

# **Minutes of the first meeting of the Advisory Group to Global Forest Resource Assessment Nairobi, Oct 16 to 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002**

## **1.0 Introduction**

The first meeting of the Advisory group to GFRA was jointly organized and hosted by FAO and UNEP at Nairobi from October 16 to 18<sup>th</sup>, 2002. FAO on request of its member countries organizes the Global Forest Resources Assessment (GFRA) and to implement this mandate, FAO regularly seeks broad guidance from a large number of national and international experts and agencies. The latest expert consultation, Kotka IV, was on "Global Forest Resources Assessments -linking national and international efforts" on 1-5 July 2002. It strongly recommended establishment of an advisory group to the GFRA process to provide detail technical guidance and to finalize specifications of future global forest resource assessments, in line with the discussions held at the 15th Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) in Rome in March 2001.

This Advisory group is informal in nature, but will be acknowledged and endorsed by the statutory bodies of FAO such as the Committee on Forestry (COFO). The group will be a long-term arrangement and it may consist of about twenty persons, selected to represent important forestry institutions and all regions. Annex 1 list the current members of the Advisory Group and indicates who were present at this first meeting. The group is tasked to review and make recommendations aimed to strengthen existing institutional networks, to make future forest resources assessments increasingly user-oriented, demand-driven, and to more closely link it with other international processes.

## **2.0 Objective of the first meeting**

The main objectives of the meeting were to provide advice on draft technical specification for the next global report on forest resources and to develop terms of reference and operational procedures for the Advisory Group (AG) as well as national correspondent to FRA process. The meeting also had an implicit purpose of developing a proposal for approval by COFO relating to establishment of the AG and defining its role and mandate for FRA process.

## **3.0 Implementation**

The three day meeting was organized and hosted jointly by FAO and UNEP. The work plan for the meeting was structured through eight agenda items and points to consider. Background documents/papers for agenda were developed and shared with the members before the meeting through email and website (<http://www.fao.org/forestry/AG-fra>) specially designed for the AG.

Twelve (Annex 1) of the sixteen members of the group came to Nairobi to attend the first meeting of the advisory group. In addition, one members (Rodney Keenan) participated by providing his comments on the agenda items through email. The meeting also benefited with active participation of four staff members of UNEP at Nairobi (Annex 1).

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Peter Holmgren, Senior Forest Officer, GFRA, FAO and facilitated by Mr. Kailash Govil, Forest Officer, GFRA, FAO. All members participated in all the discussions and were not sub-divided into discussion groups.

## **4.0 Proceedings**

The advisory group covered all the agenda items and provided its valuable inputs to FRA process. Following provides a brief summary of its deliberations and recommendations.

### **4.1 Agenda 1: Opening Ceremony**

Mr. Dan Claasson, Director, DEWA, UNEP, opened the first meeting of the Advisory Group to Global Forest Resource Assessment (GFRA). He informed Advisory Group about long association of UNEP and FAO and assured its enhanced continuance. He indicated immense potential of close partnership in future endeavors. Mr. Peter Holmgren thanked UNEP for jointly hosting the meeting at Nairobi and briefly explained the objectives of the first meeting. The members of AG approved proposal of the Mr. Peter Holmgren, FAO that being the first meeting of AG group, he works as its chairperson and Mr. Kailash Govil, FAO be the reporter for the meeting.

### **4.2 Agenda 2: Approval of the Agenda**

Mr. Peter Holmgren briefly explained the agenda to the members for their consideration. He stated that the main objectives of this meeting, apart from approving its own TOR and modalities for implementation, are defining the scope, concepts, process and implementation of next GFRA including selection of first set of global variables to initiate the iterative process for identification of global and complementary variables. Further, that the deliberations of the meeting will form the core of proposal for consideration of Committee on Forests (COFO) to specify its earlier (2001) resolution that mandates FRA to be “broad assessment”. After long fruitful discussion the AG approved the agenda with inclusion of role of regional initiatives in future GFRA.

### **4.3 Agenda 3: Information on Going Activities**

The AG was provided with two documents (Annex 3) to brief them on ongoing international activities related to GFRA process; final report on the second meeting on harmonization of “forest related definition” held in September, 2002 at FAO, and document on improved indicators for European countries under MCPFE, adopted on technical level during first week of October 2002. Mr. Holmgren, FAO explained various aspects of the first document while Mr. Ewald Rametsteiner, MCPFE, briefed the members on the second document.

