



2.3 Strengthening forest governance monitoring: Zambia and Vietnam

AREND JAN VAN BODEGOM, HERMAN SAVENIJE, ART BLUNDELL, MARTIN SEKELETI, LE KHAC COI and EWALD RAMETSTEINER

Introduction

Sustainable forest management (SFM) and its contribution to development crucially depend on the quality of governance: clear and coherent policy, regulatory, institutional frameworks; transparent and accountable decision-making; and effective implementation, enforcement and compliance (FAO/PROFOR 2011; see also article 2.1 in this issue). Deforestation, degradation, and illegal logging are often a consequence of poor governance.

Increasingly, efforts are taken by governments, industry and civil society, and at international levels to strengthen the monitoring of forest governance with a view to improve its quality and effectiveness. While forest governance monitoring (FGM) is often seen as additional to conventional forest monitoring, it is, in fact, often part of what is already being monitored (e.g., the budgetary process). This paper describes the experience of two countries (Zambia and Vietnam) to strengthen their existing monitoring systems in order to provide more robust FGM.

Given globalization, new national and international demands (REDD+, FLEGT) and the growing pressure on forests, governments recognize that they must periodically review their FGM systems to ensure that they are sufficiently responsive to present and future needs. Moreover, under changing visions of the roles and responsibilities of governments vis-à-vis other stakeholders in providing governance,¹ different stakeholders are assuming new roles. For example, industry is increasingly required to conduct self-assessment and reporting, and civil society to conduct oversight.

FGM serves several purposes. First, it is a tool to improve strategic management — monitoring whether policies are on track, which can help clarify and improve the roles and performance of stakeholders. Second, it improves operational management. Accurate information helps in coordinating human, financial and physical resources and in improving collaboration. It



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NOT DIRECTLY CHANGE LAWS, DECISION-MAKING OR IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES.

Arend Jan van Bodegom works for CDI-Wageningen University; **Herman Savenije** works for Tropenbos International; **Art Blundell** works for Natural Capital Advisors; **Martin Sekeleti** is a freelance consultant; **Le Khac Coi** works for CH8 Consultancy and **Ewald Rametsteiner** works for FAO Forestry.

can also contribute to improving understanding between stakeholder groups. Third, FGM helps to improve the reputation and credibility/accountability of the sector in the eyes of citizens, investors and the international community (e.g., REDD+ and FLEGT). It also improves the visibility of the forest sector to other departments within government. Ideally, effective FGM reinforces the actions of responsible corporate actors. Likewise, national FGM can fill the gaps left by field-level monitoring, such as independent certification schemes for legally and sustainably produced forest products.

In 2010, in response to country requests, FAO Forestry started the project “Integrating FGM into national forest-related monitoring systems.”² The aim is to support the development of national capacity in FGM. The project was designed as a process that responds to the specific country conditions, needs, priorities and feasibilities. It also recognizes that data relevant to FGM are already being collected through existing routines (albeit, perhaps not with the explicit purpose of forest governance), but that new priorities may have to be included; thus it is important to inventory existing monitoring protocols as a basis for adding FGM indicators.

The project started with the development of draft guidance for FGM assessment and strengthening at the country level. The second phase consisted of pilot application in Vietnam and Zambia. In both countries a national consultant assessed the legal and institutional landscape. Through interviews, national consultants identified existing FGM-related initiatives, articulated stakeholder needs and identified priorities for developing FGM indicators. The consultants received input from government and other national, provincial and district stakeholders.

The results were consolidated in country background documents (Sekeleti 2011a; Le Khac Coi et al. 2011). A launch workshop in each country consolidated this momentum; stakeholders requested further work on defining FGM requirements and working towards pilot projects (Sekeleti 2011b; Le Khac Coi and van Bodegom, in press). This article highlights the current status, experiences and perspectives on FGM development in Zambia and Vietnam, identifying some initial lessons for the way forward.

Status and perspectives of FGM practice in Zambia and Vietnam

Zambia

The launch workshop revealed that stakeholders’ priority was to focus on monitoring and implementation of policy/regulatory frameworks, especially how they affect communities that depend on forest resources. Such frameworks include the *National Forest Act* (and its implementation and enforcement); the national forest policy and action plan; the timber export policy; and national policies/acts on the environment, agriculture and land; as well as the Sixth National Development Plan (6th NDP; 2011–2015) and its related budgets and work plans at the national, provincial and district level. Civil society organizations (CSOs) working with grassroots groups advocated monitoring decision-making processes, law enforcement, and compliance at the community level.

National CSOs requested monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for the allocation of concessions, budget and revenue tracking/distribution, compliance with forestry laws and management plans, and Zambia's compliance with international conventions. At the district level, government agencies favored M&E on law enforcement and compliance, while national-level priorities were related to employment in the forest sector and the contribution to GDP, as well as law enforcement and internal compliance by staff, especially at the district level. Common to all was the need to know the status and jurisdiction of forest resources.

