REPORT ON WORKSHOPS TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL REPORTING IN SUPPORT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NON-LEGALLY BINDING INSTRUMENT ON ALL TYPES OF FORESTS

I. INTRODUCTION

In May 2007, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) adopted the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI), also commonly known as the “Forest Instrument”. This represented significant international consensus to boost the implementation of sustainable forest management (SFM), and thus maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations. More specifically the purpose of the Forest Instrument (UNFF A/RES/62/98) is:

- To strengthen political commitment and action for SFM at all levels to implement effectively SFM of all types of forests and to achieve the shared Global Objectives on Forests
- To enhance the contribution of forests to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), in particular with respect to poverty eradication and environmental sustainability;
- To provide a framework for national action and international cooperation.

The successful implementation of the Forest Instrument requires improved national reporting by countries to help assess progress, identify needs, and to promote a more effective sharing of experiences and best practices. Many countries are already implementing, at least some of the policy measures adopted in the Instrument, but without deliberately linking their activities to implementation of the Forest Instrument due to lack of sufficient knowledge of the Instrument. Awareness raising and capacity building at the country level are therefore crucial. Stakeholders at national level need to gain a better understanding of the purpose and objectives of the Forest Instrument and of its usefulness in achieving progress in their efforts to sustainably manage their forest resources. In response to these challenges the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFFS) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) are implementing complementary projects aimed at assisting developing countries and countries with economies in transition to strengthen their capacity to report to the UNFF on progress made in the implementation of the Forest Instrument at the tenth and eleventh sessions of the UNFF in 2013 and 2015 respectively. The projects consist of two main components namely:

1. Capacity building for a broader range of countries through regional workshops; and
2. More in-depth assistance to a smaller set of countries that demonstrate a strong interest in implementing, monitoring and reporting on the Forest Instrument.

The first component on capacity building focuses on the problem of lack of information and knowledge about the Forest Instrument and how to approach its implementation, monitoring and reporting. This has been addressed through the development of a capacity building module for the implementation of the forest instrument and awareness raising through regional capacity building workshops based on the capacity building module.
This report provides a summary of the main outcomes of the five regional capacity building workshops for Asia Pacific, East and Southern Africa, and West and Central Africa, Central and Western Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean regions. The workshops were jointly organised and implemented by the UNFF Secretariat and FAO.

2. CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOPS

Between October 2011 and April 2012, five regional capacity building workshops were held with UNFF focal points, National Forest Programme focal points and FRA correspondents of selected countries. The workshops focused on enhancing the focal points’ understanding of the Forest Instrument and of the importance of its implementation at country level. Workshop participants also discussed and contributed to the refinement of the reporting format/template.

Objectives of the workshops

The overall objectives of the workshops were:

- To provide participants with the essential tools to better understand the purpose and goals of the Forest Instrument and its usefulness to countries as a framework for streamlining and coordinating their efforts to achieve sustainable forest management;
- To discuss and improve the reporting format to be used for reporting to UNFF 10 and 11 in a participatory and transparent manner.

The specific objectives were to:

- Increase awareness on the NLBI and its importance and usefulness to countries
- Increase number of countries systematically implementing the NLBI
- Increase the number of countries reporting on progress in achieving the NLBI and the four Global Objectives on Forests
- Provide a coordinated basis for reporting progress to UNFF and other international forestry-related processes

Organization of the workshops

Each of the workshops consisted of five capacity building sessions that were presented in two major parts. The first, which covered the initial two days and consisted of four sessions, addressed the strengthening of the capacity of countries to implement the forest instrument, focusing on the following themes:

- Introduction to the Forest Instrument,
- Why should countries implement the Forest Instrument?
- Approaches to the implementation of the Forest Instrument and

Each of the first four sessions was divided into three parts: presentations, group exercises and interactive discussions of issues arising from the presentations and exercises. The final day was dedicated to session five on improving reporting on the Forest Instrument, with particular emphasis on refining the reporting template, a closing session on workshop conclusions and follow-up. The workshops were facilitated by two consultants, Peter Gondo and Jorge Illueca with support from experts from both FAO and UNFFS. To assist the participants in their deliberations, several documents were provided for their consideration, which are listed in Appendix 2. Detailed workshop reports for each workshop have already been produced and circulated.
Participation

In total the five workshops were attended by 98 experts from 60 countries distributed as shown in Table 1 below. The workshops were also attended by 16 additional experts drawn mainly from FAO regional offices and partner organisations that included GIZ, UNEP and the African Forest Forum.

Table 1: Countries that participated by region

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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Asia and Pacific Region</th>
<th>Eastern and southern Africa</th>
<th>West and Central Africa</th>
<th>Central and Western Asia Region</th>
<th>Latin America and the Caribbean</th>
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<td>Participants</td>
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<td>25 experts</td>
<td>14 experts</td>
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3. The Main results and outcomes

3.1 “Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests”

Some of the participants noted that the name and nature of the Forest Instrument does not evoke a sense of urgency or seriousness. Some stakeholders and governments tend to give it low priority since it is voluntary and non-legally binding. However, many other participants, especially from East and Southern Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, noted that although the instrument is non-legally binding most of the provisions of the Instrument are already legally binding at national level and in some regional treaties such as the SADC Protocol on Forests.

