External Project Review

IUFRO Programmes:
Science-Policy Programme (SciPol)
World Forests, Society and Environment (WFSE)
Special Programme for Development of Capacities (SPDC)

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Commissioned by: International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO)

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Abbreviations

ABS	Access and Benefit Sharing
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CASA	Centre for Applied Systems Analysis
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CSD	United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development
CPW	Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EFI	European Forest Institute
FAO	Food and Agricultire Organization of the United Nations
FLARE	Forests & Livelihoods: Assessment, Research, and Engagement
FLR	Forest Landscape Restoration
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GLF	Global Landscape Forums
GFEP	Global Forest Expert Panels
GFG	Global Forest Goal
GPFLR	Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration
HLPF	High-level Political Forum
IAF	International Arrangement on Forests
ICRAF	World Agroforestry Centre
IFSA	International Forestry Students' Association
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IKI	International Climate Initiative
IFF	Intergovernmental Forum on Forests
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
IPF	Intergovernmental Panel on Forests
ITFF	Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests
IUFRO	International Union of Forest Research Organizations
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
SAP	Scientific Assistance Programme
SciPol	Science–Policy Programme
SPDC	Special Programme for Development of Capacities
SV	Scientific Visit
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNFF	United Nations Forum on Forests
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSPF	United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests
WFC	World Forestry Congress
WFSE	World Forests, Society and Environment
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in Developing Countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
TOR	Terms of Reference

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0. Executive Summary

Introduction and Review Methodology

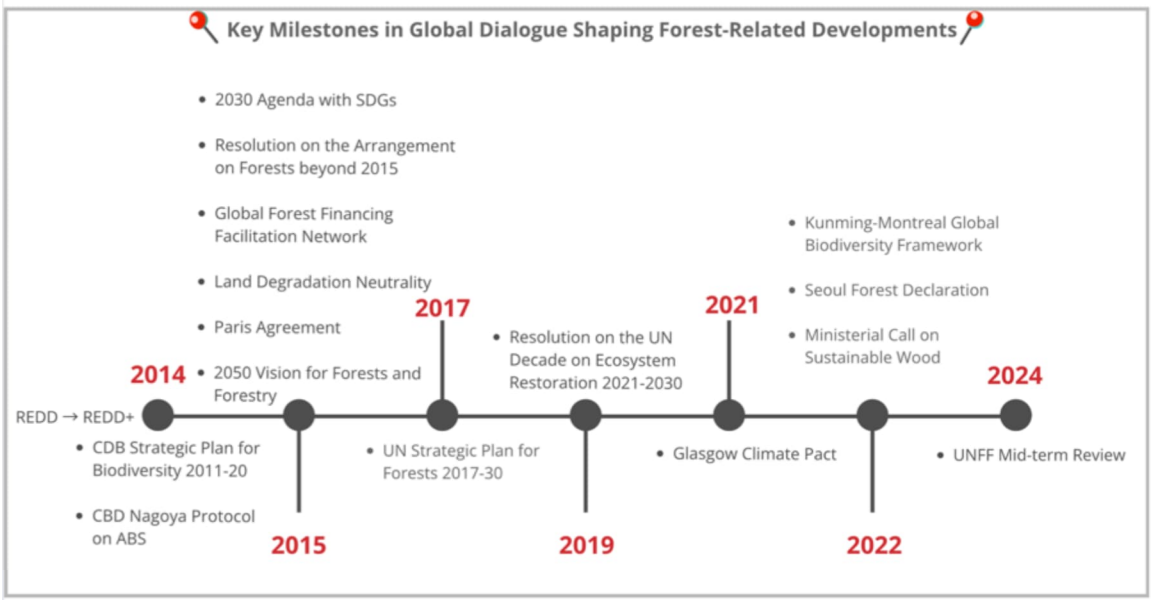
In order to assess their long-standing collaboration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) agreed to prepare a voluntary external review covering the 2014-2024 period. Targeting the three MFA-supported programmes – the (1) Science-Policy Programme (SciPol), the (2) Special Project on World Forests, Society and Environment (IUFRO-WFSE), and the (3) Special Programme for Development of Capacities (IUFRO-SPDC) - implemented by IUFRO, the review sought to present how IUFRO:

- enhanced the contribution of forest science to international forest-related processes;
- supported exchange of scientific knowledge among policy makers and practitioners; and
- strengthened capacity in forest science communication, especially in economically disadvantaged regions.

During the three-month review period (1 September to 30 November 2025), the programmes were assessed against 13 review questions addressing relevance, effectiveness (including efficiency), and sustainability. The methodology employed included document analysis and stakeholder interviews.

Background and Context Analysis

The 2014-2024 period was probably the most intense in the post-UNCED era with several milestone decisions affecting forests and forestry.



By joining the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) in the early 2000-s and actively contributing to shaping its priorities, IUFRO made big advances in promoting the science-policy interface and science-based decision making at various levels. Also, IUFRO had become the lead agency for related initiatives within the CPF with several activities going on in the review period, directly contributing to the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests and the Rio Conventions.

Description of the Three Programmes under Review

	SciPol	WFSE	SPDC
Background	Since 2007; CPF-initiated as GFEP to mobilise scientific input to forest/land-use policy; it was formalised as SciPol in 2023 to further strengthen science–policy links.	Since 2001; WFSE is a global, open network of scientists and practitioners, coordinated by Luke (Finland). It offers a global platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and policy support.	Since 1983; SPDC supports forest scientists from economically disadvantaged regions through capacity development, aiming to foster individual (and institutional) forest research and communication capacity.
Goals and Activities	Science-based assessments, follow-up studies, policy briefs; forest policy and sustainable development; aligned with global frameworks/SDGs; international expert panels; rigorous peer review.	Identify policy-relevant forest topics; produce publications, briefs, and materials often overlooked by policymakers; review knowledge and conduct new research; led by international scientists.	Key activities include providing financial support to scientists (SAP/SV), organizing training workshops on science-policy and science-practice interactions, and facilitating thematic networking.
Key Stakeholders	CPF • Scientific experts • Peer reviewers • UN bodies • Policymakers • International organizations (e.g., INTERPOL)	Scientists and researchers • Global South scientists • Practitioners and professionals • Policymakers and decision-makers	Early-Career forest scientists from economically disadvantaged countries • IUFRO member organisations • Global South networks and institutions • Policymakers and practitioners
Funding	Core work mostly voluntary; IUFRO raised funds with key support from MFA as seed money, attracting additional donors. Funding grew over time.	Is fully funded by the MFA with €100,000 annually during 2014–2024. Significant in-kind contributions from numerous voluntary authors.	MFA provides 12–18% of SPDC's annual funding as stable core support, helping coordinate projects and attract additional resources from governments, agencies, and private foundations.

Findings

Objective 1

	Relevance	Effectiveness	Sustainability
SciPol	• Topics well selected and adequate and timely selection process • CPF's status within the IAF opened doors to UNFF and other governing bodies • Contribution to 2030 Agenda via the work of HLPS • Repeated studies and regional studies of high value for many • Contribution to forest science to communicate with one voice	• Strongest impact on UNFF and relatively good uptake in CBD and FAO • Uptake by policy-makers: no documented evidence of GFEP uptake in resolutions or decisions • Uptake by practitioners: largely unknown, estimated as low • Uptake by scientific community: considerable support to science and academia, well documented	• Life-span of products up to 10 years (pertinent topics) • Need for more updates, amendments and remakes • Continued and broader consultations • Need to be more demand-driven and more attention for potential uptake and practical use would be an asset
WFSE	• Strong alignment with global frameworks (SDGs/FLR) • Topics well selected, relevant and timely • Somewhat North-dominated (European authors dominate authorship)	• Uptake by policy-makers: some evidence on country-level use in policy making • Uptake by practitioners: impact on practice may be limited and hard to assess • Uptake by scientific community: considerable support to science and academia (incl. for academic programmes)	• Long life-span of products: not highly time-sensitive due to their synthesis nature • No formal networks continued, but existence of informal collaboration after completion • Wish for more consultations regarding future topics and closer collaboration with IUFRO other programmes (esp. SciPol)

Objective 2

	Relevance	Effectiveness	Sustainability
SciPol/ WFSE	• SciPol: speaking with one voice; WFSE: coherent thinking – both countered the sector's fragmentation • Proactive approach to communication among different stakeholders • Authentic, scientific, and interest-free information	• Using the CPF/CPF Joint Initiative as a vehicle • Dialogue: active IUFRO and less engaged policy/practice • Added value to, and complementary of, the work of IUFRO task forces & divisions	• Valuable scientific reports would have not been produced in such a systematic and collaborative manner without the programmes • Challenge: improve use & further uptake of the products • Role of forest science will remain vital in the post-2030 period: good foresight and strategy by IUFRO will be needed
SPDC	• Effective addressing of knowledge gaps in forestry education (esp. prioritising female forestry scientists to become more visible) • FLR focus of the thematic networking projects was timely and relevant (aligned with UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, reinforced IUFRO's role as an active GPFLR member)	• Successful facilitation and institutionalisation of knowledge exchange among actors • Science-Policy and Science-Practice Workshops were rated as highly useful and unique • Third-party funded thematic networking projects are effective mechanisms to strengthen the role of science in forest policy and management	• Anecdotal evidence of continued use of tools and reports (adapted to local contexts) • Many products particularly valued as teaching and facilitation material • Many networks continue to grow and increasingly connect across disciplines

Objective 3

	Relevance	Effectiveness	Sustainability
SPDC	• Exposure to new perspectives & lust for more • Individual capacities and skills developed (technical and 'soft' skills), institutional capacity rather indirect • Association with positive growth-associated terms	• Effective and efficient use of funds (low overhead and staff costs) • Additional efficiency measures to keep costs down/increase input-output ratio • Substantial additional funding attracted (MFA seed allocation generally less than 30%) • Effective management/admin of scholarships	• SPDC as a springboard for long-term involvement with IUFRO • Learned skills and knowledge are highly applicable in participants' work (average score: 4.56; scale 1-5) • Direct contribution to own academic career growth (participants gained broader perspective and confidence, resilience, effectiveness, language skills) (average score: 4.75; scale 1-5)

Overall Conclusions

IUFRO's three programmes **delivered much needed scientific support to various stakeholders** negotiating milestone agreements with influence on forest-related developments at least till, and probably even beyond, 2030.

The programmes **helped the forestry community make substantive contributions to the global dialogue** shaping these agreements, and enabled IUFRO to strengthen its status as a credible and impartial source of solid scientific knowledge, and an efficient and strong member of the CPF.

Enhancing science's contribution to both policy and practice is a long-standing challenge. **IUFRO deserves credit for proactively addressing this challenge** and voluntarily launching programmes that generated and synthesized knowledge and created channels for dissemination, as well as for discussion and interaction**, and for developing innovative mechanisms** to this end.

Programme-Specific Conclusions

SciPol and **WFSE** effectively supported global policy dialogues by focusing on timely issues linked to the 2030 Agenda and key activities of CPF members. Using the CPF Joint Initiative as a major vehicle provided access to, in particular, the UNFF and the legally binding instruments represented in the CPF, but the uptake by other processes demonstrate the value of the products. The programmes' outputs appear to have rather long life-span, and some clearly deserve regular updates or remakes, as appropriate.

The programmes also made important contributions to forest science and education by summarizing knowledge in ways that helped research, education, and strengthened collaboration across the IUFRO network.

Their consultative approach combined top-down and bottom-up input, helping the programmes choose the right topics. Looking ahead, the fast-changing global policy landscape requires innovation, especially as 2030 approaches and several key elements of the current agenda expire in that year.

A major challenge is that in spite of successes, policy uptake, especially beyond forestry, remained lower than desired, so stronger outreach and engagement with policy-makers are needed.

Resources played a fundemantal role in the successful delivery, and they appear to be used well. Looking at the challenges, broader and more predictable funding would be needed to increase impact, especially for monitoring uptake and for strengthening outreach.

Undoubtedly, the emergence of AI is changing demand toward quick, easily accessible information, challenging traditional knowledge products. This is another area where innovation presents itself as a must.

SPDC has been highly relevant in bridging the gap between forest science and policy by providing exposure to high-level academia, practical field-based learning, and raising awareness of forestry's social, technical, and policy dimensions.

Its focus on FLR was timely, supporting the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and strengthening IUFRO's role in global restoration initiatives.

The programme built strong individual and institutional capacities, improving technical, communication, social, and psychological skills, while participants often acted as "multipliers" in their institutions.

SPDC used resources efficiently, leveraging volunteers, partner countries, and online formats to maximize impact without increasing costs.