The government recognizes that poor coordination in the sector poses a challenge. Furthermore, it is grappling with attracting community and private-sector participation in forest management, which is constrained by limited capacity across all stakeholders and by insecure tenure over land and resources on customary land. Nonetheless, the Sixth NDP recognizes the need to strengthen oversight of forest policies and activities, establishing measures such as enforced multi-level performance audits by government agencies to provide a clear and strong mechanism for tracking progress in development and poverty alleviation. The focus of these audits will be on improving coordination of M&E systems at national, and especially provincial and district levels, in part through a capacity-building programme, with the Cabinet Office ensuring implementation.

The next step in the FGM pilot is to match the stakeholders' needs with existing M&E mechanisms, identifying gaps and possible variables on which to collect additional data. The most efficient step will be to anchor FGM in existing administrative, budgetary, judicial and census/inventory types of data collection and to tie the strengthening of FGM to international mechanisms such as REDD+ that can provide resources (technical and financial) to further develop the necessary M&E mechanisms.

Vietnam

Vietnam has achieved important results in governing and managing its forest resources, in particular, an increase in forest cover (extending the surface of plantations), and a reduction in poverty in mountainous forest areas. Although the current forest governance system and the associated FGM has provided considerable contributions to these achievements, government and stakeholders feel the need to review and update FGM systems, given the dynamic and rapidly evolving developments in and around the forest sector.

Several FGM-related initiatives have recently started. To deal with the "legality" trade requirements of FLEGT and the U.S. *Lacey Act*, a Standing Office has been established, with a steering committee and a technical working group.³ A Standing Office has also been established for REDD+, with a steering committee and a national REDD+ network, including working groups on REDD governance. In addition, the Participatory Governance Assessment (PGA), supported by UNDP, intends to contribute to the development of a national system for providing information on REDD+ safeguards, with a particular focus on benefit sharing and participation (Anonymous 2011). A fourth initiative, on socio-economic monitoring (SEM), is currently under development as part of a FAO-led project to support the design of a National Forestry Assessment (Andersson et al. 2010).

The initiatives partly overlap and partly complement each other, although each has its own lead agency and there is no one overarching FGM system.

At the national level several monitoring efforts focus on procedures, including implementation of administrative plans, budgets and judicial procedures relevant to FG and FGM. The Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2006–2020 (VFDS) is commonly regarded as the main forest policy implementation programme. Most stakeholders feel that the strategy (plus emerging issues such as REDD+ and FLEGT) is the most feasible starting point for assessing and updating FGM. For the VFDS, a monitoring system is already in place; it contains 72 forest-sector indicators, several of which are relevant to FGM: research, education, training, socio-economic aspects, participation of communities in forest management, financial investment and human resource development.

So far the following priority issues have been identified for FGM development:

- Benefit sharing, especially for local communities, including mechanisms and actual payment for environmental services according to the law;
- Decision-making, both at the national and local level. Laws stipulate the process of formulating laws and plans within a consultative process. More rigorous monitoring frameworks and verification systems are necessary;
- Land tenure, including informal land use and tenure, small-scale leases, illegal land conversion, land use rights of households, demarcation and clear boundaries of forest and forest types on maps and in the field;
- Timber harvesting from natural forests, including monitoring the quality of the harvesting plan and its implementation, harvesting damage, impact on local communities, and chain-of-custody tracking of timber products;
- Staff capacity, including performance and training of staff and other stakeholders.

Apart from these high-priority areas, several issues were raised regarding the concept, principles and process of FGM:

- In the Vietnamese context the term forest governance monitoring is relatively new and not readily understood by most stakeholders as to what it means, what it entails as to monitoring, and in which it differs from supervision, verification or control. Indeed there is even a question of how the term should be translated into Vietnamese;
- A variety of monitoring types is necessary. There is, for example, monitoring through governmental reports to the National Assembly, but also at local, district and commune levels there should be monitoring of governance aspects. There is also need for monitoring by NGOs. Senior governmental staff recognize that there should be mechanisms for top-down (government checks) and participatory monitoring (stakeholders check). This is certainly a challenge in Vietnam;
- Participation of stakeholders in FGM. Favorable conditions should be created for communities to participate in FGM, including: awareness raising, training, and participation in different forums. Special attention is needed for stakeholders outside the government, including independent monitoring by NGOs and CSOs. The existing monitoring system of the VFDS is still considered to be top-down.

Development of the monitoring system and definition of the indicators to be monitored should not only be determined by scientists and governmental officials, but also by local stakeholders, including private sector and members of local communities. It is especially a challenge to involve ethnic minorities in a meaningful way;

- Awareness raising of managers and leaders at local levels. They are usually familiar with monitoring technical issues, but are hesitant to include non-technical issues. Transparency, accountability and fairness are important principles of governance that also require monitoring, but are difficult to implement, so these principles need special attention;
- The process so far resulted in the proposal of some 150 additional indicators for FGM. They must be analyzed for their relevance, priority and feasibility and if they cover all needs for FGM in Vietnam.

