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FRA 2020 AND EFFORTS FOR REDUCING REPORTING BURDEN BY STREAMLINING INTERNATIONAL FOREST REPORTING

I. Background

1. FAO has been monitoring the world's forests at 5 to 10 year intervals since 1946. Recent Global Forest Resources Assessments (FRA) have been produced every five years to provide a consistent approach to describing the world's forests and how they are changing.
2. FRA is based on two sources of data: Country Reports, which are prepared by the officially nominated National Correspondents, and satellite-based monitoring supported by field observations. The Country Reports are the cornerstone of the FRA process as they contain the official national statistics, which cover the seven thematic elements of the Sustainable Forest Management (SFM). As of 6 of June 2017, 161 countries and territories nominated their FRA 2020 National Correspondents.
3. The role of satellite-based remote sensing is different, as it is used mainly to assess tree cover, health and changes to provide global and regional level reference against which the summary of national statistics can be compared.
4. The scope of FRA has been evolving over time from timber-focused inventories to more holistic assessments that seek to respond to increasing information needs. At the same time the number of various information requests for countries has increased significantly resulting in an increased reporting burden.
5. In addition, insufficient coordination between the organizations and processes requesting the information, as well as lack of coordination between national authorities responsible for the reporting, can result in submission of different figures for the same or similar variables and indicators.

II. Committee on Forestry recommendations

6. At its 23rd session the Committee on Forestry (COFO) requested FAO to "continue working with the Secretariats of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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(UNFCCC), United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and other members of the CPF, as well as other relevant international processes to improve and streamline global reporting on forests, with the aim of identifying synergies and reducing the reporting burden on countries.”

7. Furthermore, COFO requested FAO to “review the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) strategy, including its financing strategy, in consultation with FAO Members, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and other relevant international agencies and organizations, and align it as necessary towards the needs of monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as to the reporting needs of other global forests processes, aiming at the production and dissemination of robust forest physical and socioeconomic information, including by using remote sensing” and “pilot new methodologies for assessing regional and global trends in forest cover”.

8. As a response to these requests, FAO proposes to implement FRA 2020 in a manner, which will reduce the overall reporting burden by developing a more efficient and focused reporting process, and facilitates generation of transparent and up-to-date information on key forest variables and indicators.

III. Common forest resources questionnaire

9. In 2011, six¹ international organizations and processes joined forces to develop a Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ) with the intention to increase the efficiency of forest related data collection, analysis and reporting. The CFRQ was first used during FRA 2015 and covered 104 countries representing some 88 percent of the world’s forest. Data gathered through the CFRQ were used many times and by several users, which reduced the reporting burden on countries and increased data consistency. The approach also promoted use of common definitions and provided a basis for enhanced sharing of forest statistics.

10. The CFRQ experience was positive. Some 80 percent of the National Correspondents who responded to the FRA 2015 evaluation questionnaire agreed that the CFRQ should be continued.

11. Based on this positive feedback, FAO proposes the continuation of this collaboration for FRA 2020 and is willing to explore possibilities for strengthening and expanding it further.

IV. Global core set of forest-related indicators

12. Another effort towards decreasing reporting burden and improving consistency of the reporting is being taken by a number of international organizations and processes through developing a *global core set of forest-related indicators*. Following several informal meetings, an international expert workshop in Ottawa, and an organization-led initiative (OLI) in Rome, the CPF launched a Joint initiative to expedite work on the global core set.

13. In line with the OLI recommendations, the CPF established a Task Force to revise the core set of indicators proposed by the OLI and to steer further work on the indicators. The Task Force met in Rome in March 2017 and fine-tuned the OLI proposal.

14. The Task Force’s proposal was then used as basis for an online consultation on the global core set. The purpose of the consultation was to collect views of a wide range of experts and stakeholders

¹ FAO, the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC/OFAC), FAO Forestry (FRA), FOREST EUROPE, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the Montréal Process and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

and it was conducted through the Food Security Network of FAO on 8-21 May 2017². There were 34 individuals or groups who contributed to the consultation, representing all regions and many different fields of expertise. During the three weeks, the webpage of the consultation received around 1,300 page views.

15. As many of the global core set indicators are already being reported on by FRA, the OLI meeting suggested also that the "... upcoming expert consultation on FRA in mid-2017 could be used to expand the number of partners involved and further develop the CFRQ to cover a global core set of forest-related indicators to the extent possible".

16. The FRA 2020 Expert Consultation on 12-16 June 2017 reviewed the global core set and provided feedback to develop a revised version of the proposal (Annex 1).