Finally, it served as a springboard for long-term engagement, supporting career growth, international collaboration, and continued use of SPDC tools and networks in institutions and policy practice.

Points for Consideration

Given the similarities between SciPol and WFSE some recommendations could apply to both of them. These are:
#1: Continue providing forest-related negotiations with impartial, solid, scientific information at all levels.
#2: Keep focus on the IAF as well as the 2030 Agenda, in particular through the Rio Conventions and other legal and soft instruments.
#3: Start preparing for the post-2030 period, establish an internal task force/think tank that follows developments and makes recommendations for IUFRO's engagement.
#4: Develop a concept for consultations in circles broader than currently, and for a mechanism which can provide information on governments' needs.
#5: Adjust timing of production cycles so that products are available in time for a good impact.
#6: Establish closer and more systematic coordination between SciPol and WFSE.
#7: Develop an enhanced communication and outreach strategy:

- Keep, or if possible, intensify current outreach and PR activities
- Strengthen advocacy in particular through IUFRO's own network and place more emphasis on the national level
- Establish true costs for communication, even if they are considerable

#8: Develop a new concept for the products and their production in light of broadening support provided by AI.

The unique features of SPDC gave rise to some further recommendations. These are:
#1: Develop a post-course alumni programme to maintain engagement and track impact.
#2: Strengthen mentorship and coaching for more systematic follow-up and engagement.
#3: Design targeted programmes to promote gender balance in forestry science.

Despite considerable differences among the three programmes, two recommendations may apply to all of them:
#1: Monitor and evaluate uptake and continuously adjust dissemination in light of the results.
#2: Diversify and strategically engage donors.

1. Introduction and Review Methodology

1.1 Review Purpose

The MFA and IUFRO have maintained a long-standing partnership focused on strengthening the contribution of forest science to international forest policy dialogues. Their work supports sustainable forest management (SFM) and promotes the development of forest research, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions. Through this collaboration, they aim to ensure that scientific knowledge plays a central role in guiding global decisions about forests, helping to balance ecological, social, and economic needs. In 2024, the MFA and IUFRO jointly agreed to commission a voluntary external project review to assess the achievements and value of this collaboration. The review was carried out by two independent experts, Peter Csóka and Lisa Ringhofer, on behalf of IUFRO between 1 September and 30 November 2025**.**

The primary purpose of this external review is accountability - to provide the MFA with a transparent assessment of how funds have been utilized and what corresponding results have been achieved. At the same time, the review serves a learning function**,** aiming to generate insights that can inform and improve future programme design, planning, and implementation within IUFRO.

1.2 Review Objectives and Scope

The overall objective of the review is to determine how far IUFRO's programmes supported by MFA have contributed to advancing forest science and its role in sustainable development and related policies. Specifically, the review seeks to assess progress toward the following three objectives, as specified in the Terms of Reference (TOR):

- Objective 1: Enhance **forest science contributions to international forest-related policy processes** and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Objective 2: Support the **exchange** of scientific knowledge among policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers at global, national, and local levels.
- Objective 3: **Strengthen capacity in forest science communication** and in the science–policy–practice interface, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions.

This review covers the period August 2014 to July 2024 and targets the three MFA-supported programmes – the (1) Science-Policy Programme (SciPol), the (2) Special Project on World Forests, Society and Environment (IUFRO-WFSE), and the (3) Special Programme for Development of Capacities (IUFRO-SPDC) - implemented by IUFRO[1]:

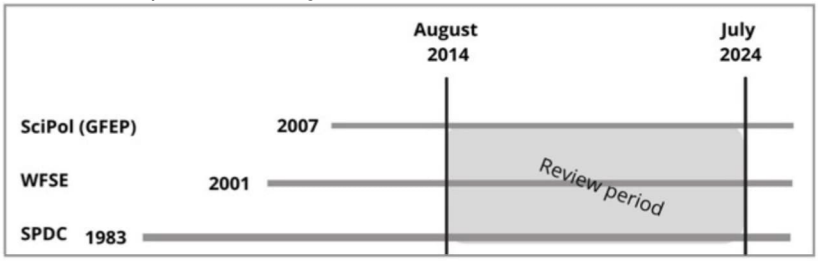


Figure 1: Illustration of review period across the programmes

[1] The programmes will be described in more detail in Chapter 3.

Together, these long-term programmes contribute to IUFRO's overarching mission "to advance research excellence and knowledge sharing, and to foster the development of science-based solutions to forest-related challenges for the benefit of forests and people worldwide".

To address the review objectives, 13 questions were developed using the OECD-DAC criteria - each offering a distinct perspective for assessing the programmes: (1) Relevance: Alignment with identified needs, priorities, and policy contexts; (2) Effectiveness (incl. efficiency): Achievement of objectives and efficient resource use; (3) Sustainability: Likelihood that outcomes will continue beyond MFA support (see Annex 3).

1.3 Review Design and Approach

The external review employed a mixed-methods approach that included a systematic document analysis, exploratory and in-depth interviews with selected stakeholders, and a quantitative data analysis.

The review was conducted over a period of three months (excluding the preparation phase), from 1 September to 30 November 2025, and comprised a total of 30 working days, divided evenly between the two external reviewers. The evaluation was structured into three consecutive phases (see Figure 2):

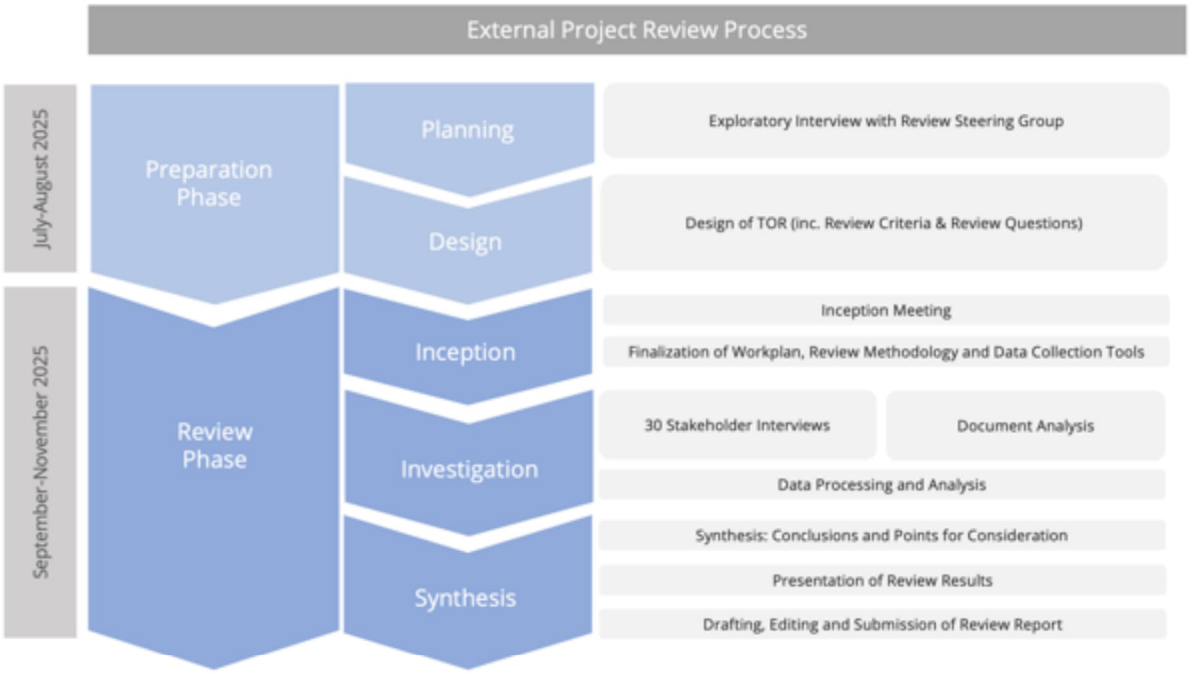


Figure 2: Illustration of external review process

Phase 1 – Inception
The inception phase began with a kick-off meeting to clarify the TOR, the evaluation questions relevant for IUFRO, the overall timeframe, and logistical arrangements for the review process.

Following an initial screening of the documents provided, a detailed work plan was developed. Based on this plan, the review methodology was further refined, and specific data collection tools

were designed - namely, semi-structured interview guides with tailored question sets for the different stakeholders (see Annex 3). All interview guides were prepared in English.

A comprehensive document and literature review was conducted, drawing on several key sources: annual progress reports submitted by IUFRO to MFA, including financial statements; summarized reports provided by Programme Coordinators detailing project results from 2014 to 2024; and IUFRO's website, which serves as a repository for publications, events, and programme results. Additional information needs were continuously met by the IUFRO Secretariat throughout the review process (see Annex 2).

Phase 2 – Investigation
The investigation phase consisted of three consecutive steps: data collection, processing, and analysis.

A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected stakeholders. These included policy-makers involved in global forest-related policy processes who had used outputs from IUFRO's programmes; authors from the SciPol and WFSE programmes' expert panels; and scientists from economically disadvantaged regions who benefited from SPDC activities, such as conferences, knowledge-sharing, and training. The current and former IUFRO Presidents, the IUFRO Executive Director, and the Coordinators of the three IUFRO programmes were also interviewed (see Annex 1). The selection of interview partners aimed at, to the extent possible, a fair gender balance for all three programmes, as shown in Table 1:

	SciPol	WFSE	SPDC	Coordinators[2]	IUFRO Presidents + Executive Director	**Total M/F**
Male	4	5	3	3	3	17 (59%)
Female	2	1	5	3	1	12 (41%)
TOTAL	6	6	8	6	4	30

Table 1: Gender Distribution of interviewees

The data collection was followed by a systematic, two-phase analysis. Qualitative content analysis was used as the main analytical method, enabling the reviewers to identify key trends, patterns, and recurring themes across the dataset. In the next step, all analyzed data from both the document review and stakeholder interviews were integrated into a comprehensive written evidence base, which provided the empirical foundation for answering all evaluation questions.

Phase 3 – Synthesis
In this final phase, the analysis was translated into key insights, which formed the basis for drawing conclusions and, subsequently, formulating recommendations and lessons for the future. The preliminary main findings were presented to and discussed bilaterally with the donor, MFA. Following this, the review report was finalized, incorporating feedback received during the iterative review loops, including from MFA and the IUFRO Secretariat.

Potential Limitations
The reviewers would like to acknowledge a few limitations with potential influence on the scope and findings of this review. Methodologically, the primary reliance on qualitative content analysis could have limited the extent to which trends or outcomes of the programmes were quantified. Time and resource limited opportunities for follow-up interviews, longitudinal data collection, or deeper

[2] Three paired interviews were conducted with Programme Coordinators, each pairing a former and a current coordinator.

exploration of emerging issues. Consequently, the evaluators could have not aimed for a fully systematic or comprehensive assessment in all areas.

Availability and completeness of data presented some additional challenges. The review gave raise to some information needs that were not possible to meet from the existing reporting system, therefore the review team had to rely on supplementary information or approximation provided by the IUFRO Secretariat.

2. Background and Context Analysis

2.1. The international forest policy landscape and IUFRO

It is a long-held view that the international forestry landscape is very complex and fragmented, and in spite of best efforts to change this, both complexity and fragmentation continued to grow over the years. The fundamental causes may be found in developments in the early 1990s, when in 1992 the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) – nick-named as Earth Summit - gave birth to the so-called Rio Conventions on biodiversity[3], climate change and desertification, but no agreement was reached on forests[4]. Forest issues continued to be discussed in various fora[5], still, there was no single instrument with a comprehensive, 360-degree approach to forests. The recognition of the need for such a policy forum led to the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) in 1995, followed by the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) in 1997, both having the status of an ad-hoc expert group under the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The work of these panels paved the road for the elevation of the forest issue to a higher level in 2000, when UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) with the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), as one of ECOSOC's functional commissions being one of its components.

UNFF, a permanent body with universal membership, focused on, with a view to recommending to ECOOSC and through it to the General Assembly, "parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests", which could also "develop the financial provisions to implement any future agreed legal framework"[6]. This mandate had proven to be so challenging that after several years of trying, UNFF shifted its focus from the legal option to developing non-legally binding instruments, such as the UN Forest Instruments[7] and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030[8] (UNSPF). While these were seen remarkable achievements of the global dialogue on forests, legally binding decisions with direct or indirect impact on forests and forestry continued to emanate from other processes and instruments.