The process so far has raised the awareness and profile of FGM among stakeholders and the need for its further development. The results will be used as an input in the related processes such as the PGA and those on FLEGT and REDD+. Linkages with the National Forest Assessment are important, e.g., for the selection of methods, methodologies and piloting changes in routines of data collection and monitoring routines.

Building on the findings so far, the Vietnamese government intends to propose a follow up project, with financial support from the international donor community. Elements of the project would include a definition of FG and FGM in Vietnam; identification of all the needs for FGM; identification of pilot provinces; institutionalization of FGM; capacity building; and awareness-raising. At the same time the country will continue working toward further specification and piloting of a design for a national forest assessment that contains biophysical, socio-economic and forest governance components.



Emerging lessons

Although stakeholders consider the discussions around FGM useful, it is often not immediately clear to them what FG and FGM are and in what way FGM is already part of, or different from and additional to, existing monitoring. Some FGM is undoubtedly already ongoing in both countries, but it is not labeled or seen as FGM. Further efforts will be needed to define FG and FGM within the specific cultural and political context at various levels in the country. This also requires awareness raising and capacity building among FGM designers and stakeholders.

The FGM project intends to bring various nationally and internationally driven FGM-related processes together, and to share views from the international level down to community/village level and from different stakeholder groups in order to obtain a comprehensive picture. A good starting point proved to be giving the stakeholders the

opportunity to present their views on FGM during the inception workshop. However, much effort will be needed to create coherent long-term FGM perspectives and activities.

In both countries, stakeholders identified the following as key issues for further FGM development: policy and regulatory frameworks and their implementation, especially the ways in which they affect communities that depend on forest resources, including how the communities may benefit from revenue sharing. This is not surprising. In Vietnam, there is already a wealth of information available about the concrete issues at stake, what relevant aspects are being monitored, what the gaps are and the need for additional indicators.

A variety of monitoring tools is necessary: both top down (the government monitoring the implementation of its policies and plans) and bottom up (NGOs, CSOs and civilian independently monitoring whether policies, plans and their implementation are really beneficial to them).

The emerging international “pillars and principles” framework is a useful starting point for awareness raising and discussion on FGM in a country. It can serve to increase understanding, develop thinking and common language about FGM, inspire people and show examples of what issues are at stake in FGM. However, it is not a ready-to-fill-out template for FGM needs: it cannot simply be translated or adapted to a national situation. Stakeholders need the overall country framework of relevant (forest-related) laws and plans as a reference, to which they can subsequently connect concrete issues that need monitoring, including decision-making and implementation.

Conclusion

The aim of this project is to support the development of national capacity in FGM. So far, it has been designed and implemented as a process that responds to the specific country conditions, needs, priorities and feasibilities. It also recognizes that certain data prioritized in FGM are already being collected.

Discussing the monitoring of forest governance issues is politically much less threatening than having to fix these issues. FGM is a tool to inform decision-making, but it does not directly change laws, decision-making or implementation practices. FGM is not a quick fix to solve FG issues; nor will it be able to address all monitoring demands (it would be too costly, not feasible, etc.). FGM may be in the interest of the country as a whole, but not in the interest of individual (powerful) stakeholders, so discussions may arise, for example, on how far principles such as “transparency” and “accountability” can be implemented. Besides, a stakeholder may decide to develop or continue monitoring activities separate from the current FGM process. Care must be taken to manage expectations.

In both countries the process to enhance FGM has just started. Next steps include defining information needs and indicators, choosing methodologies for collecting information (including the use of existing data sets), defining roles and responsibilities for stakeholders and capacity building. There should be more attention for monitoring aspects

related to administrative, financial/budgetary and the judiciary. These steps will take several years, and will be most effective and sustainable if they take place in a multi-stakeholder process, building in step-by-step requirements that take into account what is there already and what is feasible in the given circumstances. Based on the experiences in these pilot countries, FAO's guidance document will be adjusted in order to develop a country support tool for FGM.

Endnotes

1. In many countries there is a move from the old style of governance – which the government steers – to a new situation in which several actors are co-steering. In this vision the government does not bear the sole responsibility for governing the forest sector.
2. The FGM initiative is implemented within the FAO-Finland Programme and its support to National Forest Monitoring and Assessment (NFMA) and Integrated Land Use Assessment (ILUA). The initiative is implemented in collaboration with Natural Capital Advisors, LLC (www.naturalcapitaladvisors.com), Centre for Development Innovation of Wageningen University (www.cdi.wur.nl) and Tropenbos International (www.tropenbos.org).
3. The U.S. and the EU are the two most important markets for Vietnamese timber products.

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