3.2 Knowledge base of the participants in the different regions

Very few of the participants who attended the workshops in all the regions were familiar with the Forest Instrument, the UNFF and its work. This was particularly the case amongst the participants from Asia and the Pacific and Central and Western Asia. The lack of awareness of the Forest Instrument at national level therefore emerged as the major reason for low level of implementation and under reporting on progress on implementation of the forest Instrument. Consequently a common
recommendation, from experts from all the five workshops, is the need for the development of a communication strategy targeting all forest stakeholders using various communication tools such as discussion groups, capacity building, workshops and seminars, meetings, public festivals, the production of brochures and newspapers, dissemination through the media and pilot projects. They recommended that a dissemination strategy for reaching out to local communities be prepared, including in local languages. They all noted that as long as the Forest Instrument is not known within the countries, amongst the key stakeholders, implementation of the Instrument is not likely to take place. The current situation where knowledge of the Forest Instrument is limited to a few who are directly involved in the policy dialogue (Negotiators in New York and the Heads of Forest departments/offices in the different countries) is not desirable.

3.3 Importance of the Forest Instrument for national action

Participants in all the workshops agreed that the workshops had effectively demonstrated to them the importance of the forest instrument and the benefits that it could generate for their countries. Some of the most commonly cited benefits included *inter alia*:

- Strengthening political will in the countries for working towards SFM,
- Provide decision-makers with a more effective over-arching framework for achieving sustainable forest management
- Raising the profile of forests at national level including integration into national development plans
- Providing a framework for identifying areas of national forest programmes that need strengthening;
- Improving cross-sectoral coordination, including by establishing synergies and linkages outside the forest sector,
- Reverse forest degradation and deforestation and increase the area of protected forests,
- Improving the livelihoods of rural and forest dependent communities,
- Increasing mobilisation of funding from different sources, including private sector investments and forest-related public financing, as well as from multilateral and bilateral donors.

Furthermore, the workshop exercises were considered helpful in clarifying the possible steps and actions that can be taken to operationalize the forest instrument. Given that the adoption of the Forest Instrument represents a move by the international community from policy-making to implementation of sustainable forest management measures at national and international levels following years of policy dialogues, it is imperative that the UNFFS and other Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) members prioritise raising awareness on the Forest Instrument among member countries especially developing countries.

3.4 Pilot projects experiences

The experiences of the Pilot countries Ghana, Liberia, Philippines and Nicaragua proved to be very valuable as they provided the participants with insights and examples of how to implement the Forest Instrument. The Representatives from the pilot countries were able to share both the challenges and benefits and opportunities that they faced during implementation. The experiences ranged from how to raise awareness amongst all stakeholders, the benefits of conducting an inventory of on-going forest initiatives, to the advantages of building on on-going initiatives and using the national policy measures of the Forest Instrument to assess the strengths and weaknesses of national forest programmes. In this regard it was recommended by most participants that the experiences of the pilot countries be documented and shared with other UNFF members at UNFF10. In this regard it is
recommended that UNFFS and FAO prepare a special report on lessons learnt from the pilot countries to UNFF 10.

3.5 Capacity building Needs
Most of the participants noted that the capacity building workshops had helped them understand what Forest Instrument and the benefits that could accrue to the countries from implementation of the Instrument. To this end there was a call for capacity building assistance especially in raising awareness at national level, conducting the inventory of on-going activities and assessment of the current status in relation to the NLBI national policies and measures and reporting. It was noted during the five workshops that in order to effectively report on progress in the implementation of the Forest Instrument it is desirable for countries to follow a deliberate and systematic approach to implementation of the Forest Instrument. In this regard capacity building support should be targeted at the following:

1. Raising awareness about the Forest Instrument and of the benefits of implementing it among a wider range of stakeholders within the country;
2. Assessing the current situation of the country with respect to the 25 national policies and measures of the Instrument to create a baseline and to identify priority actions to strengthen the national forest programme;
3. Monitoring progress as a basis for reporting;

These capacity building areas and support for reporting can provide a basis for follow up support activities to be given to developing countries under the current pilot projects and in future

3.6 New Reporting template
a) Streamlining reporting

During the five workshops the draft reporting template was reviewed by the participants. Valuable feedback and guidance for improving the template and improving reporting was received from the participants. Firstly all the participants acknowledged the importance of reporting on progress towards achieving the goals of sustainable forest management. They noted however that this would increase the reporting burden on countries hence there was need to streamline the reporting with existing reporting to forestry and other related processes to reduce this burden. In this regard they welcomed the use of FRA, CBD and ITTO indicators among others. In order to avoid duplication of effort the pre-filling of the template with already available data e.g. from FRA was welcomed by most participants

b) National reports should meet both national and international reporting needs

Some of the participants noted that for the national reports to be useful it was important that they generate data that is useful both at national and international level. In particular the national reports should provide countries with useful information on progress they are making towards attaining national forest development objectives including the objectives of sustainable forest management as well as helping them identify areas needing urgent attention.

