

**GEF-Land Degradation and Monitoring Project  
Steering Committee Conference Call  
March 16, 2017**

**Present:**

Dr. Annette Cowie, STAP

Mr. Stephen Muwaya, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries, Uganda

Dr. Lennart Olsson, Lund University

Dr. Compton Tucker, NASA

Dr. Alex Zvoleff, Vital Signs

Mr. Tristan Schnader, Vital Signs

**Introduction and Agenda Amendments**

Dr. Zvoleff welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:09 a.m. EST. He asked if anyone had amendments to the items that were offered on the agenda. No additional agenda items were offered.

**Output 1.1.1 Draft Report Review**

Dr. Tucker provided an update on the project's first report on establishing methods for estimating the status and trends of land degradation and improvement, as outlined in paragraph 57 of the project proposal. Dr. Tucker gave credit to both his team and the Vital Signs team for incorporating most, if not all, of the suggestions from both the Science Advisory Committee (SAC) and the Steering Committee, including an example from one of the areas where our NDVI and soil moisture precipitation analysis in Kenya indicated that there was land degradation, which we confirmed with the 50 cm data. Additionally, NASA has refined Dr. Jorge Pinzon's technique and has made progress on the formation of the 50cm satellite panchromatic and multi-spectral data for all four countries.

Dr. Cowie asked about the review process, particularly whether or not the SAC has had a chance to review the revised report. Dr. Zvoleff clarified that the current report is going through final review by the NASA team and that the revised report will be sent to the SAC that day. The SAC will have a week to provide final comments and suggestions before NASA and Vital Signs finalize the report.

Dr. Olsson suggested that this first report avoids making strong recommendations on our methods until the second report, where the project team will have the chance to compare the remotely sensed data with ground data more carefully. Dr. Olsson mentioned that he has other comments, which he will send via email.

Dr. Cowie asked for an update regarding the project's interaction with the UNCCD in relation to making this report useful for their purposes. Dr. Tucker has recently sent an email to Sara Minelli for suggestions of places in Europe where Dr. Tucker and Dr. Zvoleff could give presentations on the report. Dr. Cowie suggested reaching out the CSIRO, who are currently conducting a report for the UNCCD Secretariat on data sources and methods for reporting under the SDG 15.3.

Dr. Olsson asked for clarification of whether or not this report is aiming to monitor the state and trends of land degradation or just the trends of land degradation. Dr. Cowie pointed out that, when it comes to the Land Degradation Neutrality approach and the SDG 15.3, the direction of change is most necessary, but some measure of how much land is degraded is also necessary. Dr. Olsson suggested including a section in a subsequent report about how we can address the question of determining the status of land degradation. Dr. Zvoleff suggested that Vital Signs and Lund University discuss this how to address this question in the next week.

### **Output 1.1.2 Draft Report Update**

Dr. Zvoleff led the discussion and mentioned that the outline for the report was included as part of the materials for this call. The consensus is that Vital Signs will lead the first section of the report, which will cover the background on data sets and methods and that NASA will take the lead on the second section on the disaggregation of land degradation indicators. Dr. Zvoleff asked the Steering Committee to send any comments or suggestions on the outline over the next week.

Dr. Zvoleff also asked Dr. Tucker how Vital Signs could assist NASA with section two of the report. Dr. Tucker asked that the Vital Signs and NASA teams meet to discuss how Vital Signs can help with the second section of the report.

Additionally, Dr. Tucker committed to finishing the first draft of the Output 1.1.2 Report by the end of the month.

### **Review of FY17Q2 Report**

Mr. Schnader provided an overview of the FY17Q2 report, which reported on project activities from October through December of 2016. The quarterly report was approved by the GEF and is hosted on the project's website.

The report noted delays in finalizing the Output 1.1.1 Report as well as starting on the Output 1.1.2 Report. However, given the nearly-completed status of the Output 1.1.1 Report and Dr. Tucker's commitment to completing the Output 1.1.2 Report on time, the project team will be able to move onto other activities that have previously been held up by these delays, including the toolbox development, presentations to the GEF and the STAF, and webinars designed for the UNNCD, UNCCD OFP's, and national stakeholders.

Another major challenge has been concerning the completion of the Landsat mosaics as well as the high-resolution analysis for all four pilot countries. To mitigate this issue, Vital Signs and Lund have asked NASA to prioritize Vital Signs landscapes, as well as specific hotspots and coldspots determined by Lund, in order to speed up the verification process. Once these results are received, Lund and Vital Signs will examine the results of disaggregating lower resolution estimates of land degradation.

The project reported on challenges getting national stakeholders to respond to project requests for lists of possible capacity building workshop participants as well as for location suggestions. Currently, the project has list of possible participants from Kenya and Uganda. Dr. Zvoleff and Dr. Genesis of Lund University travelled to Senegal last month and met with the UNCCD OFP and our project's on-the-ground partner, who have agreed to send a list of participants soon. Vital Signs is working through formal channels to establish regular correspondence with Tanzania's Vice President's Office. Furthermore, the project team is close to choosing a location for the workshop. Tentatively, the workshop will take place during the first week of October.

### **Updates from Alex, Jim, and Lennart on additional progress for FY17Q3**

Dr. Zvoleff began with an update on Vital Signs' progress during FY17Q3. He elaborated on his and Dr. Genesis' recent trip to Senegal and also mentioned that Dr. Gonzalez-Roglich recently attended a WOCAT meeting in Uganda to better understand how our project can integrate our tools with theirs. Additionally, Vital Signs is making good progress on the development of the toolbox. A contractor is currently writing code to build server that the toolbox will use to interact with Google Earth Engine, while Vital Signs focuses on the plug-ins for Quantum GIS. Additionally, Vital Signs has revamped the website and will be conducting small updates over the next few weeks. The project is hosted at [www.vitalsigns.org/gef-ldmp](http://www.vitalsigns.org/gef-ldmp).

Dr. Olsson reported that Lund's tasks are currently delayed and that they have not started work on the data analysis. However, he and his team are ready to begin on that work as soon as they receive the necessary land mosaics. Both Dr. Olsson and Dr. Genesis have been in the field through this quarter and will soon build training cases in all four pilot countries. Dr. Olsson suggested that Vital Signs and Lund collaborate on how to integrate QGIS into the training materials.

Dr. Tucker reported that his team is currently processing the 30, 40, and 50 cm satellite data and is resampling 50 cm panchromatic and multispectral mosaics for the four pilot countries.

Dr. Olsson and Dr. Tucker committed to submitting their teams' FY17Q3 activities statuses to Vital Signs by the end of the first week of April.

### **In-person Steering Committee Meeting**

The Steering Committee committed to having an in-person meeting in Washington, DC around the dates of the GEF Secretariat meeting, which will take place from May 23-25. Those who

cannot attend the meeting in person will have the option of joining remotely. Vital Signs will be in touch individually with each member of the Steering Committee to discuss logistics.

**Outstanding business & Adjournment**

There being no further business, the call adjourned at 10:05 a.m. EST.