



ASIA-PACIFIC FORESTRY COMMISSION

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REVIEW OF STRATEGIC EVALUATION OF FAO'S ROLE AND WORK IN FORESTRY

INTRODUCTION

FAO's forestry activities prior to 2006 were subject to a high-level assessment as part of the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO in 2007. The IEE noted that no major external evaluation of FAO's forestry activities had been undertaken for some time prior to the assessment. Accordingly, FAO's Programme Committee requested a comprehensive evaluation of FAO's role and work in forestry at its 103rd session in April 2010.

The Strategic evaluation of FAO's role and work in forestry was released on 24 April 2012 and provided a broad assessment of FAO's forestry activities. The key section of the evaluation for APFC was an assessment of *Effectiveness of COFO and RFCs in identifying priority issues for FAO in forestry* (reproduced below, with key sections relevant to APFC underlined).

STRATEGIC EVALUATION OF FAO'S ROLE AND WORK IN FORESTRY

Effectiveness of COFO and RFCs in identifying priority issues for FAO in forestry

Choice of topics for discussion at COFO and RFCs. Agendas for RFC meetings are handled by the respective regional offices. Forestry officials from the different countries can raise topics of concern for RFC meetings; if other countries face similar concerns or if there are issues that cross national borders they are more likely to be included in the agenda. Depending on regional-level interest, recommendations may emanate from the RFC on how to address this topic at a level higher than national, either regionally or globally. RFC recommendations are passed on to COFO; the 2011-2012 cycle has introduced a formal method of building on the recommendations from RFC to RFC, whereby successive RFCs can comment on the recommendations of the previous RFCs. This, it is thought, will allow for more accurate gauging of global support for addressing specific topics, and proposed methods for doing so. The agenda for COFO is put together at HQ on the basis of the recommendations. One issue is the fact that sometimes member countries do not send high-level representation or indeed any representation at all.

Effectiveness of COFO and RFCs in identifying priority issues for FAO in forestry. There is some evidence that the recommendations made by COFO directly influence FAO's programme of work on forestry. For example, COFO 2010 made a number of requests that have been directly taken up by FAO – such as the development of a long-term strategy for the FRA programme. Also, there is evidence that the European Forestry Commission (EFC) has directly influenced the work programme

of the UNECE/FAO Timber Committee. However the guidance coming from COFO Sessions is sometimes more like a ‘wish list’, and an analysis of recommendations also suggests that recommendations can sometimes be conflicting. At the same time, some big forestry resource partners can impact the work programme beyond COFO through the influence “bought” by funds. Interviews of FAO staff also indicated that some of the themes FAO is working on, or shifting priorities, may be influenced more by staff personal interest than by priorities set through the RFCs and COFO.

Discussions held in the RFCs may influence FAO’s work at the regional level more directly. RFC dynamics are very distinct from one region to the other. In Asia-Pacific, the RFC meetings shape a concrete working agenda that is primarily implemented by the FAO Regional Office in Bangkok.

COFO 2010 also recommended areas of emphasis for each Organizational Result of Strategic Objective E (SO E) for 2012-2013, taking into account FAO’s areas of strength. It is unclear to what extent these recommendations in relation to SO E have been taken into account in FAO’s actual work on forestry. The evaluation team found little indication that the areas of emphasis for SO E recommended by COFO are addressed systematically and programmatically rather than simply “cherry picked” and driven often by the demand of resource partners.

In the survey of member countries, of those 32 respondents who could comment, 81% felt that COFO was effective in influencing the work of FAO in forestry. A large proportion of those who could not assess the influence of COFO on FAO’s forestry work were from Africa, reflecting perhaps their relatively weak attendance at COFO. A number of respondents emphasized the need for the information and decisions coming out of COFO to be better communicated following the event – including a specific request for better reporting on how the decisions made at COFO meetings have influenced the work of FAO in forestry. Many respondents also emphasized the need for greater follow-up on the implementation of agreements and recommendations arising out of COFO.

