



INDEPENDENT MONITORING AND REDD¹

Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM)

Independent Forest Monitoring² was designed a decade ago to address governance and transparency in the forest sector and to support forest law enforcement at a national level. It focuses on ground truthing through field investigations, aiming to provide reliable evidence on forest management and to report on illegal activities.

The international recognition gained by IFM is illustrated by its inclusion in the EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) initiative. Several parties to the UNFCCC specifically refer to independent monitoring in their submissions on REDD, but no attention has been paid to the form that monitoring should take or how to integrate it into REDD. As negotiations progress, valuable lessons can be drawn from 10 years experience with IFM. These can be used to inform the process of designing a robust MRV³ system for REDD which incorporates independent monitoring at national and international levels.

The 'official but independent' nature of IFM makes it unique. It is based on a contract between a local host organisation (typically the ministry of forests) and an independent monitor (typically an NGO but sometimes, though not ideally, a private sector entity). The recognition that this arrangement affords helps to ensure that reports are acted upon by the government. It also strengthens civil society by providing a means to access and channel information.

For IFM to operate effectively, the following minimum standards must be observed:

1. access to information
2. access to the field
3. freedom to publish the findings

A typical field mission comprises:

1. *Planning* to gather relevant information and prepare logistics.
2. *Implementation* of the mission, either a joint mission with forest authority officials (the preferred option) or a mission undertaken by the monitor alone.

3. *Follow-up.* A field mission report is submitted to a Reporting Panel⁴ for review and validation before publication. The monitor makes recommendations in the reports, but official law enforcement bodies retain responsibility to act on them.

Country cases

Cambodia Global Witness was the first monitor in Cambodia, where IFM began in 1999. Its findings led to a national moratorium on logging operations and the cancellation of at least two major logging concessions operating illegally. But the exposure of institutionalised corruption led to the government terminating the contract in 2003. SGS (Société Générale de Surveillance) took over as the monitor, operating under a substantially weaker mandate.

Cameroon As the first monitor between 2000 and 2005, Global Witness investigated 168 cases - 99 included at least one infraction and 56 resulted in official statements of offence by the forest law enforcement agency. Logging out of boundaries and without authorisation were the most common violations. A review at the end of the contract reported increased transparency and accountability in the forest sector and improvements in law enforcement, including development of an electronic case tracking system.⁵ In 2005, the terms of reference were amended and Global Witness decided not to bid for a new contract since some of the monitor's independence was curtailed. The current monitor, REM (Resource Extraction Monitoring), has reported some achievements since 2005, including an increase in the number of fines issued, the cancellation of forest titles, and a decrease in infractions detected in titles.

Honduras IFM began in 2005, jointly implemented by Global Witness and the Honduran Commission for Human Rights (CONADEH). Following a transition period, IFM was handed over to CONADEH and is now a permanent component of a system of checks and balances and improved governance and transparency. Social audits have been introduced which are focusing on training local people to undertake forest monitoring activities.

Nicaragua Global Witness started to implement IFM in 2006. Improvements in law enforcement

include establishing a Monitoring Unit within the forest authority and action over breaches of the law. Providing forest dwellers and rural people with access to information has been an important part of the work. Experience from IFM is supporting forest sector reform, and has inspired a system of forest audits. The focus now is on building capacity of civil society in IFM methodology and securing long-term funding.

Lessons learned from IFM

Design Scoping missions preceding IFM are important to identify and consult stakeholders, explain the nature of the work, address concerns and expectations, and exchange ideas. Adequate time must be allowed to guarantee a fully participatory design process. IFM has worked best where its mandate has been broad, enabling it to look into all issues relevant to forest law enforcement, transparency and governance. If the mandate is too narrow and political will diminished or lacking, negative side-effects of otherwise positive outcomes are a risk. Establishing a Reporting Panel as a peer-review mechanism acts as a buffer against vested interests and has proved an effective platform to discuss reports and assume joint responsibility. IFM providers should have a track record of independence, credibility, rigour and objectivity. Securing adequate long-term funding will in turn help to secure better results.

Implementation IFM can only maintain its effectiveness by evolving and adapting to a changing environment. For impacts to be sustainable, the monitor must avoid performing the role of enforcement agencies. Field investigations are the core of IFM, their success depending on effective planning, implementation and follow-up. Generally, joint missions have proved most effective, since they enable the monitor to share skills and abilities with officers involved. Sharing time in the field has helped to build trust and motivation, and created a more constructive working atmosphere. Moreover, evidence based on official information is authoritative and harder to dismiss. Mission follow-up has often proved challenging and the stage where many cases have been stalled. The monitor needs to maintain links with policy makers and civil society, in part to avoid improved enforcement consolidating flawed policies. Ultimately, international providers of IFM should, through training and support, facilitate local civil society groups to take over monitoring activities – and make them permanent.

IFM and REDD

The climate change regime has an established emphasis on reporting and review which integrates a system for independent verification by international experts. While this provides a good starting point, a broader system is needed for MRV of REDD. Monitoring deforestation and forest degradation through changes in forest cover and

carbon stocks (or interim proxy measures pending full carbon accounting) is only part of the picture. To ensure that REDD delivers, this 'technological monitoring' (which in itself needs to incorporate biodiversity as well as carbon) should be complemented with 'systems monitoring'. This should include monitoring of: policy and legislation; governance, legal compliance and enforcement; tenure and use rights; access to information, transparency and participation in decision making; revenue distribution; and performance and accountability of institutions governing REDD. IFM is a proven form of 'systems monitoring' which can easily be adapted in a cost effective way for use in REDD.

Poor forest governance is a major driver of deforestation and degradation. Since most countries expected to participate in REDD face governance challenges, some serious, addressing these will determine REDD's success – or failure. Developed to monitor and strengthen forest governance, IFM is a readymade tool. To ensure that national REDD MRV systems will be robust and effective, they must address governance and integrate independent monitoring from the outset. Moreover, experience gained from IFM can serve as a basis for setting minimum standards.

Notes

- ¹ This paper summarises a forthcoming Global Witness report on 'Lessons learned from Independent Forest Monitoring to inform REDD', due to be published with the support of the UN-REDD programme later in 2009.
- ² Global Witness defines IFM as '*the use of an independent third party that, by agreement with state authorities, provides an assessment of legal compliance, and observation and guidance on official forest law enforcement systems*'. IFM is not a certification process.
- ³ The Bali Action Plan defines MRV as 'measurement, reporting and verification'. Others refer to the 'M' as 'monitoring'. Global Witness considers all three elements as part of a monitoring system where 'measurement' refers to qualitative parameters, such as measuring performance, as well as quantitative parameters.
- ⁴ The establishment of a Reporting Panel that reviews, validates and takes ownership of the monitor's reports provides a space for discussion and puts the onus on its members to take appropriate action. So far, Reporting Panels have been established in Cameroon and Honduras, and one is in the process of being established in Nicaragua. An ideal Reporting Panel should have broad and balanced stakeholder participation. The most developed Panel, in Honduras, includes representatives from the forest authority, other relevant government institutions, the police, the armed forces, civil society organisations and the private sector.
- ⁵ Cerutti, P. and Assembe, S. (2005), 'Independent observer: Global Witness end of contract project review', submitted to DFID (UK Department for International Development).

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