Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

AN ASSESSMENT OF UPTAKE OF THE GLOBAL CORE SET OF FOREST-RELATED INDICATORS

CPF Collaborative Partnership on Forests | CIFOR | CITES | Convention on Biological Diversity | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations | gef | ITTO | IUCN

IUFRO | United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification | UNDP | UN environment programme | DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS | United Nations Climate Change | World Agroforestry | THE WORLD BANK

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACTO	Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization
CBD	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
CFRQ	Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire
C&I	criteria and indicators
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
COFO	Committee on Forestry
CPF	Collaborative Partnership on Forests
EEA	European Environment Agency
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FRA	Global Forest Resources Assessment
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GCS	Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GFG	Global Forest Goal
ICRAF	World Agroforestry Centre
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUFRO	International Union of Forest Research Organizations
JFSQ	Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire
PEFC	Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFM	sustainable forest management
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP-WCMC	United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests
UNSPF	United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030

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Executive summary

The 25th Session of the Committee on Forestry requested FAO, in collaboration with other members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), to analyse the uptake of the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators (GCS) by other reporting processes and the extent to which the GCS decreases the reporting burden on countries. To respond to this request, FAO, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests, conducted a user survey among CPF members and other forest-related data- and information-reporting processes. The survey received 26 responses from 22 organizations, including all 15 CPF members.

The survey results show that the majority of the GCS indicators are considered "of interest" to the various responding organizations and that none is considered unnecessary. For most indicators, fewer than half the responding organizations indicated that they collect data themselves, leaving that role to organizations with the appropriate mandate and resources. In all cases, organizations that collect data indicated that they cooperated with others, notably through the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ) and the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire (JFSQ). Those organizations that did not collect data themselves reported that they mostly used data from trusted partners, representing a significant reduction in the reporting burden on countries.

As part of the survey, responding organizations assessed the GCS and reported on its uptake and how to improve it. In summary:

- Respondents considered that the GCS is comprehensive and balanced and provides a flexible and transparent framework for collecting comparable information at the global level.
- Most respondents considered that the GCS can provide a minimum global framework for information for policymakers, although many indicated that it needs strengthening.
- Two main groups of reasons can be discerned for why the GCS is not being used more: (1) a lack of "fit" between the GCS and the main focus and functions of the responding organizations; and (2) concerns about definitions and data quality in the GCS, notably for tier 3 indicators.[1]
- Significant work is being carried out to improve the tier 3 indicators, a clear signal that the topics are important, albeit challenging. This work should lead to a methodologically improved GCS. More than two-thirds of the respondents reported an "explicit link" among GCS and their main organizational focus.
- Proposals to develop the full potential of the GCS may be classified into three groups: (1) promotion and communication; (2) improvement of the GCS itself; and (3) using the GCS – as intended – as a framework for analysis and reporting.
- Many respondents reported that the GCS was not being used by relevant policy communities such as government agencies and stakeholders. Reasons advanced for this can be put into three groups: (1) use of the GCS would conflict with pre-existing processes such as GHG reporting as laid down by UNFCCC; (2) the GCS is poorly known (or is misunderstood) in some organizations; and

[1] Tier 3 indicators are those for which the methodology needs to be determined, data are generally lacking, and data collection poses significant challenges.

(3) use of the GCS has not been developed in the relevant policy communities.

- In responding to a question about what prevented them from using the GCS, respondents reported that, for many CPF members and other forest-related international organizations, their existing mandates or indicator sets take precedence over the GCS, and there is no readiness to adapt existing frameworks in light of the GCS.

Overall, the survey showed that the GCS is a useful and flexible tool with potential to reduce the reporting burden on countries and improve understanding of sustainable forest management but that more effort is needed for it to achieve its full potential, for example more capacity building, dissemination, communication, promotion and cooperation on data collection.

1 Introduction

Indicators are used to measure progress towards policy goals. In recent years, the international community has articulated many purposes for forests related to broader development and in the context of the Rio Conventions. Instruments focused on the forest sector, notably the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030, also articulate targets, objectives and strategies that should be monitored. There is a strong commitment in the international community to provide the information necessary for monitoring progress towards such targets and objectives and the implementation of such strategies in a comprehensive, efficient, timely and meaningful way.

For more than 25 years, numerous actors have been involved in the development of criteria and indicators (C&I) to conceptualize, monitor, assess and report on sustainable forest management (SFM) at the global, regional and national levels (Linser *et al.*, 2018a; Linser *et al.*, 2018b). The many requests for data arising from these efforts have placed a significant reporting burden on countries and led to a diversity of approaches, concepts and definitions. There is an agreed need for the international community to reduce the overall reporting burden, which is often heavy, especially – but not only – for developing countries. Furthermore, despite the efforts of all concerned, information on key forest variables and indicators is not always transparent and up to date. There is therefore a clear and urgent need for streamlining and coordination among all involved parties.

Several agencies with responsibilities related to forests have jointly developed the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators (GCS) to simplify and harmonize concepts and terminology while respecting the needs of potential users. The outcome should be a more transparent and comprehensive picture of trends and a significant reduction in the reporting burden.

The GCS comprises 21 indicators addressing topics identified in high-level policy commitments and thus focuses data-collection efforts on questions of the highest policy importance. It is intended to help in measuring progress:

- towards SFM (including monitoring Sustainable Development Goal – SDG – 15.2.1);
- in implementing the United Nations Forest Instrument and the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030, including the Global Forest Goals and their associated targets; and
- towards SDG targets other than 15.2.1, as well as internationally agreed goals in other instruments, particularly forest-related commitments in the strategic objectives of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (FAO and CPF, 2018).

Another objective of the GCS is to provide policymakers and stakeholders in all sectors with access to more concise and focused forest-related information for evidence-based decision-making. To achieve this, the GCS identifies a limited number of indicators (Table 1) that address efficiently and comprehensively the topics identified in high-level policy commitments and thus focuses data-collection efforts on questions of the highest policy importance.

Table 1. *The Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators, their classification tiers, and links to globally agreed goals and targets*

NO.	TITLE	TIER	LINKS TO GLOBAL GOALS AND TARGETS
1	Forest area as a proportion of total land area	1	Measures progress towards GFG 1 and SDG target 15.1 (SDG indicator 15.1.1)
2	Annual forest-area change rate[1]	1	Measures progress towards SDG target 15.2 and UNSPF target 1.1. A subindicator of SDG 15.2.1
3	Net greenhouse-gas emissions (source)/removals (sink) of forests, and carbon balance of harvested wood products	2	Measures progress towards SDG 13 and UNSPF targets 1.2 and 2.5. Relevant to measuring, reporting and verifying requirements under the UNFCCC
4	Proportion of forest area located within legally established protected areas	1	Measures progress towards SDG 15.2, UNSPF targets 2.5 and 3.1 and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. A subindicator of SDG 15.2.1
5	Change in area of primary forests	1	Measures progress towards SDG 15.3, UNSPF target 1.3 and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework
6	Proportion of forest area disturbed	2	Measures progress towards UNSPF target 1.4
7	Area of degraded forest	3	Measures progress towards SDG 15.3 and UNSPF target 1.3. There are linkages with SDG target 15.3, the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, UNCCD Strategic Objective 1, and the UNFCCC
8	Aboveground biomass stock in forest	1	Measures progress towards SDG 15.2, UNSPF target 1.2 and 2.5 and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. A subindicator of SDG 15.2.1
9	Volume of wood removals	1	Measures progress towards UNSPF target 2.4
10	Share of wood-based energy in total final energy consumption	2	Measures progress towards SDG target 7.2 and SDG 15.2
11	Forest area with a designated management objective to maintain and enhance its protective functions	1	Measures progress towards UNSPF target 1.4
12	Employment related to the forest sector	2	Measures progress towards UNSPF target 2.4
13	Number of forest-dependent people in extreme poverty	3	Measures progress towards GFG 2 and its target 2.1
14	Contribution of forests to food security and nutrition	3	Measures progress towards GFG 2 and its target 2.3
15	Financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management	3	Measures progress towards GFG 4 and its targets 4.1 and 4.2. There are linkages with SDG targets 15a and 15b
16	Existence of national or subnational policies, strategies, legislation, regulations and institutions which explicitly encourage sustainable forest management	1	Measures progress towards GFG 5
17	Existence of national or subnational forest assessment process	1	Measures progress towards UNSPF target 4.5

[1] The name has been updated to reflect the change in the name of the corresponding SDG 15.2.1 subindicator (FAO, 2017). Some other GCS indicators have been edited for clarity.