### **4.4. Agenda 4: Process of FRA**

#### **Process**

Brief presentation of the background paper “Process of FRA 2005: Review of Sustainability” (Annex 4) laid foundation of the discussion on the process proposed for GFRA 2005. The AG had long and productive discussion on the subject.

There was a widely shared understanding that it is important to assess and evaluate progress towards SFM and that FRA is a technical process that provides verifiable results based on neutral facts. It was underscored that changes and trends over time should be assessed. While FRA should not venture into judgement that are political in nature but in reality it is difficult to demarcate this boundary where technical ends and political starts. Therefore, some judgement may fall in both categories. The AG felt that FRA should state facts in a way that may indicate or lead to a judgment but should not necessarily go for making judgement by itself. The group felt the review of sustainability is essential because it has the capacity to indicate what data necessary is missing. However, still bigger question is who should do it and what. The FRA may work with countries and then decide who should contribute (Independently or jointly) what to the proposed process.

The AG was in line with the thinking that in general different sets of variable (global, regional, and complimentary) are needed to review sustainability at different levels and scales, where the global variables are common across countries and complementary variables are unique to the countries and regional variables capture the commonality among countries at the regional level. The AG emphasized that the process proposed for identification of these sets of variables is not one time activity but it is an iterative process that only in the end leads to identified set of variables.

The AG considered the proposal as a process to implement the recommendations of Kotka IV to use framework of “Criteria” for the “broad assessments” under GFRA. The AG agreed with assessment process proposed in the background paper but felt that it may not always necessarily mean “FAO” implemented process. It was recommended that approach should be tested through pilot project before full implementation.

The AG advised that pilot studies be developed with countries, who are willing to undertake such studies, to evaluate the feasibility of the proposed methods, to provide necessary feed back for modification, and to help in formulation of detail guidelines for implementation. Further, FRA should consider introduction of national demand driven country capacity building element for such assessment process that leads to review of sustainability of forest resources. The AG felt that pilot studies should also indicate what should be the role of FRA and what should be the supporting role of the countries and other agencies in the proposed process. These studies should also indicate how the results should be presented.

Further, the GFRA should be sensitive and should respect the role of different international agencies and it should develop synergies by developing joint working arrangements with them. The group felt that the validated and harmonised database of GFRA should continue to be the core of GFRA process.

### **Time Frame**

The AG agreed with the timing of next GFRA in the year 2005 as it will satisfy needs of UNFF’s demand of a report in 2005 on the progress towards sustainable forest management in all the countries as well as that of SOFO 2005 of FAO and next GEO (UNEP) report due in 2006/2007. The group observed that the report also meets the need of five year reporting envisaged in the UN Millennium Declaration. The AG suggested to consider development of some thematic reports for 2005 like on forest degradation etc.

The AG advised FRA to develop closer ties with UNEP especially in the field where UNEP is strong like Remote Sensing (DEWA) and biodiversity assessment (WCMC) with FAO providing overall coordination and maintaining links with countries through network of NCs. It felt that “convergence” rather than “harmonization” is the current priority for the proposed process.

The AG understood that the GFRA 2005 based on the new approach may not be a complete report but that GFRA 2010 may be the first complete report based on the proposed approach.

### **National Correspondents**

The AG envisions National Correspondents (NC) as an existing living organisation that needs continuous organization, monitoring and human resource development. It suggested development of a website exclusively on NCs to discuss proposal or to convey message. It also suggested feasibility of regular web based FRA newspaper targeted towards NCs.

The AG endorsed a proposal that the national governments be requested to renew or update the particulars of the national correspondents. Further that regional / global meetings of NCs should be organized to expose them in the proposed process and to seek their suggestion to improve it.

The AG advised that NCs be asked to revisit the questionnaire used by GFRA 2000 to suggest changes if any to meet needs of GFRA 2005. Further that it time that FRA 2000 be reviewed in the context of current international processes and initiatives to indicate their current and expected (forest information) needs at global level.

The AG suggested that the proposed NC network be utilised to get feedback on technical process and that “interviews” of major “stakeholders” be conducted to check whether GFRA is proceeding in the right direction and to make any timely modification, if it is necessary. The questionnaire for these efforts may have two parts; one relating to the past (FRA 2000) process and the other focusing on the proposed process for GFRA 2005.

### **Agenda 5.0 Conceptual Frameworks and Global Variables**

Brief presentation of two background papers (Annex 5) triggered very lively technical debate on issues like naturalness, management objective based classification and global variables. The AG acknowledged the usefulness of the concepts under the over all framework of “Criteria” of various “Criteria and Indicator” processes.

