

Expert Consultation on Streamlining Forest-Related Reporting

12-13 April 2005, New York, USA

Organized by the CPF Task Force and Hosted by UNFF Secretariat

Provisional Programme

Tuesday 12 April

9:30 – 10:30 Opening of the meeting

- Welcome
- Introduction of participants
- Adoption of the programme

10:30 – 11:00 Introduction to the CPF work on streamlining forest-related reporting

11:00 – 13:00 Country efforts to collect and coordinate forest information for reporting to various international processes

- Presentations of country experiences in reporting to international processes
- Discussion on obstacles, overlaps and synergies in national reporting

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 – 17:30 CPF information framework for forest-related reporting

- Presentation of CPF information framework for forest-related reporting (FAO)
- Discussion on potential of the CPF information framework to improve access to forest-related information; reduce reporting burden; and help design reporting formats and questionnaires

Wednesday 13 April

9:00 – 13:00 Potential benefits and use of the joint CPF Information Framework

Key questions for discussion:

- (a) What is the value for countries, secretariats and other users to have the reported information categorized and searchable by thematic elements?
- (b) How would the joint information framework help in designing questionnaires and reporting formats?
- (c) What does it take from the countries and CPF member organizations to advance the development of the CPF information framework, and to eventually use it?

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 – 17:00 Ways forward: formulation of recommendations to

- countries
- CPF task force
- governing bodies

17:00 Closure of the meeting

Expert Consultation on Streamlining Forest-Related Reporting

12-13 April 2005, New York, USA

Organized by the CPF Task Force and Hosted by UNFF Secretariat

Participants

- Invited country focal points or other experts in national reporting related to international processes dealing with forests
- CPF Task Force members (representatives from FAO, ITTO, UNEP-WCMC and Secretariats of CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC and UNFF)
- Total number of participants is not expected to exceed 18.

Objectives

- (i) better understand the differences, similarities and possible synergies in country reporting to various forest-related processes, and countries' efforts to compile the reports, in order to help:
 - international organizations to reduce the number of requests and the overlaps among their information requests to countries, and
 - countries prepare future reports;
- (ii) seek feedback on the CPF efforts to streamline forest reporting, including the potential of the *CPF information framework for forest reporting* to improve access to forest-related information; reduce reporting burden; and help design reporting formats and questionnaires;
- (iii) identify ways forward to reduce reporting burdens to countries, including through the development and use of the CPF information framework.

CPF Information Framework - Background information

Based on requests from UNFF, CBD and other fora, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)¹ has worked to reduce reporting burden on countries. Its Task Force² on Streamlining Forest-Related Reporting³ has reviewed⁴ the existing forest-related reporting requirements and processes of major international bodies and identified obstacles and opportunities for reducing reporting burden.

¹ CPF consists of 14 major international organizations, secretariats and institutions that deal with forests. (www.fao.org/forestry/cpf)

² www.fao.org/forestry/site/7697/en

³ Consists of FAO, ITTO, UNEP-WCMC and the secretariats of CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC and UNFF

⁴ International Forest-related Reporting: a Review and Comparative Analysis. CPF Task Force Working Paper. March 2004. Available at www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar.

The task force has concluded that while it is difficult at this stage to envision a single request (questionnaire) that can fulfil all requirements of all international processes, many other possibilities exist to reduce reporting burdens, especially through improved information management. Therefore, the task force is now developing a joint information framework.

The framework consists initially of a compilation of reports that countries have submitted to a number of international forest-related processes and corresponding reporting formats, organized in a multilingual (English, French, Spanish) Web portal (www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar). The reports are selectable by country or by process. The task force has decided, with CPF's endorsement, to enrich this information framework by providing an option that will allow countries to see what they have reported on a given subject (thematic element) across all of the forest-related processes. Similarly, it will allow CPF members to see what has been reported on this subject across all countries.

Usefulness and benefits of a joint information framework

The information framework provides an opportunity for countries to develop a more streamlined approach to national reporting and for CPF member organizations to harmonize their reporting requests. It can have the following benefits:

- better in-country coordination among national focal points and among the reporting processes;
- easier and more accountable preparation of future reports;
- 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;
- improved prospects for synchronized information requests; and
- improved prospects for integrated information management systems in countries.

Prototype of the CPF Information Framework

The task force has developed a prototype website through which users can search information items extracted from the reports by country, by process and by thematic element. The prototype is initially based on information from a few selected countries reporting to CBD, FAO, ITTO and UNFF. It includes information items on:

- Actions taken to implement international forest-related commitments (≈ process information);
- Situation and trends in ecological, social and economic aspects of forests (≈ outcome information).

The framework organizes the information according to seven thematic elements of sustainable forest management, which are based on a decade of work on criteria and indicators around the

world, and were acknowledged at UNFF-4. These are: 1. Extent of forest resources; 2. Biological diversity; 3. Forest health and vitality; 4. Productive functions; 5. Protective functions; 6. Socio economic functions; and 7. Legal, policy and institutional framework.

Other ways to reduce reporting burdens

The task force has also identified a range of other ways to reduce reporting burden, including:

- Collaboration among two or more bodies to *collect and to report information in a unified way*. This includes joint information requests or cross reference to existing sources of information. It could also extend to joint questionnaires such as the successful Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire developed by FAO, UNECE, ITTO and Eurostat, where countries provide information on production and trade of forest products only once but the organizations involved use this information in various ways for reporting to their own constituencies.
- *Use of and cross linking existing information* in the reports and analyses by organizations and secretariats.
- *Improvement of information requests*, including formats and questionnaires, by:
 - shortening questionnaires and rephrasing questions;
 - referencing existing information available from other sources;
 - continuing to ensure professional design and processing of the questionnaires.
- *Harmonization of forest-related definitions* (a separate process in on-going within CPF to harmonize key forest terms and definitions).⁵
- Most importantly, *improved capacity* at the national level for data collection, processing, and reporting, including improving in-country coordination among national agencies responsible for reporting to different processes/instruments. Many CPF member organizations provide assistance in capacity building but further efforts are needed in this regard.

⁵ www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-definitions