NO.	TITLE	TIER	LINKS TO GLOBAL GOALS AND TARGETS
18	Existence of national or subnational stakeholder platform for participation in forest policy development	1	Measures progress towards UNSPF target 4.5
19	Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan	1	Measures progress towards SDG 15.2, UNSPF targets 1.3 and 3.2 and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. A subindicator of SDG 15.2.1
20	Forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme	1	Measures progress towards SDG 15.2 and UNSPF targets 1.3 and 3.3. A subindicator of SDG 15.2.1
21	Existence of traceability system(s) for wood products	2	Measures progress towards UNSPF target 3.3 and 5.2

Note: Tier 1 = methodology and data available; tier 2 = methodology in place, data challenges; tier 3 = methodology needs to be determined, data are generally lacking, and data collection poses significant challenges (Anonymous, 2019). GFG = Global Forest Goal; SDG = Sustainable Development Goal; UNFCCC = United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; UNSPF = United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030.

Source: FAO and CPF (2022).

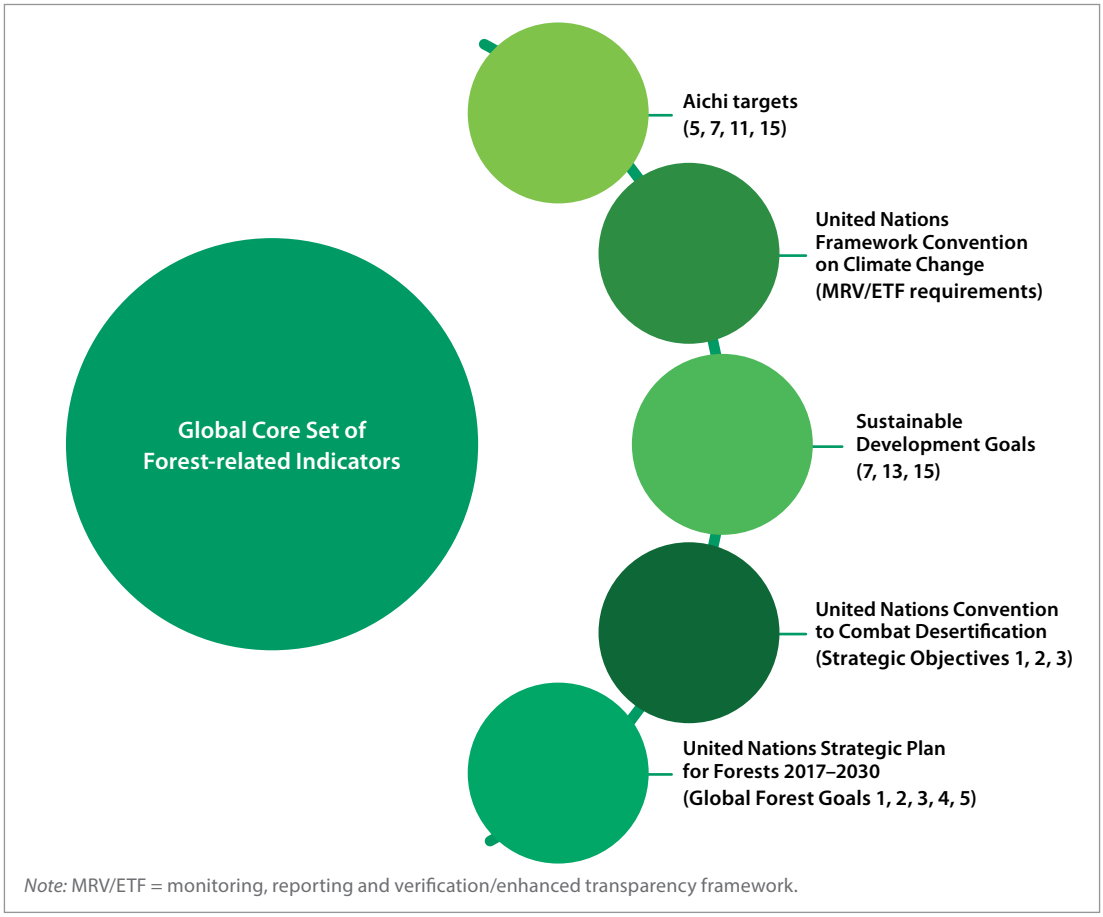
The GCS is a contribution to achieving Target 4 of Global Forest Goal 6: "A greater common understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management is achieved and an associated set of indicators is identified" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021).

The process to develop the GCS was initiated at the World Forestry Congress in Durban, South Africa, in September 2015. The GCS proposal was finalized in December 2017 and presented at the 13th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) in May 2018. The UNFF welcomed the progress made, acknowledged the value of the GCS, encouraged its application, and requested continued development (UNFF Secretariat, 2018). The GCS was presented at the 24th Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) in July 2018, which acknowledged the progress made and invited the UNFF and other governing bodies to consider its use, support capacity development, and report on progress (FAO, 2018).

A report on the status of, and trends in, the GCS (FAO and CPF, 2022) was published in May 2022 as an accompanying document of *The State of the World's Forests 2022* (FAO, 2022). It provides an overview of the 21 GCS indicators and presents the latest data on their status and trends.

In addition to the seven thematic elements of SFM,[2] the GCS has close linkages with other agreed goals and targets, such as the Aichi targets, the UNFCCC's requirements for monitoring, reporting, verification and its enhanced transparency framework, the UNCCD, the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030 and the SDGs (Table 1; Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Linkages of the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators to international goals and targets*



Note: MRV/ETF = monitoring, reporting and verification/enhanced transparency framework.

[2] The seven thematic elements of SFM, which are based on nine ongoing regional/international processes on C&I for SFM (FAO, undated), are: 1. Extent of forest resources; 2. Biological diversity; 3. Forest health and vitality; 4. Productive functions of forest resources; 5. Protective functions of forest resources; 6. Socio-economic functions; 7. Legal, policy and institutional framework.

MANDATE OF THE UPTAKE ASSESSMENT

FAO received a request from member countries at the 25th Session of COFO to analyse, in collaboration with members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), the uptake of the GCS by other reporting processes and the extent to which it decreases the reporting burden on countries (FAO, 2020). COFO also invited the CPF and forest-related international bodies and processes to consider the use of the GCS within their respective mandates and reporting processes, as appropriate (FAO, 2020).

The assessment included in this report has been prepared in response to COFO's request. As the co-leads of the CPF Joint Initiative on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting, FAO and the UNFF led the assessment, with the participation of all 15 CPF member organizations, which are:

- CBD Secretariat, www.cbd.int
- Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), www.cifor.org
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Secretariat, https://cites.org/eng
- FAO, www.fao.org/forestry
- Global Environment Facility (GEF) Secretariat, www.thegef.org
- International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), www.itto.int
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), www.iucn.org
- International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), www.iufro.org
- UNCCD Secretariat, www.unccd.int
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), www.undp.org
- United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), www.unep.org
- UNFF Secretariat, www.un.org/esa/forests
- UNFCCC Secretariat, www.unfccc.int
- World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), www.worldagroforestrycentre.org
- World Bank, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/forests.

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Methodology

A semi-structured survey was developed and applied using an online interface made available to survey respondents from 13 April to 10 June 2022 (Annex 1). The first four questions sought brief descriptions of the responding organizations and how the GCS fitted into their activities; then, for each of the 21 indicators, four questions (for a total of 84 questions) were directed at whether and how data were collected. Finally, respondents were asked seven general questions about how they use the GCS and how it could be improved.

The 15 CPF member organizations were invited to respond, along with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Forestry and Timber Section, which is a partner in both the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire (JFSQ)[3] and the Collaborative Forest Resource Questionnaire (CFRQ),[4] UNECE Statistical Division, Eurostat, the European Environment Agency (EEA) and five C&I processes. [5]

Responses were obtained online, supplemented in some cases by in-depth follow-up questions by email or interview.

All CPF members responded to the survey (in two cases they had more than one respondent, with their inputs summarized into single contributions per organization). Additional inputs were received from some other organizations (as listed in Chapter 3).

The survey's main findings are presented in Chapter 3.

[3] The JFSQ is an initiative of ITTO, UNECE, FAO and Eurostat to collect statistics on the world timber situation. Each agency collects data from the countries for which it is responsible.

