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List of acronyms and abbreviations

CBD   Convention on Biological Diversity

CPF   Collaborative Partnership on Forests

DA   Development Account

ECE   Economic Commission for Europe

FAO   Food and Agriculture Organization

GFG   Global Forest Goal

GOF   Global Objective on Forests

MAR   Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting

M&E   Monitoring and Evaluation

MF   Monitoring Framework

NFMCP National Forest Management and Conservation Plan (Jait

Executive Summary

This executive summary presents highlights of an external evaluation report of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) project, "Monitoring progress towards sustainable forest management (SFM)".

"better collaboration among forest data related government and other stakeholders in countries", "development of monitoring frameworks", and "enhanced capacity of the forestry agency to submit national reports to other global processes such as FRA 2020 and the Rio Conventions".

The survey result is generally supported by responses from the interviews. In regard to developing monitoring frameworks, several survey respondents and interviewees indicated that while the project was successful in providing very good background information, they suggested that an intensive follow-up process is required in countries to consolidate the gains made so far to work towards developing the monitoring frameworks. The interviewees further noted that despite the recommendations from the consultants' studies and workshops for developing monitoring frameworks, the project's focus in countries was primarily on the UNFF reporting format. The UNFF reporting format is an important component (or an instrument) of a well-developed and operational national monitoring framework would cater to but the format itself is not a monitoring format. The evaluator thinks that this is an important point that the project management should take note of for its future work.

Efficiency

Survey data show, respondents were generally satisfied with the efficiency issue; about 95% perceived the project was very efficient or efficient. In regard to the use of resources, more than 75% believe that they were used very efficiently or efficiently. In spite of encouraging picture on state of efficiency from the survey the evaluator noted that the project implementation in one of the six countries (Mongolia) did not start on time. In fact, its second national workshop is being planned in January 2020, after this evaluation.

In terms of financial efficiency, the Secretariat records showed that the project has spent $508,040 out of the allocated budget of $709,000 (about 71.7%). Even though the project has not completed the second workshop in Mongolia, the project has succeeded in keeping the expenditure under control.

Sustainability

It is difficult to predict the sustainability of the project at this point of time. However, most of the survey respondents and interviewees were optimistic about the sustainability of the project benefits. One indication of impact and sustainability of the project's outcomes (legacy) is the trend of policy makers basing their policy decisions on information/evidence generated by their monitoring frameworks. The survey response on this question revealed that the UNFF national focal points and other senior officials in national forestry agencies have started basing their policy making on information generated by the monitoring frameworks/reporting formats.

A number of survey and interview participants felt that the project intervention in a pilot country should not have ended after the consultant's study on 'data sources and gaps' and two national workshops.

- The UNFF Secretariat should expl e

member states have noted many challenges in data collection, data quality and national capacity in generating and systematically managing databases to be used for national-level actions and international-level reporting. Furthermore, they have underscored a need to develop a better reporting system to adequately and appropriately cover all aspects of SFM as enshrined in UNFI and UNSPF. They have also repeatedly emphasized the need for streamlining data collection and reporting obligations, so as to reduce their reporting burden to multiple international and regional processes. As such, a majority of member states, in particular, the developing countries and countries with economies in transition, seek assistance for capacity-building on monitoring, reporting and assessment.

In this context, the UNFF Secretariat launched a 3-year project, titled, "Monitoring Progress towards Sustainable Forest Management (2016-2019)" with an overall objective to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to monitor progress towards sustainable forest management. It has assisted a select group of target (pilot)[3] countries in developing a comprehensive and efficient system for monitoring progress towards SFM. The six target (or pilot) countries are Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Mongolia, Peru and the Philippines. The project was launched in June 2016 and is coming to an end in December 2019.

1.2   Objectives of the external evaluation

The external evaluation of the project is a requirement of the Project Document, and its objectives and scope are clearly stated in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation (Annex A). The evaluation assesses:

the extent, to which the project achieved its intended results
relevance, effectiveness, Efficiency and sustainability of project intervention and outcomes
the lessons learned
Recommendations for future work of the UNFFS.

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As stated above, this project is designed and launched to enhance the capacity of six pilot developing countries to monitor progress towards sustainable forest management. The project is funded through the UN Development Account, 10th Tranche.

