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*IUFRO Spotlight* also aims to present activities such as sessions at major IUFRO congresses or the work of IUFRO Task Forces with a focus on emerging key issues that are of great interest to policy makers and groups inside and outside the forest sector, and contribute to international processes and activities. The *IUFRO Spotlight* findings will be distributed in a periodic series of emails as well as blog postings.

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## How and why criteria and indicators have changed forest management since the Rio Summit

Sparked in part by the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, the use of criteria and indicators (C&I) for sustainable forest management (SFM) has become an ever more present aspect of forest management.

Since that '92 summit, "the focus of academic attention has been mainly on global forest governance with a research gap regarding regional (or international) forest related processes," said Dr. Stefanie Linser of the European Forest Institute, who is also co-ordinator of IUFRO Working Party 9.01.05 on research and development of indicators for SFM.

"They are increasingly important nowadays, in light of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and emerging global challenges," she said.



*Regeneration is also covered by indicators for SFM.  
Photo: S. Linser*

C&I are defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN as: "... a framework that characterizes the essential components of SFM, and recognise(s) forests as ecosystems that provide a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits to society. The overall aim of criteria and indicators is to promote more sustainable forest management practices, taking into consideration the social, economic, environmental, cultural and spiritual needs of different stakeholders."

Thirteen experts from Dr. Linser's IUFRO Working Party have researched the use and the usefulness of C&I in the quarter-century following the '92 summit and have jointly put together two publications covering all C&I processes and regions worldwide.

In one paper, they look at "how" the C&I processes have made a difference. In the other they look at "why" some C&I processes have flourished and others have faded.

Their conclusion is that the 25 years of C&I work in forestry has had significant positive impacts, though challenges do remain.

In the "how" publication the authors point to six areas where positive impacts are easily seen:

- Enhanced discourse and understanding of SFM;
- Helped to shape and focus the engagement of science in SFM;

- Improved monitoring and reporting of SFM, which facilitates transparency and evidence-based decision making;
- Strengthened forest management practices;
- Initiated assessment of progress toward SFM goals; and
- Improved forest-related dialog and communication.

“For forest managers, C&I are a feasible tool for generating understandable and reliable information on progress towards sustainable forest management,” said Dr. Linser.

“They increase transparency of decision-making, and demonstrate compliance with different standards or goals. They also allow policy makers to obtain easily comprehensible evidence of the effectiveness of policy measures,” she said.

However, she went on to say, “There is a wide variation in the quality of adaptation of the regional or international C&I sets onto the national level, and hence in SFM monitoring and reporting.”

Going forward, she believes that political will and respective strategies to further promote C&I are crucial. “If those are missing, it leads to insufficient funding, low data availability, a lack of trained personnel and expertise, a lack of effective promotion and little or no inclusion into policy/decision-making processes.”

The “why” publication notes that there has been an unevenness in the application across countries. “Lagging funds, capacities and political support can be a major obstacle for C&I implementation with consequences on the knowledge base and the state of SFM,” Dr. Linser said.

“Another issue is that C&I are often very top-down in their design and development. This can create challenges when it comes to implementation on the ground. One finding is that rural communities are marginalized by the origin and design of the C&I as they are reflected in state-determined forest management plans.

“To remedy that, there is a need for active national participation based on commitment, true stewardship, funding and capacity building,” she added.

“If you are a policy maker, C&I for SFM constitute a powerful policy tool for collecting and synthesizing understandable information – from the global to the local level – to facilitate decision-making processes on the state of forests and forestry, and on progress towards sustainable forest management.”

The bottom line, said Dr. Linser, is that “C&I require constant review and the procedural power to respond to emerging trends, and questions that arise from policy debate and public concerns. Hence, C&I are not a static instrument, but a dynamic tool to grasp all relevant forest information. Coordination and sufficient funding of all related activities as well as true stewardship and commitment of all related stakeholders are essential in this respect.”

The publications can be found at: <https://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-9/90000/90100/90105/>

*25 Years of Criteria and Indicators for SFM: Why some intergovernmental C&I Processes flourished while others faded*  
<http://www.mdpi.com/1999-4907/9/9/515>

*25 Years of Criteria and Indicators for SFM: How intergovernmental C&I Processes have made a difference*  
<http://www.mdpi.com/1999-4907/9/9/578>

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*Suggestions for reports and findings that could be promoted through IUFRO Spotlight are encouraged. To be considered, reports should be fresh, have policy implications and be applicable to more than one country. If you would like to have a publication highlighted by Spotlight, contact: Gerda Wolfrum, wolfrum(at)iufro.org*

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