The AG saw that the designation of forests for specific purposes rather classification of forest based on management objectives was better proposition to relate data sets to the framework of “Criteria” under various “C&I” processes. The AG advised to examine its links with other initiatives like “land cover” classification, “harmonization of forest related definitions agreed by various governments and international processes, and to consider collapsing few of them into single class with the ultimate target to provide knowledge to help various forest related political processes.

The AG advised to develop more detailed specification of the proposed global variables including supporting definitions, motivation and utility in assessing related criterion. The AG

cautioned that while doing so FRA should follow and respect related international processes rather than becoming a process in itself as envisioned at various international forums. Simply stated in other words, GFRA should take the “common criteria” as such and identify common “global variables” across various processes on which FRA can provide information. Further, the AG emphasized that list of global variable may be kept as small as possible and that any particular global variable may be used with more than one criterion.

The AG visualised that complementary variables are essential to better explain the sustainability of forest but observed that the set of such variables may be same or different at national and regional levels. Further that the Global or regional review of sustainability is not necessarily aggregation of national review of sustainability of forest resources but could be done at different levels. The AG re-emphasized the need of pilot studies to test feasibility, suggest modifications and provide necessary information to develop detailed guidelines for implementation.

### **Global Variables**

The AG members felt that the state of forest against the criterion of “Extent of Forest Resource” may be reviewed through the status and change in the global variable “forest cover” broken down into existing FRA classification (closed, open etc.), since there is no accepted global “forest type classification”. The AG also considered possibility of providing area of “unique” forest types in a country and or following some special theme like “mangroves” and “mountain forests”. The AG felt that the status and change in two other global variables “growing stock” and “conversion (forest areas) to other landuse” should also be used to help in reviewing the state of forest against the criterion.

The AG felt that the status and change in “carbon stocks” have the capacity to review the state of forest against the sub-criteria of “Contribution to Global Carbon Cycle”. However, they advised to restrict the assessment to “carbon stocks” to above ground tree biomass only.

The AG members saw the rationale of using three global variables (area affected by fire, insects and diseases) to review the state of forest against the criteria of “forest Ecosystem Health and Vitality”. They advised to include one more global variable “area affected by grazing” under this criterion.

The AG felt that following global variable will help in reviewing the state of forests against the “biodiversity” conservation criterion; (a) Number of endangered species, (b) Area under biodiversity conservation - broken down into IUCN categories, (c) Number of tree species in forests, (d) area of forest by different classes.

Several alternative concepts were discussed for specification of the classes for (d) above like (i) area of forest by designation (area of forest under biodiversity conservation, area of forest for protective (soil and water) purposes, area of forest for production, rest of the forest area that is under multiple use) and (ii) area of forest by classes of naturalness. The AG advised that this classification should consider to include both formal and informal (voluntary) allocation of forests area under protection. The AG also welcomed the second approach suggested to combine classes in order to arrive around four classes in total. Further that the area under indigenous and exotic species plantations should be reported separately under protective and production categories of forest.

The AG members observed that that two global variables “removal of wood” and “removal of NWFP” have the capacity to help in reviewing the state of forests for the criteria of “Production” but they did not see any additional utility in using global variable on “forest area under different categories”. However, “increment” measured through two successive growing stock assessments was seen as useful but there were doubts about availability of full information on this variable.

The AG members felt that the global variable “area under protective (soil and water) function” has the potential to review the state of forest against the criterion of “Protective” function but FRA does not have detailed specification for this global variable. Therefore, the AG suggested that the MCPFE’s specification in “MCPFE Assessment Guidelines for Protected and Protective Forest and Other wooded Land in Europe” may be a good starting point for this global variable and should include both formal and informal (voluntary) allocation of area for protective functions.

The AG felt that division of “Social –Economic Function” criterion into two (Social Function and Economic Function) functions does not provide any additional utility and it should be reviewed as one criterion. The AG group observed that use of global variables (a) Number and Area of sites managed for recreation, spiritual and cultural, (b) Value of primary production, and (c) Employment through primary activities” have necessary potential to contribute to the review of state of the forest against the criterion.

## **Agenda 6. Format of GFRA 2005**

A brief presentation of the draft framework (Annex 6) for GFRA 2005 initiated the discussion. The AG desired to establish a clear relationship between Part I (Review of Sustainability), Part II (GFRA) and Part III (Regional FRA).

The AG decided to organise the information in Part I into five main blocks

- Rationale and Approach to Assessment
- Global Variables
- Assessing State of forest against Criterion
- Global Issues
- Conclusion and Recommendation with tables for global variables.