2.1   Project design

Theory of Change or the logic of project intervention is as follows:

1. Start with an assessment of current data sources, data requirements and data gaps in each of the pilot countries
2. Organize a number of national workshops in each pilot country involving a wide range of stakeholders active in SFM-relevant data collection or utilization (e.g., forestry administration, planning and statistical agencies, agriculture, environment agencies, forest industry, civil society organizations, etc.) to develop a national monitoring framework
3. Apply such monitoring frameworks for:
   a. monitoring progress on SFM in the country
   b. evidence-based policy making in the country; and
   c.

Box 1. Theory of Change based on the project Logical Framework
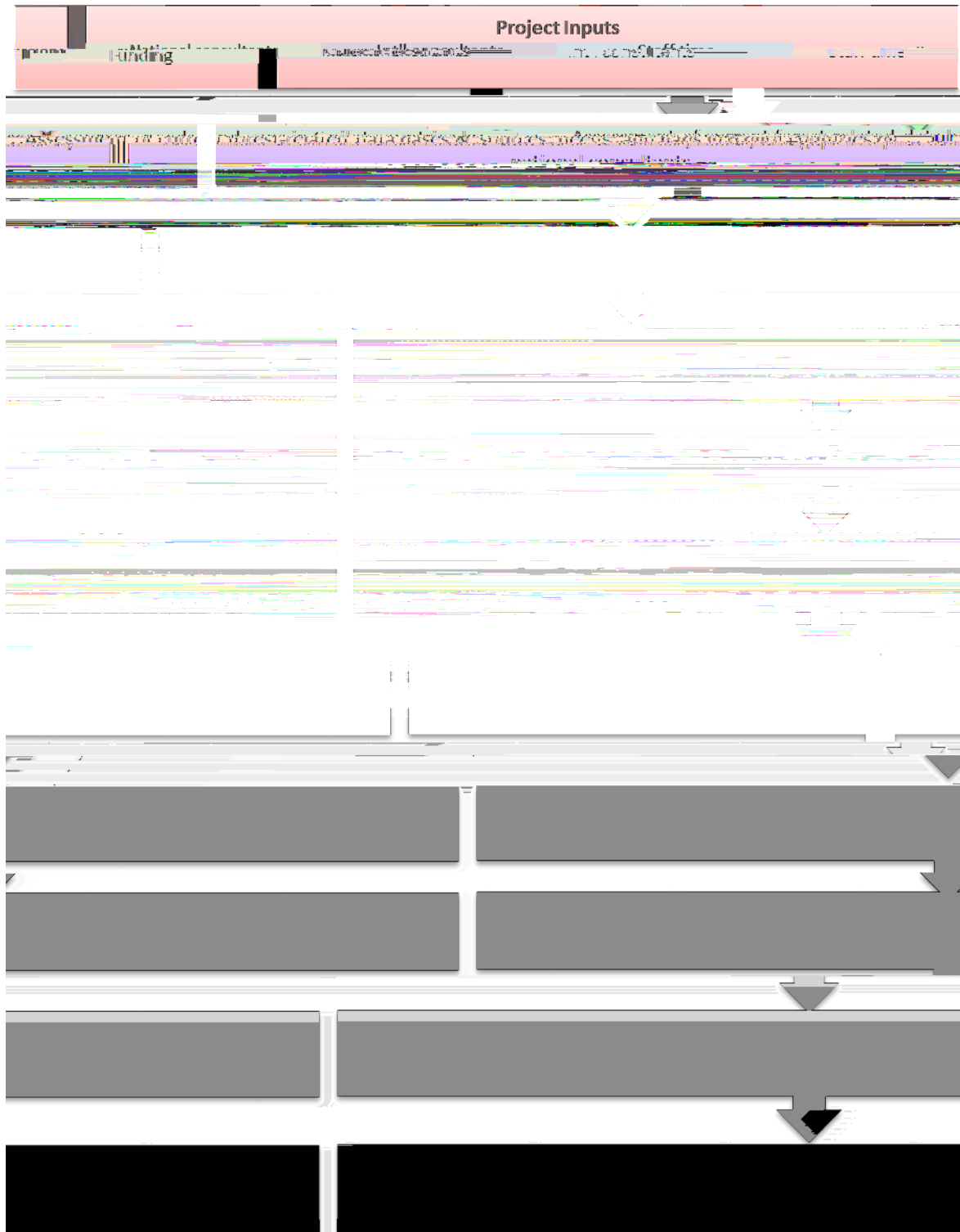
2.2   Resources

