

Using Criteria and Indicators Processes to Report on the Proposals for Action

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Summary

The Plan of Action agreed to by countries at the first formal session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) specifies that countries will, on a voluntary basis, report progress towards the implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IPF/IFF) proposals for action (UNFF, 2001, para. 9). This paper explores how countries might begin to satisfy this task through the use of the framework provided by Criteria and Indicators (C&I) processes. The general advantages of C&I for UNFF's monitoring, assessment and reporting functions is discussed, followed by an in-depth case study of how C&I can be used to report on a particular proposal for action. To ensure a fair analysis, a proposal for action was selected that at first glance seemed neither particularly suited nor unsuited for assessment by C&I processes. Our conclusion is that *many* indicators from three major C&I processes (i.e., the Pan-European Process; the Montreal Process; and the ITTO Process) are useful and instructive for monitoring, assessing and reporting on the selected proposal for action. These findings suggest UNFF participants should more closely consider the utility of C&I processes for tracking progress in implementing the proposals for action before expending time and energy developing a new and potentially unnecessary reporting framework.

As UNFF participants discuss with one another their progress in implementing IPF and IFF commitments, it makes sense for the discussion to proceed in a complementary fashion, with participants using monitoring, assessment and reporting frameworks that are mutually recognizable and intelligible. This approach is superior to one where participants adopt unilateral presentation strategies. The latter is less likely to help participants compare the successes and shortcomings of their implementation efforts.

Another aim of UNFF – one addressed at this meeting – is how to assess progress towards sustainable forest management. Indeed in IPF and IFF, participants agreed that the cumulative effect of taking action to implement IPF and IFF proposals for action was progress towards sustainable forest management. Building our dialogue around a common framework (Criteria & Indicators) enables us to abide by IPF/IFF commitments, while providing the flexibility to address sovereign governments' national priorities in that context.

Finally, UNFF is required to assess its own progress. UNFF's greatest contribution to the advancement of sustainable forest management will likely be the facilitation and coordination of countries', regions', CPF's, and other international actors' implementation of the proposals for action. C&I represent an efficient and effective means for assessing UNFF's success (or lack of success) in moving forward these aims.

Practical Reasons for Using C&I to Report on Implementation

The commitment to monitor, assess and report on the status of forests using criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management is already widely accepted by countries around the world. Countries use C&I for their own purposes and in response to international organizational commitments; the latter are largely of a voluntary nature. Moreover, though there are around nine different major C&I processes, there is congruence among these processes. Consider, for example, the similar themes addressed in the various C&I processes' *criteria*. The Pan-European Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management (MCPFE), the Montreal Process for Criteria and Indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests (MP), and the International Tropical Timber Organization's Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests (ITTO) are three major C&I processes whose six or seven criteria are nearly identical. Table 1 shows that every theme covered in the MCPFE criteria is also covered in the MP and ITTO criteria. [One insignificant difference is that different C&I processes may assign different numbers to particular criteria (e.g., MCPFE and ITTO list legal and institutional aspects of sustainable forest management as Criterion 1; this aspect is addressed by Criterion 7 in the MP process).]

Table 1: Three C&I Processes that Address the Same Criteria

Relevant Criteria from C&I Processes	Common Areas Addressed by C&I Processes						
	Legal and Institutional Aspects	Forest Health	Conservation of Biodiversity	Productive Capacity of Forests	Soil and Water Resources	Global Carbon Cycles	Socio-Economic Aspects
MCPFE Criterion	1	2	4	3	5	1	6
MP Criterion	7	3	1	2	4	5	6
ITTO Criterion	1	3	2,5	2,4	6	7	7

MCPFE = Pan-European Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management

MP = Montreal Process for Criteria and Indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests

ITTO = International Tropical Timber Organization's Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests

That the criteria across different C&I processes are so similar is no coincidence. It indicates that the founders of the different C&I processes were aware of one another's deliberations and that participants mostly agreed about what major forest-related issues were required in C&I processes.