[4] The CFRQ was created in 2011 by FAO, FOREST EUROPE, ITTO, UNECE, the Observatory of Central African Forests/Central Africa Forestry Commission and the Montréal Process. CFRQ partners jointly collect and share forestry data on more than 60 percent of the total number of variables collected through the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) process so that countries need only report their information once. This means that the data are collected once and used many times, thus reducing the reporting burden and increasing data consistency across organizations through standardized definitions and the timing of data collection.

[5] These were the Pan-European Process (also known as FOREST EUROPE); the Montréal Process (for temperate and boreal forests); the Tarapoto Process (implemented by ACTO); the Low-Forest-Cover-Countries Process, also known as the Teheran Process; and the Central Africa Forestry Commission.

3
Survey findings

RESPONDENTS

Twenty-six responses were received from the following 22 organizations: CIFOR, CITES, EEA, the FAO Forestry Division, FOREST EUROPE, the GEF, ICRAF, ITTO, IUCN, IUFRO, the CBD, the UNCCD, UNDP, the Joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, the UNECE Statistical Division, UNEP-WCMC, the UNFCCC, the UNFF, the World Bank, the Montréal Process, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) (for the Tarapoto Process) and the Teheran Process. In all cases, responses were provided by the secretariats of the organizations or by experts of those organizations and do not represent the official positions of the organizations concerned.

The 22 organizations can be separated into two groupings according to their use of the GCS, as set out below.

One grouping comprises ten organizations concerned overwhelmingly or exclusively with forest-related issues.[6] The activities of these ten are diverse, with their survey responses about their organizational focus summarized below:

- Tarapoto Process – support for the development and implementation of forest-related public policies in the Amazon.
- CIFOR – research for development on forestry issues such as conservation, management, biodiversity, landscape approaches, food security, value chains, climate change, equity, livelihoods, access rights and tenure.
- FAO – forest policy; data collection, analysis and dissemination; REDD+ reporting; improving forest-related data and information and capacities; halting deforestation and forest degradation; forest restoration; reforestation and afforestation; and the conservation and sustainable use of forests to enhance forest-based livelihoods.
- FOREST EUROPE – forest policy, reporting and the Pan-European C&I for SFM.
- ITTO – translating policy into action in the field; C&I for SFM in tropical forests; data collection; and reporting.
- IUFRO – research collaboration.
- Joint UNECE/FAO Timber Section – forest and forest-sector data and statistics, policy advice, communication and capacity building.
- Montréal Process – C&I for SFM of temperate and boreal forests.
- Teheran Process – forest policy, data collection and C&I for SFM of forests in low-forest cover countries.
- UNFF – policy forum with universal membership; monitoring and reporting, notably on progress towards the Global Forest Goals and the SDGs.

The second grouping of respondents comprises twelve organizations that are not overwhelmingly focused on forests but which address forest-related issues, as follows (summarized from their survey responses):

- CITES – improving forest governance through international trade regulations.
- EEA – forest indicators; forest information; forest assessments; reporting on land use, land-use change and forests; forest habitats and species; forest biodiversity; forest fires; and climate-change impacts, adaptation and mitigation.
- GEF – forest conservation and restoration, forest ecosystem services and environmental benefits.

[6] For FAO and UNECE, "organization" refers here to the FAO Forestry Division and the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, respectively. Both FAO and UNECE have many non-forest activities, which are not addressed here.

- ICRAF – research on agroforestry and sustainable land management.
- IUCN – forest policy and conservation.
- UNCCD – deforestation, the conversion of forest cover to other land uses, and the removal of trees from agricultural and pastoral landscapes are key drivers of land degradation. In the land degradation neutrality country reports, deforestation – along with population pressure and poor agricultural practices – is the most frequently mentioned cause of degradation.
- CBD – biodiversity and ecosystem integrity; forest ecosystem restoration; global and national policies; forest data collection and reporting; and partnerships.
- UNECE Statistical Division – statistics on forests, the SDGs, climate change, disasters and the circular economy.
- UNDP – forest policy and finance.
- UNEP-WCMC – forest biodiversity conservation; the role of forests and their biodiversity and ecosystem services in climate-change mitigation and adaptation; and nature-based solutions.
- UNFCCC – climate-change policies relevant to forests; measurement, reporting and review; and enhancing transparency in forest data and information reported by countries.
- World Bank – the Bank finances many projects with major forest-related components, including policy formulation, data collection, C&I, research, forest and landscape restoration, forest-smart approaches, nature-based solutions, and safeguards.

LINKS BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS AND THE GLOBAL CORE SET OF FOREST-RELATED INDICATORS

More than two-thirds (15) of the responding organizations reported an "explicit link" between the GCS and their main organizational focus. The reported "explicit links" included a framework for reporting and data collection, the topic of a particular working group, and a means for monitoring the achievement of targets formulated in their documents (such as those mentioned in Table 1 and Figure 1).

About one-third of respondents (seven) reported no explicit links between the GCS and the main focus of their organizations. Almost two-thirds (14) reported that they conduct **capacity building** relevant to the GCS in terms of both the indicators included in the GCS and, more specifically, in collecting information on these indicators, and they also provide technical assistance for monitoring, assessment and reporting. Workshops have been convened on improving the tier 3 indicators.[7]

Twenty-seven percent (six) of the responding organizations reported collecting data from countries to obtain information on the SDGs, particularly indicators 15.2.1 and 15.1.1 using the framework of the GCS. The UNFCCC reported that it did not use the GCS for its reporting process.

RESPONSES BY INDICATOR

For each GCS indicator, respondents were asked:

- whether the indicator was of interest to their organizations;
- whether they collected data on that indicator;
- if they did collect information on that indicator, whether they worked in cooperation with other organizations, for example in the framework of the JFSQ or the CFRQ; and
- if they were not collecting data themselves, whether they were using data from trusted partners.

Table 2 summarizes the responses, by indicator.

[7] Tier 3 indicators are those for which the methodology needs to be determined, data are generally lacking, and data collection poses significant challenges.

Table 2. *Overview of responses to the survey on the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators, by indicator*

INDICATOR NO.	INDICATOR	Total responses (maximum 22)	Indicator is of interest to organization	Organization collects data on indicator	If organization collects data on indicator, it does so in cooperation with others	If organization does not collect data on indicator, it uses data from trusted partner(s)	Proportion of responding organizations that consider the indicator to be of interest	Proportion of responding organizations that consider the indicator to be of interest and which collect data	Proportion of data-collecting organizations that cooperate with others on data collection
		(No. of responding organizations)					(%)		
1	Forest area as a proportion of total land area ("area")	22	21	9	8	9	95	43	89
2	Annual forest-area change rate ("area change")	21	19	6	6	11	86	32	100
3	Net greenhouse-gas emissions (source)/ removals (sink) of forests, and carbon balance of harvested wood products ("GHG")	21	17	6	6	7	77	35	100
4	Proportion of forest area within legally established protected areas ("protected areas")	21	16	9	9	6	73	56	100
5	Change in area of primary forests ("primary forests")	21	18	6	6	9	82	33	100
6	Proportion of forest area disturbed ("disturbance")	21	16	6	5	8	72	38	83
7	Area of degraded forest ("degraded forests")	21	20	6	6	10	91	30	100
8	Aboveground biomass in forest ("biomass")	21	15	7	7	5	68	47	100
9	Volume of wood removals ("removals")	21	14	7	7	6	64	50	100
10	Share of wood-based energy in total final energy consumption ("energy")	21	13	5	5	5	59	38	100
11	Forest area with a designated management objective to maintain and enhance its protective functions ("protection")	21	17	7	7	7	77	41	100
12	Employment related to the forest sector ("employment")	21	12	6	6	4	55	50	100

