

**Monitoring Progress towards Sustainable Forest Management
(2016-2019)**

(10th Tranche of the Development Account; Project Code: 1617F)

Project Evaluation Report

Countries included in the evaluation: Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Mongolia, Peru, and the Philippines

**Prepared for the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat,
Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

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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 (Jamaica)
PMER	Performance Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (Jamaica)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIOS	United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests
UNFI	United Nations Forest Instrument
UNFFS	United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat
UNSPF	United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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)”. This is a 3-year project (June 2016 – December 2019) with an overall objective to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to monitor progress towards sustainable forest management. In each of six pilot countries of the project - Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, Mongolia, Peru and the Philippines – it aimed in developing a comprehensive monitoring framework for systematic monitoring of progress towards SFM.

The external evaluation assesses: (i) the extent, to which the project achieved its intended results; (ii) relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of project intervention and outcomes; and (iii) recommendations for future work of the UNFF Secretariat, and lessons learned. The evaluation process gathered data from: (i) published and unpublished project-related documents and official records; (ii) an online survey and (iii) interviews (face-to-face or via Skype and telephone).

Principal findings, conclusions and recommendations

Notable outcomes/accomplishments of the project are:

- Analytical national studies on existing forest-related databases and data gaps for effective monitoring of progress in SFM undertaken;
- National consultation process through workshops, involving a wider range of stakeholders – data providers and data users, including government agencies and non-state groups;
- Increased awareness about the importance of monitoring and data sources, gaps and requirements, and signs of enhanced coordination within the countries
- Contribution to the UNFF initiative on monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR) through the organization of three international workshops (expert meeting) on national reporting format for UNFF15 (Nairobi 2017, Rome 2018 and Bangkok 2019);
- Capacity building, in particular on filling UNFF national reporting format for UNFF15 through national and international workshops;

Relevance

The relevance of the project is clearly felt and expressed. Almost all (about 95%) of survey respondents agreed that the project activities are consistent with their countries’ needs, and global priorities for monitoring SFM. During the interviews, forestry officials from both pilot and non-pilot countries reaffirmed the project intervention being highly relevant to their needs.

Effectiveness

In regard to the overall performance of the project at country level, about 86% of respondents rated the project successful in its objective. In terms of the key concrete outcomes of the project in a country, the “enhanced capacity of national forestry agencies to submit reports to UNFF” is considered the number one outcome, followed by “raising awareness of the current forest-related data sources and gaps”,

“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. They strongly felt that not having any project activities in pilot countries after the workshops broke the momentum the project has built. This may also affect the sustainability of the project’s good work.

The project has convened three global workshops for sharing the experiences and results of the project with other countries. These events have good potential to generate interest and motivation for initiating 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.

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 requirements and data gaps for various national and international purposes;
- Enhanced awareness to a wider population about the significance of monitoring on progress being made towards SFM;
- Provided excellent, and well appreciated, opportunity to bring together, through national workshops, a wide range of data-related stakeholders for cooperation, coordination and collaboration. Those stakeholders included not only the public forestry agencies but also other public agencies such as statistics, economic development and planning agencies, focal points for the Rio Conventions, as well as non-public organizations such as forest-industry, civil society, research and academic institutions and community groups. This facilitated a learning environment from each other and exploring approaches to address issues related to data, monitoring, assessment and reporting on SFM;
- Certainly helped build capacity of forestry agency officials to appropriately gather data and fill the reporting format for UNFF15.

These activities of the project are laudable. Having said that, the evaluator felt that the project design was rather ambitious compared to the resources and time at its disposal in terms of developing, formally endorsing by appropriate authority, and operationalizing a “comprehensive forest monitoring framework” in each of the 6 pilot countries. The evaluation revealed that in most countries, the project focused on filling the UNFF reporting template for its 15th session UNFF, to be held in 2020, which was considered an immediate need to utilize the project resources. To establish a monitoring framework for SFM in a country, there has to be a follow-up process leading to final design of such a framework, formal endorsement by appropriate authority and actual use in day-to-day affairs and policy making.

Recommendations

- The project document should be used as the reference as much as possible, for the implementation and monitor of the project. A provision for 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-pilot country cross-fertilization of ideas and sharing of experiences in designing and operationalizing monitoring frameworks.

- The UNFF Secretariat should explore more effective cooperation and coordination with CPF members that are key forest-related data generators and users (e.g., FAO, Rio Convention Secretariats, and the International Tropical Timber Organization).
- Pilot countries should make every effort to continue moving forward in designing, improving and utilizing their national forest monitoring frameworks, based on the building blocks generated through the project.

Key lessons learned

- Developing monitoring frameworks would require a longer term commitment from both the project and pilot countries.
- Perhaps, limiting the project to a fewer countries and increasing the duration of the project would have provided more resources and attention in developing monitoring framework 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 impacts not only the efficiency but the effectiveness of the project.
- 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.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents an external evaluation of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) project, “Monitoring progress towards sustainable forest management (2016-2019)”. The external evaluation is one of the pre-determined milestones of the project cycle. The main purpose of the external evaluation is to assess how well the project was implemented; whether, and to what extent, the project achieved its intended results; what impact it has made; the extent to which the project interventions and outcomes are relevant, effective, efficient and sustainable; and what lessons were learned from the execution of this project.

1.1 Background/Context

Any programme or policy implementation requires periodic monitoring and assessment of its outcome and impact. For this, a robust system of measurement, data collection, data management and analysis is essential. This is equally true for a country with its effort to promote sustainable forest management (SFM) through policy and programme interventions.

Countries usually have traditional systems of forest inventories to gather biophysical data of their forest resources, but the growing recognition of the role of forests in social, economic and environmental issues has expanded a need to gather new kinds of forest-related data and monitor changes. Examples of such new forest data relate to climate change, biodiversity conservation, land degradation, economic development, social inclusion, poverty eradication and so forth. Several international and regional processes (both legally binding and non-binding) eventually seek reporting from national authorities with new data and information on forests, relevant to their mandates and scopes. In this regard, two out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) - SDG6¹ and SDG 15² - are directly related to forests but many other SDGs and targets have interlinkages with forests and trees, at least 10 SDGs and 28 targets, according to FAO (FAO 2018). Furthermore, the adoption of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) in 2017 specifically required countries to make progress in achieving its six Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and 26 targets. All these developments further underscore the need for robust and systematic monitoring systems in the forest sector at national and sub national levels. Accurate, timely and relevant data gathering, data management and utilization are key to SFM efforts, national forest policy making, planning and programming. This will enable countries to provide accurate data-driven assessment of their effort to meet international commitments, including the SDGs. However, many developing countries face numerous challenges in data collection, management and processing for monitoring and assessing the progress in SFM. Even if relevant data are available in a country, they are often found scattered across different government agencies and private organizations.

The UNFF is mandated to review the implementation of the United Nations Forest Instrument (UNFI) and the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) by its member states and other relevant stakeholders. In reviewing progress, UNFF relies on voluntary national reporting from its member states. The quality and comprehensiveness of such reviews and follow-up actions (through UNFF resolutions) depend on the quality and reliability of data collected and used in such national reports. In this regard,

¹ Sustainable Development Goal 6: “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”

² Sustainable Development Goal 15: “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”

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.