The information on complementary variables may be provided in Part III. The AG advised to follow accepted region boundaries based continents and not the political boundaries covered under different C&I processes for making regional assessments.

The AG was of the view that Part I should focus on global review of sustainability of forest resources based on the identified variables and their assessment against the “criteria” and demonstrate linkages with regional and international processes. The report should explicitly mention that where it has failed due to unavailability of data. Furthermore, some global issues of high policy relevance should be taken up and discussed for example, illegal harvesting, voluntary protection of forests, and livelihood dependency etc.

The AG also felt that regions should be closely involved and be given an opportunity to work in partnership with FAO. For this purpose, COFO may consider sending strong signal to regional institutions like Regional Forestry Commissions.

## **Agenda 7. Independent Remote Sensing**

The background paper (annex 7) on the subject provided the basis for discussion on the subject. The AG felt that the independent remote sensing together with consistent ground sample will provide information that helps in developing time series for study of trends, calibrating national data, and in developing links with landuse by other sectors. Further that it may help in conducting some thematic studies like fragmentation, and degradation etc. The AG advised to revisit the sampling design to introduce stratification. The AG also suggested that remote sensing “jointly” with countries is better than “independent” remote sensing. The AG appreciated the recent initiatives to work in partnership with UNEP for remote sensing based assessments.

## **Agenda 8. TOR and Workplan for the Advisory Group**

The AG agreed with the contents in Annex 8 on the draft TOR, operational mechanism and work plan but suggested to redraft it to focus more on its mandate, organization, expected outcomes, and duration. Annex 8 It also advised that at least one member from Latin-American region be included in the group to complete the global representation. The AG made a minor modification in its operational mechanism that is the chairperson should be elected at the start of its meetings and he/she will then continue till the selection of next chairperson in its next meeting. This change was considered necessary as it is difficult to accept the chairpersonship for the next meeting in advance due various uncertainties. The contents of Annex 8 that was considered and approved as above by the AG are attached with these minutes as Annex 2a, 2b and 2c for ready reference.

The AG considered that next meeting just after COFO will be useful to understand and implement the directions given by COFO. It expects by that time detail specification on proposed global variables may be available for finalization. If possible progress report on pilot studies may also be available for its consideration. Further, that one more meeting at the end of the year may be necessary to go through the results of the pilot and special studies to finalise the method of assessment and draft format for GFRA 2005.

The AG suggested that separate website may be established for National correspondents and AG members with supporting email groups for their internal discussions. It also advised to commission few special studies as and when necessary to improve the quality of GFRA 2005.

## **9. Concluding Session**

Mr. B. M. Taal of UNEP chaired the concluding session and thanked the members for very productive discussion and practical recommendations. He thanked FAO for taking initiative to request UNEP to host the meeting. He recalled past association and hoped that it will further improve during the process. Mr. Holmgren, FAO thanked UNEP for hosting the meeting and conveyed his thanks to Ms. Pravina Patel, UNEP for taking care of logistical details.

## Annex 1: Members of AG to GFRA (in alphabetical order with remarks on attending the first meeting)

	Name	Email	Institution / Country	Address and Telephone
1	<b>Adrian Newton</b>  (Attended the meeting)	<a href="mailto:adrian.newton@unep-wcmc.org">adrian.newton@unep-wcmc.org</a>	<b>UNEP-WCMC</b>	Head of Forest, Dryland and Freshwater Programme, UNEP-WCMC Monitoring Programme 219 Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, UK Tel: (44) 1223 277314, Fax: (44) 1223 277136
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11	<b>Peter Holmgren</b>  (Attended the meeting)	<a href="mailto:Peter.Holmgren@fao.org">Peter.Holmgren@fao.org</a>	<b>FAO</b>	Senior Forestry Officer Global Forest Resource Assessment FAO, Rome 00100 Tel: (39)-06-570-52714, Fax: (39)-06-55825
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#### UNEP Staff members who attended the meeting

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## ANNEX 2A

### **Draft Terms Of Reference for the Advisory Group To Forest Resources Assessment**

FAO on request of its member countries, implements the global forest resource assessment (FRA). To implement this mandate, FAO regularly seeks broad guidance from a large number of national and international experts and agencies through an expert consultation. The most significant of these consultations have been held at Kotka, Finland with support from Government of Finland and in its partners like UNEP and UNECE. Since, these consultations are held at Kotka, therefore, they have been named as Kotka I or II or III etc. The latest, Kotka IV, was on “*Global Forest Resources Assessments –linking national and international efforts*” on 1-5 July 2002. It reviewed progress in assessing status and trends of the world’s forests, and discussed future global forest resources assessments and made many important recommendations, including to establish an advisory group to the FRA process to provide technical guidance and to finalize specifications of future global forest resource assessments, in line with the discussions held at the 15th Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) in Rome in March 2001.