The complexity of the international forest regime underlined the need for formal and informal coordination in the late 1990s and gave rise to the idea of creating a mechanism called the Inter-agency Task Force on Forests (ITFF) in 1998. In spite of its informal and voluntary nature, ITFF proved to be very efficient, whose strength lied in the spirit of collaboration and like-mindedness of its eight

[3] Noting that CBD was not negotiated under the UN but was brought under the UN umbrella subsequently.
[4] UNCED produced two outcomes directly related to forests, the Forest Principles, and Chapter 11 of Agenda 21.
[5] A non-communicated review found over 80 global and regional instruments dealing with forests in early 2000. Personal communication.
[6] ECOSOC resolution 2000/35 paragraph 3. (c) (i)
[7] Non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests; A/RES/62/98
[8] ECOSOC resolution 2017/4; UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/71/285

member organisations. Based on this positive experience, when UNFF was created, ECOSOC invited executive heads of relevant global agencies to form a partnership to support, *inter alia*, the work of the Forum. In response to this invitation, in 2001 the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) was established, partly as a successor of ITFF, and other organizations joining subsequently. CPF's membership grew over the years reaching the current 16.

IUFRO was not part of ITFF or CPF at the time of its inception, but joined CPF in 2003 at the initiative of then-president Risto Seppälä, who also spearheaded the Science and Technology CPF Initiative, which later evolved into the Global Forest Expert Panel (GFEP, now SciPol). Professor Seppälä and his successors have long emphasized the value of sound science in international negotiations, especially when polarized perspectives and competing interests made consensus difficult. In such periods science's contribution was extremely important, not only in terms of data and knowledge, but also as a source of neutral and impartial information. As experiences showed, in certain moments this contribution proved to be invaluable.

Although the primary focus of the CPF has been the support to the UNFF, the Partnership has long recognized the need to broaden its scope beyond the original mandate and contribute to other forest-related processes beyond UNFF, as appropriate. This led to defining one of CPF's functions the promotion of "the contribution of forests and trees to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other major forest-related agreements".[9] Further, CPF's Strategic Vision towards 2030[10] identified the promotion of science-policy interface and science-based decision making as one of CPF's five strategic priorities. IUFRO had been instrumental in these internal strategic discussions of CPF, arguing for close collaboration with global and regional decision-making bodies on forests and making science-based information available to them.

The period covered in this review (2014-2024) was very rich in developments with immediate and direct or less direct impacts on forests. In chronological order, selected milestones of this global dialogue, conducted mostly within instruments and processes represented in the CPF, could be summarised as follows (see also Figure 3):

1. Partly pre-dated the period concerned, the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, which included the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (including Target 5 which aimed the rate of loss of natural habitats, including forests, be halved or brought close to zero by 2020). The Strategic Plan had been impacting forest-related developments considerably.
2. The UNFCCC, at COP19 in Warsaw in December 2013, formally established the REDD+ programme for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, adding conservation, SFM, and enhancement of carbon stock to the much-debated original REDD scheme.
3. In 2014 the CBD's Nagoya Protocol on access and benefit sharing (ABS) came into force addressing several issues that were crucial also for SFM.
4. 2015 was a pinnacle year with several major decisions:
    a. The UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda containing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 6 and 15 are considered immediately, while all other SDGs, although to a varying degree, indirectly relevant for forests.
    b. UNFF negotiated and ECOSOC adopted the Resolution on the International Arrangement on Forests beyond 2015[11] which charted the way for the IAF and its components till 2030, including a revised mandate for UNFF and the establishment of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network[12].

[9] CPF Policy Document 2017 (rev 2019)
[10] https://www.fao.org/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/publications/en
[11] E/RES/2015/33
[12] https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/capacity-development/forest-financing/index.html

c. COP12 of the UNCCD adopted the Land Degradation Neutrality[13] (integrated into the SDGs as Target 15.3).
d. UNFCCC COP21 adopted the Paris Agreement[14], which became one of the cornerstones of the international climate regime.
e. Under FAO's patronage, the XIV World Forestry Congress adopted the 2050 Vision for Forests and Forestry.[15]

5. In 2017 UNFF negotiated the UNSPF with its 6 Global Forest Goals (GFGs).
6. In 2019 the UN General Assembly adopted the Resolution on the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030[16].
7. In 2021:
   a. The UNFCCC COP26 adopted the Glasgow Climate Pact[17].
   b. The CBD COP15 started to negotiate the new global framework for biodiversity. The process concluded in 2022 resulting in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework[18] setting global targets to be achieved by 2030 and beyond.
8. In 2022 the XV World Forestry Congress adopted the Seoul Forest Declaration and launched the Ministerial Call on Sustainable Wood[19].
9. In 2024 UNFF conducted the mid-term review[20] of the IAF defining steps to be taken by 2030. (Here not the review itself but the preparations made impact on the evaluation period.)

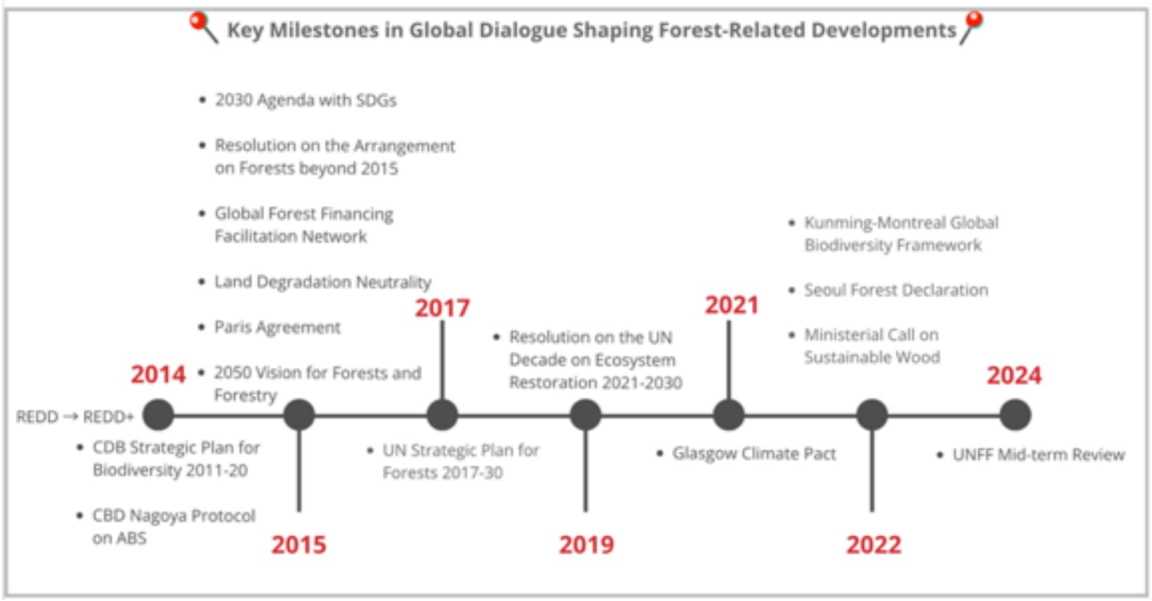


Figure 3: Key Milestones shaping forest-related developments

These decisions, together with the topical foci of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) - notably SDG 1 and 2 in 2017, 2021, and 2024; SDG 6 in 2018 and 2023; SDG 15 in 2018 and 2022; and SDG 13 in 2019 and 2024 - and the UNFF quadrennial programme of work, provided a fairly clear indication of the directions forest-related negotiations would take over the years and the challenges the scientific community would need to address in supporting the policy processes.

[13] https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/land-degradation-neutrality/overview#:~:text=LDN%20is%20defined%20as:%20*%20A%20state,**Reduce%20existing%20degradation**%20*%20**Restore%20degraded%20lands**
[14] https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement
[15] https://www.fao.org/about/meetings/world-forestry-congress-xiv/outcome/en/
[16] https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/73/284
[17] https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-glasgow-climate-pact-key-outcomes-from-cop26
[18] https://www.cbd.int/gbf
[19] https://www.fao.org/event/world-forestry-congress/congress-outcomes/en
[20] https://docs.un.org/en/E/RES/2024/15

It appears that IUFRO was very successful in "reading" these developments and initiating concrete actions and programmes. The selection of SciPol and WFSE topics in the reviewed period clearly demonstrate this. As a result, IUFRO's efforts gained strong international recognition, establishing the organization as a trusted advocate and respected voice of forest science in policymaking across various fora.

3. Description of the Three Programmes under Review

3.1. The Science-Policy Programme (SciPol)

Background: Since 2007, the initiative now known as SciPol began as the IUFRO-led Global Forest Expert Panel (GFEP), launched by the CPF to mobilize scientific expertise and provide governments, intergovernmental bodies, and other decision-makers with robust knowledge for forest, tree, and land-use policy at regional and global levels. Over time, GFEP evolved into a comprehensive Science-Policy Programme, formally established by the IUFRO Board in 2023, to strengthen the link between science and policy.

Goals and activities: SciPol produces science-based publications (assessment reports, follow-up studies, policy briefs) tailored to audiences involved in policy and decision-making. Its work focuses on forest-related policies and sustainable development, aligning with multilateral agreements and global frameworks such as the SDGs. The reports are prepared by thematic Expert Panels consisting of internationally recognized scientific experts[21] in their field. All reports undergo rigorous peer review.

Key stakeholders: **CPF:** Provides political legitimacy, guidance, and input on topics and expert panels. **Scientific Community:** Expert panels and peer reviewers conduct rigorous, interdisciplinary assessments. **Policy Makers** (including advisors)**:** UN bodies, multilateral fora, and regional policy-makers use outputs to inform forest-related policies. **International Organizations:** mostly those represented in the CPF but also others (e.g., INTERPOL) apply findings in reports and operational guidance.

Main 4 workstreams: (1) GFEP initiative: Global scientific assessments and policy briefs on key forest issues, developed by expert panels for policy-makers, scientists, stakeholders, and the public. **(2) Follow-up studies:** Updates and new perspectives on previous GFEP assessments, ensuring continued relevance and diversity of expertise. **(3) Regional activities:** Region-specific assessments, extended policy briefs, and workshops to adapt global findings to local contexts. **(4) Regional Science-Policy Networks (SPIN):** Established in 2025 (hence not part of this review) to connect research institutions and policy-makers, currently active in Africa and Pan-Europe.

[21] The teams producing the main reports included around 280 scientists from all over the world, few of them contributed to more than one report. Many authors came from outside the IUFRO network.

Period	Report and other products	Key dissemination events
2013-2015	• Forests and Food Security (World series Vol. 33) [22] • Policy Brief - Forests, Trees and Landscapes for Food Security and Nutrition Contributing to the "Zero Hunger Challenge"	UNFF11, CBD COP12, UNFCCC COP20, Expo2015, GLF2020
2015-2016	• Illegal Logging and Related Timber Trade (World series Vol. 35)[23] • Policy Brief - Forests Beyond the Law: Scientific Insights into Illegal Logging and Related Timber Trade	CBD COP13, CITES COP17, 27th Meeting of the INTERPOL Wildlife Crime Working Group
2016-2018	• Forest and Water on a Changing Planet (World series Vol. 38)[24] • Policy Brief - Forest and Water on a Changing Planet: Scientific Insights for Achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals	HLPF 2018, IISD, international water conferences
2018-2020	• Forests, Trees and the Eradication of Poverty (World series Vol. 39)[25] • Policy Brief - Forests, Trees and the Eradication of Poverty: Potential and Limitations • English and German factsheets	UNFF16[26]
2019-2020	• Forests, Trees and Poverty Alleviation in Africa - An expanded policy brief[27]	HLPF 2021, IUFRO World Day 2021
2021-2022	• Forests, Climate, Biodiversity and People: (World series Vol. 40)[28] • Policy Brief - Forests, Climate, Biodiversity and People: Assessing a Decade of REDD+ • English, Spanish, and German factsheets • Stakeholder Consultation - A Decade of REDD+: Stakeholder Perceptions of its Implementation[29]	XV WFC, GLF 2022, IUFRO World Day 2022
2021-2023	• Forests and Trees for Human Health: (World series Vol. 41)[30] • Policy Brief - Forests and Trees for Human Health: Pathways, Impacts, Challenges and Response Options • Promotional YouTube video (2 minutes) • English and German factsheets	UNFF18, media, IISD
• **2022-2023**	• Forests and human Health in Asia - An expanded policy brief[31]	media, local events
2022-2024	• International Forest Governance: (World series Vol. 43)[32] • Policy Brief - International Forest Governance: Trends, drawbacks, and new approaches. A critical review • Promotional YouTube video (4 minutes)	UNFF19, FLARE 2024 Annual Meeting, XXVI IUFRO World Congress, media

Table 2: SciPol activities and products 2014-2024
(green indicates regional activities, blue follow up studies of earlier assessments)

As reflected in Table 2, the programme grew in intensity over time and reports were increasingly followed by satellite products supporting broader dissemination and better uptake. This expansion was a direct response to experiences gained, suggesting that different audiences could have a

[22] https://www.iufro.org/publications/world-series-vol-33-forests-trees-and-landscapes-for-food-security-and-nutrition-a-global-assessment-report
[23] https://www.iufro.org/publications/world-series-vol-35-illegal-logging-and-related-timber-trade-dimensions-drivers-impacts-and-responses-a-global-scientific-rapid-response-assessment-report
[24] https://www.iufro.org/publications/world-series-vol-38-forest-and-water-on-a-changing-planet-vulnerability-adaptation-and-governance-opportunities
[25] https://www.iufro.org/publications/world-series-vol-39-forests-trees-and-the-eradication-of-poverty-potential-and-limitations
[26] It was also disseminated in the special issue of the scientific journal "Forest Policy and Economics" and in different webinars
[27] https://www.iufro.org/publications/forests-trees-and-poverty-alleviation-in-africa-an-expanded-policy-brief
[28] https://www.iufro.org/publications/world-series-vol-40-forests-climate-biodiversity-and-people-assessing-a-decade-of-redd
[29] https://www.iufro.org/publications/a-decade-of-redd-stakeholder-perceptions-of-its-implementation
[30] https://www.iufro.org/publications/world-series-vol-41-forests-and-trees-for-human-health-pathways-impacts-challenges-and-response-options
[31] https://www.iufro.org/publications/forests-for-human-health-in-asia-an-expanded-policy-brief
[32] https://www.iufro.org/publications/world-series-vol-43-international-forests-governance-a-critical-review-of-trends-drawbacks-and-new-approaches

different attitude and appetite towards new information and diverse products and proactive approaches were needed to help information reach these audiences.