1.3 Structure of the report

The rest of this report is structured as follows:

Section 2: Describes the project’s intervention logic, logical framework and key features, arrangements in the project implementation and limitations and constraints in the project design.

Section 3: Details out the evaluation scope, objectives and main evaluation questions. It further highlights evaluation criteria used and the extent to which these have been addressed

Section 4: Describe the evaluation approach and methodology used for data collection and analysis.

Section 5: Presents the evaluation findings and conclusions based on the analysis of the data/information gathered.

Section 6: Makes a few recommendations including discussions on lessons learned from implementation of the project.

³ The project document uses these two terms interchangeably. This report used “pilot” countries consistently to avoid any confusion.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT INTERVENTION

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. systematic and timely reporting to UNFF and other international processes through enhanced capacity of pilot countries
4. Eventually these outputs will result in the strengthened capacity of developing countries to monitor SFM and meet international reporting obligations.

This is graphically illustrated in Box 1 on page 10.

Per the project logical framework, the project consists of two Expected Accomplishments (EAs), four Indicators of Achievements (IAs), six main activities (As) and four targets. An abridged version of the logical framework, showing its main elements is presented in the table 1 on page 11. A copy of the original logical framework from the project document is presented in Annex 2.

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

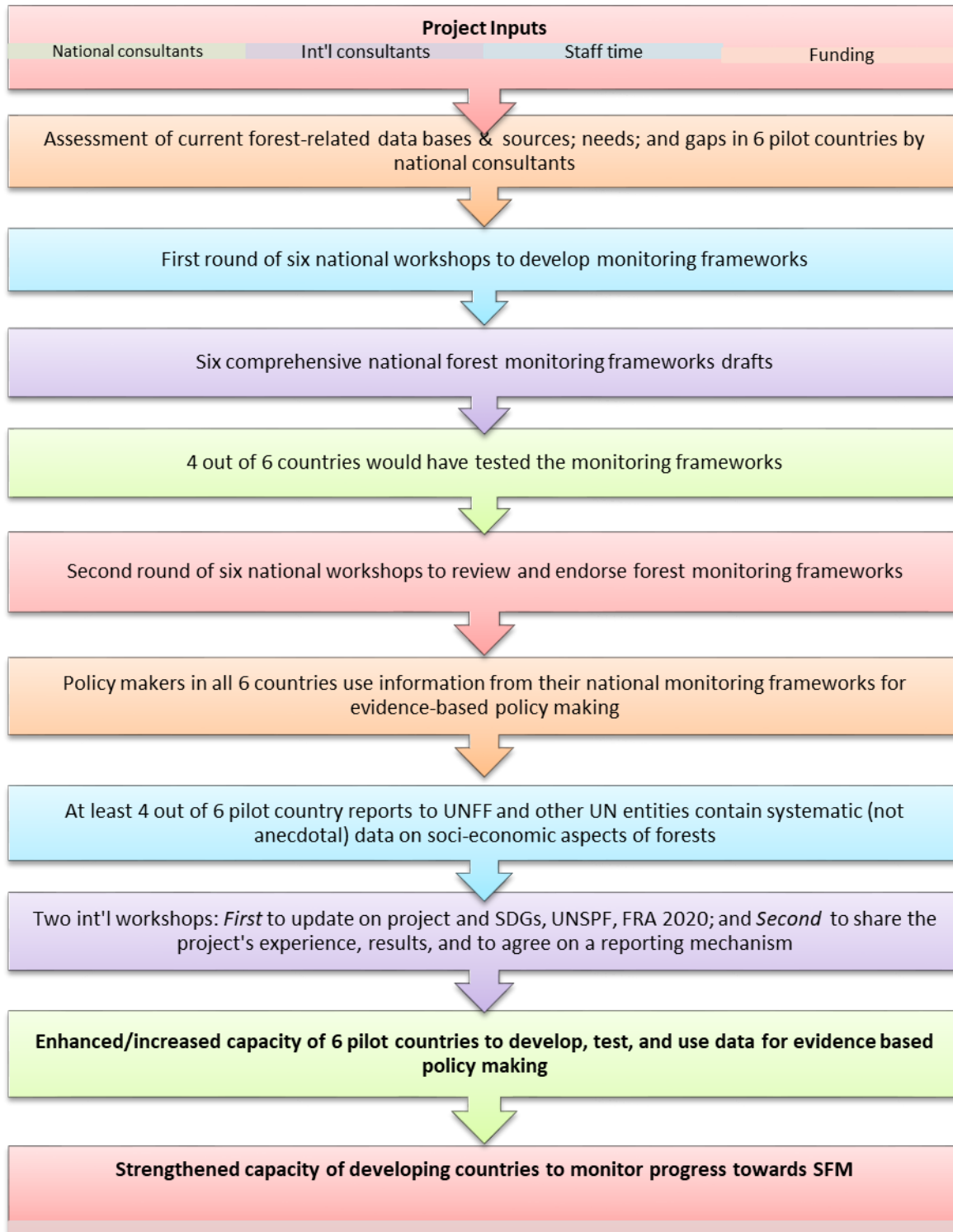


Table 1. Abridged version of the project logical framework

Expected accomplishments	Main activities	Indicators of achievement	Targets	Means of verification
EA1. Enhanced capacity of target countries to develop and test monitoring frameworks to track progress towards forest related sustainable development goals, the Global Objectives on Forests and financial flows that impact forests	A1.1 – Mapping existing national forest related-databases and identifying potential data gaps and tools to address these gaps.	IA1.1 - Comprehensive monitoring frameworks have been developed in all 6 target countries.	All 6 target countries.	The documented monitoring framework and endorsement by national authorities; National information systems, databases in forest agencies and national statistical offices.
	A1.2 – Developing the monitoring framework for international forest-related goals and targets (serving the UN Forest Instrument, GOFs, SDGs and FRA 2020) in selected countries.	IA1.2 – 4 out of 6 target countries have tested the comprehensive monitoring frameworks developed through the project	4 of the 6 target countries	
	A1.3 – 6 national workshops (1 per country), attended by a range of stakeholders from relevant sectors, to review available forest data in the target countries based on the reports by national consultants.		(6)	(Reports of the national workshops; Secretariat’s record)
EA 2. Increased capacity of target countries to use forest monitoring data for evidence-based policy making, reporting, and analysis of the contribution of forest goods and services to society and economy in their respective countries	A2.1 – Advisory services in development and utilizing their forest monitoring frameworks. The UNFFS with the international consultant will provide guidance and share information on existing reporting methodologies of other countries.	IA2.1 Policy makes in each of the target countries use information from the national forest monitoring system for evidence-based policy making.	All 6 countries report on steps they have taken to use forest monitoring information for policy development	Survey of policy makers at the end of the project.
	A2.2 – 6 national workshops (1 per country). The workshops would review and endorse forest monitoring frameworks developed under EA1 and initiate systematic tracking of a small number of indicators on socio-economic aspects and financial flows.	IA2.2 Reports submitted to UNFF and other UN entities contain systematic (not anecdotal) data on socio-economic aspects of forests.	4 of 6 target countries.	Secretary General’s report on progress towards implementation of UN Forest Instrument, GOFs and SDGs.
	A2.3 – 2 int’l workshops. <i>First</i> meeting provides context for the work within this project/update on SDGs indicators process, UNSPF, FAO/FRA 2020. The <i>second</i> meeting provides an opportunity to share experiences, lessons learned, and the results achieved within the project. This workshop would likely agree on an updated reporting format for UNFF. Both meetings would serve as capacity building for technical experts,		(2)	(Secretariat’s record)

Note – The project Logical framework did not clearly show information on indicators, targets and means of verification related to all activities (e.g., A1.3 and A2.3). The numbers and text in parentheses, across from A1.3 and A2.3 are the evaluation evaluator’s understanding.