The fact that C&I processes cover the same sets of concerns is very advantageous for the exchange, comparison, and analysis of forest-related data in the UNFF. Briefly, C&I can serve a dual role as a framework for examining the status of national and regional efforts to implement the proposals for action as well as a framework to discuss the status of forests, generally. Moreover, C&I are more than merely lists of trends and conditions that participants are expected to monitor, assess and report to one another. As *processes*, C&I are institutions that foster participation, knowledge-accumulation, and informed decision-making at various scales of human association – from the local level to

the international level. C&I are collaborative mechanisms that call for broad participation, from a variety of stakeholders, in determining what forest-related data are collected, how they are interpreted and disseminated, and how information about forest-related trends and conditions is used to make management decisions. C&I processes are also “learning” institutions whose members are actual users of criteria and indicators, who refine and improve these tools through experience, and who share their wisdom with other C&I participants.

C&I processes reflect lengthy negotiations and consensus-building among and within countries about measures (both quantitative and qualitative) to monitor, assess and report on a wide array of forest values. This process has been expensive and required substantial institutional change.

The prospect of having to embark on new multilateral negotiations to generate universally accepted reporting criteria for proposals for action should give countries pause. Before embarking on new negotiations, the international community should carefully consider how existing C&I frameworks might be used for tracking, analyzing, and reporting on proposals for action in the UNFF context.

Past investment in developing criteria and indicators, however, is not a sufficient rationale for justifying their use in this new context. We must also be sure that C&I are a useful tool for reporting progress in implementing proposals for action.

An Example of How C&I Are Relevant to Proposals for Action

It is beyond the scope of this brief paper to evaluate *all* proposals for action vis-à-vis *all* C&I processes. Instead we focus on demonstrating that C&I processes can be useful for monitoring, assessing and reporting on actors’ progress in implementing an appropriately selected, single proposal for action. By appropriately selected we mean that we avoid selection bias. To illustrate, we could argue that one or more of the indicators from Montreal Process Criterion 7 is useful for reporting on one or more of the proposals for action. This would constitute selection bias because MP Criterion 7 deals explicitly with legal and institutional aspects of forest management. Obviously, Criterion 7 is germane to the many proposals for action which deal with laws and institutions.

It would be more convincing to provide evidence that MP criteria *other than Criterion 7* are suitable for this task. With this rationale in mind, we selected a proposal for action that is typical in that it calls for multiple commitments by countries in a single proposal. More importantly, we chose a proposal for action that we believe to be a priority for many nations, for it considers the problems of balancing supply and demand for wood products and assuring a sustainable yield of wood to meet future demand. The proposal for action in question is IPF 28a,¹ which states:

The Panel urged countries to assess long-term trends in their supply and demand for wood, and to consider actions to promote the sustainability of their wood supply and their means for meeting demand, with a special emphasis on

¹ In fact, there are other proposals for action that closely resemble IPF 28a in substance, and hence, the analysis presented here is generalizable beyond a test of C&I for reporting on 28a. Other relevant proposals for action include IFF 17a; IFF 121a, c, and d; and IFF 122a, b, c, and d (see Commonwealth of Australia, 2001: 14; 18).

investment in sustainable forest management and the strengthening of institutions for forest resource and forest plantations management.

There are at least three components to proposal for action 28a; we refer to these components as tasks. The three tasks are:

- assess long-term trends in the supply and demand for wood (28a.1)
- consider actions to promote the sustainability of wood supply for meeting demand with a special emphasis on investment in sustainable forest management (28a.2)
- strengthen institutions for forest resource and forest plantations management (28a.3)

The logical next question is whether indicators within the various C&I processes provide the information needed for monitoring, assessing and reporting on progress in implementing this particular proposal for action. Again, for reasons of scope, we do not explore linkages between all of the C&I processes and IPF 28a. Instead, we examine the relevance of three widely used C&I processes: MCPFE, MP, and ITTO.

We found that many indicators from these C&I processes were useful for monitoring, assessing and reporting on IPF 28a.1 (Table 2), 28a.2 (Table 3) and 28a.3 (Table 4). Notably, useful indicators include, but are not confined to, so-called “institutional indicators” (i.e., indicators that prescribe activities for institutions to perform).