Programme funding: While the bulk of the analytical work was provided free of charge by the large number of participants/authors, SciPol products required considerable resources, and IUFRO played a crucial role in raising them. This, however, could not have been successful without the commitment and steady and predictable support of some donors, first and foremost the MFA, whose contribution provided a solid basis for IUFRO to engage in further fundraising and served as an encouragement for other donors to contribute with additional resources. These include government funds from the USA and Germany. Thanks to these efforts and contributions, the funding base grew considerably in the review period, allowing for the programme to deliver more high-quality products over the years. Although MFA's relative share decreased in the post-2020 period, it maintained its key role as "seed-money". Worth noting further that support from other donors slightly declined after 2020 v.a.v. the unchanged Finnish contribution (see Table 3).

	MFA (EUR)	%	Other Donors (EUR)	%	TOTAL Funding (EUR)
2014	95,000	*70*	39,902	*30*	134,902
2015	0	*0*	117,949	*100*	117,949
2016	135,200	*64*	76,237	*36*	211,437
2017	200,000	*77*	59,901	*23*	259,901
2018	200,000	*77*	59,268	*23*	259,268
2019	200,000	*76*	64,162	*24*	264,162
2020	200,000	*24*	618,692	78	818,692
2021	200,000	*26*	566,060	74	766,060
2022	200,000	*27*	527,321	73	727,321
2023	200,000	*30*	474,302	70	674,302
2024	200,000	*32*	423,892	68	623,892

Table 3: SciPol funding 2014-2024

3.2. World Forests, Society and Environment (WFSE)

Background: WFSE is a global, open network of scientists, experts, and practitioners. It offers an independent platform where people can participate and collaborate widely. WFSE promotes sustainable forest development, supports livelihoods, and encourages inclusive growth. It also contributes to policy-making by facilitating international collaboration, knowledge sharing, and learning. WFSE is coordinated by the Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke).

Goals and activities: WFSE's goal is to identify emerging, policy-relevant forest topics and produce high-quality scientific outputs - such as publications, policy briefs, capacity-building materials, and conference presentations - that are valued by the scientific community but often overlooked by policy-makers. WFSE takes a broad, cross-disciplinary approach, focusing on two main activities: (1) reviewing and summarizing existing knowledge to draw lessons and recommendations, and (2) conducting new research to fill important knowledge gaps. The work is driven by internationally renowned scientists who contribute in-kind to developing open-access publications, which are reviewed by editors and undergo double-blind peer review. Major publications are organized in multi-author groups led by lead authors, with contributors chosen for their expertise and relevance to the topic. Collaboration happens through physical and virtual meetings, workshops, and ongoing

exchanges. Scientists and experts involved come from leading universities and research institutions worldwide[33]. Each publication clearly lists all authors and their affiliations.

Key stakeholders: **Scientists and Researchers:** internationally recognized experts who contribute to research, knowledge synthesis, and publications. **Global South Scientists:** whose perspectives WFSE actively amplifies to address equity issues. **Practitioners and Professionals:** forestry practitioners, development experts, and policy advisors who apply and benefit from WFSE's outputs. **Policy-makers and Decision-Makers:** at national and international levels, using WFSE's evidence-based findings to inform policy.

Major phases and themes/topics addressed:

Period	Reports and other products	Key dissemination events
2014-2015	• Forests under pressure – Local responses to global issues (IUFRO World Series Vol 32)[34] • IUFRO WFSE Issue Brief 1/2014 - Synergistic policies and measures are the key to advancing sustainable forest management and forest-based development • Crowdsourced Brief for Sustainable Development Report 2015 - Advancing sustainable forest-related local development • Issue Brief 1/2015 - Management of natural tropical forests for the future	XXIV IUFRO WC, UNFF11, XIV WFC
2015-2016	• Incentives and Constraints of Community and Smallholder Forestry (Forests, Special Issue)	
2015-2017	• Shifting Global development Discourses - Implications for forests and livelihoods (International Forestry Review Vol 19)	Helsinki Seminar, IUFRO RC for Asia & Oceania, IUFRO 125th Anniversary
2017-2020	• Community Forestry and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Two-Way Street. (Forests 9(6)) • Policy brief - Building on synergies: Harnessing community and smallholder forestry for sustainable development goals • Book - Sustainable Development Goals: Their Impacts on Forests and People[35] • Policy brief - Harnessing forests for the Sustainable Development Goals: Building synergies and mitigating trade-offs • Forest tenure and the Sustainable Development Goals – A critical view (Forest Policy and Economics vol 120) • Tenure reform for better forestry: An unfinished policy agenda (Forest Policy and Economics vol 123)	UNFF12, FLARE Network meeting, 2018 EFI AC, COFO24, UNFF14, GLF 2019, XXV IUFRO WC, Helsinki Seminar, HLPF 2020
2020-2024	• Book - Restoring Forests and Trees for Sustainable Development: Policies, Practices, Impacts, and the Ways Forward[36] • Policy Brief - Balancing interests and approaches for equitable, just and sustained forest restoration	GLF 2021, UNFCCC COP26, XV WFC, IUFRO Div. 8 Conference, XXVI IUFRO WC

[33] including Chiang Mai University, CIFOR-ICRAF, FAO, Eduardo Mondlane University, EFI, IUCN, Penn State University, Tropenbos International, University of British Columbia, University of Freiburg, University of Helsinki, University of Melbourne, University of Oxford, University of São Paulo, Wageningen University & Research, US Forest Service, WWF and many others.
[34] https://www.iufro.org/publications/world-series-vol-32-forests-under-pressure-local-responses-to-global-issues
[35] https://www.iufro.org/publications/sustainable-development-goals-their-impacts-on-forests-and-people
[36] https://www.iufro.org/publications/restoring-forests-and-trees-for-sustainable-development-policies-practices-impacts-and-ways-forward

	• Governance of Forest Landscape Restoration – Analyses of Governance Issues in Cases from Ghana and India (Occasional Paper No. 34) • White paper: Forest landscape restoration for climate, nature and people • Socioeconomic, political, and cultural aspects of forest restoration - What can we learn from forest restoration practice? (International Forestry Review. Special Issue)	

Table 4: WFSE activities and products 2014-2024

Programme funding: Unlike the other two programmes, which have received substantial co-financing from various sources (see respective paragraphs), the WFSE programme was fully funded by the MFA with an annual amount of €100,000 during the 2014-2024 review period (except for 2015, as described in funding tables of SciPol and SPDC). It is, however, difficult to quantify the significant in-kind contributions made by numerous authors who have voluntarily participated in assessments and publications over time. These voluntary efforts represent a substantial, though unrecorded, share of the programme's cost.

3.3. Special Programme for Development of Capacities (SPDC)

Background: Since 1983, IUFRO has supported forest science in economically disadvantaged regions through the Special Programme for Development of Capacities (SPDC). Its mission is to expand and foster forest research capacity in economically disadvantaged countries. SPDC actively involves scientists from the Global South, who might otherwise be excluded, helping IUFRO avoid a Northern-dominated perspective while promoting inclusivity and building research capacity.

Goals and activities: The SPDC programme addresses persistent gaps in human, financial, and infrastructural resources that limit scientists' participation in regional and global networks, as well as the impact of their research on local policy and forest management. Its main activities include support to forest scientists from economically disadvantaged countries to participate in IUFRO conferences; organizing training workshops - including pre-congress trainings - on science-policy and science-practice interactions; and facilitating thematic networking activities - mainly on forest landscape restoration and resilient future forests.

Key stakeholders: **Early-Career Forest Scientists from Economically Disadvantaged Countries** are the sole beneficiaries of SPDC, receiving training, financial support, and networking opportunities. **IUFRO Member Organizations**, including national and regional forest research institutions, host or collaborate in SPDC activities. **Global South Networks and Institutions**, such as universities, research centres, and other organizations in developing regions, partner with SPDC to strengthen local research capacity. **Policy-makers and Practitioners** - particularly from economically disadvantaged countries - are stakeholders who benefit mostly indirectly from improved science-policy interactions and research outputs that inform forest management and conservation.

Main 3 workstreams: (1) Scientist Assistance Programme (SAP)[37]: Provides financial support for early-career forest scientists from economically disadvantaged countries to participate in IUFRO events and Scientific Visits. Between 2014-2024, 904 scientists benefited from event sponsorships

[37] Except in 2015, when MFA provided no support, MFA funding consistently contributed about 30-40% of the SAP's annual allocation.

(48% women), and 24 Scientific Visits were granted to foster global networking and research exposure. **(2) SPDC Training Workshops:** Focus on enhancing scientists' skills in producing high-quality research and translating results into policy and practice. Over 2014-2024, 13 science-policy workshops trained 355 early-career scientists in science-policy interactions, communication, and evidence-based approaches. **(3) Thematic Networking:** SPDC's thematic networking activities focus on forest landscape restoration (FLR), supporting also broader development goals, including poverty alleviation, improved rural livelihoods, environmental protection, and sustainable forest use. As an active member of the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR), IUFRO contributes expertise, networking, and capacity development. Since 2014, SPDC projects have synthesized global scientific information, published reports and policy briefs, developed field demonstration sites, and conducted capacity-building workshops across economically disadvantaged regions.

Programme funding: MFA's contribution represents 12-20% of SPDC's annual funding, and has provided essential and stable core support for many years, enabling SPDC to coordinate projects and leverage additional funding. Additional resources have come from various public and private sources, including government funds from the USA, Republic of Korea, Austria, South Africa, Germany, Sweden, and the EU; funding agencies such as GEF/IKI and the World Bank; and private foundations in Germany, Switzerland, and Denmark. This "seed funding" from MFA is widely regarded as highly valuable, helping attract further resources and enhancing SPDC's impact and sustainability.

	MFA (EUR)	%	Other Donors (EUR)	%	TOTAL Funding (EUR)
2014	135,000	20.4	526,800	79.6	661,800
2015	0	0	442,900	100.0	442,900
2016	100,000	14.8	576,000	85.2	676,000
2017	100,000	12.7	687,150	87.3	787,150
2018	100,000	17.7	466,000	82.3	566,000
2019	100,000	12.1	727,900	87.9	827,900
2020	100,000	12.7	686,366	87.3	786,366
2021	100,000	11.0	808,466	89.0	908,466
2022	100,000	18.2	450,000	81.8	550,000
2023	100,000	16.3	514,309	83.7	614,309
2024	100,000	12.8	680,000	87.2	780,000

Table 5: SPDC funding 2014-2024

3.4. Programme Interconnections

All three programmes draw on the same core forest expertise within the IUFRO network, yet each functions as a distinct "advocacy instrument" targeting different audiences: SciPol primarily engages with policy-makers and stakeholders at the science-policy interface, enhancing IUFRO's international visibility and influence; WFSE focuses on advancing scientific research and producing high-quality outputs, albeit within a smaller group; SPDC brings early-career scientists from the Global South into the global forest science network.