2.2 Resources

The project was managed by the existing human resources of the Secretariat without additional cost to the project, except for staff travel. One Programme Officer was assigned to oversee the project under the supervision of the Senior Programme Officer of the Secretariat.

The budget allocated for the project per the project document was US\$509,000. The Secretariat informed the evaluator that an additional funding of \$200,000 was added for the third global workshop of October 2019, held in Bangkok, Thailand, thus increasing the total budget to US\$709,000. Table 2 provides the detailed budget under different categories. The travels of the workshop participants, UNFF staff and consultants constitute for more than 70% of the budget allocation, followed by the consultant fees (14.4%).

Table 2. Project budget

	Other Staff Costs	International Consultants	National Consultants	Consultant Travel	Travel of Staff	Contractual Services	General Operating Expenses	Grants and contributions: Workshop Travel	Total
EA1	015	105	105	105	115	120	125	145	
A1.1 Mapping existing forest databases in target countries and identifying data gaps	-	4,500	24,000	-	-	-	-	-	28,500
A1.2 Developing monitoring framework for international forest-related goals and targets	-	9,000	12,000	-	-	-	-	-	21,000
A1.3 National workshops (6, one in each country) to review forest data and identify priority indicators	6,000	-	6,000	-	42,000	-	9,000	45,000	108,000
EA2:									
A2.1 Advisory services to assist target countries in developing and using forest monitoring frameworks	-	-	-	-	42,000	-	-	-	42,000
A2.2 National workshops (6, one per country) with data producers and users	6,000	9,000	6,000	24,000	42,000	-	9,000	45,000	141,000
A2.3 Global (or a few regional) meetings to endorse forest monitoring system for a wider group of countries	12,000	9,000	-	-	14,000	15,000	-	100,000	150,000
A2.4 Workshop to strengthen the capacity to assess national monitoring systems	-	13,550	-	-	10,224	35,000	11,194	130,032	200,000
Independent evaluation	-	9,000	-	4,000	-	-	-	-	13,000
General project management costs	-	-	-	-	-	3,500	2,000	-	5,500
TOTAL	24,000	54,050	48,000	28,000	150,224	53,500	31,194	320,032	709,000

2.3 Key partners

UNFF National Focal Points in six pilot countries are the key partners of the project. UNFF Secretariat worked closely with UNFF National Focal Points or their representatives, and 6 national consultants. The project anticipated coordination with the focal points of the Rio conventions (CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC), the Global Forest Resources Assessment, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO/FRA), and the UN Statistics Division (on matters related to SDGs), as well as with national statistical offices of the six pilot countries.

The project also anticipated consultations with another DA project “Accountability systems for sustainable forest management in Caucasus and Central Asian countries”, implemented by FAO and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). Although the two projects have different target countries, they have similar timeframe and address similar issues of strengthening capacity of countries to collect data, especially on socio-economic aspects of forests and monitor progress towards SFM.

2.4 Project design issues

It is clear from the project document that the development of a comprehensive “monitoring framework” in each pilot country should be the concrete outcome of the successful execution of the project. The monitoring framework is envisioned in the project document (see A1.2 of Logical Framework) as the one developed for reporting all international forest-related goals and targets (serving the UN Forest Instrument, GOFs/GFGs, SDGs and FRA 2020). The Secretariat has proceeded implementing the project with an understanding that the UNFF reporting format (adopted by UNFF13 in 2018) is the monitoring framework⁴. The report further deliberates on this issue based on a wide range of data gathered for the evaluation (see Chapter 5. Findings and Conclusions, in particular, its sub-section 5.1.1 and section 5.3).

2.5 Implementation of the project

As the first step, the secretariat in consultation with the national focal points for UNFF planned the project activities in each of the pilot countries and recruited national consultants in all six pilot countries. Those six national consultants conducted inventories of existing forest-related databases in the pilot countries. Their reports mapped out the existing databases, identified potential data gaps for addressing national and international reporting, and potential tools to address those gaps. Those reports of the national consultants provided the basis for discussions at the national workshops (two workshops per pilot country) on data availability and requirement issues, and for coordinating with stakeholders/agencies who could provide data for national reports by pilot countries to UNFF15 (to be held in 2020), using the UNFF reporting format.

At the time of this evaluation, all six countries have consultants’ reports on forest related data, and all but one, Mongolia have completed two workshops each. The first workshop in Mongolia was convened on 6-7 November 2019, just a few weeks before the end date of the project. Per the project management team of the Secretariat, there is a likelihood of an additional workshop in Kenya (third workshop on special request by the country), which will be held most likely after this evaluation.

The UNFF Secretariat has informed the evaluator that the project has completed three international meetings/workshops⁵ during its implementation phase: (1) in Nairobi, Kenya on 21-23 November 2017; (2) in Rome, Italy in 14-16 November 2018; and (3) in Bangkok, Thailand on 28-30 October 2019 even though the project has foreseen only two such meetings/workshops. The first international meeting of the project was held on 21-23 November 2017 in Nairobi, as the Expert Meeting on Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting (MAR) to UNFF. At the request of the 12th session of UNFF through its resolution 12/1, adopted in May 2017, the UNFF Secretariat had revised a draft voluntary national reporting format to UNFF on the implementation of the UNSPF, and piloted it in a few volunteer countries.

⁴ Regarding the monitoring framework mentioned in the project, the UNFF Secretariat communicated to the consultant by email of 20 November 2019 this: *“Our understanding of the “monitoring framework” is that it is a concept that allows for assessing progress towards specific objectives/goals or indicators /targets. In the context of this project, the monitoring framework is the “Format for reporting on progress made towards the Global Forest Goals and targets”. The format is developed around the Global Forest Goals and targets which cover all aspects of SFM. The information and data gathered can be used for national and international reporting purposes. Using the format for reporting to the Forum, and submitting it along with an official letter from the Ministry/Forest Agency responsible for forests is tantamount to endorsement of the framework. In addition, the validation workshop held in each of the target countries also serves the purpose of endorsing the framework.*

⁵ Project document has a provision for only two international meetings (or global workshops). The Secretariat was able to mobilize additional funding to organize the third global workshop in October 2019 in Bangkok.

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 presentations on their experiences from the project implementation. But the main focus of the workshop was on how to fill in the UNFF reporting format for UNFF15, the deadline for which was 15 November 2019. Although relevant to the general scope of the project, the evaluation has revealed that the scopes and outcomes of those workshop do not correspond to those stated in the project document.

