



CPF effort to streamline forest-related reporting

Information note for the 16th meeting of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests on 12 February 2006 (report by the CPF Task Force's chair)

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1. Background: mandate, objective and working method

The *mandate* of the CPF Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting was provided in the resolutions of UNFF as follows:

- UNFF "*further requests the CPF and its member organizations to: reduce duplication in the reports required from countries by its member organizations*". (paragraph 9c of UNFF resolution 1/3)¹
- UNFF "*invites CPF members to streamline reporting requests and, to extent possible, to synchronize their reporting cycles so as to reduce reporting burden on countries*". (section E of UNFF resolution 2/2)²

CBD and other international fora have also called on action to reduce reporting burden.

In response to these calls from governments, CPF established its Task Force in 2002³. FAO, as focal agency within the CPF for issues related to monitoring, assessment and reporting, convened the group and provided secretariat.

The Task Force was composed of the following CPF member organizations, with inputs from other CPF members: FAO; ITTO; Secretariat of CBD; Secretariat of UNCCD; Secretariat of UNFCCC, Secretariat of UNFF and UNEP, through its World Conservation and Monitoring Centre (WCMC).

The *objective* of the CPF Task Force was to:

“propose ways to reduce the forest-related reporting burden, for example, through reducing and streamlining reporting requests, synchronizing reporting cycles, harmonizing data collection methods and increasing data comparability and compatibility, facilitating the accessibility and flows of existing information.”

By the end of 2005, the Task Force had met 5 times and organized one broader expert meeting. It mainly worked through e-mails. The progress in the streamlining work has been presented to CPF for broader consultation and feedback, and through CPF, to UNFF, CBD, ITTC, COFO and other meetings through secretariat documents and side-events. Overall, the feedback has been positive, guiding members to coordinate their reporting activities, minimize duplication and improve access to information. See Annex 1 for a summary of recent feedback from various CPF members’ governing bodies and other meetings.

2. Achievements

2.1 Analysis of opportunities and obstacles for streamlining

2.1.1 Opportunities

Through rounds of discussion and analytical work, the task force concluded that reducing reporting burden and improving information sharing can be facilitated by:

¹ Report of the first session of UNFF (E/2001/42, Part II – E/CN.18/2001/3, Part II)

² Report of the second session of UNFF (E/2002/42 and E/CN.18/2002/14)

³ Terms of Reference of the task force (4 October 2002) <http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/7697/en>.

- *Improving information management* for sharing and presenting data and information at all levels.
- *Harmonizing forest-related definitions.*
- *Coordinating the information requests* among the secretariats, including joint questionnaires.
- *Improving the content of information requests* by cross-referencing information, by simplifying the questions and by better presentation of information in the secretariat analyses and websites.
- *Using better existing information*, to avoid duplication and burden to countries when they are requested to provide information and to secretariats when they process information for the use of their constituencies and public (reports, databases etc).
- *Capacity building* at the national level to improve data collection, processing, and reporting and to improve coordination among national agencies that provide pieces of information and within the countries.

2.1.2 Obstacles

The Task Force also acknowledged some obstacles for streamlining that would need to be (and have been) brought to the attention of the governing bodies of several members.

- *Need of information:* clarification is needed of the necessity for each secretariat/organization to individually collect data to be valid and useful for the processes.
- *Fixed procedures:* difficulties for the convention secretariats to streamline on a short-term as decisions regarding reporting (content, periodicity and timing) for the next few years have already been taken by the governing bodies.
- *Difficulty of synchronizing the reporting schedules*, due to the need for information in different times and frequency.

2.2 Establishment of the CPF Joint Information Framework

2.2.1 Increased coordination of reporting: benefits of the joint framework

The main purpose of the joint information framework is to further improve access to forest-related information submitted to several CPF members, with the objective of streamlining reporting and reducing reporting burden on countries.

The expected benefits of the joint information framework both to countries and the CPF members include:

- more enabling environment for national coordination among different focal points and for international coordination among CPF members;
- increased transparency and credibility of information;
- easy access to compiled and organized country information;
- better use of the reported information;
- enhanced consistency and comparability of information submitted to and used by
- various international instruments, organizations and processes;

- reduced overlap in information requests because reported information can be used for several purposes and across different processes;
- better design of questionnaires;
- improved prospects for synchronized information requests; and
- improved prospects for integrated information management systems in countries.

2.2.2 CPF Reporting Portal: increased access to national reports

As its first concrete product towards the joint information framework, the task force launched a web portal (www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar). It helps users find national reports and reporting guidelines related to forests to various international organizations, institutions and instruments.