Table 2: IPF 28a.1 and Relevant MCPFE, MP and ITTO Criteria and Indicators

	IPF 28a.1 Assess long-term trends in the supply and demand for wood		
Relevant C&I	MCPFE Quantitative Indicator 1.1 Area of forest and other wooded land and changes in area (classified, if appropriate, according to forest and vegetation type, ownership structure, age structure, origin of forest)	MP 2a & 2c Area of forest land and net area of forest land available for timber production; the area and growing stock of plantations of native and exotic species	ITTO 2.1 Extent (area) and percentage of total land area under: a) natural forest; b) plantation forest; c) permanent forest estate, and; d) comprehensive integrated land-use plans.
Relevant C&I	MCPFE Quantitative Indicator 1.2 Changes in: a) total volume of the growing stock; mean volume of the growing stock on forest land (classified, if appropriate, according to different vegetation zones or site classes); c) age structure or appropriate diameter distribution classes	MP 2b Total growing stock of both merchantable and non-merchantable tree species on forest land available for timber production	ITTO 2.3 Extent (area) and percentage of total land area under each forest type (where appropriate, classified by species composition)
Relevant C&I	MCPFE Quantitative Indicator 3.1 Balance between growth and removals of wood over the past 10 years	MP 2d Annual removal of wood products compared to the volume determined to be sustainable	ITTO 4.2 Estimate of level of sustainable harvest for each main wood and non-wood forest product for each forest type
Relevant C&I		MP 6.1.c Supply and consumption of wood and non-wood products, including consumption per capita	ITTO 7.2 Quantity (volume) and value of wood and non-wood forest products traded in: (a) the domestic market, and (b) the international market

Several C&I indicators are relevant to assessing implementation of IPF 28a.1 (Table 2). Perhaps it is not surprising that C&I, many of which deal with “non-prescriptive” aspects of forests and forest management, are relevant to assessing this portion of IPF 28a because 28a.1 does not explicitly prescribe activities for institutions to perform. However, it may surprise some readers that several indicators from C&I processes are relevant to monitoring, assessing and reporting on IPF 28a.2 and 28a.3 – which in contrast to 28a.1 *are* normative², and *do* call for the creation of institutions (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3: IPF 28a.2 and Relevant MCPFE, MP and ITTO Criteria and Indicators

	IPF 28a.2 Consider actions to promote the sustainability of wood supply for meeting demand with a special emphasis on investments in sustainable forest management		
Relevant C&I	MCPFE Descriptive Indicator 6.2 Existence and capacity of an institutional framework to: develop and maintain efficient physical infrastructure to facilitate the supply of forest products	MP 7.2.d Extent to which the institutional framework supports the conservation and sustainable management of forests, including the capacity to: develop and maintain efficient physical infrastructure to facilitate the supply of forest products and services to support forest management	ITTO 1.4 Number and adequacy of institutions to support sustainable forest management
	MCPFE Descriptive Indicator 6.3 and 3.3 Existence of economic policy framework and financial instruments, and the extent to which it: ensures new investments in the forest sector to meet future demands; existence of economic policy framework and financial instruments, and the extent to which it: supports investment and taxation policies which recognize the long-term nature of investments in forestry; supports non-discriminatory trade policies for forest products	MP 7.3.a Extent to which the economic framework (economic policies and measures) supports the conservation and sustainable management of forests through: investments and taxation policies and regulatory environment which recognize the long-term nature of investments and permit the flow of capital in and out of the forest sector in response to market signals, non-market economic valuations, and public policy decisions in order to meet long-term demands of forest products and services	ITTO 1.3 Existence of economic instruments and other incentives to encourage sustainable forest management
Relevant C&I	MCPFE Descriptive Indicator 6.4 Existence of informational means to implement the policy framework, and the capacity to: develop and put into practice new improved technology; conduct market analysis to better fulfill the need of society	MP 7.5c New technologies and the capacity to assess the socio-economic consequences associated with the introduction of new technologies	ITTO 1.6 Existence and application of appropriate technology to practice sustainable forest management and the efficient processing and utilization of forest produce

² Certain IPF/IFF proposals for action are normative in that they call for countries to commit to particular substantive policy actions (right or moral actions) that would lead to change. This is true of most proposals for action, but as an illustration, consider e.g., the opening clause of IPF paragraph 46c: “the Panel urged countries to establish protected areas to safeguard forest and related ecosystems...” This clause is normative in two ways. First, it “urges” countries to do something. Second, the substance of the urging, itself, is normative because it infers that “protected areas” and “safeguarding forests and related ecosystems” are inherently right or good things.