The programmes are also connected in practice: many participants move between them. For example, some SPDC alumni have joined SciPol and contributed to assessments, and the pool of scientists involved in WFSE and SciPol is overlapping. SPDC frequently draws on WFSE publications

in its trainings. Additionally, former SPDC participants have contributed to WFSE publications and become active in IUFRO task forces and working groups.

Learning also occurs across programmes. Ideas are exchanged at IUFRO Board meetings, congresses, and conferences, and concepts from one programme can inspire work in another - for instance, a WFSE idea feeding into a SciPol assessment. At the IUFRO Secretariat, programme coordinators collaborate and exchange ideas, mainly on a collegial and voluntary basis. It is to be added that SciPol (formerly GFEP) was formally established in 2023 with the aim to serve as IUFRO's focal point for all international policy processes, and to coordinate science-policy related work with within IUFRO to reduce duplications of efforts.

In spite of these interactions, the review also revealed potentials so far untapped, and found further opportunities for strengthening synergies, as presented later in the report.

4. Findings

4.1. Broader Considerations

The three programmes were analysed together for practical, not conceptual reasons. In fact, some fundamental differences exist between them, one of the most important being their target audiences. While SPDC was focusing first and foremost on one particular segment of the forest science community, WFSE targeted audiences being partially, while SciPol targeted audiences being considerably outside the science community. Consequently, the involvement of, and communication and interaction with these audiences were rather different. For this reason, the reviewers would like to advise on avoiding any direct comparison of the three programmes, and suggest to consider them independently.

The sources consulted indicate that the three programmes had far-reaching impact, likely beyond their original scope, both on forest science and on IUFRO. Besides providing useful contributions to their respective beneficiary groups (see the detailed analysis below), they helped progress towards the vision[38] and mission[39] of IUFRO and made substantive contributions to the IUFRO goals[40].

Realising IUFRO's vision, the three programmes, although through different means, helped formulating a common voice of forest science on key issues of sustainable development and SFM. They conveyed their messages to new, non-traditional audiences, such as those at various levels of policy making also in non-forestry circles, including climate change, biodiversity, business and even the medical sector[41]. They also helped boost the reputation of IUFRO as a global network organization. As one respondent put it, the programmes helped overcome the situation where "*IUFRO was the best-kept secret of forest science*". While this note may be an exaggeration and somewhat ironic, it reflects well the insufficient visibility of most players in forestry, and where IUFRO made laudable progress.

[38] The vision of IUFRO is to be "The Global Voice of Forest Science Promoting a Sustainable Future of Forests and Society".
[39] IUFRO's mission is to advance research excellence and knowledge sharing, and to foster the development of science-based solutions to forest-related challenges for the benefit of forests and people worldwide.
[40] Goal 1 - Research Excellence: Strive for Quality, Relevance and Synergies; Goal 2 - Network Cooperation: Improve Communication and Embrace Diversity; Goal 3 - Impact: visibility, outreach and education.
[41] For example, in a recent GFEP assessment "Forest for Human Health", the panel was composed of approx. 50% forest-related scientists and 50% of medical (physical and mental) researchers.

The programmes helped IUFRO's mission through strengthening global and regional networking, knowledge sharing, levelling regional and North-South inequalities, and providing direct contributions to regional and global discussions related to, or involving, forests. They also helped IUFRO fill a knowledge gap in the global forest dialogue through voluntary arrangements, whereas other processes pursue similar aims through institutional mechanisms, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for climate change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for biodiversity. The review also revealed that this voluntary nature has both advantages and disadvantages, offering flexibility but posing challenges in terms of funding and uptake of results. The detailed analyses in the following chapters provide further details on these aspects.

The programmes have contributed directly to all three IUFRO goals, though in different ways and to varying degrees. By design, SPDC primarily focused on Goal 2, WFSE on Goal 3, and SciPol on Goal 1, yet each programme also made notable contributions to the other goals. The review found that Goal 3 – Impact - was the area most explicitly identified as needing further improvement. While there was overall satisfaction with contributions to science, education, outreach, and visibility, the uptake of results in non-academic circles was generally seen as below the desired level.

4.2. Assessment of the Three Programmes: Relevance, Effectiveness and Sustainability

4.2.1. Objective 1

IUFRO's programmes and projects supported by MFA of Finland have contributed to **enhancing forest science contributions to international forest-related policy processes** and the 2030 development agenda.

Relevance

Question: To what extent have SciPol/WFSE thematic priorities and outputs addressed the main topics of international forest-related policy processes and the 2030 Agenda? Related sub-question: Which specific processes and goals were targeted, and where were gaps observed?

SciPol

Evidences suggest that **SciPol/GFEP selected its topics very well**, addressing pertinent issues in a timely manner and providing useful contributions to rather complex negotiations. Being also a CPF Joint Initiative, the programme had easier access to several fora – although remaining a voluntary instrument, CPF's status within the IAF opened doors to UNFF and other governing bodies of CPF member organizations.

The programme's primary target audience was UNFF, together with the Rio Conventions, of which probably the benefits for CBD are best documented. The impact on the climate change process, although strongly aimed for, remained limited or at least hard to quantify. GFEP also aimed at contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by making contributions to the work of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

It appears that **the selection process** (internal IUFRO think tank-type analysis - IUFRO "management" endorsement - CPF scrutiny and decision) **provided a rather solid ground to grasp the most important topics** of the ongoing discourses in a timely manner. The relevance of this cannot be emphasized enough in a time when fast-moving, complex negotiations created a constantly changing environment, and decisions needed to be made 2–3 years in advance to allow enough time for production.

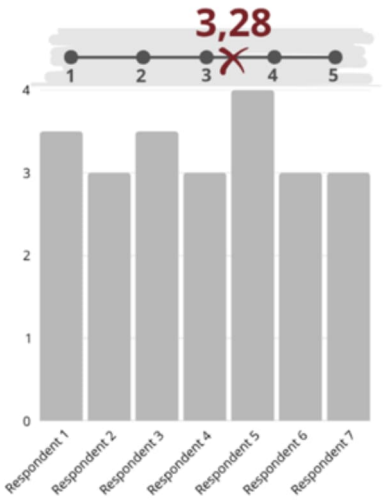


Figure 4: WFSE local engagement ratings

While no actual gaps in the thematic coverage were identified, many noted that repeated studies (e.g., on biodiversity and governance) were of high value and rolling update or amendment of earlier studies would be a real asset. Regional studies were of extremely high value for many, with some excellent examples of use in policy fora in Africa (such as the FAO African Forestry and Wildlife Commission or the African Union Commission). Other views suggested keeping the focus on global studies, possibly supplemented with more regional case studies.

The analysis revealed, that while not being the immediate objective of **GFEP/SciPol**, it **made a huge contribution to forest science** by synthesizing the available knowledge and presenting it in a coherent manner, thereby bringing scientists to "the same page" and helping forest science communicate with one voice. This impact is particularly relevant, given the high number of processes and actors, often disconnected or working in "own universes".

WFSE

There was broad consensus among respondents that **WFSE's work is strongly aligned with global frameworks** such as the SDGs and FLR. WFSE introduced new and innovative perspectives, for example by examining how SDG-related policies affect both forests and people (rather than focusing solely on how forests contribute to the SDGs).

The selection of topics was guided by major global and regional challenges - deforestation, demographic change, governance, markets, livelihoods, and climate change. Respondents agreed that **topics were well chosen, timely, and relevant**, noting that *"IUFRO deserves credit for anticipating upcoming issues"*. However, a few highlighted occasional delays between the emergence of an issue and the delivery of WFSE outputs, largely due to the collaborative (and voluntary) nature of the work. Some respondents also expressed a concern that community-related perspectives could have been represented more strongly.

There was a common agreement that WFSE outputs **could benefit from more engagement of local scientists**, balancing what was perceived as a somewhat "North-dominated" perspective. Respondents remarked that some of the excluding factors are language barriers. It was also stated that many scientists in Europe and the US tend to work within their established (Northern) structures[42]. This mixed picture is also reflected in respondents' subjective assessment of local engagement**,** which averaged **3.28** on a 5-point scale (n=7), indicating moderate and uneven involvement (see Figure 4). A rapid analysis of selected WFSE publications supports this observation.

[42] Younger researchers, especially those from the Global South, often face extra pressures. Because some WFSE outputs like monographs or IUFRO Working Papers carry limited academic recognition, contributing to them can be difficult despite their value. This can unintentionally sideline early-career scholars and leave participation largely to more senior scientists.

On average, **European authors dominate authorship**, while the United States contributes key academic expertise but represents a smaller share of total authors. Overall, the analysis suggests that regional balance in authorship has improved gradually, indicating progress toward a more inclusive and diverse authorship profile.

Effectiveness

Question 1: What mechanisms have SciPol/WFSE used to contribute to forest-related policy processes and the 2030 sustainable development agenda*?*

Question 2: To what extent have SciPol/WFSE outputs (publications, assessments, briefs) been used by policy-makers, practitioners, and international organizations in decision-making and agenda-setting?
Follow-up question: In addition to published outputs, have policy-makers sought further engagement, advice, or knowledge exchange from SciPol/WFSE?

SciPol

Being invitation-based in nature, SciPol does not have immediate or institutional channels to policy processes, similar to those of IPCC or IPBES. Thus, the primary mechanism for transmitting results to the target audiences was the CPF Joint Initiative, and the impact in the various processes showed close correlation with the recognition and role (i.e., importance) of the CPF in the different processes and instruments. Consequently, **the programme made the strongest contribution to the forest instrument**, i.e., UNFF, with relatively good uptake in CBD and FAO. Moving further away from the forest discussions the recognition lowered, corresponding to the importance of forests for the instrument concerned.

Uptake by policy-makers: **Evidence for use by policy-makers is hard to find**, partly because policy processes are normally quite reluctant to identify sources or actors directly in their outcome documents. For this reason, no documented evidence of direct impact of the GFEP reports can be found in resolutions or decisions. Some of the background documents and Secretariat notes however contain more information in this regard, referring to activities or products of GFEP in the context of the specific sessions. Further, Sage Policy Profiles lists 38 direct references and 569 indirect references to author's SciPol publications[43] in policy documents.

National level impact on policy-making processes is also not very easy to assess, as these documents are not very keen on revealing or identifying information sources used for shaping those policies. Therefore, the evidence on GFEP use, although confirmed by many orally, remains mostly anecdotal.

Uptake by practitioners: The uptake by, or impact on, practitioners remain largely unknown and estimated to be relatively low, the use of big reports probably showing patterns similar to other scientific literature. Satellite products, such as briefs, fact sheets and videos may have been useful in disseminating findings more broadly, with impact remaining limited.

[43] Information provided by the IUFRO Secretariat

Uptake by the scientific community: The various sources confirmed that **SciPol provided a considerable service to science and academia** (including education), noting also that this is the area where the uptake is the most and best documented. For example, for the GFEP Coordinator Google Scholar shows 827 citations, Research Gate counts 19,000 reads on author's profile. Consulting the same sources for the main publications only, Google Scholar shows 517 citations, Research Gate counts 162 citations and 2,079 references[44]. These numbers probably indicate scientific use, mostly or exclusively.

Overall, 12,008 hard copies[45] of all reports were distributed worldwide at various venues, noting that the role of physical copies decreased considerably within the evaluation period. Further information on the uptake could be retrieved from the web, although the launch of the new IUFRO website in December 2024 made earlier information largely unavailable. It appears that in the December 2024 - October 2025 period the website attracted 71,164 clicks in total, which is considerable, but no further details, like bounce back rate, per product clicks or downloads are available. There is no information on the type of users either, although it is fair to estimate that the majority of users came from the scientific community.

For rather similar reasons it is also difficult to show the extent to which SciPol was able to intensify the science-policy interaction "on the ground". Non-documented sources suggest that such interactions became more frequent, but no evidence of a formal dialogue established as a direct result of a GFEP report was found. Personal communications suggested that when the instrument was new, increase in interaction was observed, however growth stopped at a certain level. It appears that communication remained largely "off-line" meaning that products might have been consulted without actual dialogues taking place.

It is fair to conclude however, that **presentations and side events at various fora** should also be seen as examples of communication which **could have not existed without the programme** and which had definitely brought science closer to policy-making. IUFRO made laudable efforts in advocacy and awareness raising, but these efforts certainly had their own limits in promoting actual use or uptake. Probably this is an area where further efforts and innovation would be needed in the future.

