



Implementing criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management

Pan-European Forum

Vienna, Austria 8-9 October 2013

Forum Report

The pan-European Forum was organised during the final phase of the CI-SFM project ten years after the 4th Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, where the improved pan-European criteria and indicators were endorsed. It brought together the regional analysis and the experiences collected from the national reports and expert views, and allowed the presentation and the discussion of the conclusion and recommendations of the project. The participants represented different stakeholders, national and international experts.

Opening of the meeting

The Forum was opened by Prof. Dr. Barbara Hinterstoisser (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Austria), Mr. Matthias Schwoerer (Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection, Germany) and Dr. Peter Mayer (Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape, Austria).

Setting the context

The session was opened by setting the context, including an introduction to the CI-SFM project, its objectives and accomplishments, followed by a historical overview of the development of the pan-European C&I for SFM. One of the main challenges for the forest sector, according to participants, was insufficient dialogue and communication between the forest and other forest-relevant sectors (e.g. climate change, energy, biodiversity). It was noted that this was both due to communication weakness of the forest sector but also due to other sectors not being aware or not considering what has been established already in the forest sector.

Experiences from other regions and initiatives

Several international processes and initiatives, other than the Pan-European process, have also developed criteria and indicators as a policy instrument to evaluate and report progress towards SFM. The session on experiences from other regions and initiatives provided a platform to exchange information on C&I development and implementation with other regions and initiatives, represented by

panelists from the FAO-FRA¹, the ITTO² and the Montréal Process. The focus was on past experience, achievements and future challenges associated with criteria and indicators.

After the presentations the discussions with the audience raised the issue of the impacts of the different processes on the policy level. The representatives of the three processes agreed that the different sets have been used in raising awareness of SFM-related issues, concerns and needs among the different stakeholder groups. Challenges were seen by the panelists mostly in data availability and quality, and the need to link this information to national and sub-national policy-making.

The participants raised the question of the costs of data collection for a country. The collection of forest sector data, related to indicators imposes, in most cases, a considerable burden on data collection agencies. It was pointed out that there is also a cost - in reduced quality of evidence for policy making - in not implementing criteria and indicators. According to the panelists the costs of implementing criteria and indicators in a country depend on the general situation with regard to data collection and monitoring. As regards assessment, challenges were seen by the panelists mostly in value judgments, e.g. are certain developments positive or negative. This initiated discussion on the potential need for the development of thresholds for individual indicators in order to support the assessment of SFM.

The panelists noted that the dialogue and communication between the different sectoral processes is one of the most difficult challenges, due to different interests of the sectors and the missing linkages between information provided by the pan-European criteria indicators and the changing needs of the other sectors. Progress on the dialogue and communication between international processes and initiatives was mentioned by the panelists, notably the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire, a co-operative project between FAO, UNECE/FAO, ITTO, Forest Europe, and the Montréal Process. This questionnaire, a step to increase collaboration on forest reporting, is aiming at a reduced country reporting burden, and improved harmonization of definitions and data.

Finally, the role of the pan-European C&I as a tool for assessing progress towards sustainable forest management was discussed by the panelists also in the light of the Pan-European Operational Level Guidelines (PEOLG) that have influenced certification schemes, notably the PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification), by providing reference frames and stimulating assessment procedures on local/regional levels. The panelists agreed that the C&I also had an influence on certification schemes in their regions. The major challenge identified was the identification of future user needs and the respective adaptation of the pan-European C&I. It was also highlighted that not all pan-European indicators are suitable for an assessment of sustainable forest management as they provide background or context information only.

National/sub-national perspectives on C&I implementation

Since its introduction, the pan-European C&I have been used in a variety of ways in the different countries across Europe, e.g. monitoring, reporting, data collection, communication, policy formulation and other fields of application. During this session, on the basis of presentations by France, Montenegro,

¹ FAO-FRA: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Global Forest Resources Assessment

² ITTO: International Tropical Timber Organization

Russian Federation and Turkey, countries shared their experiences and demonstrated the varied application of the C&I for SFM at the national level.