c) Synchronisation of reporting

In order to avoid duplication and to take advantage of existing reporting frameworks there is need to synchronise the production of national reports to UNFF with on-going reporting processes such as the FRA. This will enable the countries to use the FRA reports and then only add the additional
information required for UNFF reporting. In this regard the future reporting frequency and timing for UNFF should be adjusted accordingly.

d) **Inter-sectoral data collection**

Whilst the need to report on the contribution of forests towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is appreciated most of the participants noted that the data required (especially on poverty reduction and livelihoods) is not found in the Public Forest administrations but is scattered in different ministries and departments. This will present a challenge in data collection due to difficulties associated with inter-sectoral coordination. To overcome some of these challenges it was suggested to that the Forestry agencies (as the lead institutions) should establish an inter-agency or inter-ministerial task force to facilitate the data collection. It was also emphasized that most of the data may not be available for reporting to UNFF10 but there is need to make a start and have as much of the information available for reporting to UNFF 11. It is recommended that to get an informed understanding of how feasible reporting on the MDGs is, and using the whole reporting template, UNFFS and FAO should use the pilot countries and the countries that have expressed interest to get support under the current projects to undertake a test run in reporting to UNFF 10. The results together with comparisons with reports from non-project countries should help the CPF and member states make an informed decision. The basis for this has already been established since all the pilot project countries volunteered (in Accra) to use their project teams to prepare their national reports to UNFF 10 in 2013.

e) **Support for reporting**

Whilst reporting is voluntary and the responsibility of national governments, there is need to provide support to countries for reporting. During the workshops some participants from all the regions but especially from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean noted that Forest departments do not have adequate financial resources to collect the required data for reporting. In this regard there was a request for UNFF to consider providing developing countries financial support for reporting to the tune of $5,000 to $10,000. This could be used for example to support the data collection from different sources by a consultant or through the inter-agency task force suggested in (c) above. This would not be unique to UNFF reporting as other forest related international processes e.g. the UNFCCC use a similar approach to support production of national communication reports by developing countries.

There was also a request that UNFF and FAO should consider availing technical support staff that will provide technical assistance and guidance to countries, upon request, in the production of national reports. Such staff should be readily available and accessible to countries.

f) **Strengthening the knowledge and role UNFF focal points**

During the workshops it was apparent that very few of the countries had submitted national reports to the UNFF. Even fewer participants had participated in production of a national report. In this regard it was recommended that the role of the UNFF focal points could be strengthened by helping define clear terms of reference (TORs) for UNFF focal points and FRA correspondents that would provide guidance on implementation and reporting on the NLBI. This could be supported by training of focal points in reporting and implementation.
4. FUTURE ACTIONS
A number of countries represented at the workshops expressed their interest and willingness to participate in the current projects on capacity building and reporting with support from FAO and the UNFFS respectively. Some of the countries have since formally submitted their requests or expression of interest. These include China, India, Nigeria, Mongolia, Swaziland, Senegal, Togo, and Zambia. Many of the participating countries also indicated their willingness to produce national reports if they received support. These include, inter alia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, China, India, South Africa, Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Philippines, Nicaragua, Liberia, Mexico and Brazil. It is recommended that the UNFFS and FAO should take of the awareness created through the capacity building workshops and build on the momentum to support developing countries to implement the Forest Instrument in order to have a basis for informed reports and assessment of the effectiveness of the Forest Instrument and the current international arrangement of forests as a whole at UNFF 11. It is imperative to have as many countries implement the Forest Instrument as possible otherwise the assessment in 2015 will be based on a very weak base.

5. CONCLUSION
One of the major outcomes of the capacity building workshops is that despite the adoption of the Forest Instrument in 2007 very few developing countries stakeholders are aware of the Instrument. Although many countries are already implementing some of the policy measures adopted in the Instrument, but without deliberately linking their activities to implementation of the Forest Instrument due to lack of sufficient knowledge of the Instrument, there is need for the UNFFS and CPF to mount a massive awareness raising campaign. This should be followed by a deliberate Forest Instrument implementation drive building on the lessons learnt from the pilot projects and emphasizing the benefits that have been identified through the capacity building workshops. Finally even though reporting is on a voluntary basis, The UNFFS should consider providing support to developing countries for production of national reports as these are of use to both the reporting countries and the international community.
Appendix 1: Main Workshop Documents

1. UNFF Secretariat and FAO, Programme of Work.
3. UNFF Secretariat, Strengthening national reporting in support of the implementation of the forest instrument (5 July 2011).
6. UNFF draft reporting template