WFSE

WFSE used rather similar, or sometimes the same mechanisms and channels for contribution as SciPol, combining passive (i.e., various publications) and active (i.e., events) instruments, supporting them with well-planned awareness-raising and PR activities. Not surprisingly, WFSE often experienced similar challenges and obstacles as SciPol, as presented in the previous section.

In short, WFSE outputs have mostly been **valued within the scientific community, with more limited uptake by policy-makers and practitioners**. Respondents cited several reasons: the lack of a formal communication strategy, limited resources to engage stakeholders, and generally low awareness of WFSE products.

[44] Review team's own count

[45] This includes physical copies of the latest Report and Policy Brief titled "Forests as Pillars of Social and Economic Resilience", written in 2024 and published in 2025. This study is not included fully in the review.

Uptake by policy-makers: Tracking the use of WFSE outputs by policy-makers is challenging, and there is **little systematic evidence** of uptake. Available information is largely anecdotal. Examples include:

- UNFF14 (2019): WFSE input contributed to a thematic technical panel report on SDG 8 and forests, which was subsequently cited in the UNFF report.
- IISD reports: WFSE outputs were referenced in discussions on forestry and sustainable development.
- SDG Book: Demonstrated high interest, with over 11,000 views and direct citations.
- The MFA as donor had used WFSE results directly to inform policy, illustrating the translation of scientific outputs into actionable policy guidance.

There are also **notable, still sporadic country-level examples** demonstrating the integration of WFSE knowledge into policy-making: In Mozambique**,** a former WFSE researcher helped review the Environmental Policy, incorporating forestry and climate change considerations, demonstrating growing dialogue between scientists and policy-makers. Similarly, in Malawi**,** WFSE collaborators worked with policy-makers to integrate community participation into forestry strategies for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Overall, these examples suggest that while WFSE's primary impact remains within academia, there are emerging pathways for engagement with policy-makers.

Uptake by practitioners: Respondents found it difficult to assess the extent to which practitioners had taken up the WFSE work. Some felt that uptake was likely limited, as the initiatives did not directly address the underlying causes of the issues. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that the awareness-raising efforts were valuable and helpful, even in the absence of established feedback loops to practitioners on the ground. Others believed that WFSE could make a more direct contribution to poverty alleviation, arguing that its main strength lies in providing a more nuanced understanding of diverse perspectives in forestry. This, they noted, represents a key added value for practitioners and supports their engagement with the work.

Uptake by the scientific community: Similar to SciPol, WFSE outputs have mainly been **used and valued within the scientific and academic community**. Respondents emphasized that the main beneficiaries are students and the broader educational sector, as many WFSE reports have been directly converted into teaching materials for their academic programmes. One respondent noted, *"WFSE is a credible home to consolidate scientific data and serves first and foremost the academic community".* It was further noted that WFSE's strength lies in gathering state-of-the-art knowledge and advancing scientific understanding, rather than directly providing policy guidance.

WFSE publications are distributed through multiple channels, making it even more challenging to compile statistics than in the case of SciPol. The IUFRO website reports 23,660 clicks (i.e., deliberate action by the user), being a subset of 249,269 views (when users "only" saw the content of selected publications). Looking at individual products, such as the SDG report[46], some impressive numbers can be found including 136,953 full-text views and 277 citations. These numbers certainly vary by products and can only be used for indicative purposes.

[46] Katila, P., Colfer, C.J.P., de Jong, W., Galloway, G., Pacheco, P., Winkel, G. (eds.). 2019. *Sustainable Development Goals: Their Impacts on Forests and People*. Cambridge University Press.

Sustainability

Question 1: To what extent have SciPol/WFSE addressed long-term, persistent forest-related development challenges central to international policy processes, and how sustainable are these contributions?

Question 2: What mechanisms are in place to ensure that the knowledge provided by SciPol/WFSE stays relevant for the evolving policy discussions?

SciPol

As presented through its various dimensions, SciPol's/GFEP's **topic selection was undoubtedly right**, guaranteeing lasting input to the international forest-related dialogues. Depending of course on the topic, the **life-span of the products could range from less than a year to up to 10 years**. It should be recalled in this context that several respondents emphasized the need for updates/amendments and remakes, which would make these products to remain long-lived contributions with relatively modest investments. So far, the programme used this method well although to a limited extent, and according to the opinions it should be more widely done in the future.

For SciPol to remain relevant, it is crucial that it continues to focus on the most important issues. Besides producing updates or remakes of existing reports, the current system - i.e., the focus on the SDGs, UNFF, and the Rio Conventions - should continue until 2030. Many emphasized that **topic selection should continue to be based on an as broad a consultation process as possible**, including going beyond the circles consulted so far. Some respondents suggested adopting a clearer and more focused approach, with greater consideration of who needs the information and for what purposes. With other words, **the programme should be more demand-driven** and more attention should be given to the potential uptake and actual/practical use of the information.

Respondents also mentioned various topics, which they think would deserve the attention of SciPol in the future, depending also on where the global dialogue would go regarding forests. These covered a wide range, examples are presented here in no particular order or sequence (except alphabetical): AI, bioeconomy, forest fire, plantations, youth.

WFSE

Respondents noted that WFSE products generally had **a long life-span** - often up to ten years - because the topics addressed were not highly time-sensitive and provided broad frameworks and syntheses. Case studies remained useful over time, though reports and policy briefs tended to lose relevance sooner as narratives and policy priorities evolved. Despite this, the information continued to be used as reference material, and in some cases, inspired follow-up initiatives. For example, WFSE's work contributed to the development of a research programme on Ecosystem-Based Adaptation, which has grown into a major regional research chair in southern Africa.

The **emergence of formal networks or collaborations following WFSE production is difficult to ascertain**, as it was not systematically documented. Respondents did not identify any continuing communities of practice or formal coalitions directly resulting from WFSE. However, informal collaborations persisted, with some contributors continuing to publish together. According to the

Coordinators, the main added value for participants was the opportunity to connect with colleagues they might not have otherwise met - ecologists, economists, and other specialists - leading to fruitful and eye-opening exchanges.

Respondents suggested that WFSE's **future topics should be chosen through a clear consultative process,** involving regional input and advice from both policy and practice. Topics should be practical, focused, and responsive to emerging issues, such as urban forest fires or new technologies like AI, while also revisiting important past topics. The SDGs remain a useful framework but should not be the only guide. WFSE should take a broader perspective beyond forests, offering not just analysis but also solutions. Stronger collaboration with other IUFRO programmes and careful planning were seen as key to keeping the work relevant and impactful over time.

4.2.2. Objective 2

IUFRO's programmes and projects supported by MFA of Finland have contributed to supporting the **exchange** of scientific knowledge between policy-makers, practitioners and researchers at global, national and local levels.

Relevance

Question 1: To what extent and how effectively have SciPol, WFSE, and SPDC addressed the knowledge gaps and needs of (a) the scientific community and (b) policy-makers/practitioners at national and international levels?

Question 2: What were the reasons for SciPol, WFSE, and SPDC to concentrate on the selected thematic networking activities, and to what extent were these choices aligned with global, national, and stakeholder priorities?

SciPol and WFSE

In the context of Objective 2 it appears appropriate to consider SciPol and WFSE together, given the high level of similarity in their objectives and working methods, noting also some slight differences.

SciPol deliberately placed more emphasis on informing global policy processes by summarizing existing information, and identifying gaps mostly with the intention of generating political support for continued research. WFSE focused more on regional and national needs including filling knowledge gaps and bringing missing or overlooked topics to the focus. While SciPol helped forestry speaking with "one voice" in the various forest-related negotiations, WFSE helped bring forestry "*from pieces and specific perspectives into a more coherent thinking about forest management*"[47]. These services could not be valued highly enough in a world where fragmentation was seen as a major concern.

Both programmes should be lauded for taking a **proactive approach in establishing communication between different stakeholders** and assessing the needs of these stakeholders with a view to providing answers to many of their long-discussed questions. Also, they appear to select focus areas for their work very well, not only addressing pertinent questions but doing it in a timely manner. It can be concluded that this is, to a very large extent, due to the wide consultation

[47] Quote from one interview partner

process and the careful foresight led by the Coordinators. For SciPol to achieve its global focus it was very helpful that the decision-taking included an extra step, i.e., the adoption of the proposal by the CPF, which could take a final look from a non-scientific, bird-eye perspective, strengthening also the demand-driven nature of the selection. In case of WFSE the coordination with MFA played an important, yet informal role in the decisions on the subject, strengthening also the recognition of the needs of the potential beneficiaries.

Period	Programme/Topic		Period
	GFEP	WFSE	
2013-15	Forests and Food Security	Forests under Pressure - Local Responses to Global Issues	2014-15
2015-16	Illegal Timber Trade	Incentives and Constraints of Community and Smallholder Forestry	2015-16
2016-18	Forests and Water	Shifting global development discourses: Implications for forests and livelihoods	2015-17
2018-20	Forests and Poverty	Sustainable Development Goals: Their impacts on forests and people	2017-20
2019-20	Forests, Trees and Poverty Alleviation in Africa		
2021-22	Biodiversity, Forest Management, and REDD+	Restoring forests for sustainable development - Policies, practices, impacts and ways forward	2020-24
2021-23	Forests and Human Health		
2022-23	Forests and Human Health in Asia		
2022-24	International Forest Governance		

Table 6: SciPol and WFSE programmes and topics in the review period

Looking at the outputs of the two programmes combined (Table 6), it appears that the programmes intended to share scientific knowledge related to all important topics of the period concerned, and there are **clear signs of some informal coordination between them**. The interviews revealed however that some potentials might have remained untapped. Many noted that stronger synergies between the programmes - by building on each other's results, addressing knowledge gaps, and sharing information - could enhance the impact of both.

One important conclusion applying to both programmes is that beyond supporting the political and practical work on various levels, they were able to establish themselves as **sources of information that are authentic, scientific, and not interest-driven**. Furthermore, they helped increase cohesion in the scientific community and mobilized institutions and scientists who might otherwise have been less active to contribute to IUFRO's work, thereby strengthening the entire network.

SPDC

While the other two programmes focus on addressing knowledge gaps at the global level (SciPol) or regional and national levels (WFSE), SPDC addresses primarily the local level in economically disadvantaged regions- through training and individual support - so that participants could bring knowledge and skills back to their institutions and apply them in local and national policy and field contexts.

The programme **effectively addressed knowledge gaps in the scientific community** and especially tackled systemic weaknesses in forestry education. Respondents most frequently mentioned outdated and overly theoretical curricula, which are often disconnected from global issues such as climate change, FLR, and community-based management. SPDC trainings always

tackled current challenges using up-to-date teaching materials, practical skills development techniques and facilitation methods.

Respondents repeatedly highlighted the **low number of female students in forestry education as a key concern.** Although SPDC did not focus on education of university students, the gender imbalance was addressed by actively supporting early- and midcareer women scientists[48]. The programme has promoted awareness that forestry is not solely a technical career but also involves social dimensions. Through its scholarship programmes, SPDC increasingly prioritized women scientists in conference participation and training, particularly in the later years of the review period (see Annex 4). Overall, men slightly outnumber women (474 versus 430), with notable yearly fluctuations. Early years were male-dominated, but participation became more balanced in 2017 and 2022, with a significant rise in women participants in 2024[49]. For the SV programme, 24 grants were awarded over five years (averaging five per year). Female participants dominated in all regions except Europe, where gender participation was even.

Interview partners considered the **FLR focus of the thematic networking projects timely and relevant**. This choice closely matched stakeholder priorities and reinforced IUFRO's role as an active GPFLR member, contributing scientific expertise, fostering networking, and supporting capacity development. It also fits well with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), where FLR is a key strategy to restore degraded forests, conserve biodiversity, enhance ecosystem services like carbon sequestration and water regulation, and foster multi-stakeholder collaboration among governments, scientists, and communities.

Effectiveness

Question: How effectively have SciPol, WFSE, and SPDC facilitated and institutionalised the exchange of scientific knowledge among different actors, and with what observable outcomes?

SciPol and WFSE

Some form of a science-policy interface had been a long-discussed concept in both the political and scientific circles, however neither side made much progress in its implementation and related activities remained largely *ad hoc*. Formal and less formal discussions on establishing a science-focused instrument in the context of the IAF remained inconclusive. It wasn't until 2006 that **ECOSOC**, based on the CPF Joint Initiative led by IUFRO, in cooperation with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), **decided to invite the CPF** and its members **to "provide**, if requested by the Forum, **an assessment of scientific knowledge-based actions** needed to achieve sustainable forest management and the global objectives at all levels"[50]. This is to be seen as the first major step towards institutionalising science's contribution to policy development within the IAF.