INDICATOR NO.	INDICATOR	Total responses (maximum 22)	Indicator is of interest to organization	Organization collects data on indicator	If organization collects data on indicator, it does so in cooperation with others	If organization does not collect data on indicator, it uses data from trusted partner(s)	Proportion of responding organizations that consider the indicator to be of interest	Proportion of responding organizations that consider the indicator to be of interest and which collect data	Proportion of data-collecting organizations that cooperate with others on data collection
		(No. of responding organizations)					(%)		
13	Number of forest-dependent people in extreme poverty ("extreme poverty")	21	13	3	3	6	59	23	100
14	Contribution of forests to food security and nutrition ("food security")	21	13	4	4	6	59	31	100
15	Financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management ("finance")	21	17	6	6	7	77	35	100
16	Existence of national or subnational policies, strategies, legislation, regulations and institutions which explicitly encourage sustainable forest management ("SFM policies")	21	19	10	10	5	86	53	100
17	Existence of national or subnational forest assessment processes ("assessment")	21	14	4	4	6	64	29	100
18	Existence of national or subnational stakeholder platform for participation in forest policy development ("stakeholders")	21	15	7	7	4	68	47	100
19	Proportion of forest area under a long-term management plan ("plans")	21	16	6	6	7	73	38	100
20	Forest area under an independently verified forest management certification scheme ("certification")	21	12	3	3	7	55	25	100
21	Existence of traceability system(s) for wood products ("traceability")	21	13	5	5	2	59	38	100

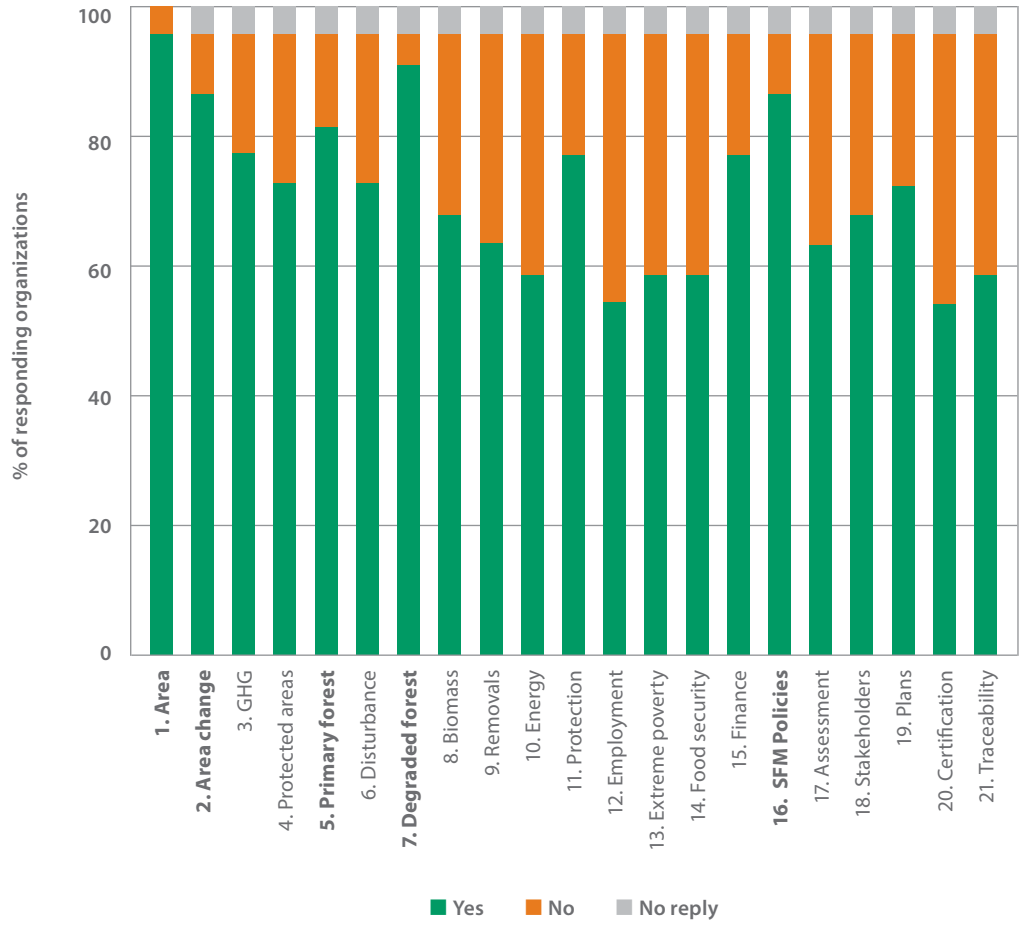
Note: The text in brackets in the indicator column shows the abbreviations used in Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5 and in places in the text.

The following conclusions can be drawn from these data:

- **All 21 indicators were "of interest" to more than half the surveyed organizations**, and five indicators were of interest to 80 percent or more of the responding organizations (Figure 2). This concerns indicator topics which are presently highly relevant in forest policy processes. GCS 12 (employment) and 20 (certification) were of interest to the fewest (12, 55 percent) responding organizations. The relatively low interest in these two indicators may be because data for both are provided partially or entirely by organizations (the International Labour Organization in the case of GCS 12 and the Forest Stewardship Council – FSC – and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification – PEFC – in the case of GCS 20) that are not members of the CPF and were not respondents in the survey. Fifty-nine percent (13) of responding organizations specified an interest in GCS 13 (extreme poverty) and GCS 14 (food security). The relatively low number may be due to the focus of some responding organizations on the Northern Hemisphere, where these topics are not central challenges.

It is to be expected that different organizations will have different interests. Nevertheless, the results show that all indicators are highly relevant to the work of many international organizations.

Figure 2. *Interest of responding organizations in indicators in the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators*

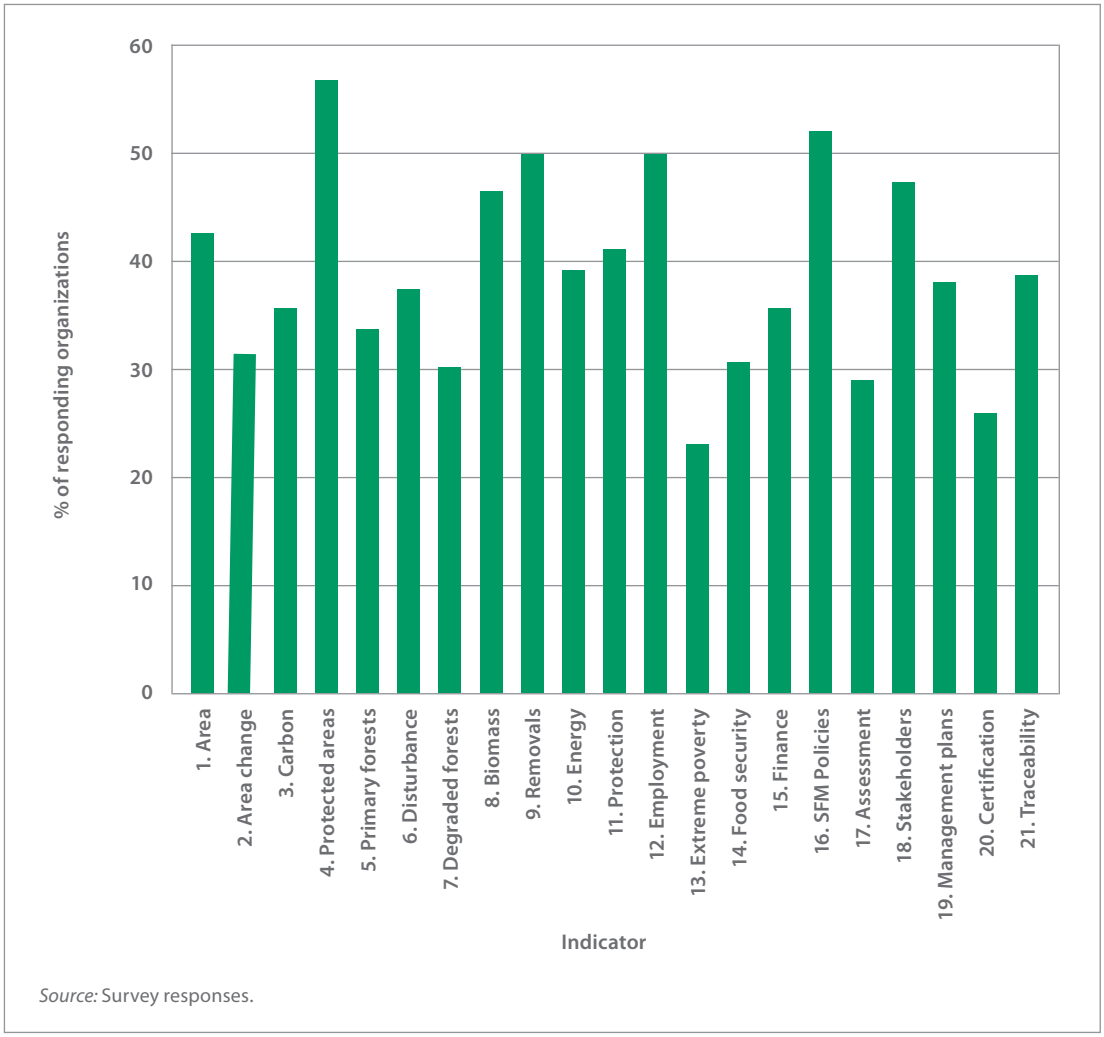


Note: Indicators in bold were of interest to 80 percent or more of responding organizations.
Source: Survey responses.

