

Harmonizing Forest Terminology: A Way to Reconcile Consensus and Diversity

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Definitions of forest and related concepts are used on a variety of occasions: to report on forest status and trends, for example, or to help assess the effectiveness of forest related policies. They can also provide a common basis for the international dialogue on forests. The fact that key forestry concepts and definitions not only differ between conventions, international processes and organizations, but also that they are not used consistently at national and international levels causes confusion and calls for harmonization.

In order to foster common understanding of the definitions and the context in which they are developed, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) organized a series of Expert Meetings on Harmonizing Forest-Related Definitions for Use by Various Stakeholders.

The previous two Expert Meetings held in 2002 concentrated on core definitions of forest and change processes between forest and other land classes. It was recognized that each international convention or process was context-specific and applied its own definitions of forest-related terms. However, the use of these terms and the way they were defined should be as consistent as possible.

In this context, **harmonization** – unlike standardization – is meant to facilitate comparisons between existing definitions of related terms. It collects existing definitions, establishes linkages, identifies common elements, differences, incompatibilities and inconsistencies, as well as qualitative and, if possible, quantitative relationships. Harmonization may result in recommendations for modifications to one or several definitions which make them more compatible, consistent or even congruent.

The Third Expert Meeting in January 2005 dealt with definitions related to the natural-ness of forests, planted forests, trees outside forest, and forest management. It additionally focused on multilingual aspects and approved the continuation of the multi-stakeholder process under the CPF umbrella.

While this process mostly affects definitions coined in English as the *lingua franca* of international communication, it also reflects unavoidable discrepancies among national or local sensibilities. **In a multilingual environment** it is important that national and local uses of terms and definitions and, thus, diversity of thinking and expression have their own right and place.

With its **four official languages and long-lasting commitment to terminology**, IUFRO is currently addressing how to reconcile consensus and diversity best. With its 15,000 member scientists in over 100 countries, and activities, products and services of **SilvaVoc** (<http://www.iufro.org/science/special/silvavoc/>) and Working Party **6.03.02** (<http://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-6/>), it provides an excellent resource for addressing international multilingual forest terminology issues while contributing to and benefiting from this unique pool of forest expertise.

You are welcome to send comments on this article to <prueller@iufro.org>. In addition, we invite you to our session *039 Added value of terminology work for forestry stakeholders* at the forthcoming IUFRO World Congress.

Report from the 3rd Expert Meeting on Harmonizing Forest-related Definitions for Use by Various Stakeholders, Rome, 17-19 January 2005. All three Expert Meetings brought together more than 50 experts representing conventions, international processes, organizations and countries around the world. Proceedings of the Expert Meeting will be available from FAO and IUFRO Websites most likely at the end of March 2005.