

Terms of Reference and Work Plan for the CPF Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting 4 October 2002¹

1. Background

Concern over the increasing burden on countries to report to international and regional bodies and instruments and, consequently, the need for harmonizing and streamlining reporting have been expressed throughout the UN system. Forest-related reporting is not exempt from this problem. Nevertheless, governments continue to call for more information on the status and trends of forest resources and on progress in fulfilling commitments and implementing agreed actions related to forests. Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) and the subsequent United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) have specifically called action on streamlining forest-related reporting, similar to the developments within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Countries report to various bodies on progress in implementation of actions agreed (for example UNFF, United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), International Tropical Timber Organizations (ITTO) and Conferences of Parties of CBD, United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Different processes and conventions have diverse objectives leading to variable reporting requirements. For this reason, a single reporting format is hardly possible. However, opportunities may exist for reducing the reporting burden by synchronizing reporting, avoiding overlap in reporting to different bodies/instruments, and facilitating information storage and retrieval, which would help avoid duplication of work and would save resources. The key issues will be to improve information management and facilitate flows of information.

CPF members' activities in the field of streamlining

In response to the call for assistance by the UNFF at its first session, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) agreed to support efforts to harmonize and streamline requirements for forest-related reporting for international and regional purposes.

In its first annual progress report and work plan, the CPF Framework, prepared for the second session of the UNFF (March 2002), CPF members reported a number of activities that have a potential to contribute to this objective:

- Data collection and maintenance of databases (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), ITTO, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC));
- Process on harmonizing forest-related definitions for use by various stakeholders, which includes development of an analytical framework for core forest-related definitions. This process is a joint effort of the CPF members FAO, Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), UNEP, with participation of Secretariat of CBD, Secretariat of UNFCCC and ITTO, and with

¹ ToR developed through consultations among CPF members between May – July 2002, **adopted** by the CPF Task Force through electronic communications, 27 September 2002 and **endorsed** by the CPF at its eighth meeting on 3-4 October 2002, New York.

cosponsoring of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO);

- Development and use of a single, streamlined reporting format, the *ITTO/UNECE/FAO/EUROSTAT Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire*, to collect country data on forest products production, consumption and trade;
- Planning future Global Forest Resources Assessments (FRA), with input from, among others, an international meeting, the FAO Expert Consultation on Global Forest Resources Assessments: linking national and international efforts (Kotka IV), 1-5 July 2002. The meeting discussed the scope and approach of future global assessments and their linkages to national forest inventories and to reporting to international and regional instruments and processes, and recommended the use of criteria (from regional criteria and indicators processes) as basic structure for future FRAs (FAO and partners);
- Support to regional processes on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management (FAO, ITTO, World Conservation Union (IUCN), UNEP, CIFOR);
- Use of the ITTO Criteria and Indicators for reporting to ITTO on the progress made towards the Year 2000 Objective (progress towards sustainable forest management). This reporting aims also to facilitate the future work of the UNFF (ITTO);
- Work on harmonizing reporting within biodiversity-related conventions, (Convention secretariats under the auspices of the Environmental Management Group and facilitated by UNEP, including WCMC) and in accordance with guidelines from respective Conferences of Parties to these conventions;
- Capacity building to countries efforts to monitor, assess and report on forests (CIFOR FAO, ITTO);
- Work on a uniform system for accessing and sharing forest information worldwide, called the Global Forest Information Service (GFIS), which aims to provide a gateway through internet to information from many national and international forest-related organizations (IUFRO-led initiative supported by CIFOR, FAO and other partners).

2. Mandate of the Task Force

The mandate of the CPF Task Force is provided in the resolutions of UNFF, as follows:

UNFF “*further requests the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its member organizations to:... reduce duplication in the reports required from countries by its member organizations*” (paragraph 9c of UNFF resolution 1/3)²

UNFF “*invites Collaborative Partnership on Forests members to streamline reporting requests and, to the extent possible, to synchronize their reporting cycles so as to reduce reporting burden on countries*”. (section E of UNFF resolution 2/2)³.

Related other references

UNFF

² Report of the first session of the UNFF E/2001/42 (Part II)–E/CN.18/2001/3 (Part II

³ Report of the second session of the UNFF (E/2002/42 and E/CN.18/2002/14)

In March 2002, UNFF2 requested its Secretariat to develop a format to serve as a basis for countries to report to UNFF3 (26 May-6 June 2003, Geneva) on their implementation of the relevant IPF/IFF proposals for action (UNFF decision 2/1).

UNFF will continue to consider Terms of Reference for an (intergovernmental) *ad hoc* Expert Group on monitoring, assessment and reporting at its third session (26 May – 6 June 2002, Geneva).

CBD

In April 2002, COP-6 of CBD requested Parties to report on progress in implementation of the expanded programme of work on forest biological diversity, through their national reports. It requested the Executive Secretary of the CBD, *in collaboration with CPF members*, to develop a format (a section in the national report) for reporting progress in implementation of the work programme, as well as to consider the need to minimize the reporting burden by taking into account reporting under the *UNFF and other international mechanisms*. (Conference of the Parties of CBD decision VI/22, paras 21 and 22). Parties to the CBD will submit their next (third) national report to the CBD Secretariat in 2005 for consideration by COP-8 in 2006. Furthermore, the CBD's expanded programme of work calls for *streamlining* reporting between the different forest-related processes, in order to improve the understanding of forest quality change and improve consistency in reporting on sustainable forest management.

3. Objective of the Task Force

The objective of the CPF Task Force is to propose ways to reduce the forest-related reporting burden, for example, through reducing and streamlining reporting requests, synchronizing reporting cycles, harmonizing data collection methods and increasing data comparability and compatibility, and facilitating the accessibility and flows of existing information. The purpose of this work is also to guide ongoing international processes by sharing experiences and lessons learned on different reporting frameworks and by seeking possibilities for common approaches for data and information collection, storage and reporting by international organizations.

