

GEF Land Degradation Monitoring Project
Steering Committee Meeting
May 25, 2017
Arlington, VA

Present:

Dr. Annette Cowie, STAP
Dr. Lennart Olsson, Lund University
Dr. Compton Tucker, NASA
Dr. Alex Zvoleff, Conservation International

Dr. Free De Koning, CI-GEF Project Agency
Dr. Miguel Morales, CI-GEF Project Agency
Ms. Christy Osoling, Conservation International
Dr. Jorge Pinzon, NASA
Mr. Tristan Schnader, Conservation International
Ms. Carly Silverman, Conservation International
Dr. Anna Tengberg, Lund University

Introduction and Agenda Amendments

Dr. Zvoleff welcomed everyone to CI HQ and called the meeting to order at 8:47 a.m. EST. He asked if anyone had amendments to the items that were offered on the agenda.

Dr. Tengberg offered to update the Steering Committee on a recent conversation that she had with Ulrich Apel of the GEF-Secretariat about the GBI algorithm.

Cowie also raised the need to discuss CSIRO.

Both suggestions were added to the agenda.

Discussion on STAP/GEF-Secretariat Presentation

Dr. Zvoleff updated the Steering Committee on the in-person presentation that the project technical team gave to members of the GEF-Secretariat and of the STAP on May 23rd. Additionally, Dr. Stefanie Herrmann of the project's Science Advisory Committee, a representative from the World Bank, as well as someone from the GEF's Independent Evaluation Office attended the meeting. 14, in total, attended the presentation.

Dr. Zvoleff noted that the GEF-Secretariat recommended that the project technical team think further about how it can link the project with countries outside of our current four pilot countries. One way that we suggested reaching out was through the project's FY17Q4 webinar series by inviting representatives from IAP countries. The GEF Secretariat suggested that we

think more broadly than that. We also mentioned that we can use WOCAT as well as SERVIR as avenues of disseminating our project to other countries.

Dr. Zvoleff also noted a question from a member of the STAP about the applicability of our methods outside of arid areas. Potential indices that we can consider integrating into our toolbox would be PPI, which Dr. Olsson mentioned could help us measure vegetation in more humid regions.

In addition to those suggestions, the GEF-Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) had a number of questions about how we recommend harmonizing evaluations across countries and making sure that the results are comparable across countries. The GEF IEO also asked about integrating new methods as well as integrating future sensors, including Sentinel and Landsat 8, into the toolbox.

Lastly, the STAP recommended that we focus our work more broadly on other SDG indicators, including soil carbon and land cover, rather than completely focusing on productivity.

Update on development of toolbox

Dr. Zvoleff then gave an update on the toolbox, which has been CI's main focus recently. CI has made great progress on the toolbox and is at a point in the development where completed mosaics from NASA are required to continue making progress. The toolbox supports processing data in the cloud, which allows countries to work with large datasets using a regular computer. Additionally, CI has coded the algorithms required for the NASA's first report and also has completed the user-interface through Quantum GIS (QGIS).

Dr. Olsson asked about how often QGIS is updated and will the toolbox automatically work with every new version of QGIS. Dr. Zvoleff responded that QGIS software is updated independent of our project approximately every three months with major changes every few years. Updating the QGIS plug-ins can be done remotely and easily.

The incorporation of a French version of the toolbox was addressed. Translating the toolbox from English to French is doable and will be something that we would like to support in our FY18 budget. In addition to the toolbox being open-sourced and available for all countries to use, we would all of our stakeholders to be able to use it. Training materials will be able to inform users on varying expertise how to apply this tools in a myriad of situations.

Dr. Cowie added that the toolbox will need to have warning labels to minimize the misinterpretation of what the toolbox measures and should be used for, since productivity is not exactly land degradation.

Dr. De Koning asked about other examples of tools that currently exist outside of our project. Dr. Zvoleff mentioned WOCAT has some tools that provides a framework and how to approach the question of how to assess land degradation. There are currently no land mapping tools that

use data to measure and assess trends related to land change. Dr. Tengberg mentioned a tool called Collect Earth, which is an open sourced tool that is useful for collecting ground truth data. Collect Earth is more focused on the processing steps associated with conducting a forest inventory, whereas this toolbox provides more options for analysis. Collect Earth supporting collecting data from high resolution imagery and then using this information to conduct an analysis of cover. Because Collect Earth is open source, the project's toolbox can link to Collect Earth.

Dr. Cowie suggested that Ms. Sara Minelli of the UNCCD be updated as to which countries might have use for this toolbox for future capacity building.

There was a discussion about access to high-resolution data for countries other than the project's pilot countries and about how those countries can get access. The project team noted that there are several options for acquiring data. High-resolution data can be purchased outright from several vendors. However, this imagery is only available at fairly high costs. Dr. Tucker noted that high-resolution data can be acquired through NASA if there is an ongoing NASA project in the area. Dr. Zvoleff suggested that there is potential to add a request function within the toolbox would allow users to request high-resolution imagery in particular areas. The project team would need to then decide on the best way to meet this request.