The project was managed by the existing human resources of the Secretariat without additional cost to

2.4   Project design issues

An international consultant was recruited in 2017 to analyze and recommend improvements to the draft voluntary national reporting format, to facilitate the discussions by the above-mentioned Expert Meeting on MAR held in November 2017. For the second international meeting, held in Rome in November 2018, a second international consultant was hired to review literature on issues related to the Global Forest Goal 2 (GFG2), Target 2.1 and Target 2.3, concerning the concepts of forest dependent people and forest and food security. The third and final international meeting under the project was the global workshop to strengthen the capacity of countries to assess their national monitoring systems, and increase the efficiency in MAR. The workshop was held in Bangkok, Thailand on 28-30 October 2019. The workshop was attended by both pilot and non-pilot countries, where three pilot countries (Jamaica, Kenya and the Philippines) gave

3   Evaluation Scope, Objectives and Criteria

3.1   Evaluation Scope

The evaluation covers the period 2016-2019 in all six pilot countries. However, since the project activities have just started in Mongolia in 2019 and its first workshop was concluded only in the first week of November 2019, most of the evaluation findings and conclusions are based on other five countries. The evaluation assessed all the activities, outputs and outcomes as specified in the project document.

3.2   Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation seeks to assess the performance of the project and the extent to which the project's intended results and outcomes have been achieved. It further seeks to establish the extent to which implementing the project had increased the capacity of the six pilot countries to monitor progress in sustainable forest management, develop comprehensive monitoring frameworks involving relevant stakeholders, utilizing such monitoring frameworks in policy making and for reporting obligations to international processes such as SDGs, UNFF, FAO/FRA and Rio Conventions.

3.3   Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation process is guided by the terms of reference (ToR) for the evaluator (consultant). As such, the evaluation focused mainly on:

(i)   Assessing the performance of the project against the targets, stated as indicators of achievement in the logical framework of the project; and
(ii) Evaluating the project performance based on the evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project of those outputs/results (see Box 2 for the definitions of evaluation criteria used).

o   The monitoring frameworks developed through the project are used in reporting to UNFF15;

o   The monitoring frameworks developed through the project are used in policy making related to SFM.

Table 3. Survey responses (te)P13(%)]T1368I5.29158x8.B44 B45442N41B1/61n345 A43965B802242B3)486542 H604100391

Respondents by major categories	Sample	Responses	Response rate %
UNFF National Focal points and alternates	12	5	41.7
National consultants 5	6	6	100
Others including workshop participants, Secretariat and int'l consultant	113	27	24.5%
Total	131	38	29.0% overall

4.4

developed under EA1. As with A1.3, all workshop participants would make presentations explaining their areas of work and the way they would contribute to this project.			Kenya: 24-26 Feb 2019 Mongolia: Not yet[9]. Peru: 20-21 Sept 2018 Philippines: 17-20 Sept 2017

A. 2.3. Two international workshops. First meeting to provide context for the work within the project.

Second meeting to provide an opportunity to share experiences and lessons learned and to demonstrate the results achieved within the project.

5.1.1

understood the concept as the one closer to the first interpretation above. On the other hand, a large number of survey respondents (80%), who

One interesting trend that surfaced from the interviews is that indeed, those three countries – Jamaica, Kenya and Ghana – are in different stages of embarking in developing and institutionalizing monitoring frameworks (or M&E systems). Jamaica adopted its new National Forest Management and Conservation Plan 2016-2026 (NFMCP) at around the same time this project was launched there. The NFMCP has developed an elaborate "Strategic Framework for Performance Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER)" for an online data system involving the Forestry Department and six other government agencies. It is now being operationalized. Whether the project had any impact on this development, the interviewees opined that it would be a too much of imagination to say that the project had resulted in this PMER process but still they agree that some credit should be awarded to the project for being

successful in its objective. The remaining responses were either "don't know" or "not applicable" to the respondents. There was no response saying the project not effective.