2.6 Challenges in project implementation

The project faced some challenges at its initial phase of implementation. It started with a delay due to the development of the UNSPF 2017-2030 at around the same period when the project was planned to start its activities in the pilot countries. The UNSPF was finally agreed upon by UNFF in January 2017, and subsequently adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in April 2017. The UNSPF has huge implications on the project's scope of work, because countries are expected to monitor, assess and report on progress on implementing the UNSPF and achieving its six Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and associated 26 targets (compared to the four Global Objectives of Forests⁶ in the project's original scope). Thus, the relevance of the project in the work of the Forum has further increased, and its scope broadened. This is undoubtedly a very important development and logical to be brought within the scope of the project.

The first internal progress report of the Secretariat (for July 2016 –January 2017) noted that since the UNSPF's new 6 GFG and 26 Targets are the basis for national reporting to UNFF from now on, those elements had to be incorporated into the work of the project. Accordingly, this new development – 6 GFG & 26 Targets – were included in the ToR of national consultants and discussed at the national workshops. But other than that internal progress report, the evaluator found no formal record of the project document being revised accordingly, nor any sort of record maintained on the changes made in project's strategy or expected accomplishments regarding the comprehensive national forest monitoring frameworks.

Other factors impacting project implementation were a change in government in Peru and delay in nominating a new UNFF focal point in Mongolia. The project activities in Mongolia were launched only in late 2019, and its first national workshop was organized towards the end date of the project, i.e., in 7-8 November, after the global workshop in Bangkok in late October, while most other pilot countries have completed their project activities.

⁶ The four Global Objectives of Forests were incorporated as the first four of the six GFGs of the UNSPF 2030. The UNSPF's fifth GFG (GFG5) is focused on promoting "governance framework" and sixth GFG (GFG6) on enhancing "cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergies". For full text on GFGs and Targets, visit UNFF website - <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Global-Forest-Goals-booklet-Apr-2019.pdf>

3 EVALUATION SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

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).

Box 2. Definitions of criteria used for evaluation

The “Inspection and Evaluation Manual” of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) defines those terms of second category as follows (see its Glossary at https://oios.un.org/sites/oios.un.org/files/images/oios-ied_manual.pdf):

Relevance: The extent to which an activity, expected accomplishment or strategy is pertinent or significant for achieving the related objective and the extent to which the objective is significant to the problem addressed. Relevance is viewed in the context of the activity’s design as well as in the light of the factual situation at the time of evaluation.

Effectiveness: The extent to which the development intervention objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.

Efficiency: A measure of how well inputs (funds, staff, time and so forth) are converted into outputs.

Sustainability: The probability of continued long-term benefits.

For assessing the project’s performance against its targets, the ToR have listed evaluation questions, the majority of which is related to “monitoring framework” (see Annex 1 for ToR). Accordingly, this evaluation attempted to find evidence to answer the following questions:

- Extent to which:
 - The project achieved its objectives and planned outcomes (expected accomplishments), in particular the development of monitoring frameworks;
 - The project results are relevant to the national priorities and needs; are effective, efficient and sustainable;
 - The Project’s methodology for the development of monitoring frameworks:
 - took into account different functions of forests (economic, socio-cultural and environmental);
 - integrated national as well as global needs and priorities;
 - allowed for alignment of national development and sectoral policies;
 - engaged relevant stakeholders

- The monitoring frameworks developed through the project are used in reporting to UNFF15;
- The monitoring frameworks developed through the project are used in policy making related to SFM.

4 EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation process was undertaken over eighteen (18) days within the period, 26 September to 29 December 2019, with the evaluator (consultant) working closely with UNFF Secretariat staff members who managed the project implementation. This evaluation has been undertaken while the project was coming to its closing date (i.e., 31 December 2019).

The evaluation makes use of the project documents as the reference document for evaluation, in particular, its logical framework (Annex 2).

4.1 Data Sources

The evaluation process gathered data from two main sources:

- (i) Existing *secondary* data and information generated by the project, and external literature reviewed; and
- (ii) New evaluation-specific *primary* data gathered through an online survey (see Appendix 2) and interviews.

4.2 Sampling and Sampling frame

The sampling frame for the online survey used is the list of UNFF national focal points and their alternates, consultants (national and international), participants of the national workshops in the six pilot countries, and the project related staff members of the UNFF Secretariat. From this frame, the lists of workshop participants with email addresses for each country were included in the survey. Those lists of workshop participants with email addresses were provided by the national focal points of the pilot countries and/or the secretariat. The sample contained 131 individuals (a purposive sample).

A purposive sample of persons to be interviewed from the pilot countries was made in consultation with the secretariat that included national focal points, other forestry administration officials who have been actively involved in the project activities in their respective pilot countries, national and international consultants and project-related UNFF staff members. The ToR specifically asked the consultant to “interview at least a reasonable sample from 21 countries including the six pilot countries that will participate in the Global Workshop to strengthening the capacity of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to assess their national monitoring systems, increase the efficiency in monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR) planned for October 2019.” Out of the six pilot countries, the participants from only three (Jamaica, Kenya and the Philippines) were present at that global workshop, held in Bangkok (referred to in this report as Bangkok Workshop of October 2019 hereafter). Those three officials from pilot countries were interviewed in person. In addition, four participants from non-pilot countries (Iran, Lesotho, Nigeria and Uganda) of the Bangkok Workshop were interviewed in person during the workshop, on as available basis, to get their perspectives of the project. Interviewing participants during the intensely engaging workshop was not very convenient to participants so only a few interviews could be conducted.

Other project related individuals (UNFF National Focal Points or officials closely involved in the project, consultants and the UNFF Secretariat) were interviewed by phone, Skype, email and WhatsApp based on their responses to interview requests made by the evaluator.

4.3 Data collection procedures and analysis

Data collection procedures for the evaluation involves the following three phases:

Phase 1: The first phase of data collection and analysis involved desk research that reviewed project related documents (project document, project progress reports, workshop reports, and consultants' studies on data sources and gaps in each of the pilot countries). The project logical framework was used as a reference for evaluation.

Phase 2: The second phase involved the administration of a survey and interviews.

A questionnaire survey (Annex 3) was designed covering all aspects of evaluation criteria and evaluation questions mentioned above. The online survey was launched through "SurveyMonkey" software. The survey has a total of 28 questions. The survey data was collected over a two-week period in November 2019. Out of 131 individuals included in the survey, 38 have responded. Thus, the effective response rate **29.0%**, which is reasonably satisfactory⁷ considering the diverse groups of individuals, their degree of involvement in the project activities and time elapsed for many of them since their participation in the project activities (mainly, the national workshop). The survey response pattern is shown in table 3 on next page.