Table 4: IPF 28a.3 and Relevant MCPFE, MP and ITTO Criteria and Indicators

	IPF 28a.3 Strengthen institutions for forest resource and forest plantations management		
Relevant C&I	MCPFE Descriptive Indicators 6.1 & 3.1 Existence of a legal/regulatory framework, and the extent to which it: provides for legal instruments to ensure development of the forest sector & encourages forest owners to practice environmentally sound forestry based on a forest management plan or equivalent guidelines	MP 7.1.b Extent to which the legal framework (laws, regulations, guidelines) and institutional framework support the conservation and sustainable management of forests, including the extent to which it: provides for periodic forest-related planning, assessment, and policy review that recognizes the range of forest values, including coordination with relevant sectors	ITTO 1.1.a Existence of a framework of laws, policies, and regulations to govern: national objectives for forest including production, conservation and protection
	MCPFE Descriptive Indicator 3.4 Existence of informational means to implement the policy framework, and the capacity to: improve technologies and plans based on proper forest inventories	MP 7.4b Capacity to measure and monitor changes in the conservation and sustainable management of forests, including: scope, frequency and statistical reliability of forest inventories, assessments, monitoring and other relevant information	ITTO 1.7 Capacity and mechanisms for planning sustainable forest management and for periodical monitoring, evaluation and feedback on progress
	MCPFE Quantitative Indicator 3.2 Percentage of forest area managed according to management plan or management guidelines		ITTO 4.4 & 4.8 Existence and implementation of (a) forest management plans, and (b) forest harvesting (operational) plans

IPF 28a.2 encourages countries to “consider actions to promote the sustainability of wood supply for meeting demand with a special emphasis on investments in sustainable forest management.” As Table 3 reveals, several MCPFE descriptive indicators are potentially useful for measuring IPF 28a.2 because they deal with institutional aspects of forest conservation and management. Moreover, Table 3 shows that the *indicators* used to measure sustainable wood supply and demand are *similar across C&I processes*.³ All three processes call for the evaluation of institutional frameworks, assessment of economic instruments, and appraisal of new technologies for promoting sustainable supply of and demand for forest products.

Note also that certain indicators used to measure IPF 28a.1 (Table 2) are useful for monitoring and assessing the implementation of 28a.2 and 28a.3 (Tables 3 and 4). To illustrate, indicator MP 2d (“annual removal of wood products compared to the volume determined to be sustainable”) is useful for measuring progress in implementing 28a.2 because MP 2d indicates whether countries’ actions are promoting a sustainable wood supply. This is the case because MP 2d requires countries to measure and report on annual removal of wood products (the numerator) versus the volume determined to be sustainable (the denominator). The resulting ratio should speak volumes about whether “actions” (i.e., actions in 28a.2) are or are not promoting a sustainable supply of wood. Similar arguments can be made for the usefulness of MCPFE Quantitative Indicator 3.1 and ITTO 4.2 in measuring implementation of proposal for action 28a.2.

³ In fact, the strong similarity among relevant indicators across C&I processes is evident in all three tables.

