Over the past 25 years, criteria and indicators (C&I) for sustainable forest management have been a vital tool for developing a common understanding of sustainable forest management. However, they have fallen short of the general ambition to use them as a framework to shape policies and guide management practice, and to improve communication with other sectors.

During the past year, C&I experts and users from Latin America, the Near East, Africa and Asia have participated in regional workshops to take stock of current uses, experiences and lessons learned. These consultations have contributed to a draft vision and roadmap on how to best mobilize the full potential of C&I to promote and demonstrate sustainable forest management in policy and practice. Actions identified range from local community use to providing global-level indicators to demonstrate the contribution of forests to sustainable development goals.

Organized as a side event of the WFC, the Global Forest Indicator Forum offered an unique opportunity to share the evolving vision and roadmap, and to refine it based on multiple perspectives provide by distinguished panelists, as well as interventions from the audience.

The Forum kicked off with opening remarks from representatives of the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, funder of the FAO global C&I project, as well as the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization and ITTO, implementing partners. The speakers highlighted three challenges: 1) reaching agreement on a global set of indicators; 2) taking into account other demands on forests; and 3) linking with the post-2015 agenda and the 17 SDGs.

The FAO project leader then presented: 1) a review of the experiences and key lessons learned, gleaned from the past 25 years of C&I work; and 2) an overview of the vision and roadmap for strengthening C&I, featuring 10 proposed actions for moving forward directed at international and regional bodies, governments and non-governmental stakeholders.
The panel discussion on the way forward for mobilizing the full potential of C&I to strengthen forest sustainability featured six speakers. The panelists were requested to share their views on: 1) the relevance and importance of the proposals made in the C&I vision and roadmap; and 2) what can be done concretely in the future work of their organizations or countries.

The first four panelists provided their views from multiple perspectives and levels: global (UNFF), regional (ATO/ITTO), national (Peru), and community (RECOFTC). The last two speakers focused on key financing (FAST) and forest certification (FSC) aspects.

All panel members concurred on the relevance and importance of the C&I vision and roadmap. Moreover, they highlighted the following needs and actions moving forward:

- Need to develop one common set of global indicators
- Need to address data gaps, and develop appropriate indicators for people and socio-economic aspects, not just for forests
- Need to reduce the number of indicators, and simplify them where possible
- Need to promote better cross-sectoral linkages, as well as inter-regional sharing
- Need to draw lessons from traditional and community-level knowledge, as well as mainstream C&I development into various educational systems
- Need to provide matchmaking between enterprises and investors, improve the credit readiness of providers, and create incentives for enterprises to get involved with C&I
- Need to view forest certification as an indicator of government commitment, and share more widely the database of enterprises that are certified

Interventions from the audience centered on: 1) underscoring the importance of ecosystem services within the definition of sustainable forest management; and 2) the fundamental importance of scale and resilience within the C&I framework.

Looking ahead, feedback from the Forum will be duly incorporated into the C&I vision and roadmap, which will be presented to the secretariats of global and regional C&I processes. It is hoped that this will inform their future work and increase the use of this key tool to promote sustainability. Without a doubt, C&I will play an important role in underscoring the contributions of forests toward the attainment of the SDGs.