

**GEF-Land Degradation Monitoring Project
Steering Committee Conference Call Minutes
August 24, 2017**

Present:

Dr. Sandy Andelman, Organization for Tropical Studies

Dr. Annette Cowie, STAP

Dr. Lennart Olsson, Lund University

Dr. Compton Tucker, NASA

Dr. Alex Zvoleff, Conservation International

Mr. Tristan Schnader, Conservation International

Introduction and Agenda Amendments

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

Output 1.1.2 Draft Report and Discussion on Additional Report on Output 1.1.2 Activity 5

Dr. Jorge Pinzon from NASA had recently sent a draft of the Output 1.1.2 Report. Dr. Zvoleff went over the report's criteria, which includes:

- Summary of freely-available, higher-resolution data sources, their suitability and trade-offs (e.g. resolution, accessibility, repeatability, sustainability, potential for automated analysis and cost of use);
- Review and evaluation of approaches to disaggregate indicators for degradation and other change from coarse data to medium and fine resolutions; and
- Proposed algorithm to conduct the aggregation and disaggregation via data merging for use in a toolbox.
- Description of the final methods for assessing land degradation suitable for identified end-users.

**Pulled from Report 3's Criteria*

Dr. Zvoleff noted that it appears as if most of the content is provided in the report, but that he has not had the opportunity to read it fully prior to the meeting. Dr. Pinzon had mentioned to Dr. Zvoleff that the report's conclusion still needs work and there are still some notes from the NASA team within the draft.

Dr. Andelman mentioned that the report was not clear enough about the linkages of the methods within the report to the SDG indicator outputs. While the report discusses steps for

disaggregating, it seems to stop short of providing details on the disaggregated indicators. Dr. Andelman noted that the purpose of this report is to compare indicator outputs from different spatial resolutions. Dr. Andelman also commented on the 5th column of Table 1 in the report, which outlines analytical approaches and expected outcomes. The last row of this table, under commercial imagery, indicates that the outcomes should be the spatial disaggregation, but the ability to understand the drivers and processes at the local scale. However, the types of processes and the drivers of degradation has not been fully addressed within the report.

Dr. Andelman offered to send more detailed comments in writing.

Dr. Olsson mentioned that NASA's reports may have too strong of language that prescribes how to measure land degradation. Dr. Olsson suggests that NASA uses more nuanced language when reporting on the pros and cons of remote sensing. He noted that, currently, there is a mismatch between the technicalities of how to process the remote sensing data and what exact indices to use to link it to what is truly happening on the ground.

Dr. Lennart then brought up Output 1.1.2 Activity 5 on the research on the disentanglement of the effect of climate and land use. This activity has no specified output. Dr. Olsson committed to Lund providing an additional report that outlines the results of this work. Dr. Olsson believes that the work from this activity should be linked more closely with NASA's work, which will provide an opportunity to test NASA's algorithm to see if it can explain what is happening on the ground.

Dr. Zvoleff agrees that an output on Activity 5 would be useful. Dr. Olsson committed to having a later conversation with Dr. Tucker about the aforementioned thoughts on tone and about the possibility of getting NASA involved in an Activity 5 report.

Dr. Andelman expressed her agreement with Dr. Olsson's concern. Providing guidance on how to understand various types of land degradation and linking that to management and intervention will be one of the more useful outcomes of the project. Therefore, providing explanations and nuanced language that integrates what is happening on the ground with this project's methods. Dr. Olsson additionally mentioned that there is some risk in attracting critics from potential users who do not work at a scale to that is compatible with global datasets.

Dr. Tucker then joined the call and mentioned that the status on NASA's Output 1.1.2 was unclear, but that he would meet with Dr. Pinzon to discuss when a more finalized draft of the report would be completed. Dr. Tucker committed to reporting back within a day on when an updated Output 1.1.2 Report draft will be ready for peer review by the Science Advisory Committee.

Dr. Zvoleff stressed the importance of getting NASA's Output 1.1.2 Report peer reviewed by middle of the next week. According to the workshop, the report is scheduled to be finalized and designed by end of September.

Output 2.1.1 Report Discussion

Dr. Zvoleff then brought up the Output 2.1.1 Report, which is scheduled for first draft completion by the end of FY18Q1 and that a completed final draft is due during the project's last quarter. Dr. Zvoleff mentioned that a majority of the content required for this report has been completed already. The criteria for this report includes:

- Documentation of the application of methods in each country;
- Tabular and graphical presentations of the results, including the most relevant satellite image examples, indices, and maps of resulting estimates of land degradation
- All satellite data used, including national coverage of AVHRR, MODIS, Landsat and SENTINEL-2, as well as wall-to-wall commercial satellite-data mosaics
- Derived data and final results in GIS format that are organized so they can be viewed through an open-source GIS.

Dr. Zvoleff suggested gathering stakeholder input during the project's capacity building workshop in October. The Steering Committee unanimously agreed.

Update on development of toolbox

Dr. Zvoleff reported on the development of the toolbox. A beta version has been completed. Dr. Zvoleff noted that he plans on sharing the beta version with both the project team and the Steering Committee.

Dr. Zvoleff reported that the toolbox functions a QGIS plugin. An initial version was shared at the UNCCD in Bonn in July and it was well received. Additionally, there will be a side event at the UNCCD COP in China, where the toolbox will be presented on.

The Vital Signs team is continuing development of toolbox and plans on implementing capabilities within the toolbox to eventually allow stakeholders to process all three indicators from SDG Target 15.3: soil carbon, land cover, and vegetation productivity.

Update on GBI Algorithm Discussion with GEF

Dr. Zvoleff reported that the project team is ahead of schedule regarding the production of the GBI algorithm and has already submitted a report to the GEF. He noted that Dr. Ulrich Apel of the GEF Secretariat expressed enthusiasm, but that the project team has received no further feedback.

Dr. Olsson will be in Washington, DC in mid-November, and the project team will schedule a time for Dr. Olsson to present the GBI algorithm at the GEF Secretariat.

Review of FY17Q4 Report and PIR

Dr. Zvoleff reported that the FY17Q4 Report was submitted to the CI-GEF Project Agency (PA), but was missing two updates that NASA was responsible for. Those two items are the time series data and the mosaics for the priority sites. Since these items were delayed, the GEF PA would like to know when they will be completed. Dr. Tucker agreed to report back shortly and encouraged Mr. Schnader to reach out.

Dr. Zvoleff mentioned the status of a few other items that were highlighted earlier in the meeting that were also critical components of the Q4 report. Additionally, a draft of Report 3, which is a compilation of smaller reports of presentations about the project, is on schedule.

The Project Implementation Report (PIR) has been completed and is currently being reviewed by the CI-GEF PA. When the report is finalized, the Steering Committee can review the report.

Updates on FY18Q1

Dr. Zvoleff noted that most outputs needed to be discussed for FY18Q1 have already been discussed during the conference call. However, he mentioned that the project team is planning a capacity building workshop in Morogoro, Tanzania during the first week of October, where the project will host key stakeholders from each of the four pilot countries. The project team is focused on making the workshop as gender balanced as possible, and hopes to successfully train the attending stakeholders on the project's methods and toolbox.

Outstanding business & Adjournment

There being no further business, the call adjourned at 9:58 a.m. ET.