- **For most indicators, fewer than half the responding organizations collect data themselves** (Figure 3). For example, GCS 1 (area), GCS 2 (area change) and GCS 5 (primary forests) are measured by the CFRQ; moreover, relatively few organizations have the capacity to collect data on several difficult-to-measure indicators, such as GCS 7 (degraded forests), GCS 13 (extreme poverty), GCS 14 (food security) and GCS 17 (assessment). The primary data sources for certification (GCS 20) are the certification organizations FSC and PEFC, which are not members of the CPF and did not participate in the survey.

  More than half the responding organizations delegate data collection on certain of-interest topics to other organizations, thus avoiding duplication of effort and reducing the reporting burden on countries.

Figure 3. *Proportion of responding organizations that considered specific indicators in the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators to be of interest and which collect data on those indicators*

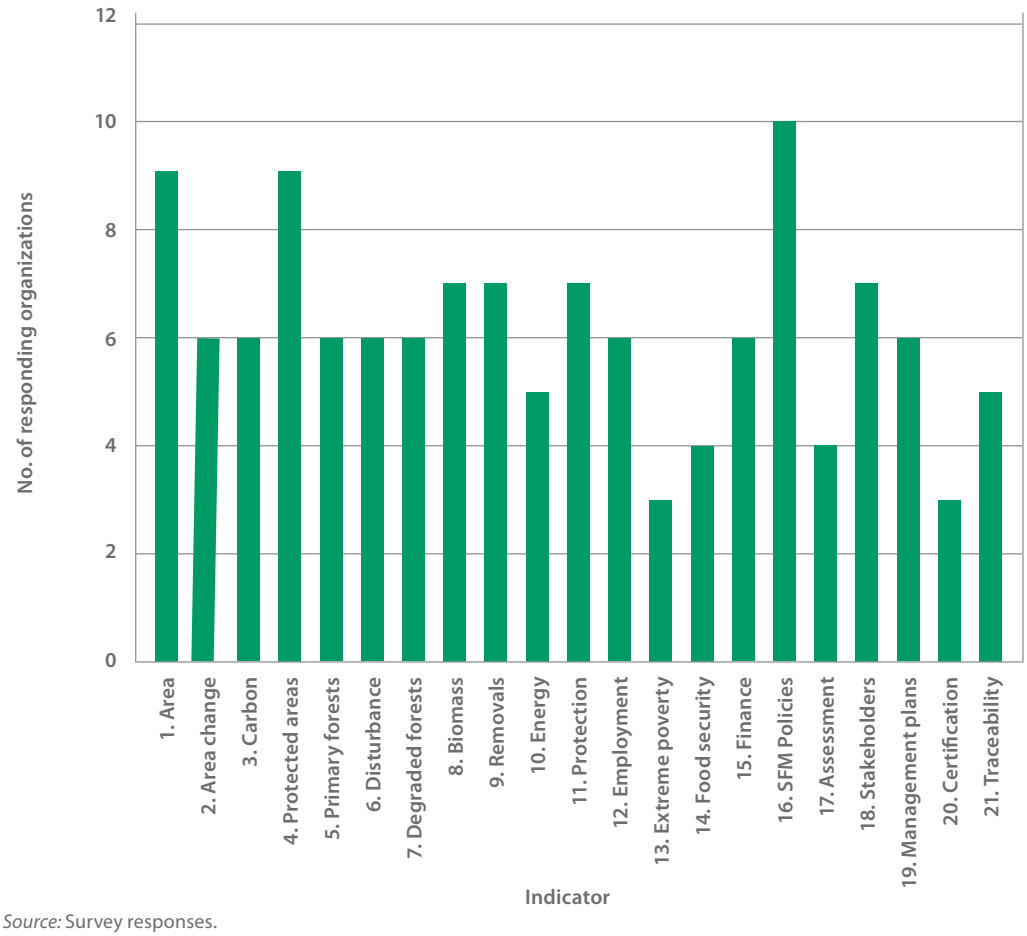


Source: Survey responses.

- Figure 4 shows that, for **most indicators, data are collected by five or more organizations with the structure and capacity to do so**. Only three organizations collect data on the hard-to-measure indicator CGS 13 (extreme poverty), and four collect data on CGS 14 (food security) and CGS 17 (assessment). Note that data can be collected at different levels (e.g. local, national, regional or global) and with different foci and scales; thus, more than one organization collecting data on the same indicator does not necessarily constitute duplication. For example,

the data-collection structure and focus of ACTO and EEA differ from those of the CFRQ partnership. Moreover, many organizations cooperate on data collection, notably through the CFRQ, and some may approach data collection with their own focus and approach. Figure 5 provides more information on the extent of cooperation on data collection between organizations.

Figure 4. *Number of responding organizations collecting data on indicators in the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators at the national, regional or global level, by indicator*

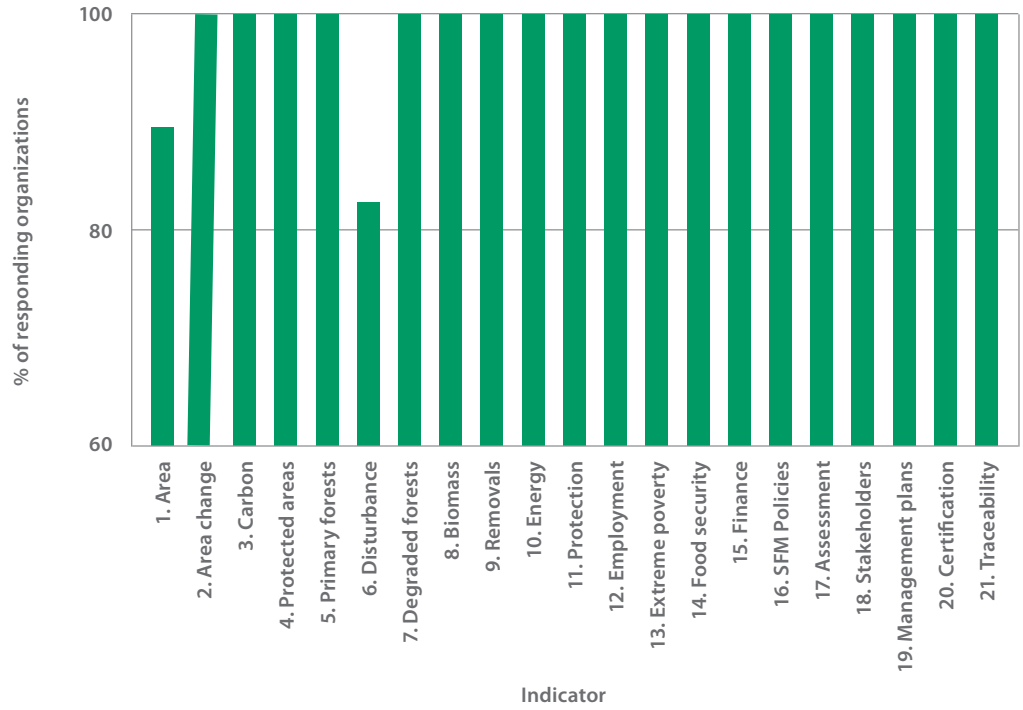


Source: Survey responses.

- **For 19 of the 21 indicators (90 percent), all those organizations collecting data do so in partnership through instruments like the CFRQ and the JFSQ**, whereby organizations agree on methods and definitions and share the results to achieve globally harmonized results, with each country supplying data only once to one organization. Cooperation is less than 100 percent for two indicators, GCS 1 and GCS 6 (Figure 5): in the case of GCS 1, one organization (ICRAF) is solely responsible for collecting data on the area of land under agroforestry; thus, of the nine organizations involved in data collection for GCS 1, one does not cooperate because other organizations do not collect data on that aspect of the indicator. In the case of GCS 6, of the six organizations involved in data collection for GCS 6, five of them cooperate (see Figure 5). In addition to CPF members, respondents mentioned partnerships with, or the use of data from, national forest agencies, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, the Copernicus Land-Monitoring Service, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the World Resources Institute, the PEFC, the FSC and Global Forest Watch. Four responding

organizations (the UNFCCC Secretariat, CIFOR, the CITES Secretariat and EEA) mentioned their own channels and processes, partnerships with national and subnational governments, focal points, the Joint Research Center of the European Commission, and others.

