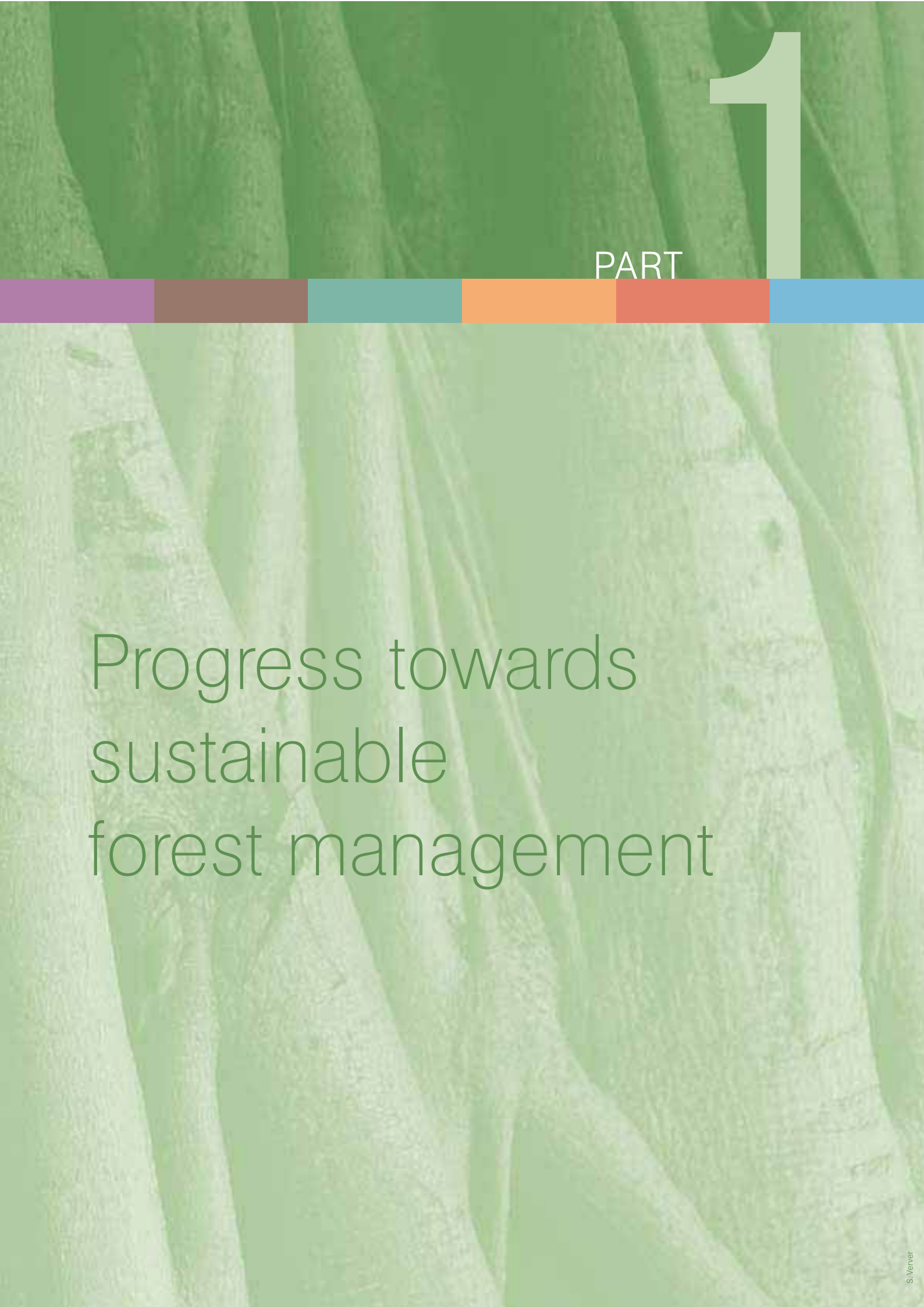
PART 1

Progress towards sustainable forest management



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Part I examines progress towards sustainable forest management region by region. Broadly speaking, sustainable forest management refers to the use and conservation of forests for the benefit of present and future generations. It is clearly an issue of widespread interest. A Google™ search for "sustainable forest management" produces 25 million results.