⁷ According to SurveyAnyplace, the average response rate for email survey is 30%, (Response rate for in-person survey is the highest at 57% and In-App survey at the lowest at 13%, and average being 33%). See <https://surveyanyplace.com/average-survey-response-rate/>. Another source Surveygizmo puts the average response rate for an external survey at 10-15% only. See <https://www.surveygizmo.com/resources/blog/survey-response-rates/>

Table 3. Survey responses

<i>Respondents by major categories</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Response rate %</i>
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
<i>Respondents by countries and other groupings</i>	<i>Sample frame</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Response rate of each country and other group %</i>
Ghana	27	8	29.6
Jamaica	8	5	62.5
Kenya	42	11	26.2
Mongolia	4	1	25.0
Peru	18	4	22.2
Philippines, The	28	5	17.9
Other	4	4	100.0
Total	131	38	29.0% overall

A purposive sample of persons to be interviewed from the pilot countries was made in consultation with In total, **19** individuals from pilot and non-pilot countries including consultants and the UNFF Secretariat staff handling project management were interviewed, based on their response to interview requests that were made by the consultant (see Annex 4 for the individuals interviewed).

Phase 3: The third phase involved the analysis of the data using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. This involved the following activities:

- i. Project-related documents and records were reviewed and analyzed using the content analysis approach, gathering evidence of accomplishments, implementation experiences and challenges, common and/or contradictory threads and unintended outcomes and impacts.
- ii. Responses from the survey were analyzed using the SurveyMonkey software. Open-ended responses and additional comments to survey questions were analyzed using the content analysis approach.
- iii. Interview notes were also analyzed using a content analysis approach.
- iv. Evidence gathered from these approaches were cross-checked for validation

4.4 Quality assurance

Continuous consultations were done with the UNFF Secretariat throughout the evaluation process. Official records and data were collected with the help of the Secretariat, and carefully reviewed and analyzed. The survey questionnaire was prepared in close consultation with the Secretariat. Some informal consultations were done with experts involved in similar project evaluation and reviews of other international organizations.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The evaluation process underscored the need to protect the rights and confidentiality of informants. Hence the online survey did not seek to identify respondents. Both survey respondents and Interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of the information provided by them so that no statements in the report would be attributable to the respondents or interviewees.

4.6 Evaluation limitations

The evaluation process faced some challenges in data collection, including:

- The time allocated for the entire evaluation process (a total of 18 days) has been a limiting factor, compared to the scope of the work to be completed. The allocated time was not sufficient to thoroughly review all related documents and records; to design and pilot test the questionnaire survey; to provide reasonable time to survey participants for responses; and to interview more people during the global workshop in Bangkok in October and afterward.
- A 29.0% of survey response rate, in spite of the repeated reminders. The responses were also not evenly distributed among the six pilot countries, thus limiting the representativeness of the response coverage.
- Due to late start, Mongolia has not fully implemented its project activities thus limiting their feedback on all aspects of project implementation. Furthermore, their participation in the survey and interviews was the lowest (only one response each to the survey and interview).
- Due to poor communication networks and vast time differences between the consultant's home base (USA Central time zone) and some countries, made conducting interviews very difficult.
- Low number of national focal points agreed to be interviewed.
- Interest for interview by the participants of the Bangkok workshop was low and even finding appropriate time for those who were interested to be interviewed was very difficult due to the flow of the workshop. This has resulted in a small sample of interviewees coming from the non-pilot countries (*a convenient sampling*).
- The lack of provision for field visit to any of the pilot countries prevented the evaluator from getting a feel of ground reality and opportunity to get feedback from larger stakeholders' bases.

5 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 PROJECT OUTPUTS

Project activities corresponding to targets and achievements are presented in the table below

Table 4. Project achievements

Project activities	Targets	Achievements number (percent)	Remarks
A1.1 Mapping of existing national forest-related databases and identifying potential data gaps, and tools to address those gaps	All 6 target countries	6 (100%)	
A 1.2 Developing the monitoring frameworks (MF) for international forest-related goals and targets (serving UNFI, GOFs ⁸ , SDGs and FRA 2020) in selected countries.	4 out of 6 target countries	4 (100%), according to the UNFF Secretariat email (Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya and the Philippines tested the framework)	No clearly documented and endorsed MFs. The pilot countries explored data availability and gaps in completing the UNFF reporting format for UNFF15.
A 1.3 Six national workshops (1 per country) to review available forest data and identify top priorities for socio-economic and financial flows indicators. Participation by a range of stakeholders and each concerned stakeholder to make presentation on their areas of work and how they can contribute to the project.	6 workshops	6 (100%)	Ghana: 11 Jan 2018 Jamaica: 29 Nov 2017 Kenya: 6-7 Dec 2018 Mongolia: 6-7 Nov 2019 Peru: Feb. 2018 Philippines: 1-2 June 2017
A 2.1 Advisory services to assist target countries in developing and utilizing their forest monitoring frameworks (provided by UNFFS and international consultant)	All 6 target countries report on steps taken to use forest monitoring information for policy development.		Advisory services provided mainly in filling the reporting formats for submitting voluntary national reports to UNFF15
A2.2 Six national workshops (1 per country) involving a wider range of data users. The workshops would review and endorse forest monitoring frameworks	6 workshops	5 workshops (83.3%)	Ghana: 26-27 Feb 2018 Jamaica: 18-19 Apr 2018

⁸ As stated in footnote 6 above, the GOFs were converted into the first four GFGs of the UNSPF. In addition, the UNSPF has two other GFGs – GFG5 (promote forest governance) and GFG6 (Enhance cooperation, coordination, coherence and synergy).

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.	2	3 (150%)	Nairobi, Kenya in Nov 2017 Rome, Italy in Nov 2018 Bangkok, Thailand in Oct 2019. Mostly to build capacity of countries in filling the UNFF reporting format to submit voluntary national reports to UNFF15.

Notable outcomes/accomplishments of the project are:

- National studies on existing forest-related databases and data gaps for effective monitoring of progress in SFM undertaken;
- National consultation process through workshops, involving a wider range of stakeholders – data providers and data users, including government agencies and non-state groups;
- Increased awareness about the importance of monitoring and data sources, gaps and requirements, and signs of enhanced coordination within the countries
- Contribution to the UNFF initiative on monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR) through the organization of three international workshops (expert meeting) on national reporting format for UNFF15 (Nairobi 2017, Rome 2018 and Bangkok 2019);
- Capacity building, in particular on filling UNFF national reporting format for UNFF15 through national and international workshops;
- Women and gender mainstreaming - The project has encouraged participation of women in all national workshops. It is reported by the Secretariat that as a result of the discussions at national and international workshops/meetings, facilitated by the project, the final reporting format to UNFF15 now contains a separate question which calls for country responses on their actions on gender equality in the forest sector.

⁹ The UNFF Secretariat informed the evaluator that the second workshop in Mongolia is planned for 30-31 January 2020.

5.1.1 Monitoring Frameworks: A key conceptual issue of the project

As mentioned earlier, the development of a comprehensive “Monitoring Framework (MF)” in each pilot country is one of the core elements of the project. While the project document has provided a few features of such a framework, it did not provide a clear definition or description of what it should be. The following quotes from the project document indicate some of the features of the MF concept:

- *“...the project aims to develop a common monitoring framework that would serve national interests but also allow reporting on progress towards forest-related SDGs, the UNFI and its GOFs.” (p. 9);*
- *A footnote in its logical framework on MF states, “Comprehensive monitoring framework will include indicators both on financial flows for SFM and on socio-economic contributions of forests (environmental services, contribution to food security, poverty reduction).” (p. 15);*
- *“Designing the monitoring mechanisms in a way that they will equally useful for national purposes as for international obligations – in this sense, it will be a country-driven process with facilitation by the UNFFS.” (p. 18);*
- *“The project, ..., will facilitate an all-stakeholder workshop to map out existing data sources, coordinate activities with national stat offices and agree on how to build up a comprehensive monitoring system on forests.” (p. 19).*

On p. 15 under EA1 of in its logical framework, it states that MFs would be endorsed by national authorities but on p. 16, under EA2, it says “The workshops would review and endorse forest monitoring frameworks developed under EA1 ...” Moreover, it should be noted that MF is implied sometimes as a common MF (singular), and at other times as separate national MFs (plural).