In terms of the key concrete outcomes of the project in a country, the frequency of responses (mutually non-exclusive responses) indicate that the "enhanced capacity of national forestry agencies to submit repots to UNFF" (81%) is considered the number one outcome, followed by "raising awareness of the current forest-related data sources and gaps" (75%), "better collaboration among forest data related government and other stakeholders in countries" (64%), "development of monitoring frameworks" (57%) and "enhanced capacity of the forestry agency to submit national reports to other global processes such as FRA 2020 and the Rio Conventions" (46%).

The survey result is generally supported by responses from the interviews in most of the areas discussed above.   Most of the interviewees noted the significance of the project in raising awareness about the importance of monitoring, current status of data sources and gaps, identification and opportunities for collaboration among data-relevant stakeholders. In regard to developing monitoring frameworks, however, several individuals expressed that while the project was successful in providing very good background information as a good basis, but it requires an intensive follow-up process. A number of survey respondents also provided similar views (as additional comments) to generally closed-end questions. They noted that despite the recommendations from the consultants' studies and workshop for developing monitoring frameworks, the project's focus in countries was primarily on the UNFF reporting format. The evaluator thinks that this is an important point the project management should take note of. The UNFF reporting format is an important component (or an instrument) of a well-developed and operational national monitoring framework but the reporting format itself is not a monitoring framework.

53% of the survey respondents confirmed that their country is submitting voluntary national reports to UNFF15, using the monitoring framework developed through the project. One possible way to measure the effectiveness of the project intervention could be to see if the national reports of those six pilot countries to UNFF15 are, in general, of higher quality and comprehensive compared to those of other countries that did not get projects support. But this was neither a responsibility nor practically possible for the evaluator to undertake during this evaluation period.

In terms of the project management, the Secretariat seemed to have developed and maintained good working relationship with all UNFF national focal points and other closely related officials in the pilot countries as well as with the national consultants. The project, however, seemed to have very little or any coordination or cooperation with other organizations and a project, which were mentioned in the

work on monitoring frameworks in other countries, thereby improving the likelihood of sustainability of project outcome within and outside of the six project pilot countries.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The project was a timely and relevant intervention with a good conceptual foundation and objective. The project is, in general, a successful endeavour in the sense that it, clearly:

Provided valuable information on existing forest-related data sources, data quality, data

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The project document should be used as the reference as much, as possible, for the implementation and monitor of the project. The project management should take timely actions to adjust the project activities based on ground reality and changing context, and the project document duly revised/updated. In this regard, a provision of mid-term review is also worthwhile in the future projects.

The Project should maintain better coordination between the country national focal points and UNFF Secretariat, and among the pilot countries for inter-

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Developing monitoring frameworks would require a longer-term commitment from both the project and pilot countries.

The project intervention in a pilot country should not have ended after the national consultant's study on 'data sources and gaps' and two national workshops; not having any follow-up process after the national workshops broke the momentum the project had built. This should be a lesson to apply in designing future projects with similar themes.

Perhaps, limiting the number of pilot countries to a lower number in the project and increasing the duration of the project would have provided more resources and attention in going beyond the national studies and consultation workshops, leading to a successful monitoring framework development processes and models that can be scaled up to a larger number of countries.

The project should be flexible for course correction based on the ground realities. Not being able to initiate project activities in all pilot countries simultaneously, as was evident in this project, impacts not only the efficiency but the effectiveness of the project. As is now, the project was still conducting the first workshop in Mongolia when the external evaluation had started. Such delay would not help gain common knowledge that can be shared among the pilot countries and eventually to a larger community of countries.

Related to the above point, the project should have an item in its key activities to synthesize the experiences from its pilot countries and present a toolkit of recommendations for developing, maintaining and utilizing a national monitoring framework to monitor progress on SFM in the country, and report to forest-related and relevant international and regional processes such as FAO/FRA, CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC and UNFF.

One seemingly petty matter but nevertheless crucial for project management is maintaining record of participants of national workshops. This became obvious when contact information of national workshop participants were needed for the survey. It is also a useful practice to gather post-workshop feedback from the participants as an indicator of capacity building.

A lesson learned from evaluator's perspective is the limited utility of arbitrarily attaching the interview task into a meeting or workshop programme, which is designed with a different objective, agenda and duration, such as the Bangkok Workshop of October 2019. The evaluator could not take advantage of the workshop, as

Additional reference materials: