

**GEF-Land Degradation and Monitoring Project
Steering Committee Conference Call
March 31, 2016**

Present:

Dr. Sandy Andelman, Vital Signs
Dr. Annette Cowie, STAP
Dr. Lennart Olsson, Lund University
Dr. Stefan Sommer, JRC
Dr. Compton Tucker, NASA

Mr. Tristan Schnader, Vital Signs
Ms. Carly Silverman, Vital Signs

Introduction and Agenda Amendments

Dr. Andelman welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 3:04 p.m. EDT. She read through the meeting's agenda and asked if anyone had amendments to the items that were offered.

Dr. Cowie suggested adding the establishment of a scientific committee as part of the call's discussion. Her suggestion was adopted into the agenda.

Establishment of Scientific Committee

The establishment of a scientific committee was previously discussed during an informal conversation held in on February 24th to help address the question of how we can receive expert input during both the implementation and review stages of this project. Dr. Cowie noted that having a scientific committee as part of a targeted research project, such as this one, is normal and proposed that such a committee should be included in the governance of the project. Dr. Andelman suggested that it would be infeasible to have two governance bodies for a medium-sized project like this one, especially at this point in the project. Dr. Cowie agreed that it might be too late to establish a second governance body to the project, but suggested that the project establishes a group that provides an advisory role. Dr. Andelman proposed the creation of a Science Advisory Committee. Dr. Olsson agreed to the establishment of such a committee as long as it fits within the budget and timeframe of the project, and Dr. Sommer seconded Dr. Olsson's stipulation. The proposal was then adopted unanimously.

Dr. Cowie noted that the GEF Secretariat asked for ESA input to this project and asked how the Steering Committee intends to involve ESA in the project. Dr. Andelman stated that the Steering Committee fully intends to comply with the GEF Secretariat's request. Dr. Tucker suggested inviting a representative from the ESA onto the Steering Committee. Dr. Sommer

agreed, but noted that this representative should be a scientist who uses ESA data products and not just someone who develops data products.

Dr. Andelman then reported that, at the Inception Workshop, there was a proposal from the Focal Points that a representative from Africa be appointed to the Steering Committee to represent the collective interests of the four pilot countries. This person should be someone with technical knowledge, but who also understands the practical challenges the pilot countries face with reporting to the UNCCD and the GEF.

Dr. Andelman proposed that the Steering Committee accepts this request by the Focal Points and also proposed that the Steering Committee agrees to invite a scientific representative from ESA onto the Steering Committee. Both motions were adopted unanimously.

Nominations of candidates for both the Steering Committee and the Science Advisory Committee will be circulated and voted on via email. Invitations will be issued afterward.

Terms of Reference for Steering Committee

Dr. Andelman outlined the general roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee (SC), which includes mostly providing strategic guidance to the project. Specifically, the SC will review and approve the annual workplans, budgets, and major outputs for the project. The Steering Committee will also provide input to the final evaluation that will be conducted by an external consultant and will help ensure the wide dissemination of project outputs.

Summary of Inception Workshop

Dr. Andelman provided an overview of the Inception Workshop, which took place in Nairobi on March 16-17, 2016. A report of the Inception Workshop will be circulated to the Steering Committee and stakeholders. The project website will be online by the end of April.

We invited the GEF Operational Focal Points, the UNCCD Operational Focal Points and also the UNCCD Science and Technology Correspondents from the four pilot countries, and several contacts from the SERVIR Africa node to the workshop. There were some challenges of communication and availability in getting certain people to attend. In addition, the GEF and UNCCD OFP for Kenya changed ministries just before the meeting and a new GEF OFP had not yet been designated at the time of the workshop. However, 21 people in total, representing all four pilot countries, attended, and those who attended were engaged and provided substantive input. Operational Focal Points from the GEF and the UNCCD said that they wanted to remain in communication and provide guidance throughout the various steps of the project. There was also substantial input on the capacity building component of the project.

Dr. Olsson reported on some of the input received related to capacity building. The stakeholders suggested having links to the project portal embedded in national agency websites, which would be an effective mode of outreach. The capacity building training may

include field activities. He also reported that there was agreement at the Inception Workshop to target a specific audience, including academia, from each pilot country to build capacity for training within each pilot country. Additionally, Lund University would like to get the contact information on who the best points of contact in each pilot countries are, so they can begin a dialogue.