Influence of RFCs on COFO. In the last three sessions of COFO (2006, 2008 and 2010), the chairpersons of the RFCs played an active role in planning and managing the work of COFO through its Steering Committee. In considering areas of emphasis for future forestry work, COFO reflects on requests for assistance or involvement of FAO made by the RFCs – which often relate to targeted needs expressed by FAO’s member countries. In taking decisions on future work for FAO forestry, COFO gives detailed consideration to each request made by the RFCs and takes note of how and where they fit within the Organizational Results of Strategic Objective E – itself based on the FAO Strategy for Forests and Forestry – as well as other emerging issues that have been identified. Thus, the processes are in place for recommendations coming out of the RFCs to have an influence in COFO, and thereby in identifying priority issues for FAO in forestry. Amongst member countries responding to the survey, of those 35 respondents who commented on the relationship between the RFCs and COFO, 74% felt that the recommendations of RFC meetings are effective in influencing COFO discussions. However, interviews both with FAO staff in the decentralized offices and with government representatives indicated that certain “big” forestry countries can directly influence the COFO agenda.

Influence of RFCs on FAO’s regional work on forestry. While recommendations from the RFCs may influence discussions at COFO, and ultimately be approved by FAO Council or Conference, there is mixed evidence on the RFCs being an effective mechanism for identifying priority areas for FAO’s work in forestry at a regional (or sub-regional) level. In some regions, the link between priorities identified in the RFCs and subsequent FAO forestry work in the region is strong. For instance, in Latin America LACFC develops recommendations at the regional level and for COFO, which the FAO Regional Office then puts into action. LACFC has parallel “advisory” or collaborating groups that provide recommendations to it. This network carries on dialogue and makes recommendations to LACFC.

RFCs and the FAO Regional Conferences. In each region, a Regional Conference is held every two years to determine the priorities for FAO’s future work in that region. The recommendations of the

RFCs are now, since decentralization, sent to the Regional Conference for consideration. Forestry officers from across the regions noted that countries send representatives from their ministry of agriculture to the Regional Conference, and seldom send staff from the forestry agency or environment ministry. This may limit the extent to which recommendations from the RFCs are taken into consideration when drafting priorities.

Given the increasingly important role expected from the Regional Conferences in decision-making and priority-setting within FAO, there is a risk that the inputs of the regional technical commissions, outside agriculture will be marginalized. Specifically, e.g. in the report of the 2010 Regional Conferences, there is little mention of forestry issues except in relation to climate change in Africa. Secondly, whereas before Regional Conference recommendations were presented to the FAO Council, now themes have to be identified as priority areas at each Regional Conference, which has implications for budget allocations at the SRO and national levels. Furthermore, in some regions (e.g. Asia and the Pacific) there has been resistance from the Regional Conference to allow for separate presentations of reports from the regional technical commissions; while in others (e.g. Latin America and the Caribbean) the Chair of the RFC is invited to present the RFC results at the Regional Conference.

Efficiency of COFO and RFCs. The majority of member country survey respondents who commented on COFO's efficiency felt that the meetings were efficiently run. Similarly a clear majority felt that RFC meetings were efficiently managed. Disagreement with this statement was highest in Latin America and the Caribbean. The co-hosting of Forestry Week events with the RFCs appears to place a heavy burden on regional staff and the host country, relative to the benefits obtained. For example, even with the help of numerous unpaid interns and volunteers, it was estimated that the 2011 APFW took up about 25% of the RAP forest staff's time. While RFCs take place every two years, the possibility of holding a Forestry Week only in conjunction with alternate RFCs is now under consideration.

Summary of findings and conclusions

On the whole, the RFC-Regional Commission-COFO process appears to be functioning adequately in that countries can influence FAO forestry work through participating in this process. However, this positive finding is limited by the fact that some countries have much more influence than others, particularly given the relatively low attendance by high-level personnel, or attendance at all, especially from Africa and least developed countries; and the risk of marginalization of forest issues given the importance of priority-setting within the Regional Conferences as a result of FAO decentralization and the fact that Regional Conferences are heavily dominated by agricultural interests.

The fulfilment of FAO's commitment to reinforcing policy and practice affecting forests and forestry through international cooperation and debate (Strategic Objective E) depends ultimately on whether and how the decisions taken through this governance process are implemented, particularly in operational work on the ground. This question of the impact and sustainability of FAO's forestry governance structure requires a more detailed examination of FAO forestry work as a whole, which is the subject of the remainder of this evaluation report.