17. UNFF, at its last session in May 2017, "noted the ongoing work led by the CPF to develop a global set of forest indicators for use in assessing progress on, *inter alia*, the Global Forest Goals and forest-related SDGs, and invited the CPF to present its proposal at UNFF13".

18. Accordingly, the final draft will be submitted to UNFF13 and other governing bodies of CPF members during autumn 2017, as appropriate.

V. Sustainable Development Goals – Agenda 2030

19. The Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) agreed in March 2017 on the framework of targets and indicators to measure progress towards the SDGs. Two of the targets in SDG 15 (15.1 and 15.2) refer explicitly to forests and sustainable forest management, and a third target, 15.4, is to monitor the conservation of mountain ecosystems. FAO is the custodian agency for three indicators under these targets and thus responsible for the following main tasks: 1) development of relevant methodologies; 2) measurement of progress; 3) collection, compilation and validation of data; 4) submission of data and storylines to the United Nations Statistical Division; and 5) provision of support to enable countries to develop their reporting capacity.

20. FAO is responsible for these tasks for two forest related indicators, 15.1.1 "Forest area as a proportion of total land area" and 15.2.1 "Progress towards sustainable forest management". The SDG reporting on these indicators has started and will continue on an annual basis. The data for these indicators will be collected and reviewed through the new FRA on-line reporting platform.

VI. Paris Agreement, Nationally Determined Contributions and the enhanced transparency framework

21. The Paris Agreement focuses on efforts that maintain the global temperature rise "well below 2° Celsius above pre-industrial levels". It also aims to strengthen countries' ability to deal with climate change impacts. In addition, the Agreement presents a new transparency framework, which will evolve from the existing transparency system and will apply to all Parties.

22. The new transparency network foresees reporting on emissions at least every two years according to the provided guidance. These reports are subject to an expert review and should use commonly agreed accounting framework, which allows tracking of the progress towards Nationally Determined Contributions.

23. Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry was explicitly mentioned in 73 percent of the submitted Intended Nationally Determined Contributions as a potential mitigation action³. In addition,

² The online consultation material is available at http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/activities/discussions/forestry_indicators

³ <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2016/cop22/eng/02.pdf>

roughly 70 countries mentioned forestry as one of the priority sectors for adaptation actions. Thus, reporting on forest-related carbon stores, sinks and sources is vital for the transparent and successful implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions.

24. The FRA reporting provides an indirect linkage to the reporting under the UNFCCC as it supports the process by enhancing the countries' capacity to produce Green House Gas (GHG) data for the Agriculture Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU) sector. Furthermore, FRA provides an independent reference for the forest related emissions and removals reported to the UNFCCC, and FRA data and its terms and definitions support further development of the IPCC guidelines.

25. The FRA 2020 reporting will contribute also to increasing transparency through the development of a new on-line data submission, review, analysis and reporting Platform, which will allow self-explanatory documenting of the reported values.

VII. Remote Sensing

26. FAO, with the financial support from a number of donors, has developed a set of tools for remote sensing-based data collection, analysis and mapping. Some of these tools are based on visual assessment of sample sites, while others can produce spatially explicit maps. These tools facilitate access to latest freely available remote sensing data and allow analysis and processing in a fast and user-friendly manner.

27. These tools have already been used to support a number of countries to produce data and information on their forests, including on forest area and its changes. FAO, together with its partners and with financial aid from Germany and the EU, has also produced a global data set of roughly five hundred thousand visually assessed sample plots. This Global Forest Survey data set can be made available for countries for their review, revision and potential release to the public.

28. FRA 2020 plans to use these tools and data for capacity development in a number of countries to support their efforts to produce better data on the forest area and its changes.

VIII. The way forward

29. The above-mentioned developments pose several new demands for the FRA process. First, a serious effort for reducing the reporting burden must be made by carefully considering the collected variables and indicators as well as their relevance and by further facilitating the FRA reporting process. Second, further expansion of the CFRQ and synergies with other reporting processes will minimise overlaps in data collection and improve consistency. Third, since reporting on the SDG indicators is to be done on an annual basis, FRA will need to support annual submissions, reviews and reporting on these data. Finally, to support countries in consistent reporting on key indicators, FRA, together with the other forest monitoring related projects and programmes of FAO, will need to strengthen the provision of the necessary capacity development to support countries in conducting field inventories and using remote sensing to estimate forest area changes.

30. Given the importance of up-to-date and transparent forest information for national policy making and international reporting, it is essential to promote transparent and open access to data. Efficient and open reporting platforms, combined questionnaires and related capacity development will help achieve consistent, timely, credible and transparent FRA reporting, which will serve also other international reporting processes. This can also help identify new opportunities to support countries in the actual data production process as the open and transparent systems are attractive to resource partners.

