

PROCEEDINGS

THIRD EXPERT MEETING ON HARMONIZING FOREST-RELATED DEFINITIONS FOR USE BY VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

Rome, 17-19 January 2005

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Rome, 2005

SUMMARY REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Third Expert Meeting on Harmonizing Forest-related Definitions for Use by Various Stakeholders was organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in collaboration with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) at FAO Headquarters in Rome, from 17 to 19 January 2005. The meeting was a follow-up to the Second Meeting, organized by the same bodies in Rome from 11 to 13 September 2002.

The meeting was organized as a response to the resolution made by the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) at its Fourth Session in May 2004, which stated:

“invites the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, other partnership members and countries to enhance efforts to harmonize forest-related definitions in order to facilitate national progress towards sustainable forest management, clarify reporting requests, minimize inconsistencies in information provided and reduce reporting burdens, and urges member States to support that work, including by convening expert consultations”

Objective

The overall objective of the meeting was to contribute to improved communication and information on forest-related issues. Specifically, the objectives of the meeting were (i) to take stock of developments in forest-related reporting processes since the Second Expert Meeting, and (ii) to contribute to harmonization of definitions related to biophysical constitutions of forest resources and human interventions to manage forests for various purposes. The key terms discussed in the Meeting were: **natural forests, planted forests, forest plantations, trees outside forests as well as managed forests and human interventions in forests which may take into consideration definitions of protected areas and various designated functions of forests.**

<p>It was recognized that harmonization is a process which identifies differences, incompatibilities, and inconsistencies, but also common elements between existing definitions of related terms. Harmonization recognizes and respects the different objectives underlying the varying uses of a given term, and establishes linkages as well as qualitative and quantitative relationships.</p>

Documentation

The background document “Definitions Related to Classification of Forests and their Management Status” was prepared and shared with the participants before the meeting. A number of technical documents were distributed to the participants during the meeting which are included in Annex VI.

Participants and Agenda

The participants (Annex I) included a total of 70 experts, resource persons and observers. The experts were selected on the basis of their specialized knowledge and familiarity with the ongoing work on forest-related definitions in various international forums, including UNFCCC, CBD, ITTO, UNCCD and UNFF. Participants served in their personal capacity and not as representatives of their governments or organizations. In addition, resource people from each of the co-sponsoring and collaborating agencies attended the meeting.

The Meeting agenda is shown as Annex II.

Opening

On behalf of Mr M. Hosny El-Lakany, Assistant Director-General of the FAO Forestry Department, Mr Wulf Killmann, Director of the Forest Products and Economics Division, opened the meeting. Mr Peter Mayer of IUFRO, Ms Thelma Krug of IPCC; Mr Markku Kanninen of CIFOR, Mr Alastair Sarre of ITTO and Mr Jinhua Zhang of UNEP made statements on behalf of the partner Organizations on the relevance of the Meeting's work to their organizations and action taken to implement the recommendations of the Second Meeting as shown in Annex III.

Organization of Work

The meeting was chaired by Mr Wulf Killmann and moderated by Mr Markku Simula. Most of the meeting was conducted in the form of group sessions.

Initially, four groups focused their work on ways and means to harmonize the core terms and definitions related to forest origin and composition of forests, and managed and unmanaged forests. The first two groups, which dealt with issues related to forest origin and composition were chaired by Mr Ewald Rametsteiner and Mr Thang Hooi Chiew while Mr Brian Haddon and Ms Saskia Ozinga acted as rapporteurs. The two groups working on the definitions related to managed and unmanaged forests were chaired by Mr Ralph Ridder/Mr Alastair Sarre and Mr Aquiles Neuenschwander, and Mr Peter Csoka acted as rapporteur. These four groups were merged into two during the third day to achieve coherence and consistency of outputs.

During the third day, five smaller working groups were established to analyze problems related to the multilingual aspects of forest-related definitions (French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Chinese). The groups were chaired by Mr Claude Vidal, Mr Carlos Bahamondez, Mr Talat Abdel-Hamid Omran, Mr Anatoly Shvidenko and Mr Jinhua Zhang, respectively. A sixth group, chaired by Mr Majid Seyfollahian, worked on the term "Trees outside Forests" (ToF).

After the opening statements, Mr Peter Holmgren, FAO Forest Resources Division, gave a presentation on the progress in terms and definitions among the Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) stakeholders since the previous meeting, including multilingual aspects. The moderator then summarized the main achievements of the previous Expert Meetings and presented the highlights of the background paper. The work was broken down into groups and two plenary sessions were held during the second day to take stock of progress and to create interaction between groups. Group work involved elaboration of a comparative analytical framework for the core terms and preparation of proposed options for harmonization including action to be taken by stakeholders. In the afternoon of the second day, Ms Renate Prüller, IUFRO, gave a brief overview presentation on multilingual aspects. It served as a starting point for the subsequent group discussions in the morning sessions of the third day. The results of the working groups were presented and discussed in two plenary sessions on the third day.