On a longer term, the work aims at contributing to better information management system(s), whereby data and information are more easily accessible and widely available and whereby these could eventually be provided and updated by countries themselves.

4. Activities and tasks

- (i) Identify gaps and overlaps in current national reporting of forest data and information for regional and global purposes⁴ and provide a review and comparison of forest-related reporting requirements of various international organizations, agreements and bodies.
- (ii) Propose practical approaches and means for harmonizing and streamlining reporting by countries, including the contents, frequency and timing:
 - propose better coordinated or reduced reporting and/or a common core national reporting framework for forest related information (e.g, for UNFF and CBD, for criteria and indicator processes etc.);
 - explore feasibility of a core set of forest information;

⁴ A background paper for Kotka IV meeting was produced by Ms. Susan Braatz, UNFF Secretariat, which examines current international reporting requirements: mandates, mechanisms, overlaps and potential. This paper will also serve as useful basis for the Task Force's work.

- seek possibilities to use common indicators for reporting.
- (iii) Seek practical, widespread and modern solutions to manage forest-related information and to make forest-related information and reports easily accessible:
 - seek ways to improve information storage and retrieval systems, which make data and information more easily accessible;
 - seek possibilities for integrated or interlinked information management system(s) among CPF members (e.g. a website) with a view to facilitating reporting on forests to international agreements and fora, improving knowledge of work undertaken on forests, and to improving coordination.
- (iv) Propose means and ways to enhance country capacity to provide information.

The work of the Task Force will be closely linked and draw upon related ongoing efforts as described in the Background section above, including national reporting to various CPF members or their governing bodies (for example, national reporting related to forests within CBD, CSD, ITTO, UNCCD, UNFCCC and UNFF); the regional and international criteria and indicators processes, in particular those which are at the stage of reporting (i.e., ITTO, Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Pan-European process), and the Montreal process); work of FAO and partners on future global Forest Resources Assessments (FRA), and especially the proposed advisory group for Global Forest Resources Assessments; and work related to developing a common understanding of forest-related concepts, terms and definitions, including the FAO/IPCC/UNEP/CIFOR/IUFRO process on harmonizing forest-related definitions.

5. Membership

The CPF Task Force will be kept small to maximize efficiency and effectiveness although all CPF members will be informed and invited to contribute to the work. The Task Force will initially consist of the following organizations/secretariats:

DESA (UNFF Secretariat)
 FAO
 ITTO
 Secretariat of CBD
 Secretariat of UNCCD⁵
 Secretariat of UNFCCC
 UNEP

6. Working Modalities

The Task Force will be established, by electronic communication, in July 2002. FAO, as focal agency⁶ within the CPF for issues related to monitoring, assessment and reporting, will convene the Task Force and provide secretariat.

⁵ Confirmation to be received on the nomination of the representative for the Task Force

⁶ In its fifth meeting in October 2001 in New York, the CPF agreed upon its focal agency system. Accordingly, FAO is the focal agency, within the CPF, on monitoring, assessment and reporting and concepts, terminology and definitions. Supporting agencies for this UNFF element are all other CPF members.

The Task Force will report its results to the CPF, which will make the results of the work of its Task Force widely available to the UNFF, governing bodies of CPF members and other organizations and fora, as relevant.

During the course of its work, the CPF Task Force will consult experts from other CPF members, governments, criteria and indicator processes and participants of the CPF Network. They may also be invited to contribute and participate in the Task Force meetings, as deemed beneficial.

The CPF Task Force will meet up to three times a year, preferably in conjunction with other international meetings, and use electronic means of communication in the interim. The Task Force members will cover their travel expenses for meetings.

7. Proposed Overall⁷ Work Plan of the Task Force

| Steps | Time schedule |
|---|---|
| Establishment of the CPF Task Force | July 2002 (by e-mail) |
| Preparation and dissemination of other background material and refinement of the work plan | July – October 2002 |
| Work by e-mails; possibly a conference call prior to the eight meeting of the CPF to finalise the ToR | July- October 2002 |
| (for information: second Expert Meeting on Harmonization of Forest-related Definitions) | 11-13 September 2002, FAO Headquarters, Rome |
| Endorsement of ToR of the Task Force by the CPF | 3-4 October, New York (eighth meeting of the CPF) |
| First meeting of the CPF Task Force Initial agenda items could include: - work plan of the Task Force; - different reporting systems; lessons learned; - development of the CPF “portal”; a “virtual database/information pool” on national reporting” | 19-20 November 2002 in Bonn, to be hosted by the Secretariat of the UNFCCC. |
| Work by e-mails | October → |
| (for information: International Conference on Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management) | 3-7 February 2003, Guatemala City |
| (for information: Proposed UNFF country-led initiative by US and other partners with support by FAO on monitoring, assessment and reporting | proposed in March 2003, immediately after COFO, in Rome |
| Second meeting of the CPF Task Force - This meeting could also be extended to a small expert meeting including CPF Task Force members, government experts and other stakeholders | proposed first quarter of 2003 |
| Discussion at the ninth meeting of the CPF | Dates to be determined |
| Interim report by the Task Force through CPF; dissemination of results to UNFF and other bodies | to UNFF3, May 2003 |
|work by e-mail, meetings as appropriate.... | |
| Report by CPF (including concrete proposals) | to UNFF4, mid 2004 |
| Possible continuation of the work | up to 2005 |

Note that the time schedule will also need to take into account the discussion and reporting within relevant Governing bodies of CPF members, notably by FAO/COFO, ITTC, COPs of CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC

⁷ More specific Work Plan of the Task Force will be prepared and agreed in the first meeting of the Task Force