Not only do Tables 2, 3 and 4 exhibit the substantial degree to which C&I can be helpful for monitoring, assessing and reporting on proposals for action, they also underscore that so-called non-normative and non-institutional indicators are applicable for reporting on normative and institutional proposals for action. Note, for example, that MCPFE quantitative indicators are applicable for measuring both IPF 28a.1 and IPF 28a.3.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 also provide a new perspective on a recent assessment conducted by the MCPFE on the relationship between its work program and the institutional needs described in the IPF/IFF proposals for action. This assessment was presented at UNFF 1 in June, 2001 (*The MCPFE and the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action*) and includes a lengthy appendix correlating several of the IPF/IFF proposals for action with various MCPFE Work Programme elements. (Work programme elements are activities that MCPFE countries agreed to undertake beginning in the 1990s.) The MCPFE's appendix was very forthcoming in showing the lack of linkages between many proposals for action and the various Work Programmes of the Ministerial Conference. Indeed, IPF 28a is among the many blank cells in the MCPFE appendix, meaning that the MCPFE sees no clear links between its Work Programmes and proposal for action 28a (MCPFE, 2001: 29).

However, we *do* see that several MCPFE Pan-European Criteria and Indicators are *highly relevant* to IPF 28a, as shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4. Hence, it may be worthwhile for the MCPFE to explore not only the relationship between the MCPFE Work Programmes and the proposals for action (as was done in MCPFE, 2001), but also the relationship between its own Pan-European Criteria and Indicators and the proposals for action. Such a study is likely to demonstrate the usefulness of C&I processes for monitoring, assessing and reporting on proposals for action.

Purported Weaknesses of C&I for Reporting on Proposals for Action

The use of C&I to monitor, assess and report on countries' and other actors' implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action has not been analyzed in published or gray literatures. However, some forestry officials in different countries have expressed doubts about using C&I in the UNFF context. Perhaps these doubts represent a lack of understanding of the proposed approach outlined above. It has been suggested that many of the proposals for action deal with institutional dimensions of forest conservation and management and are normative. Hence, there is concern that C&I are inappropriate for monitoring, assessing and reporting on proposals for action because most C&I processes involve quantitative measures of forest conditions and forest production and are therefore not suitable for the qualitative assessment of institutional (i.e., governmental and policy) needs.

Some have implied that only a few indicators in any given C&I process are suitable for reporting on implementation of the proposals for action. For example, one suggestion we have heard is that of the 67 Montreal Process (MP) indicators, only the nineteen Criterion 7 indicators are relevant to the proposals for action since these indicators address institutional facets of forest management and conservation.

Our findings, however, do not support such narrow generalizations about the limits of C&I processes for examining, analyzing and reporting on implementation of the proposal

for action. As evidenced in Tables 2, 3, and 4, many indicators from C&I processes can provide useful direct or indirect measures of current implementation status.

C&I Processes as Frameworks for Assessing Progress

C&I processes are systematic means for monitoring, assessing and reporting on a wide array of forest-related modalities, addressing trends as varying as the condition of plantation forests and protected areas to the status of institutions required to manage these forests. This broad variety of concerns mirrors the breadth of concerns covered by the various IPF/IFF proposals for action. Moreover, there is great uniformity in the major categories of trends and conditions (criteria) that are monitored, assessed and reported across the various C&I processes (see Table 1, above).

But C&I are more than merely schemes for generating data on sustainable forest management. C&I processes are *institutions* that resemble the very institutions described in the proposals for action. As institutions, they are systems for sharing forest-related information; structures for building consensus about which forest-related trends and conditions to examine and appraise; arrangements for refining and improving monitoring, measurement and assessment methods; and means for fostering participation in forestry decision-making.

C&I institutions have already proven valuable for promoting collaboration and they have produced compatible reporting frameworks whose users hail from virtually every region of the world. Hence, they are promising for UNFF's needs, and in particular, as foundations for monitoring, assessing and reporting on the proposals for action. It is more cost-effective and practical to use C&I for this purpose than to invent a new reporting system. The latter alternative would require new negotiations and new compromises and it may yield a product that is inferior to the already-tested and already-useful C&I processes.

Finally, there is UNFF's short time horizon to consider. It is conceivable that UNFF 5 will arrive before countries agree on a new, uniform system for reporting on the proposals for action, not to mention pre-testing and refining such a system. Hence, not only are C&I processes cost-effective and practical for monitoring, assessing and reporting on the proposals for action, they are expedient.

Sources

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