



## Information note

### Strengthening national forest monitoring systems through a comprehensive capacity needs assessment

*“A needs and gaps assessment aims to enhance forest monitoring and allows different stakeholders to get a full picture of the status of their national forest monitoring systems.”*

Julian Fox, Senior Forestry Officer, FAO

#### Summary

A lack of institutional and individual capacity often undermines the long-term impact of otherwise technically sound programmes. To support efforts towards sound and impactful forest monitoring, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has developed a **national forest monitoring system (NFMS) assessment tool** to help countries identify capacity gaps and weaknesses in order to address their real needs in a targeted manner.

#### Context

The enhanced transparency framework (ETF) is a key element of the 2015 Paris Agreement. Under the ETF, robust data collection, analysis and dissemination of forest-related data are the basis for reporting on emissions and removals and tracking the progress of nationally determined contributions. Given the significant climate change mitigation potential of forests, improving the **transparency** of forest-related data and information within the ETF is timely, indeed urgent, in order to translate this potential into action.

#### Why support a capacity assessment?

A capacity assessment is a structured approach to analysing capacity across three dimensions: individuals, organizations and the enabling environment. In the context of forest monitoring, a capacity assessment aims to provide a broad picture of an NFMS, in terms of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. Building an NFMS is a complex national-scale effort that must consider multiple institutional, technical and financial aspects. The system should increase **transparency, reliability** of the information produced and ensure a long-term perspective, through participatory processes that include multiple stakeholders with different skills, who must be identified and informed throughout. The stakeholders draw on their breadth of knowledge to identify needs and gaps in order to achieve a **robust** and **sustainable** NFMS that captures and delivers continuous information on a country's forests.



#### Significance of the new tool

FAO's new **NFMS assessment tool** facilitates the identification of needs and gaps in order to establish or strengthen a country's forest monitoring. The tool is based on FAO's Voluntary guidelines on national forest monitoring (VGNFM) reinforced with the REDDcompass resources of the Global Forest Observations Initiative (GFOI). It also incorporates 50 years of FAO experience gained in the field, working together with countries around the globe. The assessment tool, which provides an easy way to use and implement the VGNFM, is free, Excel-based and available in English, French and Spanish.

The tool supports the strengthening of an existing NFMS, including capacity assessment of the system and facilitation of dialogue with key national stakeholders, helping to pool their first-hand knowledge of a problem or development challenge and identify possible solutions. It also helps to identify the institutional dynamics, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement of an NFMS. A useful complimentary series of guidance, good practices and practical tools based on local circumstances when running a capacity assessment, is available on FAO's Capacity Development website: [www.fao.org/capacity-development](http://www.fao.org/capacity-development).

## What does the new tool consist of?

The NFMS assessment tool is aimed at country stakeholders responsible for forest monitoring through good practices. The tool presents good practice guidance and examples for three complimentary themes - institutional arrangements, measurement and estimation, and reporting and verification. The graphic highlights institutional arrangements as the foundation of a robust and sustainable NFMS, which the other two themes build on.

### Measurement and estimation

- identification of information needs
- data management and archiving
- preparation
- design for field data collection and remote sensing
- operational design (field and remote sensing)
- data management, data analysis and documentation

### Reporting and verification

- communication and dissemination
- preparation and submission of reports

### Institutional arrangements

- institutionalization
- developing national capacity
- developing partnerships and collaboration
- strengthening research and research institutions in forest monitoring
- mandate
- stakeholder identification and engagement
- integration of young experts
- impact assessment

## How can a country benefit?

The NFMS assessment tool aims to assist countries in strengthening their NFMS by:

- » facilitating understanding of FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on National Forest Monitoring;
- » identifying needs, gaps and weaknesses, enhancing opportunities to focus a country's efforts and investments;
- » helping to organize international cooperation and build a work plan together with stakeholders and partners;
- » assessing progress in identifying capacity gaps in forest monitoring;
- » encouraging harmonization of processes to set up a stronger and more robust NFMS.

## Conclusion

With tailored national forest monitoring systems, countries are able to develop informed forest and land-use policies with proven knowledge and up-to-date, reliable, transparent and accessible information. Efforts to support forest monitoring should focus on strengthening and enhancing the development of an NFMS.

## Bibliography

FAO. 2017. *Voluntary Guidelines on National Forest Monitoring*. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6767e.pdf>

Global Forest Observations Initiative. REDDcompass: <https://www.reddcompass.org/frontpage>.