After the meeting, a draft report was distributed to the participants, whose comments were taken into account in the preparation of this final report.

The presentations made in the workshop are reproduced in Annex IV and the reports of Group Work in Annex V.

Closing

In his closing remarks the Chairman recalled the mandate of the Meeting which had been given by the UNFF. While the harmonization process on forest-related definitions is targeted at facilitating reporting by countries to various international processes, it is also aimed at facilitating better understanding of forestry issues by all stakeholder groups. The CPF and their governing bodies will be informed of the results and they will decide on the follow-up of the harmonization process.

STOCK-TAKING OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Many of the recommendations of the Second Expert Meeting have been implemented by the involved parties. The Task Force on Inventory of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) has recently completed the Good Practice Guidance for Land-Use, Land-Use Change in Forestry (LULUCF) and a report on approaches to address forest degradation and devegetation of other vegetation types, which were adopted by IPCC in 2003. The Task Force is presently conducting a review of the IPCC Guidelines for GHG Inventories, which cover sources and removals by sinks and changes in carbon stocks associated with forestry and other land uses. The UNFCCC process is starting to discuss its post-2012 arrangements where several current definitions are likely to be reviewed. In this context, one task will be to consider biome-based definitions related to forests which were discussed in the First Expert Meeting. The results of the international harmonization work are duly considered in these processes.

Both FAO's Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) and ITTO reported that they have already implemented most of the relevant recommendations regarding their own definitions. The FRA 2005, due to be completed by the end of the year, serves policy decisions which ultimately concern all forest benefits and beneficiaries. Reliable information on trends is therefore vital. Efforts have been made to improve harmonization with the IPCC Good Practice Guidance, the UN Millennium Development Goal Indicators, the FAO/UNECE/Eurostat/ITTO Joint Questionnaire, the IUCN Protected Areas Categories and Redbook, the nine regional C&I processes, the work of ILO and the UN Statistics Division, and the CPF initiative to streamline reporting. Multilingual aspects are necessary for implementation of FRA as the focus is on collecting and using data at country level. Data availability and documentation have proved to be more critical than global definitions and consistency over time more important than consistency among countries.

ITTO has recently revised its Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests and is in the process of revising its Guidelines on the Conservation of Biological Diversity in Tropical Production Forests. Harmonization of definitions is also related to ITTO's on-going work on reporting on the status of tropical forest management.

IUFRO has continued its work on multilingual forest terminology (SilvaVoc project) including and a web-based glossary on forest-related carbon terminology available from the SilvaVoc website.

It was noted that the CPF has presently three closely linked initiatives: harmonization of forest-related definitions, streamlining reporting and global forest information service.

CONCLUSIONS

Objectives of Harmonization

The meeting reiterated the need for harmonization for various purposes. The overall goal is to improve communication and understanding of forests among stakeholders and to foster unambiguous use of definitions in various international processes. Improved definitions will help countries in rationalizing their reporting efforts. The purpose of the harmonization process is therefore to identify opportunities and provide options for better consistency and compatibility of international and country level definitions. In spite of the positive developments mentioned above, inconsistencies and incompatibilities continue to prevail, which unnecessarily increases the reporting burden of countries.

There is a particular need to improve communication on the role and potential of forests to contribute to poverty alleviation and sustainable development, and the clarity and consistency of terms and definitions is important in these efforts. There is also a need to obtain comprehensive information on the environmental services of forests.

Forests and related issues are viewed and perceived differently by various stakeholders who have different objectives. The terms and definitions used are targeted at these purposes. Therefore, the same terms and definitions will in some cases continue to be used for different purposes. The harmonization process can make these differences transparent, thereby improving understanding and facilitating reporting and other uses of definitions while respecting the legitimacy of the objectives of various stakeholders.

Harmonization is not standardization, i.e. the purpose is not necessarily to achieve common definitions but to improve consistency, compatibility and comparability. In improving the definitions, their rationale should be made clear. It is necessary to understand the context and objectives in order to avoid misinterpretation of forest-related definitions, as many of them are context specific.

Definitions, which are outcomes of international policy processes, are difficult to change and their modification can take time. Definitions that are scientific and technical by nature are easier to improve. The scope and approaches needed for improving these different types of definitions are likely to be different.