31. To meet some of these requirements, FAO has prepared related capacity development plans and initiated design and development of a new online FRA Platform. The Platform will facilitate filling in the FRA questionnaire and reviewing the reported data, as well as performing related

analyses. In addition, it will provide the necessary interpolation and extrapolation modules for production of the needed estimates for given reporting years, and greatly facilitate reporting on the biomass and carbon stocks and their changes according to the IPCC guidelines.

IX. Points for consideration

32. The Commission and the Committee may wish to encourage countries to:
- Participate actively in the FRA 2020 reporting process, including the review and validation of remote sensing products.
 - Collaborate with FAO and partner institutions to achieve synergies in data collection, analysis and management, and to reduce duplication of efforts.
33. The Commission may wish to request FAO to:
- Continue supporting the development of the global core set concept and contribute to the collection of data for those indicators that are relevant for the FRA.
 - Continue the development and implementation of the new FRA on-line platform to allow annual submissions, reviews and reporting on SDG indicators 15.1.1 and 15.2.1.
 - Further strengthen the CFRQ and consider options for expanding it towards reporting with regional Criteria and Indicator processes.
 - Make the country-specific remote sensing datasets available for national validation and to provide the necessary tools and support for data analysis and management.
 - Initiate the FRA capacity development activities on remote sensing methodologies and national spatial data infrastructure.

ANNEX I**Proposed Global Core Set of forest related indicators, for consideration by CPF,****as of 19 June 2017*****Background***

The process to agree on a global core set of forest related indicators has been moving forwards from a side meeting at the World Forestry Conference in Durban, culminating at an Organisation-Led Initiative in Rome in November 2016, which proposed a core set for wider consultation. Since then there has been the first meeting of a CPF Task Force, an online consultation, and the Expert Consultation on FRA 2020, which discussed the Global Core Set. This paper presents the latest version of the Global Core Set, taking account of views expressed in all these consultations. This paper does not repeat the background material on objectives and linkages with high level policy commitments which were presented at some length in the background paper to the Expert Consultation.

It is now for the CPF, possibly through its task force, to take a final decision on the Global Core Set, and how it should be implemented by CPF members. Thereafter, the CPF should present the results to UNFF13, as requested by UNFF12.

Many participants in the consultations agreed that there is now a unique window of opportunity, when the high level policy commitments have been made and the reporting systems are being put in place, but are not yet finally fixed. There is still the possibility to adjust definitions, reporting mechanisms and timetables to streamline processes and reduce the reporting burden, by applying the Global Core Set. All major players have expressed their willingness to cooperate, within their own mandates. However, this window of opportunity is closing rapidly: by the end of 2017, it will no longer be possible to modify the reporting systems being put in place, notably FRA2020 and the SDGs, but also for UNFF, CBD and others. Formal approval by the CPF, of the Global Core Set, as well as agreement on its implementation, notably reporting responsibilities, is therefore urgent.

Proposed Global Core Set of forest-related indicators

Set out below is the Proposed Global Core Set, taking account of the many constructive comments made in a wide variety of consultations, up to mid-June 2017. It has been renumbered, dropping the references to indicators which have not been maintained. If CPF members wish to track the changes made during the last stage of the process, the annex to the Expert Consultation report keeps these references, as well as noting changes made during the Expert Consultation.

	Global Core Set	unit	Comments
1	Forest area net change rate	%	Same wording as SDG 15.1.1. Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1. Combines trends for natural and planted forest, so could be misleading (see proposed new indicator 19)
2	Proportion of forest area located within legally established protected areas	%	Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1. Refers also to Aichi T11. Note: forest loss outside protected areas will increase share of protected areas in total forest area
3	Above-ground biomass stock in forest	tonnes	Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1. Monitors overuse of wood supply as drop in above ground biomass indicates harvests + other damage are greater than increment, possibly as a result of unsustainable forest management
4	Forest area designated and/or managed for protection of soil, water,	ha	Only indicator of protective role of forests. Challenge to define "designated and/or managed" as all forests have some protective role