The shared national experiences revealed that, different national socio-economic conditions, legal, policy and institutional settings as well as a varying level of awareness, human capacities and available resources are the major reasons for the different approaches to implementing C&I among the countries. Furthermore, during the discussion, several issues were raised:

- The driving force to initiate and carry forward the process of C&I implementation is not only the political will and commitment, but also the **cost-effectiveness** of collecting and analysing the information structured according to the indicators. Even though information on the cost-effectiveness was not available for some of the countries, it was noted that the cost-benefit ratio of implementation is not favourable for some of the indicators and this requires further exploration. However, the cost and consequences of not implementing the C&I for SFM should be also taken into consideration.
- The respective roles of **data verification** and **validation** were also discussed, and some examples from the countries were given, highlighting the importance of information credibility in the process of C&I implementation at the national level.
- The idea of **composite indicators** was highlighted by a few participants, focusing on the need to measure progress of specific policy issues (e.g. biodiversity, profitability, protection) and have a balanced conversation/dialogue between interested parties (e.g. policy makers, researchers)
- Another aspect that was raised during the discussion concerned the fundamental question of **evidence-based policy making** and how it C&I can help **move from policy agenda setting to monitoring**.
- Although the pan-European criteria and indicators are not intended for use at the forest management unit level, the **indirect impact on forest management practice** was discussed. In particular, the importance of integrating international needs into national, sub-national and, when possible, forest management unit (FMU) level data collection systems was underscored.

Sustainable forest management and criteria and indicators are also used at sub- national level. In this context, a case study from Germany was presented. It revealed that the C&I use at sub- national level in Germany is at an advanced stage due to the use and consideration of both the pan-European C&I and the derived sub-national sets. In the framework of the CI-SFM project, the different modes of C&I implementation have been explored and the project's findings from the national assessments were presented. The discussion afterwards was mainly focused on the use of the C&I by other sectors, emphasizing the need to establish linkages between other sectors' requirements and enquires (e.g. land use, land-use change and forestry and the Convention on Biological Diversity).

Synthesis of the cumulative findings and lessons learnt from the past

During this session, the cumulative findings from the CI-SFM project were presented. The major focus was on the current status of C&I implementations and the main trends associated with the various fields of applications. The findings presented were seen by the majority of those who took the floor as a good

basis for further improvement and advancement of the pan-European C&I implementation. The discussion revolved around two main aspects:

- **Objectives of the pan-European C&I** many participants agreed on the use of the criteria and indicators in providing a common description of sustainable forest management. When they were drafted, the current indicators were expected by some to be used primarily in a national context and not for international comparisons. However, assessment of sustainable forest management in an international context was now welcomed by many experts. An emphasis was placed also upon the need for defining clear long-term objectives and thresholds. It is clear that the C&I can serve as an assessment tool, but this will require a broad agreement on a common interpretation of the indicators to reach a common understanding and identify the benefits of such an approach.
- **Communication with and provision of information to other sectors-** the reflections were centred on the challenging task of communicating forest relevant information to the other sectors. Communication is about listening as well as talking, and the different audiences should be taken into account, e.g. who is our target audience and what are their demands? However, many agreed that communication is a two way process and posed the question of how the other sectors try to harmonize their definitions with the forest sector.

The future of the pan-European C&I set in a changing policy environment

In order to examine the future of the pan-European set in a changing policy environment, the major focus of this session, including two panel discussions, was on identifying the needs and potentials for further improvement and enhancement of criteria and indicators and their applications.

Expert panel on forest information use

The objective of the expert panel on forest information use was to provide a platform for experts in the field to share their views and opinions and to stimulate discussions in relation to the expectations of institutions, organizations or processes which may have use or need for forest indicator information, inside and outside the forest sector. In particular, the focus was on how the forest sector could supply better information to meet the biodiversity, energy, private owners and for statistical demands.

The C&I for SFM are seen by the environmental sector more as a tool for the forest sector. And progress towards inter-sectoral co-operation between different sectors on European level can be noticed, namely in the SEBI³ process. The SEBI process, involving different sectors e.g. environmental, forest and the agricultural sector, aimed at assessing progress towards the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity and was built around its focal areas and addresses key policy questions for decision makers. According to the panelist the development of the 26 specific biodiversity indicators was seen as challenging, because of the different sectors' objectives and goals.