Forest-related Definitions of the Climate Change Negotiations

Under the UNFCCC, there are two levels of reporting: national reporting on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions under the Convention proper, and on activities defined by the Kyoto Protocol (KP). Common to both levels is that all the changes in carbon stocks to be reported have to be anthropogenic by nature. In the national GHG reporting, the UNFCCC encourages countries to use the same definition of forest that they have applied in their reporting to FRA.

Under the Climate Change Regime, there are two reporting obligations: National Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventories and National Communications to be prepared under the UNFCCC proper, and supplementary reporting of information on activities, definitions, methods and parameters under articles 3.3, 3.4, 6 and 12 of the Kyoto Protocol (KP). In both reporting procedures, carbon stocks to be reported should be predominantly human-induced.

For national GHG Inventories, the Convention does not define “forest”, “managed forest”, or “forest management”. However, the 2003 IPCC Good Practice Guidance (GPG) cites recommendations of the Second Expert Meeting on Harmonizing Forest-related Definitions (FAO 2003) and states that “a managed forest is a forest subject to forest management. Forest management is the process of planning and implementing practices for stewardship and use of forests aimed at fulfilling relevant ecological, economic and social functions of the forest.”(IPCC 2003:3.13). If any activity or change in carbon stocks occurs on “managed” land, including forest, it has to be reported. “Unmanaged “forests (e.g. some primary forests) are left out of the reporting system. For the purpose of reporting under the Convention, countries will therefore have to split their forest lands into “managed” and “unmanaged”.

Under the KP, article 3.3 obliges Parties to report on and account for carbon stock changes due to afforestation, reforestation and deforestation, terms defined in the Marakech Accords. These accords also provide definitions for “forest management”, “cropland management”, “grazing land management” and “revegetation”, should a country choose to account for these eligible activities under article 3.4.

In our context, countries that elect “forest management” have to report which lands are subject to “forest management”. These areas are not necessarily identical to the country’s “managed forests”, as reported under the UNFCCC. Lands subject to “forest management” could conceivably be larger than, identical, or only a subset of “managed forests”, as reported under the UNFCCC. However, the 2003 IPCC GPG considers it good practice to define the national criteria for the identification of land subject to “forest management” so that there is broad agreement between the area of “managed forest” as reported under the UNFCCC and the area of forest subject to “forest management”.

Under the KP, all changes in the carbon stock on lands subject to forest management have to be reported, even if they are not strictly “human- induced” (wildfire, windthrow, etc.). However, if those changes occur on “unmanaged” land, or on areas not subject to “forest management”, no reporting is required under the applicable agreement.

The definitions of the UNFCCC and KP are highly context specific, and have been devised to serve their respective objectives, i.e., to avoid anthropogenic interference with the climate system, or to relate to a set of provisions and mechanisms to the implementation of the Convention.

Biophysical Characteristics of Forests

There are several criteria governing how biophysical characteristics can be used to classify forests. These include the degree of naturalness, which encompasses a whole range of dimensions such as method of stand establishment, origin of tree species, the structure of the forest, and various ecosystem functions and the characteristics that maintain those functions. Practices and intensity of forest management have an influence on these characteristics and therefore the respective definitions are closely interrelated.

The comparison of the definitions of various international processes revealed important similarities: (i) all apply a continuum in a three or four class structure, (ii) all have a category separating “primary/undisturbed” from the rest of “natural” forest, and (iii) all include plantations (except UNFCCC and ITTO). On the other hand, they differ in emphasis on human intervention rather than origin of tree species. In addition, UNFCCC has an entirely different classification, due to the specific objectives of the definitions of the Convention.

Various dimensions can be applied to describe forest characteristics and a hierarchy between them may be developed. In addition, management objective (intensity) is often associated with various forest characteristics but it was considered a lower level concept than, for example, those related to naturalness.

The definitions refer to stand level, which was considered appropriate. The origin of species is classified into native and non-native or exotic. “Native” was deemed more appropriate a term than its synonym “indigenous” which is usually associated with the concept of indigenous people.

Information on the various characteristics of forest is used by FRA to assess how much forest is in primary state and what kind of wood supply can be expected from the world’s forests. For this purpose, forests have been classified into five groups which have not, however, been tied with the concepts of secondary and planted forests due to difficulties in reporting on these categories. As an example, modified natural forest is an important group for tropical countries, to differentiate it from primary forest.

Flexibility is necessary for interpretation of the reported data, as classification practices between countries tend to differ. However, other users of information than FRA can have different priorities, making full harmonization impractical. There may, therefore, be no need for a strict hierarchy between classification criteria, such as establishment method, origin of tree species, primary/other state of the forest, etc.