	infrastructure and managed natural resources		Make consistent with final text of FRA 2020 concerning management objectives
5	Employment related to the forest sector	Number FTE	Include in addition to “forestry and logging” as defined by ISIC, wood and paper industries, plus (estimates of?) forest-related research, education, tourism, production of NWFP, as well as subsistence/informal employment
6	Existence of policies, strategies and institutions which explicitly encourage SFM	References (title, date URL etc.)	Same wording (“explicitly encourage”) as FRA 2020.
7	Existence of national or sub-national forest assessment process	References (title, date URL etc.)	Full details on methods of NFI available from FRA2020 framework. Readers can make their own assessment of the scientific soundness of the method chosen, through FRA transparency.
8	Existence of a national or sub-national stakeholder platform	References (title, date URL etc.)	See FRA2020 definition of stakeholder platform
9	Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan	%	Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1. See FRA2020 for definition of “long term forest management plan”.
10	Forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme	ha	Sub-indicator of SDG 15.2.1. See FRA 2020 for definition of “independently verified forest management certification scheme”
11	Volume of wood removals	m ³	Only indicator of production function of forests. Ideally would be expanded to include NWFP, and possibly be expressed in value terms. However, both present significant technical problems (variety of NWFPs and lack of markets in many cases, difficulty of defining at what stage value should be assessed)
12	Existence of traceability system(s) for wood products	References (title, date, URL, state of development ⁴)	Response to commitment to increase “share of products from sustainably managed forests” (GFT 3.3) which cannot be monitored without a traceability system (also an important policy tool against trade in illegally logged products) Often traceability applies to legality, not sustainably sourced products, so caution needed in assessment.
13	Proportion of forest area disturbed (or reword to gain consistency with FRA 2020)	% of forest area	GFGT and Aichi refer to “resilience” and “adaptive capacity”, while the third thematic element refers to “health and vitality”. Well known issues linked with disturbance/damage: conceptual framework, aggregation of different types of disturbance, separating “normal” from “abnormal” disturbance etc. Need to be able to aggregate types of disturbance and follow trends.
14	Area of degraded forest	ha	GFGT, SDG, UNCCD and Aichi all refer to “degraded” lands, forests and ecosystems, so it is necessary to monitor trends for degraded forests. The challenge is to define “degraded”. Urgent to define and measure “forest degradation” in realistic way, adaptable to many different circumstances and types of degradation. A multi-axis approach might be useful, monitoring different ways in which forest functions diminished
15	Number of forest dependent people in extreme poverty	Number	The most specific commitment under GOF2 is to eradicate extreme poverty for all forest dependent people, although several challenges exist: first, to define “forest-dependent”, and then to collect the data. Needs urgent further work, on definition of “forest dependent people”,

⁴ Operational, being developed, under consideration etc.

			and then on survey methods which could be used. Then CPF to take policy decision on whether to pursue.
16	Financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management	\$	The indicator repeats the wording of GOF 4, as trends in financing SFM must be monitored. Further work needed: what types of financing are covered ⁵ , and how is each defined and monitored, and how to distinguish financing “for the implementation of SFM” from other financing (does all investment in forestry contribute to SFM?)
17	Total supply of wood-based energy	MJ	Maintained despite lack of policy commitment on wood energy, as this is very important in both developing and developed countries, and potentially more important in green economy based on renewable energies. Include wood energy of all types and sources.
18	Net GHG sink/source of forests, and carbon storage in harvested wood products	t CO ₂ e ⁶	Addresses forest sector’s role in mitigating climate change (GFGT 2.5), covering all greenhouse gases, not just CO ₂ UNFCCC guidelines should be followed, recognising that reporting obligations varied by countries and parameters
19	Change in area of primary forests	ha	Addresses Aichi T5, using FRA 2020 terms
20	Number of threatened forest dependent species/trends in keystone/indicator species for forests	number	New indicator of species diversity. Data may be available from IUCN

Comments on the proposed Global Core Set and its implementation

With all indicators, analysis must take account of context, and national circumstances. In some cases, it may not be clear whether an increase or a decrease of the indicator is “sustainable”. In any case, the Global Core Set should be taken as a whole.

The set as a whole seems comprehensive and balanced, although rather longer than originally intended (20 indicators instead of 10-15). Each indicator is directly linked to one or more high level policy commitments, as set out in the appendix table.

It was pointed out that while many of the indicators addressed the status of the aspect covered, others addressed the policy response to the situation, in accordance with the Pressure/State/Response model used by OECD and many others. This is the case for indicators 6, 7, 8 and 12. In these cases, the effectiveness of the measures was of the utmost importance but international data collection processes are not in a position to make a judgement on this. However, the transparent presentation of references made it possible for each user to develop his or her own opinion on the effectiveness of the instruments presented.

Regional C&I processes had played a key role in developing the concepts underlying the Global Core Set, and might be involved in finalising and implementing the set. This applied especially to indicators addressed through the CFRQ mechanism.