FAO MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO THE STRATEGIC EVALUATION

RECOMMENDATION 1.2: Lay the groundwork for greater and more effective interaction and collaboration between the various statutory/advisory bodies of FAO that will contribute to strategic priority setting.

PROPOSED RESPONSE

1. Strengthen linkages between the regional forestry Commissions to both COFO and the Regional Conferences.
2. Set-up coordination between the related thematic WG of regional forestry commissions themselves and correspondent units at headquarters.
3. Reform and update the mandates and procedures of technical statutory bodies, as appropriate, including the Advisory Committee on Paper and Wood Products, International Poplar Commission and Mountain Partnership.
4. More actively coordinate agendas between statutory bodies responsible for management of natural resources. Strengthen links between COFO, COAG and CFS.

RECOMMENDATION 1.4: Prepare, for each region, a strategy on how to enhance the value of FAO's presence in forestry at regional/sub-regional levels. This strategy should particularly reflect on how FAO works with existing regional policy processes and organisations and other strategic partners on common regional challenges and opportunities relating to forests and other land uses. This process could draw on the existing development of CPFs to identify regional issues and priorities

PROPOSED RESPONSE

1. Fully involve regions and decentralized offices in the process of reviewing FAO strategies and priorities for forestry. This will build from the country level up based on priorities identified in Country Programming Frameworks, and include consultations with the regional forestry commissions and Regional Conferences, to ensure that forestry is fully integrated within overall regional priorities and programmes. Ensure that these are adequately reflected in Country Programming Frameworks and invite national forestry administrations in the development of the CPFs. Drafting processes of equivalent CPFs of IFI should be closely followed.
2. Assure appropriate follow-up of substantive forest and forest-related regional, subregional and national processes.

RECOMMENDATION 1.5: Communicate more effectively FAO's forestry vision, mission and strategic priorities in-house, as well as to potential funders and other stakeholders at global, regional and country levels.

PROPOSED RESPONSE

1. Contribute proactively to setting institutional priorities and strategies and ensure adequate collaboration with key departments to address cross-sectoral issues at all levels.
2. Develop and implement a communication strategy for FAO forestry to streamline activities, support communication activities in countries and in regions and to intensify forestry's media presence.
3. Launch information campaigns and new products to reach target audiences, emphasizing forests' contribution to achieving major developmental and institutional objectives.
4. Support to regional forest communication networks and to communication activities in regions and countries.
5. Active engagement with CPF partners in promoting the forestry agenda at various international fora, including through coordinated communication activities.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1: Streamline FAO's normative work on forests and forestry by being more selective and more responsive to regional and sub-regional needs.

PROPOSED RESPONSE

1. Closely examine country needs, including information coming from CPF formulation process, in the context of creating a “Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Toolkit”. This will also facilitate more focused resource mobilization around key thematic areas for countries, as well as improved follow-up.
2. Normative products will be reviewed regarding their multiplier effect for project work and country implementation.
3. Strengthen the new Forestry Functional Technical Network to emphasize improved knowledge sharing and cross-fertilization of ideas between headquarters and decentralized offices, including the mobility policy and briefing of new forestry staff in DOs.
4. Identify common forestry sector priority areas between selected member countries and IFIs. Develop synergies and proposals for concrete cooperation. Improve the linkage between FAO’s work with IFIs and the Organization’s field programme support, specifically with TCP funding, with the objective of scaling-up best practices through investment projects.

RECOMMENDATION.3.2: Strengthen expert capacity in forestry at SRO & RO level & selectively in prioritized countries to provide technical and operational support and facilitate a two-way flow of information and coordination.

1. Ensure that the Forestry Department is fully engaged in implementing a strengthened and more flexible decentralized office network. Review and reallocate forestry expertise to more effectively address Members’ needs. Use APOs, secondments, JPPs and increased involvement of developing countries to strengthen forestry in decentralized offices.
2. Strengthen linkages between the Forestry Functional Technical Network, regional forestry commissions and COFO, including through joint participation in key events.