consolidate efforts of the diverse initiatives underway to define different options to measure both historical and future rates of degradation.



Measuring forest degradation

Under the umbrella of the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010 (FRA 2010) and together with members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and other partners, FAO has initiated a special study to identify the elements of forest degradation and the best practices for assessing them.

Forests may be degraded in terms of loss of any of the good and services that they provide (fibre, food, habitat, water, carbon storage and other protective, socio-economic and cultural values). By using the seven thematic elements of sustainable forest management and considering multifunctional approaches of forest management, the initiative will identify suitable indicators to assess the degree of degradation of a forest at different management levels.

Objectives

To help strengthen the capacity of countries to assess, monitor and report on forest degradation by:

- Identifying specific elements and indicators of forest degradation and degraded forests
- Classifying elements and harmonizing definitions
- Identifying and describing existing and promising assessment methodologies
- Developing assessment tools and guidelines



Approach

- A survey of existing country practices to see what is being measured
- An analytical study on definitions to provide a framework for the process
- A series of case studies to describe proven or promising methodologies and tools for assessing different aspects of forest degradation
- A technical meeting to review the results and recommend actions to improve measurement, assessment and reporting on forest degradation

Expected outcomes and benefits

- Better understanding of the concept and components of forest degradation
- An analysis of definitions of forest degradation and associated terms
- Guidelines and effective, cost-efficient tools and techniques to help assess and monitor forest degradation
- Enhanced ability to meet current and future reporting requirements on forest degradation



Milestones 2009

June: Side event at UNFCCC-SBSTA to increase awareness about the initiative

September: Technical meeting to review case studies and methodologies

October: Special session at XIII World Forestry Congress

December: Side event at UNFCCC COP-15 to present results

Partners

- Members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests
- Governments and national institutions
- Land Degradation Assessment Project (LADA)
- Members of the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership
- United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Programme)



Photos: FAO

To contribute or learn more

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