

GFOI Review

Response from the GFOI Leads Group

GFOI Leads Group

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Context

During 2016 a holistic review of the Global Forest Observations Initiative (GFOI) has been underway. Led by Dr Jim Baker, the review was conducted on behalf of all GFOI partners to assess the progress of the Initiative towards meeting its goals and to provide recommendations for the way forward. The final draft of the report was submitted to the GFOI Leads Group in mid-October, who then gathered in Rome from 27 to 28 October to consider its findings. This note summarizes the Leads agreed responses to the major recommendations made by the review. Following this, work will be undertaken to inform the implementation of a revised second phase of GFOI.

Response

Overall, the Leads agree with the review's finding that the GFOI has been largely successful in pursuing its initial goals. GFOI has demonstrated that via an informal-collaborative-initiative productive relationships can be established, operational guidance can be developed, data needs addressed and the development of new technologies pursued for the benefit of developing countries. However, the Leads also agree with the central recommendation that GFOI now needs to chart a course for the future that is consistent with the changing global context; including the Paris Agreement and other significant developments since the Initiative was first established.

Under a second phase, GFOI will focus its efforts on a primary goal of coordinated capacity building in forest monitoring for the benefit of developing countries. This will be underpinned by continually updated methods and guidance, to assist in achieving consistency and good practice compliance in capacity building activities. These activities should focus on operational methods which meet country specific needs and requests. Input on data, research, and technology will be continued with the methods and guidance documentation (MGD) as the central basis, and will be provided in the context of how it best enhances capacity building.

GFOI will focus on facilitating coordination between its components and partners. The implementation of activities will continue to be the responsibility of partners and undertaken according to their mandates. The Office would carry day-to-day management responsibility for GFOI, on behalf of the Leads group.

GFOI's second phase will focus on assisting developing countries to monitor and report on the condition of their forests, particularly greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and removals for the purposes of REDD+, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) and broader UNFCCC transparency requirements. These efforts should also help countries to generate information to support their implementation of emissions reduction activities and improved forest management.

The Leads agree with the need to continue to develop closer collaboration between the existing GFOI components, and structured mechanisms for aiding this will be pursued as part of the planning for the second phase. The Leads do not necessarily agree with the review's recommendation that the best way to ensure closer collaboration is to merge the Capacity Building component with the MGD component, and similarly merging the R&D Coordination component with the Space Data Coordination component, but will consider several options.

Given the success of CEOS in making the core space data streams available to support national forest monitoring as found in the review, the Leads believe that GFOI's Space Data Coordination component should be re-prioritized. The new component should now cover all data coordination activities, including tools for accessing and analyzing data and the integration of different datasets. The coordination of data access by GFOI will continue to be focused on freely available or low cost datasets. The current contributions of CEOS to GFOI should continue but be closely integrated and coordinated with the other data streams, activities, actors and initiatives coordinated as part of this expanded data component.

Additionally, the Leads agree with the recommendation for an improved communications strategy that targets both internal and external information sharing, recognizing communication as a key element to effective coordination. In addition, the Leads see a need for more structured mechanisms for coordination between the components and their activities. However, they note the encouraging progress that has already been made in this regard, including in the development of the Communications and Assessment Readiness Level (CARL) framework. CARL presents not only a structure for the progressive development of new technologies towards operational levels and hence applicability for capacity building activities, but it also provides a useful framework for how the four components can interact.

The Leads also support the recommended new effort on detailed systems design and implementation planning but think this can be aligned with the existing roadmaps utilized by GFOI partners in some countries. Roadmaps are seen as not only beneficial to guiding countries through the complex process of system development but as an important tool for allowing capacity building partners to coordinate their activities and ultimately ensure the delivery of their support is sequential and working towards the development of complete systems.

The GFOI will be open for new partners to join under its second phase, either by supporting the coordination of activities, developing new collaborations and/or contributing to the core coordination functions of the Initiative. Bilateral and multilateral organizations and donors with interests in enhanced forest monitoring capacities will be invited to contribute to the redesign process of the Initiative, to allow for a second phase to potentially align with their interests also.

The Leads also strongly agree with the identified need to further the engagement of developing countries in the oversight of the Initiative and support with the recommendation for representation on the Leads Group via appropriately structured rotating appointments, or other mechanisms for representation (process to be determined).

Subject to the availability of funds, a second phase of GFOI will be designed for implementation over multiple years. This includes the provision of core funding to support the central coordination function (the GFOI Office) of the Initiative. Partner activities are expected to continue to be funded independently.

The redesign process will be led by a temporary planning taskforce. Their responsibilities will include developing a logic model, a performance-based monitoring framework, mechanisms for more systematic coordination and considering adjustments to the governance structure of the Initiative. The redesigned Initiative will be presented to the GFOI Leads for approval and subsequent consideration of resourcing implications. Wherever possible, the taskforce will seek to ensure that future activities build up on the considerable progress made to date by the GFOI and that only necessary changes be made to the current structure. The taskforce will be multidisciplinary and consist of representation from the Leads Group, Component Managers, Office, developing countries and other experts. Possible new partners will also be invited to participate a members of the taskforce. The Leads are currently developing the Terms of Reference for the taskforce.

GFOI will continue to focus on facilitating coordination with the aim of providing a more holistic and specialized program of support for developing countries than any one partner can provide on their own. It should also help to avoid overlap and duplication of effort. The Leads hope that a redesigned Initiative will further streamline the coordination process for partners and ultimately allow for the benefits, in additional value generated through collaboration, to outweigh the costs of devoting resources to the often difficult task of global coordination.

The ultimate outcome should be that as a result of improved coordination and collaboration, there will be an increase in the development and operation of robust national forest monitoring systems which leads to improved international reporting by developing countries and data availability to inform their national policies and programs. However the Leads acknowledge that GFOI can only largely influence coordination activities and that full implementation and sustained use of forest monitoring techniques is the responsibility of countries and subject to a range of external factors that are outside the control of GFOI.

The report from the review will be finalized within the next two weeks and then made publically available. In the meantime, a terms of reference and participant invitation list for the temporary planning taskforce will be developed with the aim that work can commence shortly thereafter. A high-level initial concept for a redesigned second phase of GFOI will be presented to stimulate discussion and further development via a teleconference by the end of November 2016. All going to plan, the initial redesign process will ideally be completed and submitted to the Leads by the end of January 2017. The resourcing of the core coordination functions will then be considered.

During this planning process the Leads welcomed the extension of support from Australia and Norway for the GFOI office until end April 2017.

The GFOI Office will coordinate the redesign process in close consultation with the task force and under the direction of the Leads Group. For further information about this process, please contact office@gfoi.org.