³ SEBI: Streamlining European Biodiversity Indicators

Considering more closely the specific needs of other sectors on forest information and recent policy developments in the European forest sector in relation to sustainable wood fuel production, a panelist noted challenges for the forest sector in general and the C&I for SFM in particular. According to the panelist, end users and consumers ask whether biomass is sustainably produced or not. This question is difficult to answer, partially because wood fuel is imported also from outside Europe. But a few key indicators (for instance related to biodiversity and carbon neutrality) as well as chain of custody might prove sufficient.

The European forest owners' organisation uses key figures of C&I for SFM for dialogue and communication of forest sector trends and changes of forests and their management. Nevertheless, convincing the general public that European forests are sustainably managed remains a challenge.

Another panelist expressed the need for better communication between the different data providers to minimize uncertain data quality and inefficiency of data provision (e.g. data on biodiversity was mentioned). Concerns were raised on the reporting period of 5 years, which is applied currently, as annual data were needed for "green accounting" purposes. Comprehensive and realistic time series over a longer time period were suggested by the panelist in order to make significant statements about changes and trends, which could lead to a more focused discussion on achieved targets towards SFM.

According to the panelists future challenges for the pan-European C&I set include ecosystem services, value of natural capital, green jobs and green economy, sustainably produced biomass and finding the right label for SFM.

Expert panel on future prospects of C&I development

The expert panel on future prospects of C&I development, represented by two national experts and by PEFC⁴, provided a platform for discussions on the further development and implementation of the pan-European C&I for SFM. Attention was given to the future structure and content of the pan-European set as well as the future of the set in a changing policy environment.

The panelists were asked how the quality of the indicators could be improved. The panelists noticed challenges for a subset of the indicators, due to the fact that those indicators are not assessed by national forest inventories or that national statistics are not compiled on these indicators. In order to tackle this challenge, the panelists see the need to further develop methodology, terminology and definitions in order to improve the quality of the pan-European C&I for SFM. The MCPFE technical guidelines were mentioned in that context.

On the question of whether the quality of each indicator is still sufficient to cover current and future needs the panelists see the need to revise the set and to verify if an indicator is producing relevant and meaningful information. The panelists see also the need to include new indicators (e.g. certified forest area, volume of illegally logged timber, budget for research on climate change adaptation) and/or modifying existing ones in order to maintain a viable, up-to-date and widely accepted indicator set. Nevertheless, the panelists proposed moderate changes to the C&I for SFM. Furthermore, the need to

⁴ PEFC: Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification

develop composite indicators to address specific policy and emerging issues (e.g. future energy needs) was raised and emphasized by the panelists.

The discussions continued on the need to compare the costs of revising, expanding and implementing a new C&I for SFM set with the benefits in terms of improved policy, information and communication. The participants stressed that it might be difficult to identify current emerging needs, and that these would not be “emerging needs” in the future. In addition, the importance of data interpretation (jointly with other sectors) and the need to monitor trends over time was strongly emphasized.

The panelists were asked how in their view a misinterpretation of an indicator under different objectives could be avoided. The panelists see the difficulties in finding a common interpretation for C&I as regards to definitions and targets. Therefore, the panelists see the need to define common objectives and corresponding targets for the C&I for SFM.

Finally the panelists were asked if they see the indicators as a meaningful tool to provide overall holistic picture on SFM for a country. The panelists stressed the need for comprehensive time series over a longer time period to make significant statements about changes and trends, which could lead to a more focused discussion on achieved targets of a country and its short-and long-term objectives.

Following these panel discussions, the forum was informed that on 20 September 2013 the European Commission had proposed a new EU Forest Strategy which responds to the new challenges facing forests and the forest sector. The new Strategy gives a new framework in response to the increasing demands put on forests and to significant societal and political changes that have affected forests over the last 15 years. It incorporates the following major principles: sustainable forest management, resource efficiency, and global forest responsibilities, promoting sustainable consumption and production of timber products. In this context, the European Commission is working on developing sustainability criteria for biomass which would assure that the raw material (wood, or other biomass, etc.) comes from a sustainable source.