The portal provides easy (one window) access to:

- national reports that countries have submitted to various international processes and that are selectable by country or by process
- reporting formats and guidelines developed by the secretariats
- reporting schedule/contact person for all the key processes
- national focal points
- meeting reports of the task force and other useful information and links.

The portal provides access to forest-related national reports to and synthesis reports by CBD (national reports and thematic reports); CSD (national reports); FAO (FRA and forest products); ITTO (world timber situation and progress towards SFM in tropical forests); UNCCD (national reports), UNFCCC (national communications and greenhouse gas inventories) and UNFF (national reports on implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action). Also the Ramsar reports, GEF database on projects, national reports to UNDP on progress towards MDGs and the Poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) maintained by the World Bank are included in the Portal.

2.2.3 Organizing information according to thematic elements

Recognizing the need for more coordinated presentation of information collected the task force members agreed to test whether it was possible to organize information in a common way. They noted that a common way of presenting information would lead to its wider availability, which could also help improve decision-making at the national level as well as efficiency of reporting.

Given the intergovernmental progress in developing the concept of sustainable forest management (SFM), the task force agreed to work towards organizing the information provided in the reports according to seven thematic elements of SFM. These elements are based on a decade of work on criteria and indicators, and were acknowledged at UNFF-4:

1. Extent of forest resources
2. Biological diversity
3. Forest health and vitality
4. Productive functions
5. Protective functions
6. Socio economic functions
7. Legal, policy and institutional framework

Some processes, such as FAO's FRA and ITTO's C&I have already structured their reporting closely according to the thematic elements of SFM. CBD and UNFF secretariats have articulated that in principle the forest information from reports submitted to them could also be organized according to these thematic elements.

The thematic elements of SFM could indeed be a way forward in future forest reporting, considering also that in some processes, such as CBD, there has been a move from process reporting (action) to outcome-oriented reporting (situation and trends) based on targets and/or indicators.

In concluding, the task force members have reiterated that the development and eventual use of the joint information framework provides a great opportunity for CPF member organizations to streamline and harmonize forest-related, and for countries to develop a more streamlined approach to national reporting.

To build the Reporting Portal (website) further, an option for a transversal look at the country reports was developed and tested through a prototype developed by FAO. This tool aimed at allowing search of information from the country reports according to themes. It would enable countries to see what they have reported on a given subject across all of the forest-related processes. Similarly, it would allow CPF members to see what has been reported on this subject across all countries.

The prototype included information that could be categorized as:

- Actions taken to implement international forest-related commitments (mainly the information reported to the conventions, UNFF and ITTO)
- Situation and trends in ecological, social and economic aspects of forests (mainly the information reported to FAO/FRA and ITTO)

However, it was soon noticed that extracting information from the existing reports was time consuming and was not pursued further at this stage. Once the information requests by the secretariats are better coordinated, such a search tool by thematic elements may become useful again.

3. Feedback through an Expert Consultation

In order to receive feedback to the efforts done and to better understand the differences, similarities and possible synergies in country reporting to various forest-related processes, and countries' efforts to compile the reports, the task force organized an expert consultation in April 2005. It was attended by 16 experts from countries (Colombia, Finland, Ghana, Guyana and Norway) CPF member organizations and hosted by the Secretariat of UNFF in New York.

Participants noted the utility of presenting information in an organized and coordinated way. They confirmed that organizing information according to the seven thematic elements would add value to the future sharing of information/reporting processes, make future information sharing easier, reduce reporting burden and enable better use and analyses of the existing information. In addition, they indicated that collecting and organizing forest-related information in a comprehensive way better demonstrates the contribution of the forest sector to broader development issues

The participants also recommended:

- Discipline by countries participating in international processes and by secretariats when identifying information needs, deciding on reporting processes and designing questionnaires;
- Secretariats and their governing bodies to make better use of the reported information and provide more analytical, comprehensive, yet reader friendly synthesis reports for the use of their constituencies;
- FAO (FRA), ITTO (C&I) and CBD Secretariat (indicators for the outcome oriented targets for the expanded programme of work on forest biological diversity) to coordinate their next rounds of preparing and sending questionnaires to their member countries;
- The secretariats of CBD and UNFF to continue efforts in harmonizing their forest-related reporting requirements.

4. Other harmonization efforts

The Task Force's work has benefited from and contributed to the UNEP-WCMC effort to harmonize reporting by five global biodiversity-related conventions. For example, the CPF Reporting Portal and the concept of the joint information framework were presented in a workshop that was organized by UNEP-WCMC, in cooperation with the governments of Belgium and the UK in Haasrode, Belgium, in September 2004. The meeting acknowledged the Task Force's practical steps to reduce reporting burdens and increase access to information.⁴

The UNFCCC and UNCCD secretariats have kept the other task force members informed about the developments in their national reporting processes and contributed to the maintenance of the CPF Portal. The reports that countries have submitted to these conventions are available through the Portal.