The concept of sustainable forest management gained momentum during the 1990s when forest issues were debated within the wider framework of sustainable development, which has several broad dimensions: environmental, economic, social and cultural. A number of countries have sponsored processes to identify criteria and indicators (C&I) for sustainable forest management. Building upon C&I processes, intergovernmental processes such as the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) have identified seven thematic elements (Box 1) as a framework for monitoring, assessing and reporting on progress towards sustainable forest management:

- extent of forest resources
- biological diversity
- forest health and vitality
- productive functions of forest resources
- protective functions of forest resources
- socio-economic functions
- legal, policy and institutional framework.

State of the World's Forests 2007 uses these seven elements as a framework for discussing progress towards sustainable forest management.

The first six elements were used as the framework for the most recent *Global Forest Resources Assessment* (FRA 2005) (FAO, 2006a). Unless stated otherwise, data discussed in Part I are taken from FRA 2005. Part I also draws on economic statistics published in the FAOSTAT online database (FAO, 2006b) and on information gathered for forestry sector outlook studies and national forest programme updates. All of these sources rely heavily on information provided by national correspondents. Hence, the present text is essentially based on information provided by countries.

In addition, a number of other sources were used to validate data, including official national Web sites and reports, remote sensing studies and expert assessments. Regional reports were discussed at the 2006 sessions of the FAO regional forestry commissions, whose comments have been incorporated.

BOX 1 Thematic elements of sustainable forest management

1. **Extent of forest resources.** This theme reflects the importance of adequate forest cover and stocking, including trees outside forests, to support the social, economic and environmental dimensions of forestry; to reduce deforestation; and to restore and rehabilitate degraded forest landscapes. The existence and extent of specific forest types are important as a basis for conservation efforts. The theme also includes the important function of forests and trees outside forests to store carbon and thereby contribute to moderating the global climate.
2. **Biological diversity.** This theme concerns the conservation and management of biological diversity at ecosystem (landscape), species and genetic levels. Such conservation, including the protection of areas with fragile ecosystems, ensures that diversity of life is maintained, and provides opportunities to develop new products in the future, including medicines. Genetic improvement is also a means of increasing forest productivity, for example to ensure high wood production levels in intensively managed forests.
3. **Forest health and vitality.** Forests need to be managed so that the risks and impacts of unwanted disturbances are minimized, including wildfires, airborne pollution, storm felling, invasive species, pests and diseases. Such disturbances may have an impact on the social and economic, as well as environmental, dimensions of forestry.
4. **Productive functions of forest resources.** Forests and trees outside forests provide a wide range of wood and non-wood forest products. This theme reflects the importance of maintaining an ample and valuable supply of primary forest products while ensuring that production and harvesting are sustainable and do not compromise the management options of future generations.
5. **Protective functions of forest resources.** Forests and trees outside forests contribute to moderating soil, hydrological and aquatic systems, maintaining clean water (including healthy fish populations) and reducing the risks and impacts of floods, avalanches, erosion and drought. Protective functions of forest resources also contribute to ecosystem conservation efforts and provide benefits to agriculture and rural livelihoods.
6. **Socio-economic functions.** Forest resources contribute to the overall economy in many ways such as through employment, values generated through processing and marketing of forest products, and energy, trade and investment in the forest sector. They also host and protect sites and landscapes of high cultural, spiritual or recreational value. This theme thus includes aspects of land tenure, indigenous and community management systems, and traditional knowledge.
7. **Legal, policy and institutional framework.** Legal, policy and institutional arrangements – including participatory decision-making, governance and law enforcement, and monitoring and assessment of progress – are necessary to support the above six themes. This theme also encompasses broader societal aspects, including fair and equitable use of forest resources, scientific research and education, infrastructure arrangements to support the forest sector, transfer of technology, capacity-building, and public information and communication.