Implementing criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management

Regional Workshop in

Estoril (Lisbon), Portugal 20–21 May 2013

Recommendations

The background and objective of the Estoril workshop (WS) was to define and understand the various aspects of the implementation of criteria and indicators (C&I) at the national level; to share experiences and identify regional issues across Southern and Northern Europe; as well as to propose recommendations on C&I implementation in these regions. The WS was structured across 2 Working Groups (WG) according to applications listed in the working definition¹ of implementing the pan-European set of C&I of SFM. WG1 focused on policy (application 1 and 4) while WG2 focused on monitoring and reporting (application 2 and 3). Both groups were also requested to address application 5. The participants were also presented with the results of the first two workshops, organised in Zagreb and Budapest.

Participants presented² their national experience of implementing criteria and indicators (in Finland, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and United Kingdom) and the project team reported on the pilot studies on sub-national implementation of C&I in Germany and Italy. These presentations demonstrate that there is a significantly varied application of C&I throughout the countries represented in the WS, ranging from the Northern to Southern Europe. From the discussions in the Estoril WS, both in the separate WG discussions and from the final round table discussion (including all participants), some major issues were raised. These are as follows:

WG1 on policy initially noted that C&I were, first and foremost, used as a framework for communication and dialogue on SFM. Also its supportive function in policy-making was brought forward in the discussion. For C&I application, it was stressed as mostly implicitly applied to organise thoughts, finding a common language and as a common data set. This

¹ The CI-SFM working definition is available online
² Proceedings are published on the workshop’s website
was linked to the formal commitment in plans and strategies at all levels concerning SFM and the role C&I have in steering this process (e.g. C&I define the boundaries for SFM). The main issues and/or problems were identified as: the cost benefit ratio of applying C&I, relevance of C&I to policy makers, horizontal and vertical communication (within and between sectors affecting forests), the mismatch between indicators and policy makers priorities, different interpretation of indicators and the level of details for some indicators is too high. This makes it costly and time-consuming to collect all the information related to these indicators. To address these issues and problems it was recommended to tackle two areas:

- The first recommendation concerned the development of clear objectives of what C&I are for. The purpose of this would be to revise the indicator set (not criteria) in light of these defined objectives (based on existing experience) and to link regional, national and international levels of C&I.
- The second recommendation focused on the need to capitalize on the opportunities that may come out of the legally binding agreement (LBA) negotiations. The main point being that the LBA provide a good opportunity to increase the potential impact of C&I, for example, to re-address objectives and to increase visibility. This also touched on the need to have a dialogue with other sectors on what they really need from C&I focusing on the forest sector.

Additional remarks addressed the need to maintain a stable set of C&I to ensure that indicators can be monitored and assessed over a longer time period. Also the link between analysis and policy-making (e.g. policy relevance) as well as the cost effectiveness of the C&I application were discussed.

WG2 on monitoring and reporting initiated the discussion by noting that some definitions for C&I should be made clearer for international reporting (e.g. additional guidelines should be given on how to apply monitor/report). It was also noted that changes between reporting cycles should be avoided if possible. The main elements as regards to monitoring and reporting concerned: forest resources (e.g. problematic aspect of accounting for carbon in soil; difficulties to report on forest age classes), health and vitality (e.g. difficult to report on forest damage in terms of area, and the need to separate pests and diseases based on origin), productive functions (e.g. problems to classify services using international classifications and difficulties associated with measuring the production of non-wood products), biodiversity (e.g. focused on the definition of regeneration and difficulties in defining between natural, artificial and coppice, also aspect connected to threatened species and landscape patterns), socio-economic functions (e.g. expenditures for services,
forest holdings in terms of fragmented ownership, and the health and safety of workforce).
To address these issues and problems it was recommended to tackle three areas:

- The first recommendation concerned the need to review the current set of indicators. More specifically, take into account availability of data, quality and possible interpretations, to take care to avoid losing data comparability over time (if the set is modified) and to integrate national specificities in the review process.
- The second recommendation focused on discrepancies in monitoring and assessment, namely, on the difficulties to read and interpret data coming from different countries. Targets and thresholds may be defined at national/sub-national levels and assessment, which should be based on relevant national/sub-national goals and circumstances. It was also emphasised that national correspondents should be involved in reviewing these issues.
- The third recommendation was on forms of reporting and communication. It is important that different types of outputs are produced (e.g. European reports, brochures, leaflets and databases). Also the Internet should be used as much as possible to disseminate information. It was further recommended that mixed tools/approaches should be applied when communicating (e.g. combined indicators or shortened sub-sets of indicators) and that simple messages should be applied when trying to convey results. For example, reported numbers should be assisted by relevant explanations and/or interpretations.

The noted problems and recommendations provide an overview of the main difficulties in implementing C&I in the Northern and Southern European regions, including possible solutions in the form of recommendations. The main issues that should be addressed concerns the clarification and definition of objectives of the pan European set of C&I; revising the pan-European indicators of sustainable forest management, on the basis of agreed objectives; using C&I to improve governance of the forest sector and enhance forest policy; improving the meaningfulness, readability and applicability of the indicator set; address the indirect use of C&I through certification systems; smart use of C&I and capacity building.