The concept of MF has been widely mentioned in a number of consultants’ studies and the reports of the national workshops but the evaluator could find no demonstrable evidence that such a system has been developed through the project in each of the pilot countries and is in operation. There is a clear notion for a need of such a system, and a few workshops made concrete recommendations on forms and functions of such frameworks. But it is found that the workshops organized by the project primarily focused on explaining about the reporting template to UNFF15 all along in all 6 countries.

From the interviews and survey responses, the evaluator came to the following two interpretations of the term monitoring framework:

- A new coordinated platform (preferably online) for forest-related data collection, update/management and with clear responsibilities of different stakeholders who generate data, as a few consultants’ studies and national workshops recommended. Such a monitoring platform or system or framework would require a follow-up process of consultations, convergence of ideas and designing of a framework, and get that endorsed by concerned government institution (e.g., a ministry), and resources are appropriated by the government;
- The UNFF-approved voluntary national reporting format (template) itself is considered a monitoring framework, as was explained to the evaluator by the secretariat. Apparently, this is how the project is being implemented and discussions were held at the national workshops.

However, when considering a few studies by national consultants, recommendations of national workshops and interviews with pilot country individuals, it also became clear that several of them

understood the concept as the one closer to the first interpretation above. On the other hand, a large number of survey respondents (80%), who indicated a familiarity with the MF developed through the project, may have understood the concept as the second interpretation (**i.e., MF = UNFF reporting format**). This is because, it seemed that the national workshops were organized from day 1 as an exercise to map out current data sources and data gaps in order to address the UNFF reporting format along the six GFGs and targets of the UNSPF. In doing so, the workshops identified potential agencies/organizations to provide supporting data and information to the national forest authority.

Some of the additional comments by survey respondents on project's outcome in general and monitoring framework issues in particular, are interesting to note (*verbatim*):

- *Monitoring framework not yet done but back ground information and goals, targets and indicators identified considered SFM UNFI and UNSPF Already mainstreamed into our information collation system for national reporting to different organizations.*
- *The monitoring tools for SFM are yet to be developed and not all key stakeholders are involved in testing the monitoring and evaluation.*
- *We didn't get opportunity to pilot proposed monitoring framework hence efficacy, effectiveness and practicality not certain.*
- *Adequate background information and data now available for developing overarching monitoring and control framework courtesy this project.*
- *While the project was good at raising/ highlighting the issues I think it would have been more effective if the project had funding to assist countries to develop or purchase useful online monitoring systems to increase data collection, and facilitate reporting and sharing of information.*
- *It would be really effective to allocate resources to enable development of the Framework to pilots thus consolidating the experience.*
- *Securing funding to support further development of the methodology is strongly recommended.*
- *There is need for additional technical and funding support to finalise the work of drafting the indicators for the GFG targets, testing them, sharpening them, sharing them with stakeholders through sub-national / regional meetings.*
- *Based on data gap analysis findings, the capacity development plan should be elaborated and executed to establish domestic SFM monitoring framework.*

It should be noted that a couple of consultants' reports and national workshops made recommendations to develop comprehensive monitoring systems incorporating new technology such as online platform with clear responsibilities to different agencies (e.g., Ghana, Jamaica and Kenya).

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 launched at the right time and sensitizing this issue. It provided some “push” to the development of an M&E framework in the country. One of the interviewees believed that the project was “Not a sufficient intervention”, and that “For a concrete framework to emerge there is a need for action-planning, e.g., including designing, a platform, piloting and implementing.”

Through the interviews and UNFF secretariat progress reports, the evaluator understood that Kenya is working on national indicators for the GFG targets and whether data collection for such indicators be integrated into the routine collection of data by the Kenyan National Statistics Bureau (KNBS). The UNFF Secretariat is exploring additional funding under the project to hold a 3rd national workshop in Kenya to facilitate the elaboration of indicators and methodologies for data collection for monitoring SFM in the country.

In the case of Ghana, a national level collaboration between the Forestry Commission and the Ghana National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) is emerging on data collection and monitoring issues. NDPC is the overall agency for M&E of development in the country and it has incorporated some forest-related indicators into their development strategy and forestry is gradually gaining visibility in national accounting. The Forestry Policy of Ghana, 2012 and the Forestry Development Master Plan (2016-2030) have been aligned with this project outputs. The Corporate Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of the Forestry Commission is now the lead in data collection and reporting to the UNFF and the National Development Planning Commission.

Thus, the project can be said to have made some impact in right direction prompting further work in participating pilot countries for systematic monitoring of progress towards SFM that meets national forest management needs as well as international reporting commitments. This criteria that a monitoring framework should satisfy the need of the country in monitoring progress towards SFM, facilitating evidence-based policy making, and taking actions on ground should be the primary purpose of an intervention for developing such a framework. Once such a framework is developed, institutionalized and functioning well, then it can equally and concurrently satisfy a country’s need to report to UNFF and other international, regional processes where the country has reporting commitments. In this light, the current understanding of many respondents to the survey who understood that the UNFF national reporting format is the same as the national monitoring framework may not be totally correct. The secretariat would need to reflect on this matter seriously¹⁰.

¹⁰ In response to the first draft evaluation report, the UNFF secretariat on 17 December 2019, provided an additional clarification on the monitoring framework, which acknowledged that “the UNFF reporting format is actually one of the main components that make the monitoring framework.” However, there is no indication of this approach being used during the project implementation; all national and global workshops agenda and discussions were focused entirely on the UNFF reporting format.

5.2 PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

This section of the project evaluation is undertaken using the criteria highlighted in Section IV above. The evaluation assesses the extent to which key project indicators and the four evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability are achieved. The assessment draws heavily on the survey, interviews and review of the project related documents and records of data.

In the survey, Kenya and Ghana have the largest representation in terms of respondents (30% and 22%) and Mongolia with the lowest (under 3%). As seen in Figure 2, respondents cut across different functions, with majority of them working in national forest administration and having participated in workshops.

5.2.1 Relevance

The criteria of relevance was measured by gauging the extent to which the objectives of the project's development intervention is consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs and global priorities. The intent of the project is to enhance capacity of the pilot countries to develop and effectively utilize the monitoring system, both of which are vital for those countries to manage their forests sustainably and improve the livelihoods of their citizens. Thus, any such intervention is highly relevant today, and will continue to remain relevant in the future. This was clearly demonstrated from the survey results and interviews.

Respondents indicate a high level of consistency of the objectives of this project and beneficiaries' requirements, country needs and global priorities. Good communication between consultants and focal points, and the use of local people as consultants feature as some of the reasons that respondents ascribe to the achievement of such high relevance scores.