[48] One example of SPDC's influence is a former participant who coordinated the IUFRO-IFSA Joint Task Force on Forest Education (2016–2024), aimed at raising awareness of forest-related education.
[49] Gender distribution also varies by region: Latin America is the only region where women outnumber men, while other regions remain male-dominated.
[50] E/2006/49 paragraph 23. (e)

With this mandate SciPol gained political support, even if its products remained voluntary contributions and their uptake was left at the discretion of the different beneficiaries, be they international (global or regional) processes or national governments.

Both SciPol and WFSE established a **novel communication interface between science and policy**, effectively translating complex scientific knowledge into accessible and policy-relevant formats. By synthesizing existing research and linking it to broader sustainable development agendas, IUFRO made significant progress in creating new opportunities for science's contribution to policymaking or to practice. IUFRO worked diligently and very effectively to promote the programme's outputs bringing them to the attention of the intended audience, but due to reasons beyond IUFRO's control, the information flow or exchange remained largely unidirectional, moving mostly from science to policy.

While products were appreciated for their clarity and relevance, and there are clear evidences on how and to what audiences the products were introduced, **it is** more **challenging to assess the actual uptake or use**, or the impact they made. The reasons for this are the same as explained in connection with Objective 1. However, it can be added with confidence that both SciPol and WFSE experienced bigger challenges in reaching practitioners, access to policy making was easier to organize or achieve.

Both SciPol and WFSE provided an **added and complementary value** compared to IUFRO's divisions and task forces. Unlike IUFRO's informal, voluntary, and discipline-specific task forces**,** WFSE produces regular reports and publications that attract attention from decision-makers. In doing so, they complement the more network- and career-focused work of the task forces. As one respondent aptly noted, *"WFSE helps to come out of the bubbles that have been created in IUFRO divisions and task forces".*

It has to be noted that while neither of the two programmes created networks or communities of practice that remained operational beyond the actual work, several lasting collaborations started or grew out of the joint work and still continue, although without necessarily taking a formal or institutional status.

SPDC

The SPDC Programme **has successfully facilitated and institutionalised knowledge exchange among actors** through two main mechanisms: (1) Science-Policy/Science-Practice Workshops and (2) Thematic Networking projects.

Science-Policy/Science-Practice Workshops: These workshops build on ongoing science-policy interfacing debates since 2009. They aim to equip scientists with tools and methods to communicate their work effectively, ensuring it is heard and used by policy-makers at national and international levels. The "Science-Policy Module" includes practical tools, such as writing policy briefs. It also teaches how policy decisions consider multiple information sources, not just scientific evidence. While applied to diverse topics like climate change, biodiversity, and FLR, the core tools and approaches remain consistent.

During the review period, 13 Science-Policy and Science-Practice Workshops were held back-to-back with major IUFRO events in SPDC partner countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. A total of 355 early-career scientists participated, averaging 27 per workshop. Workshops covered science communication tools, evidence collection, working at the science-policy interface, and methods for

participatory processes in FLR, supported by practical case studies. Respondents rated the trainings as highly useful and unique. According to all participants, the workshops met their aim: to learn concrete tools for the science-policy interface, and understanding the mechanisms on how scientific findings inform policy decisions.

Participants were mainly academics from diverse fields, including ecology, sociology, technical disciplines, and economics. This interdisciplinary mix was highly valued, as the exposure to different fields had a significant impact, with one remarking that it *"shaped our thinking about forest management forever".* Policy-maker participation was low, mostly due to time constraints. To compensate, workshops used hands-on planning and role-play exercises, with participants acting as policy-makers. They highlighted this as an effective way to understand different perspectives[51]. Some suggested using real examples of conflicting policy frameworks - such as in Lebanon, where the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture share forest responsibilities - to further enhance practical learning. Some respondents also recommended longer-term follow-up to apply role-play lessons in local or regional practice[52].

Workshop size was seen as ideal for interactive sessions. Most topics were discussed with a gender perspective, prompting lively discussions[53].

Thematic Networking: SPDC's thematic networking activities on FLR are a highly effective mechanism to strengthen the role of science in forest policy and management by fostering collaboration among scientists and forest experts across regions. Since 2014, various projects on forest landscape restoration have been implemented by SPDC in all economically disadvantaged regions. These projects involved synthesizing globally available scientific information, communication through online media and the publication of synthesis reports and policy briefs, developing field demonstration and research sites, implementation of field-based capacity development and knowledge-sharing workshops**.**

Respondents rated the projects highly effective in facilitating knowledge exchange. They connect people across regions and disciplines, offering "eye-opening" insights into different contexts. The projects are practical, involve forest practitioners and policy-makers, and include hands-on activities such as trainings and demonstration plots. They also contribute to broader economic, environmental, and social objectives, including poverty alleviation, and their visible impact attracts donor attention.

Sustainability

Question: What evidence exists of institutional or stakeholder commitment to sustain and further develop the use of SciPol, WFSE, and SPDC tools, reports, or networks beyond the programme period?

[51] Even with few or no policy-makers present, the trainings were useful as effective "warm-ups" and "ice breakers," helping participants prepare to engage with policy-makers and practitioners at the conference.
[52] Currently a WhatsApp group exists for sharing follow-up experiences, but it is used mainly informally.
[53] No gender data are available for participants in these 13 workshops.

SciPol and WFSE

The primary products of the SciPol and WFSE programmes are valuable scientific reports whose life span, although depending on the subject to a large extent, could be very long, up to 10 years. **Without the programmes these reports most likely would have not been produced** in such a systematic manner and in so broad global collaboration. Furthermore, together with the already existing concept of remakes and the suggested regular updates, they could be converted to "living documents" whose validity will not deteriorate over time.

For global negotiations the "global roadmap" to 2030 is relatively clear, allowing for the programmes to consider future focuses and also to assess the need for updates, therefore in the context of the current IAF there is a sufficiently solid basis for deciding on the creation of new, and the use of existing products.

In the outcome of the review of the effectiveness of the IAF, members of the UNFF were invited to "promote science-policy dialogues to support science-based decision-making on forests at the local, national, regional and global levels"[54]. Therefore, **the question for IUFRO** (and the global community) **is less about how to sustain the use of the programme products, rather, how to increase their use** and elevate them to next levels. Options for that are presented in Chapter 5 of this paper.

Looking more into the future it appears that the global community will continue to struggle with finding solutions to the biggest challenges of environmental and economical sustainability, and a lot will be left to do in the post-2030 period. It can be stated with confidence that nature-based solutions and forests within them, continue to be in the centre of future negotiations, thus **science's contribution to policy making and to sustainable management of natural resources will be needed more than ever**.

We observed that IUFRO and the programmes were quite successful in assessing the needs arising from global, regional and national dialogues and were able to decide on the appropriate scientific contributions to these dialogues. Maintaining or even elevating the standing and role of forest science in the development of future policies would require IUFRO to look into the post-2030 period and develop its foresight and strategy for where and how scientific contributions make the most impact and assess what changes will be needed to increase the efficiency of the existing instruments and to which directions develop them further.

SPDC

There is (albeit anecdotal) evidence that institutions and stakeholders **have sustained** and **have further developed the use of SPDC tools, reports, and networks.** Overall, SPDC has contributed to the evolution of natural resource management education by shaping approaches to science-policy interactions and applying theory to practice. This practical, integrative approach is what makes the SPDC programme unique.

Many **SPDC tools and reports continue to serve as valuable teaching and facilitation materials**. One concrete example is the guide "Implementing Forest Landscape Restoration – A

[54] E/2024/42 section B. I. A. paragraph 1. (h)

Practitioner's Guide"[55], a key resource outlining the journey from broad FLR policy to local implementation. The guide is available in six languages (English, Spanish, French, Sinhala, Tamil, and Russian). In addition, a Chichewa version (local language in Malawi) was produced with the support of local trainers. According to a respondent from Malawi, this translation is still widely used by local practitioners and policy-makers. In addition, many interview partners said they trained colleagues who had not attended the workshops and shared their notes with them. Some now use these materials in their daily work, especially for communicating with policy-makers, showing that the tools have become part of routine practice.

Furthermore, specific SPDC topics, such as Adaptive Resource Management, have also been integrated into existing curricula - for example, the PhD program in Climate Change at the University of Ghana - thereby enriching and expanding course content.

Anecdotal evidence from SPDC Coordinators indicates that **many SPDC-created networks continue to exist and, in some cases, have expanded**. Coordinators reported meeting former participants at various meetings and conferences who would informally share their continued network experiences. One statement summarized the effect well: *"I used to only work with mushroom guys, now I work with hydrology guys too".*

4.2.3. Objective 3

IUFRO-SPDC supported by MFA of Finland has contributed to **expanding capacity** in forest science communication and science-policy-practice interfacing, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions

Relevance

Question: To what extent and through what mechanisms has SPDC, via its science-policy-practice interface work, contributed to filling gaps and responding to emerging needs in forest-related science education at global and regional levels over the past decade?

SPDC has made a significant contribution to filling gaps and addressing emerging needs in forest-related science education, particularly at the regional level. The programme has proven transformative, tackling systemic weaknesses in forestry education while providing participants with invaluable "exposure" and "igniting lust for more" in their professional journeys.

[55] Stanturf, John; Mansourian, Stephanie; Kleine, Michael; eds. 2017. Implementing Forest Landscape Restoration, A Practitioners' Guide. International Union of Forest Research Organizations, Special Programme for Development of Capacities (IUFRO-SPDC). Vienna, Austria. 128 p.

“Exposure” to new perspectives and experiences
Through SPDC, participants have expanded their professional horizons and gained insights into the broader science and policy landscape. They explored innovative ways to link research with decision-making, engaged with emerging global forestry challenges, and connected for the first time with international colleagues and diverse forest stakeholders. SPDC also introduced them to new teaching and learning methods, demonstrating fresh ways to think, communicate, and inspire.

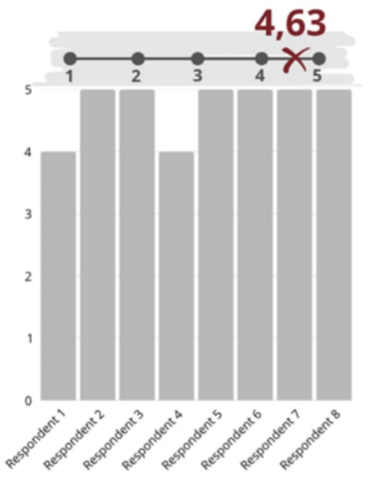


Figure 5: Relevance ratings of SPDC to gaps

“Ignited lust for more”
This exposure has sparked ambition and motivation among participants. Respondents highlighted that SPDC inspired them to see “*what can be possible*”, emphasizing the consistently encouraging support of the SPDC Coordinators and the IUFRO Secretariat. Participation in SPDC has also encouraged longer-term engagement in international initiatives, including involvement with IUFRO as coordinators of working groups, members of task forces, resource persons for thematic networks, and, in some cases, participants in other major IUFRO programmes such as WFSE and SciPol. In this sense, SPDC has acted as a true catalyst for sustained professional and international collaboration.

These findings also align with respondents’ self-reported assessments (on a scale of 1–5, with 1 being the lowest), indicating that SPDC is highly relevant in addressing forest-related science education gaps (see Figure 5).

The SPDC programme has made a strong contribution to capacity development in forest-related science education, particularly by enhancing science communication and strengthening linkages between science, policy, and practice.