Dr. Andelman also noted that the Inception Workshop included a mapping exercise, during which stakeholders drew polygons over priority areas in their countries that are hotspots for land degradation, areas where investments are being made to reverse degradation, and areas of concern where it is not clear what is happening. Those maps are being cleaned up now and will be included in the Inception Workshop Report.

Review of Year One Workplan

Dr. Andelman introduced the discussion on the workplan. Because the project has only a two-year timeline, both years were provided as context, but the Steering Committee is being asked to approve only the Year 1 workplan. The timeline of the workplan is presented to comply with the GEF's fiscal year. The workplan in its entirety was reviewed during the Inception Workshop, and several adjustments were made to make the project fit together better and to make the timeline more feasible.

Component 1 of the project is being led by NASA. The other components of the project hinge on Component 1's completion. Dr. Tucker gave an overview. The first part of Component 1 is the processing of the NDVI data from NASA's 36-year NDVI3g data set, 2002-2015 MODIS Aqua, 2000-2015 MODIS 250 Terra, as well as several different soil moisture data sets, including NASA's reanalysis root zone product called MERRA-2 Soil Moisture Data Set, the European Center for Medium Range Forecast's reanalysis soil moisture dataset, as well as the NOAA Climate Prediction Center's soil moisture dataset. This will be done in an 8km and a 250m resolution for each of the four pilot countries. NASA is currently organizing the data. Additionally, NASA will process the 50 cm data for the four countries, which will eventually be formed into two wall-to-wall data sets for each pilot country over two time periods.

Dr. Cowie asked about where exploring the full range of various indices, apart from NDVI, fits into the project. NASA will process and verify 2002-2015 MODIS Aqua & 2000-2015 MODIS 250 Terra NDVI and coincident soil moisture data for Senegal, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. They will evaluate the following soil moisture data sets: NASA's MERRA-2 1981-2016 soil moisture data; the Hadley Center's HadISDH soil moisture data set; and NOAA's Climate Prediction Center's soil moisture data. NASA will also evaluate the following NDVI & other vegetation index data sets with the soil moisture data sets: JRC's 1-km NDVI data set from 1999-2013 derived from SPOT-Vegetation; ESA's MERRIS 300-m NDVI data from 2002 to 2012; and the MODIS 250-m "enhanced" vegetation index from 2000-2015. Dr. Tucker agreed to add this language into the workplan to make clear that all of the different relevant data products, from both NASA and ESA will be evaluated, as well as the different methods for analyzing these products.

Vital Signs and NASA will process the Landsat 7 and Landsat 8 data for each country wall to wall at 30m. The intention is to process the Landsat 7 data circa 2000 and then compare that to Landsat 8 data from 2014-2015.

Dr. Andelman continued the discussion on the workplan. For Component 2, depending on the findings from the comparison of the different datasets and methods, we will demonstrate the use of these data products and methods in each pilot country and then produce a guidance document on how other countries can use the toolbox and implement these methods in other countries. The success of Component 2, therefore, hinges on the on time completion of Component 1. During the Inception Workshop, it was agreed that we will convene monthly phone calls with the project technical team to ensure the project stays on track.

Dr. Andelman suggested that we add specific activities into the workplan for peer review of each major product and realistically, it may require a month for turnaround of the reviews.

Component 3 is the gender appropriate capacity development portion of the project and focuses on the use of the toolbox and data products. It was recommended during the Inception Workshop that we develop terms of reference for the types of people we would be seeking to train in the capacity building workshop. We will need to target our audience, so we can provide satisfactory materials during the training.

It was agreed that the workplan will be revised and recirculated to the Steering Committee for approval.

The revised Year 1 workplan was circulated to the SC members on April 18, 2016. The Steering Committee reviewed the revised workplan and the workplan was approved April 25, 2016.

Review of Year One Budget

Due to limited time, the group agreed to review budget separately and will discuss and approve the budget by email.

The Steering Committee approved the Year 1 budget by email on April 25, 2016.

Scheduling of Quarterly Calls

Given the difficulties of scheduling this call, Dr. Andelman suggested that we try to schedule the Steering Committee's quarterly call in advance. The group decided to schedule each call 4-6 weeks in advance.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the call adjourned at 4:38 p.m. EDT.