It is important to prepare a narrative or rationale for each of the indicators, linking it to the high-level policy commitments (and possibly to the corresponding regional indicators, although that might be

⁵ Target 4.2 specifies “public (national, bilateral, multilateral and triangular), private and philanthropic financing”

⁶ Greenhouse gases in tons of CO₂ equivalent

done by the C&I processes themselves), and outlining the significance of the information which would be collected

Some indicators require urgent work (by CPF task force?), on concepts and/or definitions before they are usable, but should nevertheless be in the GCS because of a strong policy commitment in those areas:

- 14 - Area of forest degradation
- 15 - Number of forest dependent people in extreme poverty
- 16 - Finance from all sources for implementing SFM

There should also be a “candidate list” of indicators/topics not yet suitable for inclusion in the Global Core Set, but which deserve further consideration, for possible inclusion in a revised list:

- Contribution of forests to food security (strong commitment, very difficult to monitor)
- Payment for forest ecosystem services (emerging issue, not yet “ripe”)
- Economic aspects of SFM⁷ (GFGT commitment 2.4 extremely wide, so difficult to measure)
- Social aspects of SFM (GFGT commitment 2.4 extremely wide, so difficult to measure)

As regards data collection for the Global Core Set, the Expert Consultation identified the following as indicators for which FRA 2020 would collect data (14 indicators in all):

- 1) Forest area net change rate
- 2) Proportion of forest area located within legally established protected areas
- 3) Above ground biomass stock in forest
- 4) Forest area designated and/or managed for protection of soil, water, infrastructure and managed natural resources
- 5) Employment related to the forest sector
- 6) Existence of policies, strategies and institutions which explicitly encourage SFM
- 7) Existence of national or sub-national forest assessment process
- 8) Existence of national or sub-national stakeholder platform
- 9) Proportion of forest area under a long term forest management plan
- 10) Proportion of forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme
- 11) Volume of wood removals (through JFSQ)
- 12) Existence of a traceability system for wood products
- 13) Proportion of forest area disturbed
- 19) Change in area of primary forests

The CPF partners should agree as soon as possible on data collection responsibilities for the whole Global Core Set.

Next steps for the CPF

To summarise, the CPF, possibly acting through its Task Force on the GCS, should:

- 1) Finalise the Global Core Set of Forest-related indicators, building on the version set out above, which has emerged from several rounds of consultation with relevant communities
- 2) Complete associated work, in particular:
 - a) Address the conceptual and definition challenges for indicators 14, 15 and 16
 - b) Prepare a narrative to accompany and explain the Core Set
 - c) Draw up a candidate list of indicators which are not yet appropriate for inclusion in the list

⁷ For instance forest sector share of GDP, livelihoods/revenues from forests

- 3) Assign reporting responsibilities among CPF partners
- 4) Present the outcome to UNFF13.

As other processes which would use the Global Core Set, including SDG reporting, FRA 2020 and reporting under UNFI are already advancing according their own schedules, it would be desirable that CPF complete steps 1-3 above by autumn 2017.

Appendix*Relation between GCS and policy commitments*

	Indicator	Thematic element	SDG	GFGT	Aichi
1	Forest area net change rate	1	15.1.1 15.2.1	1.1 1.3	T5 T14
2	Proportion of forest area located within legally established protected areas	2	15.2.1	1.3 2.5 3.1	T11
3	Above-ground biomass stock in forest	4	15.2.1	1.3 2.5	T7
4	Forest area designated and/or managed for protection of soil, water, infrastructure and managed natural resources	5		1.4	
5	Employment related to the forest sector	6		2.4	
6	Existence of policies, strategies and institutions which explicitly encourage SFM	7		5.1 5.3 5.4	
7	Existence of national or sub-national forest assessment process	7		4.5	
8	Existence of a national or sub-national stakeholder platform	7		5.3 6.3	
9	Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan	7	15.2.1	1.3 3.2	T7
10	Forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme	7	15.2.1	1.3 3.3	
11	Volume of wood removals	4		2.4	
12	Existence of traceability system(s) for wood products	7		3.3 5.2	
13	Proportion of forest area disturbed (or reword to gain consistency with FRA 2020)	3		1.4	
14	Area of degraded forest	3	15.3.1	1.3	T15
15	Number of forest dependent people in extreme poverty	6		2.1	
16	Financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management	7		4.1 4.2	
17	Total supply of wood-based energy	4	7.2.1		
18	Net GHG sink/source of forests, and carbon storage in harvested wood products	7		1.2 2.5	
19	Change in area of primary forests	2			T5
20	Number of threatened forest dependent species/trends in keystone/indicator species for forests	2			T5

In addition:

GCS 14 is linked to commitments under UNCCD

GCS 3 and 18 are linked to commitments under UNFCCC. It was pointed out that the level of commitment to report varied between UNFCCC parties and the relevant instruments.