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STRENGTHENING CRITERIA AND INDICATORS FOR SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT AND THEIR USE IN POLICY AND PRACTICE IN AFRICA

I. The key role of Criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management

1. Over the last 25 years criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management (C&I for SFM) have become a vital tool for developing a common understanding of the key components of sustainable forest management. In Africa, regional C&I processes have developed principles, criteria and indicators (PCIs) for SFM and joined efforts towards strengthening monitoring and reporting on indicators. They have been adopted and applied in different contexts and thereby have undoubtedly helped to define SFM, providing a framework for discussion, and have stimulated improved monitoring.

2. However, C&I have fallen short of the general ambition to arrive at a commonly agreed set of C&I for SFM, to use them as a framework to shape policies at different levels and guide management practices, to assess progress towards sustainability, or to improve communication with actors outside the forest sector. Thus, there is substantive scope to further strengthen C&I and to further enhance application of forest indicators in policy and practice at regional, national and forest management unit level. Realizing their full potential on these key areas requires a renewed effort at all levels to further develop and adapt existing C&Is and enhance their use, including in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. During 2014, FAO undertook a national and regional overview and needs assessment, consulting experts from 38 countries in Central, Eastern, Southern, and West Africa, and explored

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opportunities to strengthen the use of C&I for SFM at regional, national and local levels¹. A subsequent C&I regional workshop in Africa took place in May 2015 in Douala (Cameroon), organized in collaboration with International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and under the auspices of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife of Cameroon. 65 participants from African forests and environment administrations, national and international NGOs, research institutions, private sector and other stakeholders participate to the workshop. The aim of the workshop was to examine the various situations in West Africa, Central Africa, and Eastern and Southern Africa, to share experiences, understand the strengths and weaknesses of the various initiatives using C&I, and to propose an approach for the coming years to boost the use of C&Is, not only in terms of forest management strategies and policies, but also by the actual managers of forests in the field for the whole sub-Saharan Africa.

II. The use of C&I for SFM in Africa

4. Since 1992, PCIs have been developed in Africa for the management of natural timber production forests, notably with the assistance of ITTO. These PCIs have been adopted in almost all ITTO member states, but these countries have not developed yet effective monitoring systems based on these same PCIs. It should be noted that ITTO PCIs have most often been used as the basis for developing more operational, targeted PCIs as part of voluntary forest certification processes (Forest Stewardship Council, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification, "Origine et Légalité des Bois", OLB certification, Timber Legality & Traceability Verification, etc.) and more recently for developing FLEGT² legality grids or REDD+³ verification systems. Central Africa has a forest observatory, OFAC, with a set of indicators on which information is regularly provided throughout the Congo Basin. In non-ITTO member countries that export little or no logs and sawnwood, the situation with regard to C&Is varies more widely. Generally speaking, PCIs have not been formally adopted by countries for the monitoring of forests, although in some cases C&I have been used as basis to set specific requirements, for example with regard to forest plantations or community managed forests and related licences.

5. In general, an improved understanding of the concept of PCIs can be seen at regional, national and local levels. There is general recognition of the advantage of having appropriate tools support evidence-based policy making and planning, promoting sustainable practices and to monitor and evaluate forest management. PCIs have been used to various degrees for these tasks by different stakeholders (see Figure 1), even if a number of weaknesses can be observed in practice. This includes the real assumption of ownership and more systematic use of PCIs by government agencies.

¹ Project "Strengthening C&I for SFM and their use in forest policy and practice" (2014-2015), coordinated by FAO and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture.

² Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade

³ Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks

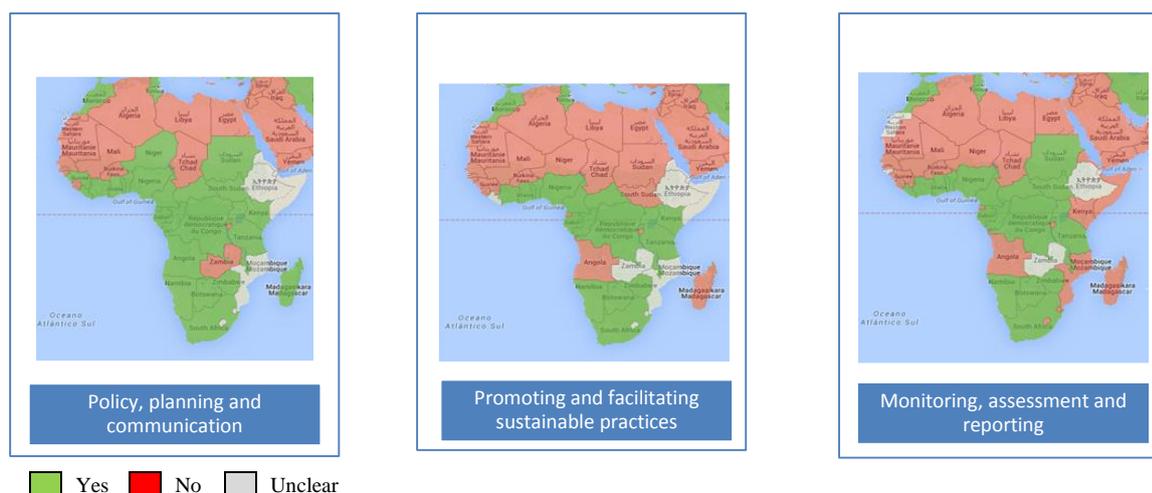


Figure 1. Different uses of C&I for SFM in Africa

6. A major disparity among the main African regions exists, with marked cultural and juridical differences. In practice, Central Africa is the most advanced region in developing and using PCI, in particular with a convergence plan since 2005 and a newly adopted plan scheduled for completion in 2025. Eastern and Southern Africa is the least advanced in using C&I for SFM, with government agencies often playing a minimal role in developing, using and promoting C&I for SFM. West Africa is in an intermediate situation, with a convergence plan that has just been approved and its implementation could benefit from the development and availability of C&I that are meaningful nationally, regionally and internationally accepted. The main factors that explain these differences between African regions are:

- The fact that the state is or is not the owner of the land, and hence of the forests on this land;
- The fact that the country is or is not a member of ITTO and has received some specific support;
- The existence or absence of a national forest programme.

III. The Way forward to mobilize the full potential of C&I for SFM in Africa

7. The Africa regional workshop in Douala, Cameroon, in 2015, reflecting on the way forward for C&I, emphasized that the added value of C&Is in the long term depends on their use and hence on the way they were developed and on whether the process was sufficiently participatory. Participants noted that their use should be promoted at all levels by adapting them to the different contexts. C&Is are notably seen as useful for planning and developing guidelines (legal and regulatory frameworks, standards etc.). They also help to build up an atmosphere of trust between states and the various groups of forest users (private sector and communities). And they serve as a basis for agreements, the evaluation of results, transparency and accountability.

8. The workshop also concluded that efforts are needed to establish appropriate incentives to promote the use of C&Is in order to obtain a return on investments in forest value chains. This will require enhanced monitoring, evaluation and reporting, based on reliable data (satellite monitoring, socio-economic governance and efficient management and use of resources), all of which must be at an affordable cost.

9. The working groups and plenary discussions during the African workshop produced 15 suggestions as to lines of action (see Workshop Report⁴), including to:

- establish a permanent national multisector consultative framework on SFM and on land-use planning, incorporating the various ongoing processes (REDD+, FLEGT etc.), in order to harmonize C&Is and simplify their monitoring and reporting;
- develop generic PCIs for regions and countries that do not yet have them, so that they can carry out specific adaptations for the various modes of use of forests and forest resources;
- encourage countries not yet equipped with PCIs to adopt and implement them for the various types of forest and to promote their application by small and medium-sized enterprises through incentives and facilities for accessing finance;
- build up stakeholders' capacities for PCI use;
- build up national and local capacities for collecting, processing and disseminating information on the monitoring of forest management;

10. Following the recommendation of the African workshop a study is ongoing in four central African countries (Cameroon, Congo, DRC and Gabon) to identify the existing platforms and discuss the harmonization of approaches to promote synergies among the various initiatives and to eliminate expensive duplication.

11. Furthermore, two publications on the uses of C&I for SFM are being prepared to provide broad access to experiences and lessons learned:

- Experiences and Lessons in using C&I for SFM to strengthen Results-Based Management (RBM): Guidance for country-level Forest Administrations to strengthen results-based policy planning and monitoring.
- Using C&I to strengthen sustainable community-based / small scale forest management: experiences and lessons.

12. The results of regional consultations on the status and future potential of C&I to promote and demonstrate SFM were presented at the World Forestry Congress held in Durban (South Africa) in September 2015. At the XIV World Forestry Congress Global Forest Indicator Forum, participants called for “mobilizing the full potential of C&I for SFM in policy and practice: the way forward”⁵. By 2020, C&I for SFM are used by decision makers in policy and practice at all levels to:

- strengthen development of results-based forest-related policies, programmes and plans and monitor their implementation;
- promote and provide incentives for the transition to sustainable forestry practices and forest management certification;
- strengthen dialogue with other sectors and to demonstrate the contribution of forests and forestry to sustainable development and the well-being of society; and to
- monitor, assess and report on sustainable forest management and contribute to measuring progress towards more sustainable natural resources and land use.

IV. Points for consideration

13. Considering the need to strengthen the use of C&I for SFM, including in monitoring, evaluation and reporting, the Commission may wish to:

⁴ workshop report at <http://www.fao.org/forestry/ci/89368/en/>

⁵ See

http://foris.fao.org/meetings/download/_2015/global_forest_criteria_and_indicators_forum_promot/misc_documents/_2._strengthening_forest_sustainability_indicators_vr_wfc.pdf

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- Encourage the Governments in Africa to develop generic C&Is for the region and to carry out specific adaptations, at national level, for the various modes of use of forests and forest resources, including areas outside the forest for more integrated sustainable land management and promoting the use of C&I for the monitoring of forest-related contributions to SDGs.
 - Encourage the Governments in Africa to establish a permanent national cross-sectoral consultative framework on SFM and land-use planning, incorporating the various ongoing processes (REDD+, FLEGT, etc.), in order to harmonize C&Is and simplify their use in monitoring and reporting.
 - Encourage FAO to continue its support to the Governments in building up stakeholders' capacities for C&I use, including their use by small and medium-sized enterprises.