Natural and Planted Forests

The meeting agreed upon the following working definition (by which to guide further harmonization work of stakeholders) of natural forest:

- **Natural forest:** forest stands composed predominantly of native tree species established naturally. This can include assisted natural regeneration, excluding stands that are visibly offspring/descendants of planted trees.

In regional and national contexts, different terms are often used for possible subcategories of natural forests such as modified natural forest and semi-natural forest. These concepts may involve different intensities of management. Further work would be needed to define what “predominantly” means in varying forest situations.

The meeting used the following interim working definition of planted forest:

- **Planted forest:** *Forest stand in which trees have predominantly been established by planting, deliberate seeding or coppicing, where the coppicing is of previously planted trees.*

Explanatory note: includes all stands established by planting or seeding of both native and non-native species.

Planted forest can be divided into forest plantation and other planted forest. There was agreement on a working definition for forest plantation, which is

- **Forest Plantation:** *Forest stand in which trees have been established by planting or/and deliberate seeding or coppicing (where the coppicing is of previously planted trees) with either native species or non-native species that meet all the following criteria:*
 - one or two or a few species;
 - even-aged;
 - regular spacing.

The term plantation forest, which in essence denotes the same as forest plantation, should preferably be replaced by the term forest plantation.

It was recognized that some forest stands can show features of both natural forest and planted forest, or do not match any of these two categories, e.g. self-sown forests of invasive tree species. In the same vein, it was discussed whether planted forest should be a main category, with forest plantation being a sub-category, juxtaposed against natural forest. A possibility and appropriateness of creating a third category between natural forest and planted forest was touched upon but time was not sufficient to discuss this issue fully. Further work would be needed to harmonize the intermediate class(es) between natural forest and planted forest based on forest biophysical characteristics.

Forest Management and Managed Forests

Forest management is a broadly used term in different contexts, which influences how it is defined. Forest management is part of human interventions in the forest, and this has implications for definitions by some international processes. It was noted that human intervention and forest use are often difficult to separate but they are different concepts.

Forest management has several dimensions, which have implications for harmonization. These include degree of human intervention and levels of intervention and impacts. Human interventions vary from taking an intentional decision on the objectives or designation of a forest for a particular use (which may not necessarily include any action on the ground) to forests which are managed with high intensity. Many protected or inaccessible areas typically fall into the first category while planted forests with exotic species are often highly intensively managed. Different objectives and intensities of forest management tend to be reflected in changes in forest dynamics, composition and structure.

The meeting agreed on the following working definition for forest management :

- **Forest Management** *is the formal or informal process of planning and implementing practices aimed at fulfilling relevant environmental, economic, social and/or cultural functions of the forest and meeting defined objectives*

Explanatory note: Further detailed definitions, such as those in terms of time-frame, intensity, impacts, management level and resource requirements can be applied, depending on the purposes, such as reporting, forest resources assessment, policy formulation or resource allocation.

Forest management practices are a subset of those human interactions with, or interventions in, forest that can impact on forest functions, structure or services.

Further work would be needed on the definition to clarify what informal process means in practice. This is important for community and small-scale forest owners who do not often have formal planning and implementation procedures. These ownership groups are significant, including in the tropics, and their importance is increasing.

Practices of forest management cover information and data gathering and planning, and a whole range of interventions on the ground, including stand establishment (by different methods) silvicultural, conservation and protection measures, and those related to multiple uses of forests.

The meeting discussed a tentative inexhaustive list of forest management practices which can be used as a reference for further work. In this connection, it was noted that the forestry community has traditionally used the terms afforestation and reforestation in a broader way than how they are defined by Article 3.3 of the Kyoto Protocol. This inconsistency appears difficult to reconcile without changing terms and it remains a potential cause of confusion among users. The definitions of afforestation and reforestation were analyzed in the First and Second Expert Meetings on Harmonizing Forest-related Definitions, which also discussed “natural expansion of forest” and “forest improvement”.

Another issue is that, compared to the broad use of the term “forest management” by the forestry community, the UNFCCC definition only refers to forest lands defined by countries as “managed” (see p.5).

Common thresholds for individual practices are difficult or impossible to identify due to the heterogeneity of forests. It was also recognized that “doing nothing” on the ground can be considered a forest management practice if it was conceived through a process as defined above.

In applying the working definition of forest management, due consideration should be given to the level of management, which can be (i) normative (ii) strategic, (iii) tactical or (iv) operational. Typical interventions, geographic scope, actors and impacts on forests can be different on different levels. These factors, in addition to management intensity and time horizon, affect interpretation of the working definition agreed by the Meeting in different contexts.