Conclusions and the way forward

This session aimed at exploring the way forward of how the forest sector could supply information and how the pan-European C&I for SFM could be further integrated and adapted to address cross-sectoral needs at the different levels. The session started with presentations of the CI-SFM project’s recommendations for the C&I implementation at pan-European, national and sub-national levels.

CI-SFM project’s recommendations for implementation at national and sub-national levels

Regarding the recommendations for implementation at national and sub-national levels, the discussion centred upon the following issues, which will be taken into consideration for the final version of the report.

- **Integrate and involve other sectors to future C&I for SFM workshops:** This would allow for strengthening cross-sectoral linkages, enhancing information provision to the other sectors and

hence reducing the possibility of indicator misinterpretation by the other sectors. Nevertheless, the use and the objectives of the indicator set have to be first clearly defined.

- **Sequence of activities (i.e. workshops):** The timing of the future workshops is important, especially in relation to national and sub-national levels. It would be advisable to conduct some workshops before a potential revision of the indicator set. This would stimulate and prepare the participants to take a part also in the revision process. Once the revision is completed, it would be beneficial to continue national level consultation to raise awareness and explain any potential change.
- **The Legally Binding Agreement and the pan-European indicator set:** It remains to be clarified how the pan-European indicator set would be affected by a potential legally binding agreement, in light of the outcomes of the currently ongoing negotiation process.
- **Integrate and involve forest owners:** It would be desirable to involve the forest owners in relevant meetings and discussions. However, the question is whether they would be interested in such information and what level. This could be further explored.
- **Smart use of the criteria and indicators-** economise on studies and research in order to connect the different forest sector layers correctly.

CI-SFM project's recommendations for C&I implementation at pan-European level

There were several comments in relation to the recommendations for C&I implementation at pan-European level:

- **Objectives of the set:** The working definition consists of five major applications, which would serve as a basis for the discussions when reviewing and defining the objectives of the pan-European set. In addition, it was noted that it would be advisable to provide also guidance for implementing C&I for SFM at national level. Furthermore, it was emphasised that the pan-European criteria and indicators set is only one of the SFM tools and that this should be taken into account when the other tools are discussed.
- **Revision of the set:** The majority of the participants widely acknowledged the need for revising the pan-European C&I due to various challenges associated with the current use and implementation of the C&I (e.g. emerging new issues and policy developments, lack of data for some of the indicators, suitability for an assessment of SFM, overburdening in reporting duties, lack of cross-sectoral communication). This should go hand in hand with developing updated guidelines to improve both data collection and interpretation. Preferably, the criteria should remain unchanged since they are established in the currently negotiated legally binding agreement on forests in Europe and provide the conceptual frame for SFM. Furthermore, the revision of the indicators should be considered very carefully in terms of the different levels of advancement of the countries. It also noted that the indicators were developed also to monitor

implementation of the commitments made during the MCPFE process (MCPFE declarations and resolutions), and this should be taken also into consideration.

- **Build bridges to other sectors:** Most of the participants agreed that the set is not well known outside the forestry society and it needs active interventions outside the forest sector. It was recommended to find a common ground and communicate and explain forest sector concepts to the other sectors (e.g. sustainable forest management vs. ecosystem approach or forest functions vs. ecosystem services). Moreover, it is important to develop C&I tools and information materials for the different audiences and different sectors. The need for develop the forest indicator partnership was also strongly underscored.

Outlook for further research

The presentation and the followed discussion on the outlook for further research and development of the pan-European C&I for SFM concerned mainly the following aspects:

- Composite indicators (e.g. aggregating sub-indicators/parameters) and their potential role in addressing specific policy challenges
- Congruent indicator sets (e.g. compare and contrast sectoral/cross-sectoral C&I sets) and transmission of C&I applications on different levels
- Exploring mechanisms and stimulating debates on assessment procedures for SFM (including indicators for impact assessments)
- Process of C&I revision, mainly in relation to stakeholder participation, political and social aspects of C&I development and potential instruments for C&I development and revision
- Towards a new logical framework, incorporating inter-sectoral concepts , clearly defined targets and goals before preceding data collection and well-established linkages between quantitative and qualitative indicators