About 95% of respondents agreed that the project activities are consistent with their country's needs on monitoring sustainable forest management. Same percentage of respondents considered the project being relevant with global priorities for monitoring SFM. Almost all respondents believed the methodology for developing monitoring framework is relevant to the national development and sectoral policies. Similarly, 95% of respondents agree that the project activities are consistent with the global priorities on monitoring sustainable forest management. More than 90% of respondents indicated that the project's methodology allowed for integration of economic (93%), socio-cultural (97%) and environmental (100%) functions of forests. Over 90% of respondents agreed that the methodology, to a great extent or to some extent, allowed for integration of different expectations and requirements from the major environmental conventions.

During the interviews, the pilot country individuals reaffirmed the project intervention being highly relevant to their needs. The forestry officials from non-pilot countries, who were interviewed at the global workshop in Bangkok also expressed the relevance of the project to their countries' needs, and they wished that their countries would also be included in similar future projects.

5.2.2 Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the project is measured through understanding of how successful the project has been in raising awareness, delivering high-quality project outputs and building capacity of the forestry institutions in pilot countries. On all measures, respondents indicate a high level of effectiveness.

In regard to the overall performance of the project at country level, 35% of survey respondents found the project "highly effective" and 51% found it "effective", i.e., about 86% of respondents rated the project

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 reports 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 additional questions in the survey reaffirmed the project’s positive effect on capacity building of national agencies in submitting reports to UNFF and other related global processes but also showed an interesting distinction of the degree of effectiveness. The respondents showed very high opinion of the effectiveness (“to a great extent” and “to some extent” cumulatively) in building capacity for submitting both to UNFF (87%) and to other global forest-related processes (81%). However, on a closer examination, their responses clearly indicate that the project’s effectiveness in capacity building for reporting is tilted more towards UNFF (e.g., 47% “to a great extent” for UNFF versus 26% for other global processes). This is understandable as this being a UNFF project (see figures below):

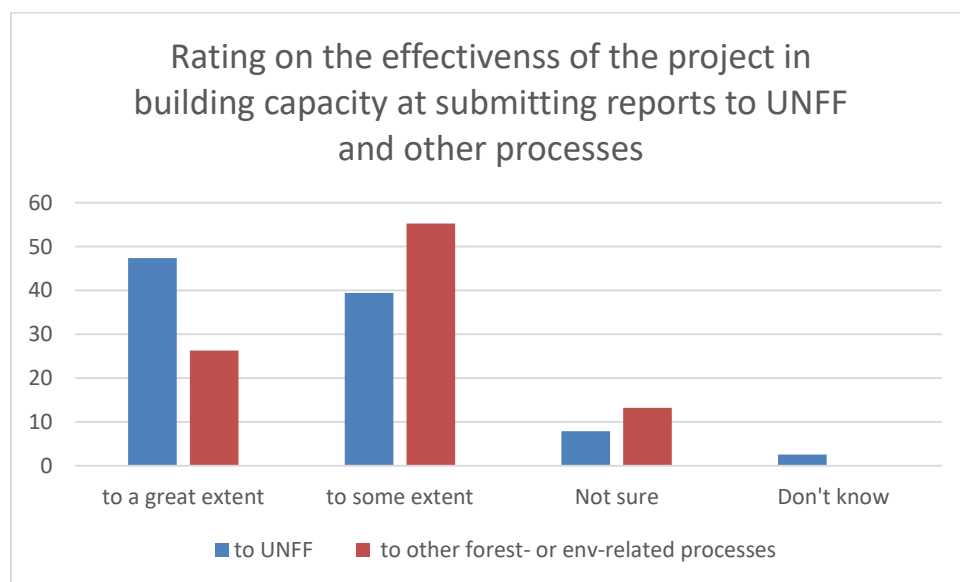


Figure 1. Survey responses on building capacity in reporting

The project has been effective in disseminating national studies prepared by project’s consultants. 44% of respondents are very familiar with these studies, and equal number of respondents are at least somewhat familiar with the studies. Over two thirds of respondents indicate that the studies are very good or good while more than 90% rate the workshops as effective or somewhat effective.

The project was recognized highly for its effort in engaging a wide range of stakeholder involvement in the monitoring framework development process. Over 95% of respondents agree that stakeholders were involved to a great or to some extent.

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 project document, for example, the national focal points of the Rio Conventions and another Development Account funded project executed by the FAO/ECE, which was designed to address similar issues and intent (i.e., strengthening capacity of countries to collect data) with a similar timeframe – *“Accountability systems for SFM in Caucasus and Central Asian countries”*.

5.2.3 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. However, a few respondents (8%) were not sure or felt that the resources were not used efficiently.

In spite of encouraging perception on state of efficiency from the survey, the evaluator would like to point out that the project implementation in one of the six countries (Mongolia) did not start on time due mainly to factors beyond the control of the project management. This definitely has affected the overall performance of the project and its use of resources. Both the effectiveness and efficiency of the project could have been higher if all six countries could similar start and end dates, within a reasonable conditions.

In terms of financial efficiency, the Secretariat records showed that the project has spent a total of US\$508,040 out of the allocated budget of US\$709,000 (about 71.7%)¹¹. Even though the project has not

¹¹ It is interesting to note that the actual expenditure data of \$508,040 is closer to the original project budget of \$509,000. This means, the additional \$200,000 allocated to the project is essentially unspent, and the UNFF Secretariat may wish to explore a possibility of using this resource for follow-up activities including in developing monitoring frameworks in pilot countries, as the survey and interviews have revealed for such a need and desire.

completed the second workshop in Mongolia, the project has succeeded in keeping the expenditure under control.

5.2.4 Sustainability

It is too early and therefore difficult to predict the impact and sustainability of the project at this point of time. However, the most of survey respondents (86%) 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 (33% said they have "started using to some extent" and 37% said "started using to some extent". This is a good indication towards usefulness, impact and sustainability of the project outcomes.

The interviews with the national focal points and other officials reaffirmed the survey result in the sense that the project came in their countries in the right time to raise awareness and providing valuable background materials (e.g., national consultants' reports on data) and opportunities (e.g., stakeholder consultation and collaboration platform). It has certainly generated a healthy momentum. However, they cautioned that, this momentum and enthusiasm must not be allowed to wither away. There should be political commitment at national level and continued international support to keep the momentum to move forward with stakeholder coordination, collaboration and cooperation and in developing comprehensive forest monitoring frameworks that meet national need for SFM and serve adequately in reporting to international processes, including to UNFF.

A number of survey and interview participants felt that 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. They strongly felt that while those project activities/outputs were of great value and a solid starting point, not having any project activities in pilot countries after the workshops broke the momentum the project had built. This may also affect the sustainability of the project's good work. This should be a lesson to apply in designing future projects with similar themes.

To help improve the likelihood of sustaining the positive results of the projects, it would be useful to understand what factors, the survey respondents believed, led to the project being successful or not being successful in achieving its expected accomplishments. The factors mentioned with higher frequency for both those questions are presented in the table 5 on next page.