The Advisory group (AG) will be informal in nature, but will be acknowledged and endorsed by the statutory bodies of FAO such as the Committee on Forestry (COFO). It will be a long-term arrangement with meetings anticipated to take place annually. Specifically, the Advisory Group will be tasked to review and make recommendations aimed to strengthen existing institutional networks, to make future forest resources assessments increasingly user-oriented, demand-driven, and to it more closely linked with other international processes. More specifically, the AG will carry out the following tasks,

1. Review the broad recommendations of expert consultations on forest resource assessments like Kotka IV and advise FAO and its partners on their implementation.
2. Advice on the organization, process and time frame of future FRA
3. Advice on technical methods including variables for future FRA.
4. Advice on the reporting format for future FRA, See Note 4 for consideration for the first meeting.
5. Advice on communication processes and meetings between stakeholders in the FRA process, including regional arrangements, expert consultations and with other international forest-related processes.
6. Advice on role and terms of reference of the national correspondents to FRA.
7. Advice on other technical matters related with forest inventory or assessment.
8. Develop its operational mechanism (OM).
9. Formulate its broad multiyear work plan (MYWP)
10. Any other task approved by AG to FRA.

## **ANNEX 2B**

### **Operation Mechanism (OM) for AG to FRA**

The AG in first meeting during October 2002 at Nairobi approved the following operational mechanism.

- a. The AG to FRA will be an informal body and will constitute of not more than 20 members. Any member country of FAO, if it so desires, can send its representative to work as observer on the AFRA.
- b. AG to FRA can invite experts to provide technical advice to AFRA during its meetings or can invite professionals to attend its meeting as observers.
- c. The AFRA will normally meet once a year. However, it be called, as and when required.
- d. The AG to FRA can also function through email group discussions, if and when required.
- e. To provide timely information and maintain transparency in its activities FAO will develop and maintain a website on AG to FRA that will be open to public.
- f. The AG to FRA will have a Secretary to manage, document and process its operations with FRA at FAO providing necessary secretariat support. The Senior Forest Officer, FRA, FAO will function as the secretary to AG to FRA. He will develop the draft and the final proceedings for each of its meetings. He will also manage the website for AG to FRA.
- g. The AG to FRA will have a Chairperson for each of its meeting to be selected by its members among themselves. The chairperson will be selected a the beginning of a meeting and will continue till the beginning of next meeting.
- h. The Chairperson for any meeting will direct the operation of the meeting and approve its proceeding finalised by the members and submitted by the secretary to AG to FRA.
- i. The draft proceeding of the meeting will be developed and posted by the secretary on its website for about two weeks for comments. After this it will be finalised and submitted by the secretary to the Chairperson of the respective meeting for approval and for posting on the website.
- j. The secretary to AG to FRA will submit the proceedings of AFRA to COFO at FAO for its consideration. Other members of the AG to FRA will also submit the proceeding to the respective reviewing bodies in their organization through their normal channels of communication.
- k. The AG to FRA may make changes in its OM as and when required by it.

## ANNEX 2C

### Development of its Multiyear Work Plan (MYWP)

This should briefly state the main activities proposed by AG to FRA during next five years. For example,

a. 2002

- Development of TOR and OM for AG to FRA
- Development of Annual and Multiyear Work Plan
- Developing consensus of priority issues
- Advice on concepts, process, variables, methods, implementation, draft format

b. 2003

- Pilot Studies
- Review of specification of variables, methods and draft format
- Progress on last year Work Plan
- Updating Work Plan for current and future years
- Developing consensus of priority issues
- Review of Linkages of FRA with other international processes

c. 2004

- Development of Proposed agenda for Kotka V
- Progress on last year Work Plan
- Updating Work Plan for current and future years
- Developing consensus of priority issues
- Bi-annual Review of AG to FRA activities
- Review of Draft FRA 2005
- Review of Linkages of FRA with other international processes

d. 2005:

- Progress on last year Work Plan
- Updating Work Plan for current and future years
- Developing consensus of priority issues
- Finalization of the FRA 2005 report
- Approval of Draft FRA 2010 report
- Review of Linkages of FRA with other international processes