Output 1.1.1 Proof Report Review

Dr. Zvoleff reported that the proof of Report on Output 1.1.1 was completed and that final comments will be submitted to the designer by close of business on May 26th. The report will be finalized and distributed during the next week.

Dr. Cowie commented that changes need to be made to the report where "trend in" land degradation are mentioned, which should be amended to "changes in" land degradation. The suggestion was noted and agreed to. Similarly, for the sake of transparency, Dr. Olsson advised that the project should be more careful with how we label the toolbox as a means of measuring land degradation when, in fact, the project is focused on measure indicators of land degradation.

Output 1.1.2 Draft Report Update

Dr. Tucker reported that all of the 50cm mosaics were completed. NASA is in the process of scrutinizing them to determine any errors prior to finalization.

Dr. Zvoleff then reviewed the criteria of the report as listed in paragraph 64 of the Project Document. The specific sections of the report include: a summary of freely-available, higher-resolution data sources, their suitability and trade-offs; a review and evaluation of approaches to disaggregate indicators for degradation and other change from coarse data to medium and fine resolutions; and a proposed algorithm to conduct the aggregation and disaggregation via data merging for use in a tool.

Dr. Tucker reported that his team will focus first on the algorithm for disaggregating moderate resolution datasets using the high-resolution commercial imagery, as this is the key component of the report. Dr. Tucker noted that, because review of the high-resolution imagery takes time, there may be some image review remaining after the July 1 deadline, but agreed that the algorithm for disaggregation will be sent out for review by July 1.

Update on conversation between Anna and Ulrich re GBI

Dr. Tengberg brought up to the Steering Committee a meeting that she had with Dr. Ulrich Apel of the GEF-Secretariat, who introduced her to the person in charge of developing the GBI at the GEF. Dr. Tengberg reported that there is no longer one focal area of the GBI; the GEF has decided that they want one GBI for all focal areas related to land degradation to combine with STAR allocations. Therefore, there is no need to combine NDVI with other indicators.

It was agreed that the project needs a more formal communication on this topic, and Dr. Olsson agreed that his team would follow up with Dr. Zvoleff.

Update of FY18 Budget, Review of FY17Q3 Report, Updates on FY17Q4 and FY18 Workplan

Ms. Silverman introduced Ms. Osoling, who will take over managing the project's finances in the coming months as Ms. Silverman transitions to another division within Conservation International.

Ms. Silverman then provided an update on the budget that was approved by the CI-GEF Project Agency in February of 2017, which was required for adjustments made after Dr. Andelman left CI. She also updated the Steering Committee on actual spending from inception through March 31, 2017. The project appears to currently be underspent, and Ms. Silverman reported that she does not expect there to be any issues with spending by the end of the project in accordance with the course of activities.

Ms. Silverman also provided an update on FY18 projections, compared to FY17, which will be submitted to the GEF for approval at the end of May 2017. Minor adjustments have been made to the budget compared to what was projected at the beginning of the project.

Mr. Schnader provided an overview of the FY17Q3 Report, which reported from January through March of 2017. The quarterly report was approved by the CI-GEF Project Agency and is hosted on the project's website.

It was noted that several adjustments have been made to the FY17 Workplan around the time that the FY17Q3 Report was submitted. While several activities were reported as overdue, all activities are now adjusted as on track according to new deadlines that have been approved by both the Steering Committee and the CI-GEF Project Agency. The project also made significant

progress on planning for the capacity building workshop and, as already noted, on the toolbox and the Output 1.1.1 Report.

The project's most pressing deadlines for FY17Q4 include the on-time completion of Output 1.1.2, which Dr. Tucker has agreed to an on-time draft completion, and the webinar series. The Project Technical Team has committed to completing two webinars in English, one in French, and one in Spanish by the end of June.

Furthermore,

From a capacity building standpoint, Mr. Schnader reported that he will be traveling to Tanzania to meet with key stakeholders, scope out venues for the training workshop during the first week in October, and conduct surveys to help plan for the field portion of the workshop. The project will be working with TFCG, who will assist in on-the-ground capacity building preparations. The workshop will be held in Morogoro, and the Project Technical Team is currently finalizing a list of stakeholders to invite.

Additionally, the Project Implementation Report (PIR) is due to the CI-GEF Project Agency at the end of July. Guidelines for the PIR were sent to the project team in late May, and there are plans to begin working on the PIR in late June, once the entire Vital Signs team is back in-country.

CSIRO

Dr. Zvoleff noted that the CSIRO report that was commissioned by the UNCCD has been delayed and will be delivered in final form to our team later in the year. Dr. Cowie suggested that the project team should review a draft of the report. Dr. Zvoleff agreed to conduct a more thorough review to provide comments by May 29th.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:28 a.m. EST. Presentations from each project team proceeded the meeting.