EXPERT CONSULTATION

National Forest Monitoring and Assessment (NFMA): Meeting Evolving Needs

Reviewing FAO's support to NFMA in light of new demands on countries to assess forest carbon, land use changes and other reporting requirements

CONCEPT NOTE

Background information and justifications

The need for improving national forest monitoring systems is imperative as the demand for information has never been greater. National forest programmes, polices and strategy processes strive to address cross-cutting issues such as poverty and food security related to the multiple functions of forests in social, economic and environmental contexts. Additionally, international fora request countries to report regularly on a variety of forest and environmental issues and civil society is increasingly concerned.

Recently, UNFCCC COP-13 in Bali adopted a decision on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries involving approaches to stimulate action. Further decisions concerned enhancing the development of methodological approaches to consistently monitor and verify estimated national reductions of carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation over time in developing countries through transparent and verifiable means.

Yet in many countries, forest and land use information is outdated, partial or subjective, and in most cases the precision is not sufficient to draw reliable conclusions in order to develop or adapt relevant policies. As a result of such insufficient information and poor data quality, including differences in concepts and definitions, scenario development and planning regarding sustainable forest management may not be realistic. Consequently, land use policies are not in tune with real conditions and user needs, in particular those of rural populations.

Information improvement about all forest types and trees outside forests was also targeted by United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and by member countries at the Committee on Forestry (COFO) as an area of significant importance towards better forest policy formulation and national forest programme development. Both processes have emphasized the need for policy frameworks and institutional arrangements that foster the participation of civil society in forest decision-making and improved cooperation across sectors based on enhanced data collection, monitoring, assessment, analysis and reporting on forests.

The UNFF proposals for action underscore the need for improved data collection on a full range of goods and services of all types of forests and trees outside forest boundaries, based on rapid, cost effective and policy-oriented methods. Emphasis was placed on integrated and holistic multidisciplinary approaches incorporating cross-cutting issues, technology transfer and country capacity building.

Upon request, FAO assists countries in their efforts to close the knowledge gap by providing technical support for: implementing systematic field inventories, conducting remote sensing

studies and establishing information systems. The National Forest Monitoring and Assessment (NFMA) programme of FAO has been active since 2000 in a growing number of countries. The NFMA programme has designed an approach based on data collection from nation-wide systematic sampling and remote sensing. While fieldwork is the backbone of the inventory process, remote sensing is used as a complementary tool to map land cover/uses and land cover changes on a full wall-to-wall or sample plot basis.

The assessments place local uses of forests and trees in the center, thus focusing on information related to real-world management decisions and factors influencing those decisions. Statistical rigour allows for aggregation of findings at the national level. The approach creates new knowledge not only about overall national estimates of important parameters, but also how these vary throughout the country. In conclusion, the NFMA approach has the potential to aid in the analysis of the national forest and related land use sectors and to provide a sound basis for policy development and evaluation. It also guides specific and detailed inventories of rare events.

Objectives of the expert consultation

Increasingly detailed and diverse forest information requirements necessitate continued flexibility from NFMA systems in order to optimally serve all stakeholders. With this in mind, the main objective of the expert consultation is to review lessons learned over the past 8 years, ascertain strengths and weaknesses and recommend ways to enhance the FAO approaches and methodologies for NFMA to meet increasing country needs in monitoring forest cover and land use change and in generating the required information for national forest programmes, policy dialogue and strategic planning purposes, whilst also meeting international reporting requirements. Moreover, enhancement of information systems to improve data accessibility and utilisation will be examined.

Specifically, the Expert Consultation will focus on the following objectives:

1. NATIONAL PROCESSES: Review the FAO approach to NFMA in relation to country needs for reliable and timely forest resources and land use data and information requirements for policy dialogue, national forest programme formulation and national forestry sector strategic planning and recommend changes to meet evolving national needs.

2. INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES: Review the FAO approach to NFMA in relation to datasets and information that countries need for international reporting (UNFCCC, CBD, CCD, UNFF, including the Global Forest Resources Assessment), policy dialogue and planning and recommend changes to meet evolving international needs.

3. NFMA TOOL FOR REDD MONITORING: Review the FAO approach to NFMA in relation to monitoring REDD and recommend improvements to take into account methods and technologies developed for forest carbon monitoring.

4. INFORMATION SYSTEMS: Provide guidance on how to present and disseminate information and results of the NFMAs effectively to make them accessible to national policy and decision makers for domestic use and international reporting and processes.

Expected outputs

1. NFMA approach and methodology to meet country data and information evaluated and reviewed for the purpose of better meeting policy dialogue, national forest programmes

formulation and forestry sector strategy development needs on key forestry issues (including REDD).

2. NFMA approach and methodology evaluated and reviewed for the purpose of better meeting country reporting requirements to international conventions and processes, including synergies with the Global Forest Resources Assessment process and reporting.
3. NFMA approach and methodology to monitor REDD and to meet UNFCCC requirements and links with other initiatives for methodological developments on REDD, evaluated and reviewed.
4. NFMA methodologies reviewed to better incorporate remote sensing methods to meet national planning needs.
5. Links between NFMA and, international initiatives strengthened e.g. UN Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UN-REDD), WB Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), and other international forestry initiatives.
6. NFMA data and information requirements for national land use planning identified to meet country-specific needs.
7. NFMA data management tools reviewed to be more user-friendly and applicable for various users from data collection to analysis and utilisation.
8. Improved communication and dissemination of NFMA data and information for different audiences identified.

Participation

Five groups are proposed for participation in the expert consultation: i) international agencies/processes/donors; ii) countries undertaking NFMA, REDD or WB CPF activities; iii) NFMA expert advisors; iv) NFMA field specialists/supervisors; and v) FAO resource persons (NFMA, nfp Facility, policy, GFRA).

Dates

The FAO NFMA expert consultation has been scheduled to dovetail UN-REDD expert consultations on monitoring, assessment and verification in Sept and early 2009. FAO's NFMA expert consultation will have inputs from the Sept UN-REDD meeting and provide inputs to the early 2009 UN-REDD meeting. Additionally, the COP 14, UNFCCC, Poznan, Poland is scheduled from 1-12 December 2008.

Taking the above into consideration, the most workable scheduling for the expert consultation is 26-28 November, 2008

Location

The expert consultation is proposed in the Malaysian Room, FAO Headquarters, Rome

Dated 5 August, 2008