Figure 5. *Proportion of responding organizations that collect data for indicators in the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators and cooperate in doing so*



Source: Survey responses.

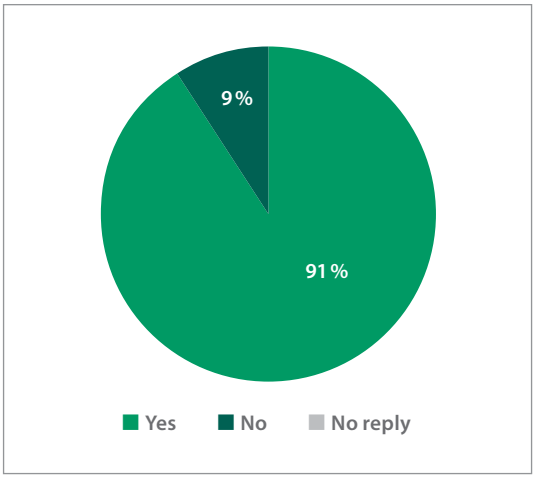
VIEWS OF RESPONDING ORGANIZATIONS ON THE GLOBAL CORE SET OF FOREST-RELATED INDICATORS AND ITS POTENTIAL

Respondents were asked seven open-ended questions about the GCS, how it is used and its challenges. The responses are summarized below (Annex 2 contains the full responses, by organization).

Survey question 1. ***Do you think the GCS can help to achieve "a greater common understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management"?***

Twenty organizations (91 percent of the respondents) considered that the GCS could help achieve a greater shared understanding (Figure 6).[8] Respondents stressed that the GCS is comprehensive and balanced; provides a flexible and transparent framework for collecting comparable information at the global level; provides a common frame of reference; and has the potential to build a global core understanding on forests.

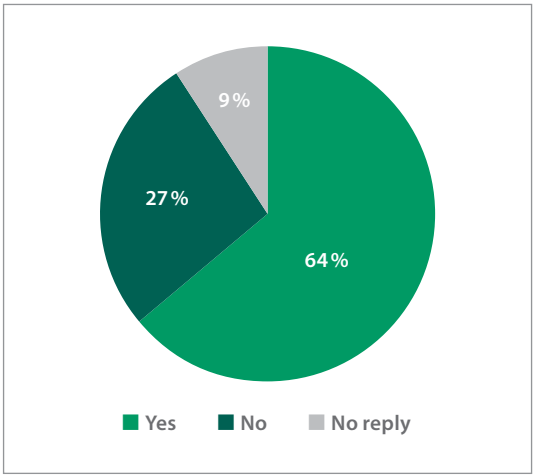
Figure 6. *Responses to survey question 1*



Survey question 2. ***Do you think the GCS provides an adequate minimum global framework for information for policymakers?***

Opinions differed as to whether the GCS as it now stands provides a minimum global framework: about two-thirds (14) of responding organizations considered that the GCS provides an adequate minimum global framework, and six stated that it did not provide this (Figure 7).[9] The latter group of respondents suggested that the GCS has the potential to provide an adequate minimum global framework if strengthened, for example by setting minimum measurable levels for each indicator, developing more detail on forest types and functions, and incorporating an indicator on forest ecosystem services or on payments for ecosystem services. One respondent pointed to the need for a more substantial global policy commitment, and another – who noted the lack of active participation by countries and other stakeholders – thought a regional framework might be more suitable than a global one.

Figure 7. *Responses to survey question 2*

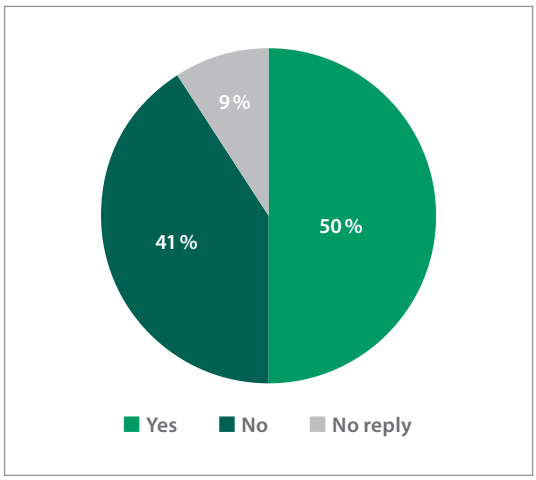


[8,9] Two organizations did not respond to this question.

***Survey question 3.** Are the GCS indicators used by your policy community/stakeholders?*

Eleven (half) of the responding organizations stated that the GCS was already being used by their policy community/stakeholders, and nine (41 percent) reported that this was not the case (Figure 8).[10] For two of the organizations in the latter group, the use of the GCS by the relevant policy community/stakeholders would conflict with pre-existing mandates and processes. Other respondents indicated that uptake was low because the GCS is not well known (or is misunderstood) and its use has not been developed. Responses indicated that there may well be a tension between a tool focused on the international level (i.e. the GCS) and the needs and activities of national communities.

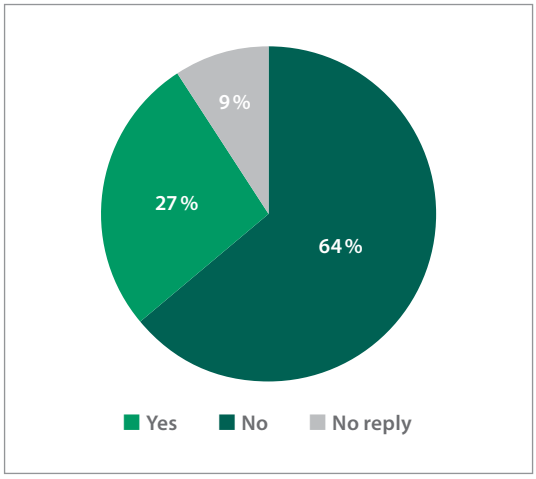
Figure 8. *Responses to survey question 3*



***Survey question 4.** Is your organization moving towards using the GCS as a lowest common denominator in your reporting process, conventions, institutions, and organizations to secure best comparability and minimum (reduced) reporting burden?*

More than one-quarter (six) of the surveyed organizations stated that they were moving towards the use of the GCS as a lowest common denominator, but this was not the case for another 14 (about two-thirds) (two organizations did not respond) (Figure 9). For many CPF members and other forest-related international organizations, already-existing mandates, conventions and indicator sets naturally take precedence over the GCS, and there is no readiness to adapt existing frameworks in the light of the GCS.

Figure 9. *Responses to survey question 4*

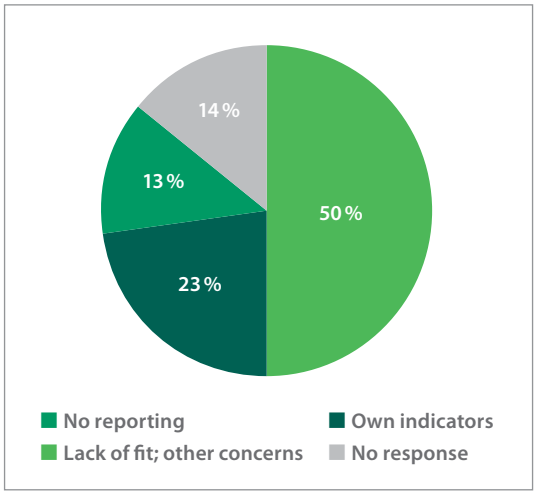


***Survey question 5.** What, if anything, is preventing you from using the GCS indicators?*

Three of the responding organizations (13 percent) indicated that they do not do any reporting and five (23 percent) stated that they already had their own indicators in place (Figure 10). There are two main groups of reasons why the GCS is not being used more: (1) a lack of "fit" between the GCS and the organization's main focus and functions; and (2) concerns about data quality/definitions in the GCS, notably for tier 3 indicators.

[10] Two organizations did not respond to this question.