Table 5. Factors referred in survey accounting for the project being successful or not being successful

<p><i>Factors that accounted for the project being <u>successful</u> in achieving its expected accomplishments</i></p>	<p><i>Factors that accounted for the project being <u>not successful</u> in achieving its expected accomplishments</i></p>
<p>Responses to this questions have generated factors with many similar themes/concepts.</p> <p>They are grouped and ordered below based on the frequency of responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of stakeholders, especially Statistics agencies (#1) • Inter-institutional coordination/consultations • Analysis of data sources/gaps • Awareness of int’l context to national experts • Country-focused, few concise objectives • Political will/ Forest Administration/Senior management Commitment • Information sharing • Funding/prudent use of project resources • Responsiveness of UNFFS • Local/competent consultants • Timeliness of project vis-a-vis national initiatives (e.g., Jamaica’s NFMCP) 	<p>This question generated too many stand-alone factors mentioned compared to the success question.</p> <p>Factors mentioned more than once were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding • Inadequate awareness creation among stakeholders • Skewed involvement of stakeholders, lack of involvement of relevant stakeholders • Lack of coordination within country to gather data • Lack of government commitment/interest/bureaucratic inertia • Lack of data <p>A few factors mentioned only once but worth noting are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a binding process • Not aligned with national scope/priority • Setting unrealistic goals • No provision for pilot testing of monitoring framework/indicators • Lack of follow-up/M&E of project • Inadequate country capacity

The project has convened three global workshops for sharing the experiences and results of the project with other countries. These events have good potential to generate interest and motivation for initiating

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 requirements and data gaps for various national and international purposes:
- Enhanced awareness to a wider population about the significance of monitoring on progress being made towards SFM. Response from survey and interviews consistently highlighted this effect of the project on political leaders, stakeholders related to forest-relevant data generation, collection or utilization in a country;
- Provided excellent, and well appreciated, opportunity to bring together, through national workshops, a wide range of data-related stakeholders for cooperation, coordination and collaboration. Those stakeholders included not only the public forestry agencies but also other public agencies such as statistics, economic development and planning agencies, focal points for the Rio Conventions, as well as non-public organizations such as forest-industry, civil society, research and academic institutions and community groups. This facilitated a learning environment from each other and exploring approaches to address issues related to data, monitoring, assessment and reporting on SFM;
- Certainly helped build capacity of forestry agency officials to appropriately gather data and fill the reporting format for UNFF15.

Having said that, the evaluator also felt that the project design was too ambitious compared to the resources and time at its disposal in terms of developing, formally endorsing by appropriate authority, and operationalizing a “comprehensive forest monitoring framework” in each of the pilot countries.

The reporting format, which the Secretariat interpreted as the “monitoring framework”, was not the main purpose of this project. Because of the closely related and relevant scopes of the project and the UNFF reporting format, the project’s activities obviously could and did contribute to the development of the UNFF reporting format but this assumption and sole focus of the project on UNFF reporting format missed the opportunity to make advances in developing comprehensive forest monitoring frameworks in pilot countries. The reporting format was developed with a different process and agreed by UNFF13 (in 2018) and is applicable to all countries for submitting their national reports to UNFF15. Obviously, the pilot countries, with more background information on their existing data sources and gaps, together with stakeholder consultations (among national-level data/statistics agencies), facilitated by the project, may be better prepared to submit their reports to UNFF15 compared to the countries not assisted by the project.

It seems too ambitious and even simplistic to imagine that a country will have a comprehensive and fully functioning monitoring framework as a result of the project which has a very limited resources, scope and

timeline. Essentially, the project undertook national analytical studies on current status of related databases and data gaps, needed for monitoring SFM in the country (and to meet international reporting obligations) followed by one to two national consultation workshops involving a wider stakeholder participation. These activities of the project are laudable. But the evaluation revealed that in most countries, the process stopped there and/or focused their energy on filling the UNFF reporting template for its 15th session UNFF15) in 2020, which was considered an immediate need to utilize the project resources. To establish a monitoring system in the forestry agency of a country, there has to be a follow-up process leading to final design of such a framework, endorsement by the forestry agency and actual use in day-to-day affairs and policy making. Definitely, the project's activities and outputs provided background materials and points of reference. But for a systematic and institutionalized monitoring framework/system to come into existence and functioning, it requires more follow-up activities, commitments and resources.

During interviews several pilot country officials and consultants underscored the need to develop and establish a comprehensive and effective monitoring framework or platform or system. They felt that the project was very helpful in sensitizing its need through the national studies on data sources and gaps, and national consultations process involving different government and non-government stakeholders which generate or have potentials to generate relevant data (e.g., national statistical agencies, national development planning commissions, private sector and academic/research institutions) have greatly raised the awareness and for such a need and created a momentum. Those are significant building blocks necessary for developing the forest monitoring frameworks. However, due to lack of follow-up actions to the national studies and consultation workshops, it left the process incomplete or hanging. They strongly felt it as an opportunity missed and hoped for a dedicated follow-up project or projects. They ascertained that it would require more resource commitment for consultation process, designing, pilot testing, endorsing and implementation. An example of such a monitoring framework is the Strategic Framework for Performance Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) of Jamaica. This comprehensive PMER Framework and associated Plan came into existence through its separate process of National Forest Management and Conservation Plan 2016-2016 (NFMCP). The UNFF project came in the country around the same time they were developing their NFMCP. Although the PMER Framework is not entirely due to the UNFF project, it certainly deserve some credit for generating background information and further sensitizing the significance of monitoring framework for SFM. Obviously, for such a comprehensive framework to come into existence, there is a clear need for commitments and follow-up activities, in addition to background studies and consultations workshops.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 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-pilot country cross-fertilization of ideas and exchange of experiences in designing and operationalizing monitoring frameworks.
- Similarly, the UNFF Secretariat should explore more effective cooperation and coordination with CPF members that are key forest-related data generators and users (e.g., FAO, Rio Convention Secretariats, and the International Tropical Timber Organization).
- Pilot countries should make every effort to continue moving forward in designing, improving and utilizing their national forest monitoring frameworks, based on the building blocks generated through the project (as mentioned earlier).

7 LESSONS LEARNED

- 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 planned because the workshop had a tight schedule and the participants were intensively engaged in their work, which did not allow them much time or flexibility for unexpected interview requests, especially when such interviews require informed responses. Therefore, if an evaluation-related activity (such as interviews, focus group or panel discussions) is to be attached to a future meeting or workshop, then it should be appropriately included in the programme of the meeting/workshop, and the participants should be notified in advance.

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Additional reference materials:

- Relevant GA/ECOSOC resolutions on the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030 and quadrennial programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2017–2020 E/RES/2017/4;
- Reports of the UN Forum on Forests;
- Format for voluntary national reporting to UNFF15;
- Explanatory notes for voluntary national reporting to UNFF15;
- Project document;
- Reports of the national workshops in six pilot countries; and
- Annual internal UNFF Secretariat progress reports on the project for three periods (07/2016 – 01/2017; 03/2017 – 03/2018; and 01/2018 – 02/2019).

Other web-based sources consulted:

BEAM Exchange. Building Effective & Accessible Markets. <https://beamexchange.org/>

Better Evaluation. <https://www.betterevaluation.org/en>

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