

Forests are crucial for the well being of humanity. They provide foundations for life on earth through ecological functions, by regulating the climate and water resources and by serving as habitats for plants and animals. Forests also furnish a wide range of essential goods such as wood, food, fodder and medicines, in addition to opportunities for recreation, spiritual renewal and other services.

Today, forests are under pressure from increasing demands of land-based products and services, which frequently leads to the conversion or degradation of forests into unsustainable forms of land use. When forests are lost or severely degraded, their capacity to function as regulators of the environment is also lost, increasing flood and erosion hazards, reducing soil fertility and contributing to the loss of plant and animal life. As a result, the sustainable provision of goods and services from forests is jeopardized.

In response to the growing demand for reliable information on forest and tree resources at both country and global levels, FAO initiated an activity to provide support to national forest monitoring and assessment

(NFMA). The support to NFMA includes developing a harmonized approach to national forest monitoring and assessments (NFMA), information management, reporting and support to policy impact analysis for national level decision-making.

The purpose of the NFMA initiative is to introduce countries to an alternative approach designed to generate cost-effective information on forests and trees outside forests, including all benefits, uses and users of the resources and their management. Special attention is placed on monitoring the state and changes of forests, and on their social, economic and environmental functions. Another main objective is to

build national capacities and harmonize methods, forest related definitions and classification systems among countries.