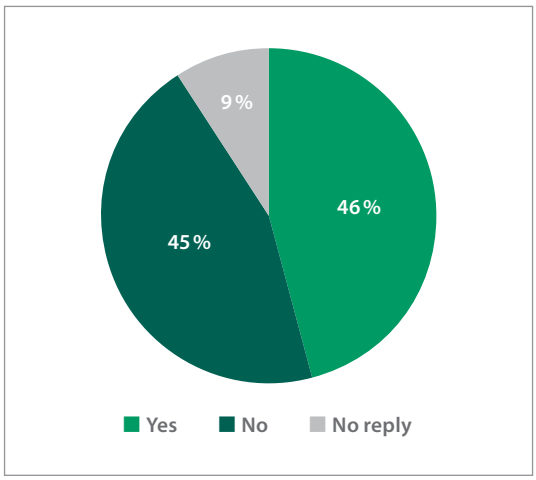
Figure 10. *Responses to survey question 5*



Survey question 6. ***Do you conduct or support activities to improve methodology and data availability/quality of tier 3 indicators?***

Forty-six percent (ten) of responding organizations reported that they were working on tier 3 indicators (Annex 2 provides details of these activities) (Figure 11). In summary, significant work is being carried out to improve the tier 3 indicators, a clear signal that the topics are important but challenging. These activities may ultimately lead to an improved GCS.

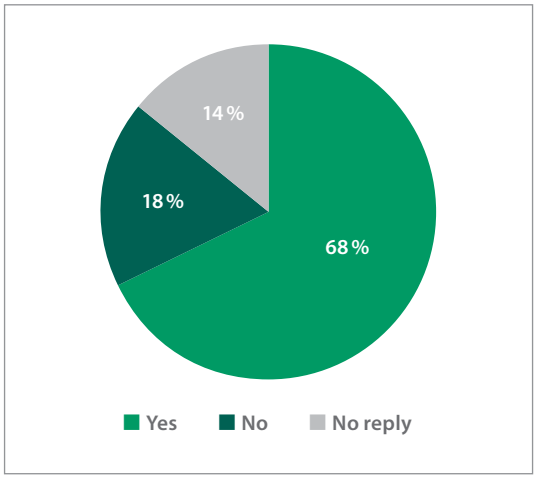
Figure 11. *Responses to survey question 6*



Survey question 7. ***According to you, are further steps desirable to utilize the full potential of the GCS?***

About two-thirds (15) of the responding organizations suggested further steps to realize the full potential of the GCS (see Annex 2) (Figure 12). These can be classified into three groups: (1) promotion and communication (possibly including formal political endorsement); (2) improvement of the GCS itself, notably the tier 3 indicators, and linked processes (creation of a core team to monitor the use of the GCS); and (3) using the GCS to provide analysis and reports (to some extent this is already being done, such as in *The State of the World's Forests 2022* by FAO and *The Global Forest Goals Report 2021* by the United Nations).

Figure 12. *Responses to survey question 7*



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4
Conclusions and possible next steps

Overall, the survey respondents considered that the GCS is comprehensive and balanced and constitutes a flexible, transparent framework for collecting comparable global-level information. It provides a common frame of reference and has the potential to improve understanding of SFM, and it has helped reduce the reporting burden on countries. There is a lack of awareness about the GCS, however, and few national-level communities and stakeholders use it. There appears to be potential to both strengthen the GCS and expand its use and thereby achieve its full potential. Possible further steps towards this – based on the responses received but not formally endorsed by the respondents – are to:

- conduct a campaign by CPF members and C&I processes to promote and explain the GCS – the present report could be used as a basis for discussion;
- continue efforts to build capacity at the national level to supply information on the GCS indicators;
- use the structure and concepts of the GCS as a framework for international studies on SFM, along the lines of recent work by FAO (*The State of the World's Forests 2022*) and the United Nations (*The Global Forest Goals Report*), to demonstrate the usefulness of the GCS and familiarize the expert community with it;
- continue efforts to improve the tier 3 indicators;
- examine whether there is potential to expand cooperation on data collection and sharing along the lines of the CFRQ and the JFSQ with new partners and for new GCS indicators as a means for further reducing the reporting burden on countries; and
- formally endorse the GCS and its objectives, preferably at a high level.

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Annex 1. Survey questions

UPTAKE ASSESSMENT OF THE GLOBAL CORE SET OF FOREST-RELATED INDICATORS[11]

Several organizations with responsibilities for forest-related issues have been working within the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, with the aim of developing a Global Core Set of forest-related indicators (GCS). The GCS will simplify and harmonize related concepts and terminology, on a voluntary basis, while respecting the needs of all potential users. The ultimate outcome should be a clearer, more comprehensive, picture of trends and a significant reduction in the reporting burden.

The GCS is intended to contribute to the following purposes:

1. measure progress towards sustainable forest management (including using Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicator 15.2.1 Sustainable forest management);
2. measure progress in implementing the UN Forest Instrument and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, notably the Global Objectives on Forests, and their associated targets;
3. measure progress towards SDG targets other than 15.2, as well as internationally agreed goals on forests in other instruments, notably through meeting the forest-related reporting needs of the Rio conventions.

MANDATE FOR THE SURVEY

The 25th session of Committee on Forestry (COFO 25) requested FAO "to analyse, in collaboration with CPF members, the uptake of the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators by other reporting processes and the extent to which they decrease reporting burden on countries". In addition, the Committee "invited the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and forest-related international bodies and processes to consider the use of the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators within their respective mandates and reporting processes, as appropriate".

This online survey is being conducted to analyse the uptake of the GCS by other reporting processes and the extent to which it may decrease the reporting burden on countries. The results of the survey will be the basis for a report to be presented during the 26th session of COFO, in fall 2022.

* Your Name and Surname

* Your organization

QUESTIONS ON THE "UPTAKE" OF THE GCS

***1.** What is the main forest-related focus of your organization? (e.g. forest policy, data collection, reporting, C&I, research, etc. – Multiple answers possible)

***2.** Are there any explicit links between the GCS and the main focus of your organization? (e.g. data collection for or reporting on certain indicators)

☐ No

☐ Yes. Which ones?

[11] The text in this annex is as it was made available online to survey participants.

*3. Does your organization do capacity building focused on specific GCS indicators or on the set as a whole?

☐ No
☐ Yes. Which indicators? Which activities?

*4. Has your organization used the GCS indicators in its contributions to SDG reporting?

☐ No
☐ Yes. Which GCS indicators and which SDG indicators?

QUESTIONS ON DECREASING THE REPORTING BURDEN

This section focuses on the main joint efforts (FRA/ Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire, CFRQ; Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire, JFSQ), but also investigates whether there are others, and if the "decreasing the reporting burden" is actually being achieved.

GCS INDICATORS: RELEVANCE, DATA COLLECTION AND DATA SHARING

GCS 1: Forest area as a proportion of total land area

*5. GCS 1 – Is the indicator of interest to your organization?

☐ Yes
☐ No

*6. GCS 1 – Does your organization collect data on the parameter?

☐ Yes
☐ No

7. GCS 1 – If your organization collects data, do you do so in cooperation with others?

☐ No
☐ Yes. With whom? E.g. JFSQ, CFRQ, others (please specify)

8. GCS 1 – If your organization does not collect data, does it use information from a trusted partner(s)?

☐ No
☐ Yes. From which partner?

In the online survey the above 4 questions have been asked for each of the 21 GCS indicators and are not repeated here for brevity.

EVALUATING AND IMPROVING THE GCS

*89. Do you think the GCS can help to achieve "a greater common understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management"?

☐ Yes, in what way?

☐ No, why not?

*90. Do you think the GCS provides an adequate minimum global framework for information for policy makers?

☐ Yes
☐ No. What is missing/not covered/unnecessary?

*91. Are the GCS indicators used by your policy community/stakeholders?

☐ Yes
☐ No. Why not? What is needed?

*92. Is your organization moving towards using the GCS as a lowest common denominator in your reporting process, conventions, institutions, organizations to secure best comparability and minimum (reduced) reporting burden?

☐ Yes
☐ No. Why not?

93. What, if anything, is preventing you from using the GCS indicators?

☐ Own indicators different from GCS
☐ No reporting
☐ Other (please specify)

94. Do you conduct or support activities to improve methodology and data availability/quality of Tier 3 indicators?

☐ No
☐ Yes. Which conducted or planned activities (e.g. hosting ofworkshops, leading of WGs, funding of activities, etc.) for which indicators?)

95. According to you, are further steps desirable to utilize the full potential of the GCS?

☐ No
☐ Yes. Please suggest which ones.