The meeting agreed on the following working definition of managed forest:

- ***Managed forest*** is a forest subject to forest management

The above working definitions of forest management and managed forest are closely interrelated and should be used in conjunction with each other to avoid misunderstanding.

The meeting agreed that the definition of unmanaged forest can consequently be *forest which is not subject to forest management*. Nonetheless, since unmanaged forest covers a wide range of situations, there may be a need to explore later a definition commonly applicable to them.

As regards designation of forest functions (production, protection, etc.), the definitions of FRA 2005 were acknowledged as adequate. It is important to recognize the various levels of forest management within which designated functions are defined. Designation itself is not necessarily part of management.

Quality and impacts of forest management are important aspects, as information on the outcomes in the forest is increasingly needed for policy making and other purposes. Quality is closely linked with the objectives of forest management (e.g., sustainability). Further work would be needed to elaborate appropriate definitions, which could be elaborated within the framework of C&I.

Established ownership does not mean that a forest is managed although tenure is closely linked to management objectives.

Trees outside Forests

Trees outside Forests (ToF) is a relatively new concept applied in FRA. It is used to assess tree-based resources outside forest and other woodland (i.e., on “other land”). FRA provides a good basic definition for ToF: “Trees on land not defined as forest and other wooded land”. These lands include built-on areas, agricultural land, and barren lands. TOF includes isolated and grouped trees; they can be found in rural and urban areas. ToF involves a range of concepts such as tree systems, trees and shrubs, and forest and fruit trees. These resources are managed under a diversity of systems.

Problems related to the ToF definition are linked to how forest, forest land and other wooded land are defined. Problem areas include forest fallows, shelterbelts, fruit trees, and structures of various tree systems (isolated trees, linear tree lines, etc.). At a national level, sectoral responsibilities for the management for ToF resources are often unclear and improved intersectoral coordination is needed. ToF should also be better addressed in policy-making, building technical capacity in assessment and management, training and information exchange.

With regard to harmonization, the definitions of UNFCCC and other processes have not always duly considered this category of tree systems. In addition, the CBD refers to “agroforest” only. Further harmonization efforts should involve representatives from the agriculture and other relevant sectors.

Multilingual Aspects of Forest Definitions

As data collection and reporting for international processes take place at country level, multilingual aspects are important for correct use and interpretation of agreed definitions. There are a number of problems, which could be addressed through collaborative actions at international and country levels. Within the same language, there are regional/national differences in the use of some terms. There are different interpretations of some concepts in various languages. There may not be any equivalent term in the local language or the local term may only partly cover the internationally used term (or vice versa). If definitions are used without a proper description of the context, their interpretation is difficult. Other problems include quality of translations and shortage of reference documents in some languages. Proliferation of terms is an additional challenge. The reports of the four Working Groups are shown in Annex V.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The meeting made the following recommendations:

CPF

- CPF should continue to provide the framework for the process of harmonizing forest-related terms and definitions.

UNFCCC/KP

- For the KP, consider adopting a different terminology to reduce confusion (e.g. forest subject to forest management under the KP) for the second commitment period.
- For the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for the UNFCCC, consider including clearer descriptions of forest-related definitions, taking into account the general definition for forest management as agreed to by the meeting.

CBD

- Apply the current definition for “plantation forest” to “forest plantation” and use the latter term only.

FAO

- In FRA, for the term “planted forest” include provision for deliberate seeding.
- Together with IUFRO, carry out follow-up work to improve multilingual harmonization of definitions used at international, regional and national levels.

ITTO

- In the definition of “planted forest” consider removing reference to enrichment planting at this level of definition as it is too prescriptive.

IUFRO

- Consider bringing its definition of “forest management” in line with the one proposed by the meeting.

All Stakeholders

- Invite governing bodies to take note of outputs from relevant expert level meetings in their efforts towards harmonization and synergies.
- Use the term “forest plantation” instead of “plantation forest” as they are synonyms.
- Facilitate the use and interpretation of international definitions in various languages through the following actions.
 - use English in this process as the reference basis for international definitions
 - avoid creating new terms and using unnecessary synonyms
 - use the existing terms whenever possible

- use the existing terms whenever possible
- keep definitions simple and easily understandable
- provide explanations
- use “indigenous” as synonymous with “native” (reference to Spanish language working group)
- when interpreting definitions in local contexts (often involving reclassifying national data), avoid bias in the reported information
- involve national experts in validating translations and involve multidisciplinary teams in the work.

The updated matrix of action recommendations by parties for core terms is given below.