Work is going on between the CBD and Ramsar secretariats to streamline and improve the effectiveness of national reporting on inland water ecosystems, taking into account the CPF work and experiences on streamlining forest reporting.

5. Proposed phase II of the CPF information framework: towards joint assembly of information

Based on the progress made and lessons learned, it is proposed that the next phase in the CPF work on streamlining forest-related reporting would focus on the further development of the joint information framework and capacity building, in order to reduce the reporting burdens on countries and enhancing more coordinated activities by CPF members dealing with forest reporting.

The CPF's endorsement is sought for the following key outputs for 2006-2010:

- More coordinated approach for working with countries on information requests, including
 - (i) joint information requests,
 - (ii) addressing gaps in information,
 - (iii) closer networking both at the international and national levels, and
 - (iv) establishment of a CPF repository of national forest information reported to these bodies.
- Maintained CPF Reporting Portal. Relevant CPF members continue to link their national reporting processes, including the reports and guidelines, to the CPF Reporting Portal and update their information periodically. FAO will maintain the site technically.
- Increased coordinated approach for the information assembly. Considering the information gathering for FRA2010, progress toward CBD 2010 target, and the next round of ITTO's C&I reporting, the three secretariats have agreed to meet on 6-7 April 2006 in Rome to explore concrete ways for more coordinated approach for their information assembly towards 2010. Other organizations and processes, including regional processes could join this initiative, provided that they have similar information and reporting needs on forests.
- Increased capacity at the national level for forest information collection, analysis and reporting.

⁴ <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/conventions/harmonization/workshop.htm>

Annex 1. Recent recommendations for CPF work on streamlining reporting

COFO-17 (March 2005, Rome)

Recommended that FAO, with other members of CPF, strengthen activities in collecting, analyzing and disseminating relevant data on forests in order to demonstrate and raise awareness of the contribution of forests to development goals and to ensure that related reporting arrangements are effectively harmonized (para 41).

ITTC-35, November 2005, Yokohama)

Support development of a CPF joint questionnaire on forest management (\$40,000.00) (Decision 2(XXXIX), ITTO Biennial Work Programme for the Years 2006-2007, para 2 (iv) b.)

UNFF-4 (May 2004, Geneva)

Encourages CPF members to continue to work on streamlining voluntary national forest-related reporting to international forums in order to reduce duplication and reporting burdens, particularly on developing countries, and continue to make information from voluntary national reports to international forums readily accessible; (resolution 4/3 , para 9)

CBD/SBSTTA-11 (December 2005, Montreal)

Encourages Parties and other relevant stakeholders to access existing information on forest related reporting when preparing the third and fourth national report, for example, through the Joint Information Framework for Forest-Related Reporting web site of CPF and other non-web-based means; (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/11/L.7, para 3 b)

Encourages the Task Force ...to continue its work towards reducing reporting burden and minimizing duplication of reporting requests, including options for developing joint forest-related information requests at future stages, such as reporting on global outcome oriented forest targets; (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/11/L.7, para 3 c)

Requests the Executive Secretary to... suspend the operation of the forest web portal of CBD due to its low rate of use, and direct Parties to the CPF Joint Information Framework web site, hosted by FAO and invite FAO to incorporate the CBD forest-related information more comprehensively into the CPF web portal; (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/1.10, para 4 d)

CPF (meeting in March 2005, Rome)

CPF members agreed to continue the development of the information framework and expressed that they look forward for further results of the Task Force.

Expert Consultation on Streamlining Forest-Related Reporting (April 2005, NY)

... the participants recommended that FAO (FRA), ITTO (C&I) and CBD Secretariat (indicators for the outcome oriented targets for the expanded programme of work on forest biological diversity) should coordinate their next rounds of preparing and sending questionnaires to their member countries.

CPF (meeting in May 2005, NY)

UNFF secretariat and FAO briefed participants of the recent Expert Consultation ...to provide feedback to the proposed Joint Information Framework. [Experts] had welcomed the effort of the task force to facilitate access to forest-related country reports to all the major international processes through the CPF Portal on Forest Reporting, and acknowledged the step made to organize the information according to the seven thematic elements of sustainable forest management. CPF members took note of these developments and encouraged its task force to continue the streamlining work. In addition, they encouraged efforts to take into account poverty reduction and other MDG areas in this work.