Thank you for providing your valuable input to this survey!

Annex 2. Unedited anonymized responses to the open-ended questions

Do you think the GCS can help to achieve "a greater common understanding of the concept of sustainable forest management"?

About 90 percent of the responding organizations considered that the GCS could help achieve a greater common understanding, and none stated that it could not. Comments included:

- Considering the flexibility of SFM it provides the potential for building a global core and understanding and setting common variables in this regard.
- The GCS provides a coherent description of the main aspects of SFM identified in different globally agreed goals and targets.
- Yes, it has this potential, as it covers all seven thematic areas of SFM.
- By illustrating the basic elements required to be able to achieve and assess SFM; by facilitating synthesis reports on progress towards SFM based on the GCS.
- By drawing attention to all of the aspects and the degree to which they are currently receiving attention.
- It is comprehensive and includes the key issues/dimension.
- It provides a comprehensive overview of what SFM includes.
- Trends shown by the various indicators could provide signals on how individual countries/regions are achieving SFM.
- The GCS also includes socioeconomic indicators which contributes to provide a more comprehensive view of forests.
- The evaluation of the indicators may contribute to this (which indicators are key in SFM).
- By illustrating various important aspects of forests and forestry in a balanced manner.
- Provide evidence, monitoring and reporting, transparency and accountability.
- Having tangible metrics that can help understand features of SFM is key to improve the condition of forests.
- Yes, by offering a common frame of reference.
- To the extent that it does not duplicate existing efforts, yes. It helps keeping a focus, increase comparability of forest information.
- Yes, providing trustable data.
- Yes, active participation of countries and true stakeholders.
- Yes, it provides the big picture on sustainable forest management.
- It is a global and comparable indicator sets.

Do you think the GCS provides an adequate minimum global framework for information for policy makers?

Around two-thirds of responding organizations considered that the GCS provides an adequate minimum global framework, and about one-third stated that it did not provide this, with the following comments and suggestions:

- In early discussions about C&I it was envisaged to include measurable minimum levels for each indicator. This ambition has not (yet) been met.
- Yes and No – it is a bare minimum – the expectations of society/policy makers have changed – we really should incorporate one indicator on forest services/PES.
- More detail is needed on forest types and function – e.g. biodiversity value, hydrological services provided, not just designations.

- Stronger global policy commitment possibly required.
- There is no active participation of countries and true stakeholders, regional framework may be more suitable than global.

Are the GCS indicators used by your policy community/stakeholders?

Eleven organizations stated that the GCS was already being used by their policy community/stakeholders, and nine reported that this was not the case. Remarks of those who reported that their communities did not use the GCS were as follows:

- Individual indicators of the GCS are used, not sure if the set is used as a whole for this purpose.
- No information, and not clear if countries in their reporting to the FCCC process also use the GCS indicators to facilitate their reporting.
- We have already an adopted minimum set of indicators for reporting purposes. Some of the GCS indicators could be of potential interest for planning and implementation of LDN (Land Degradation Neutrality) interventions at the national to local scale provided that data for the indicators are available or regularly collected and at a sufficient resolution.
- This report generated at national level are rarely shared and easily understandable for local decision makers.
- Our overlap with core forestry issues is not strong.
- The policy community/stakeholders are not yet be familiar with the GCS.
- The value of forests is not well covered.
- They overlap partially with other indicator sets.
- The focus has been on SDGs so far, but could be considered to use the GCS in EEA context.

Is your organization moving towards using the GCS as a lowest common denominator in your reporting process, conventions, institutions, organizations to secure best comparability and minimum (reduced) reporting burden?

Almost one-third of responding organizations stated that they were moving towards the use of the GCS as a lowest common denominator, but this was not the case for the other two-thirds, who provided the following explanations:

- We are not a reporting organization.
- Our mandate requires it to collect data based on its own C&I which incorporate most elements of the GCS but include broader coverage of indicators relevant to tropical forests on relevant topics.
- We do not carry out reporting ourselves and we encourage more complete info on biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- Our institution is large and the reporting is complex, and directed by the board.
- We don't need all the indicators of the GCS, just few of them and depending on the projects.
- Reporting framework, modalities, procedures and guidance are in accordance with the mandates of the FCCC Conference of the Parties.
- The answer is not a clear yes or no, but rather "sort of". As FRA is already the main instrument for collecting these data and have worked on reducing the reporting burden, one could say that we are moving towards that. That also links to the wider approach to try to minimize duplication in data collection among the UN agencies and other players.
- Indicators for post 2020 are determined by the country Parties.
- We already have an adopted minimum set of indicators for reporting purposes.
- We do not report using GCS.
- Our overlap with core forestry issues is not strong.
- We do not use the information for reporting purposes as such. We use it in the context of our own research.
- We were unfortunately not involved in this global process.
- We have not enough administration facilities.

What, if anything, is preventing you from using the GCS indicators?

Three of the responding organizations indicated that they do not do any reporting, and five

responded that they already had their own indicators in place. Other reasons reported for not using the GCS indicators were as follows:

- Difficulties are primarily related to the lack of information on some "difficult" information.
- Tier 3 indicators are still not operational due to the lack of methodologies but also data – the work should be done in parallel at international level and by building capacities of countries – so both the methodologies are in place but also at least some data is available and accessible at national level.
- Thematic focus.
- It is up to the reporting Parties as to whether they want to use the GCS or not and to decide if the GCS reduces their reporting burden.
- Data can be obtained from the data suppliers.
- Not yet available to my knowledge, may use them in the future.
- Nothing but lack of data for some of the indicators.
- Implementation framework missing for many indicators and no resources to promote use of indicators.
- Our overlap with core forestry issues is not strong.
- We do not use the information for reporting purposes as such. We use it in the context of our own research.
- The matter of definitions and data availability are crucial. The GCS may be considered to be included as EEA indicators to join the global approach.
- Additional resources missing to further develop methodologies under an agreed framework.

Do you conduct or support activities to improve methodology and data availability/quality of Tier 3 indicators?

Ten responding organizations reported that they were working on tier 3 indicators. The following activities were reported:

- Not only Tier 3 indicators but also other indicators still require considerable work for their improvement. The Joint UNECE/FAO Section work on the improvement modalities of the whole set, with a focus on some of them – recently it is on forest disturbance/damage.
- See information about IUFRO Working Party 9.01.05 "Research and development of indicators for sustainable forest management" (https://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-9/90000/90100/90105/) which develops/improves the scientific basis for the CGS, including Tier 3 indicators.
- UNFF workshops with FAO (Rome, 2019) and national capacity building workshops.
- Funding is available for up to two C&I training workshops in 2022; C&I implementation projects are currently underway in several countries and more may be funded in future; Active participation in FRA training workshops (e.g. on primary forests), planning sessions and CPF work on GCS.
- We support national protected areas agencies in improving and mobilising data on protected areas.
- We support countries on the indicators of their choice depending on projects.
- We work on the methodological development of indicator 13.
- Supporting countries in data collection on forest area, carbon stock and emissions/removals (REDD+).
- Methodological studies are ongoing re employment and forest proximate peoples.
- GCS 10+12.
- Indicator QA/QC workshops.
- Review of biodiversity indicators, area of degraded forests.

According to you, are further steps desirable to utilize the full potential of the GCS?

More than two-thirds of the responding organizations suggested further steps to realize the full potential of the GCS, as follows:

- They need more publicity and promotion at different levels and in- and outside the forest community.

- Formal political endorsement/adoption of the GCS at the highest-possible level.
- (i) Finalization of the Tier 3 indicators; (ii) Dissemination of information about the GCS among countries – there are still countries which are working on their "national sets" (iii) Possibly structure the next or 2030 FRA along the set.
- More collaborative work to develop synthesis reports based on reporting on the GCS; more collaborative work to generate political will to get more countries to regularly and accurately report against GCS indicators.
- Better outreach and awareness beyond forestry, better connection with other thematic foci
- Perhaps a core team monitoring it.
- We may need further outreach to countries to use the GCS.
- To work on the methodology of indicators Tier 3.
- Increase awareness of their existence, is there a download location (like FRA2020 data)?
- Promotion and use of the set to produce summary reports and similar.
- Provide adequate resource to develop and implement an actionable implementation framework.
- Make them available at the country level.
- Harmonize definitions of the C&I processes.
- Administrative support for the C&I processes.
- Active participation for application in the Amazon region.

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