Most outcomes are evident at the **individual level** (see Figure 6), with additional gains at the **institutional level**:

1. Individual capacity development

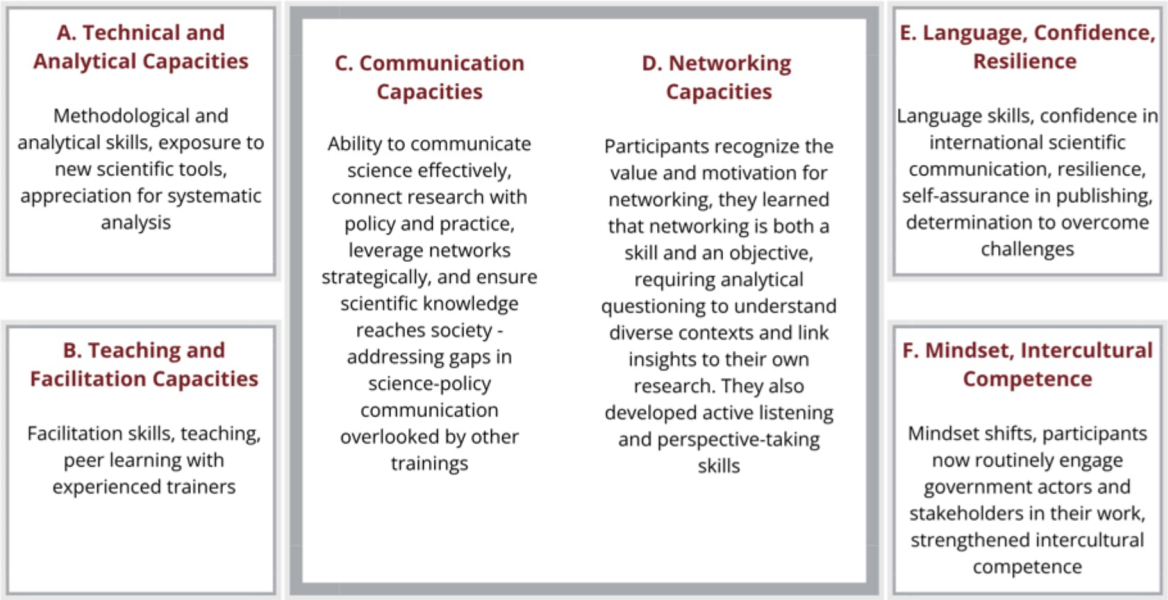


Figure 6: Overview of key capacities at individual level

a. Technical and Analytical Capacities
Participants enhanced their methodological and analytical skills through exposure to new scientific tools and hands-on experience with method analysis. The programme fostered an "*appreciation for systematic analysis*", enabling them to move beyond theoretical discussions and apply findings concretely within their own institutions.

b. Teaching and Facilitation Capacities
Many mentioned also their improved facilitation skills due to exposure to SPDC through peer learning with experienced trainers.

c. Communication Capacities
A key achievement of SPDC was developing participants' science communication capacity, enabling their work to inform decision-making. Participants highlighted SPDC's "synergistic effect", addressing the missing focus on science–policy communication in other trainings. They recognized that science travels through many channels into society and learned to use social and professional networks strategically to link research with policy and practice.

d. Networking and Collaboration Capacities
Many participants discovered their motivation for networking. They realized how much can be achieved through communication and collaboration, even without traveling. Networking is valuable both as a skill and as a goal. Participants discovered that it requires asking analytical questions to understand different contexts across continents and connect insights to their own research. They also learned the importance of active listening and considering other perspectives.

e. Language, Confidence and Resilience
SPDC strengthened participants' language skills and confidence to engage in international scientific discourse. Spanish-speaking researchers, for example, gained the self-assurance to write and publish in English. One participant reflected, „*I did not think this would be possible for me or for my*

country". Another noted an increase in her own resilience: "*Seeing someone who has travelled your path guiding you makes you more determined to stay on course*".

f. Mindset Change and Intercultural Competence
The programme also fostered deeper mindset shifts**:** Participants now routinely involve government actors and other stakeholders in their projects, recognizing the value of inclusive collaboration. Intercultural competence was enhanced; projects like the joint book with African partners were described as 'eye-opening,' broadening understanding of diverse research and policy contexts.

Respondents were asked to spontaneously associate three words with the SPDC programme. The word cloud (see Figure 7) illustrates their responses, with the size of each word reflecting how frequently it was mentioned. Respondents unanimously associated the SPDC programme with **positive and growth-oriented terms,** most frequently **"**capacity building", "opportunity", "impactful" and "exposure". Other notable words like "collaboration", "mentorship" and "educative" highlight the programme's role in learning, networking, and professional development. Overall, the responses reflect SPDC's strong impact and value for participants.

Figure 7: Wordcloud showing responses, size indicates frequency

2. Institutional capacity development
While SPDC primarily develops individual capacities, these often extend to institutional impact. Participants act as multipliers, engaging colleagues and students in SPDC activities through thematic networks, such as the Resilient Future Forests Lab. Institutional benefits include improved curricula, new programs, innovative teaching materials and facilitation methods, and enhanced university reputation when hosting IUFRO events.

Effectiveness/Efficiency

Question: Were the human and financial resources allocated to SPDC (including those by MFA) used strategically to achieve enhanced knowledge dissemination and improvements in individual and institutional capacities?

The human and financial resources allocated to SPDC were managed carefully and used effectively to achieve the programme's goal.

Financial Resources:
As outlined in Chapter 3 (see Table 7), **SPDC successfully attracted multiple additional funders**, supplementing its core budget. Within the annual budgets, the programme applied several efficiency measures to ensure optimal use of funds.

Table 7 also shows the programme's cost-effectiveness:

Year	SPDC Annual Totals		MFA allocation
2014	Total allocation	661,800	135,000
	SPDC Personnel + Office	13%	21%
2018	Total allocation	566,000	100,000
	SPDC Personnel + Office	25%	6%
2019	Total allocation	827,900	100,000
	SPDC Personnel + Office	20%	18%
2022	Total allocation	550,000	100,000
	SPDC Personnel + Office	30%	25%
2024	Total allocation	780,000	100,000
	SPDC Personnel + Office	27%	27%

Table 7: SPDC annual totals, respective MFA allocation, overhead ratio

Low overhead costs: The share of overheads ranged between 13% and 30% of the total annual allocation, depending on the total funds raised each year. This range is consistent with overheads charged to MFA, which also varied based on donor flexibility in covering personnel and office costs.

Annual budget and staff costs: SPDC's annual budget ranged from €400,000 to €800,000, with higher amounts during Congress years. Despite this, staff costs never exceeded €120,000-€130,000 per year, representing roughly 20% of the total budget for project management and coordination.

Additional efficiency measures: In addition, SPDC implemented several measures to ensure cost-effective and efficient use of resources:

- **Cost-effective pre-Congress training organisation:** Workshops were primarily held in partner countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America and often aligned with major IUFRO events. This allowed participants with SAP scholarships to attend both, maximizing the impact of donor funds. This setting was well received, serving also as an effective icebreaker and warm-up for the upcoming larger event.
- **Use of in-house expertise:** IUFRO scientists contributed as volunteer trainers and resource persons, collaboratively developing workshop content with SPDC coordinators. This approach avoided costly consultant fees, as only essential costs were covered, and no per diems were paid. IUFRO Coordinators played multiple roles - project managers, trainers, and content developers - and their extensive involvement was highly valued by participants.
- **Moving to online and hybrid formats:** During and after the pandemic, SPDC increasingly used online and hybrid modes, enhancing accessibility and participation. While these formats required additional preparatory effort, they allowed broader reach and efficient use of resources.

In addition, the different SPDC components – SAP/SV, Training Workshops and Thematic Networking Projects – were seen as highly effective in their use of resources. For the SAP/SV, respondents valued the **efficient and smooth administration of SAP/SV scholarships** handled by IUFRO, recognizing that modest resources are effectively leveraged to reach as many participants as possible. They noted that funds were used efficiently, covering actual costs for travel, accommodation, registration, and local logistics managed by the SPDC team. The well-structured agendas, balancing work and rest, were particularly appreciated. Participants also praised IUFRO's flexibility and responsive management, with one remarking that *"SAP organisation is getting better every year".*

The effectiveness of the SAP Scholarship should not be underestimated: these were widely regarded as a "gateway" to the international forestry community - an opportunity that many participants would not have otherwise had. As one respondent expressed, SAP's main value lies in "*planting the seed*" - sparking curiosity and opening access to further opportunities and grants. Thus, **SAP serves as a crucial catalyst for professional growth and international engagement**. Regarding the SV, participants emphasized the value of longer-term, one-on-one interactions with experienced forest scientists, noting that these exchanges were instrumental in shaping their own research ideas.

Furthermore, the SAP/SV radiates beyond its immediate recipients, since it also strengthens IUFRO as a truly global network. By supporting Global South participation, it broadens perspectives beyond Europe- and US-centric views and enhances diversity across IUFRO activities.

Sustainability

Question 1: What evidence exists that forest scientists from economically disadvantaged countries have applied and sustained the knowledge gained from SPDC's training programmes in their professional contexts?

Question 2: To what extent and in what ways has the SPDC training programme contributed to advancing the professional careers of participating scientists (e.g., skills, opportunities, leadership roles)?

There is substantial anecdotal evidence that forest scientists from economically disadvantaged countries have applied and sustained the knowledge gained from SPDC training in their professional work. Many have gone on to take leadership roles within their institutions, with IUFRO, or both.

SPDC clearly serves as a strong springboard for long-term engagement with IUFRO through its divisions, task forces, working parties, and programmes. Pre-Congress trainings offered an excellent starting point for building academic networks and participating in projects (see Figure 8 for success examples). The typical path is: **SAP/SV recipient → mentor → teacher → resource person → trainer**.

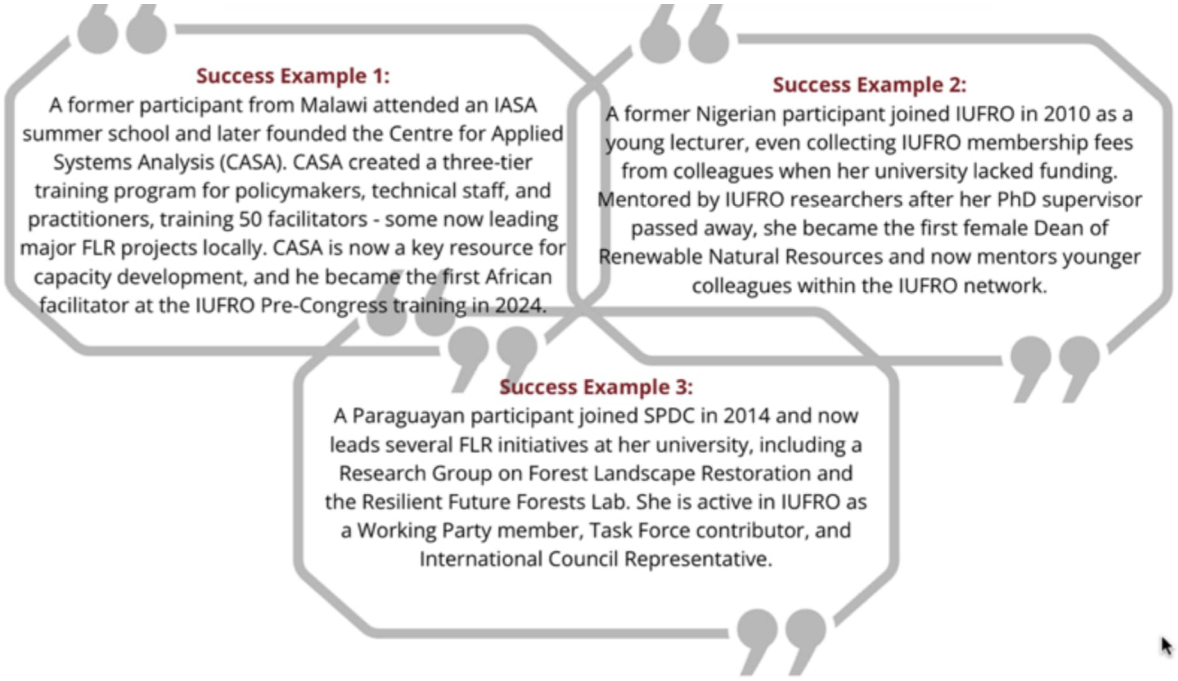


Figure 8: Some success stories of former SAP recipients

Respondents mentioned many more forest scientists who have benefited from SPDC in their careers[56]. It is therefore unsurprising that, when the eight respondents were asked to rate how much forest scientists in their region have applied knowledge or skills from SPDC training in their work (1 = lowest, 5 = highest), they gave a high average rating of **4.56** (see Figure 9).

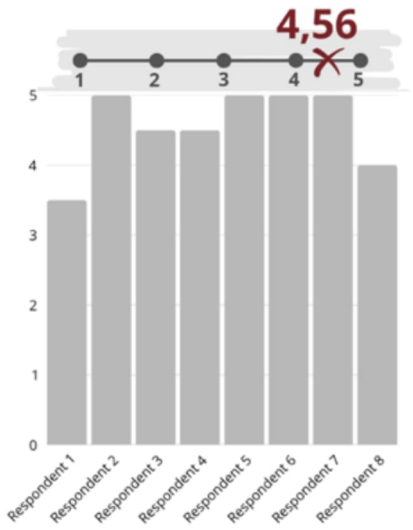


Figure 9: Ratings of forest scientists' use of skills

[56] A key source of information for participants is the WhatsApp groups they set up after SPDC trainings, where members share updates on publications, project grants, and other relevant academic news.

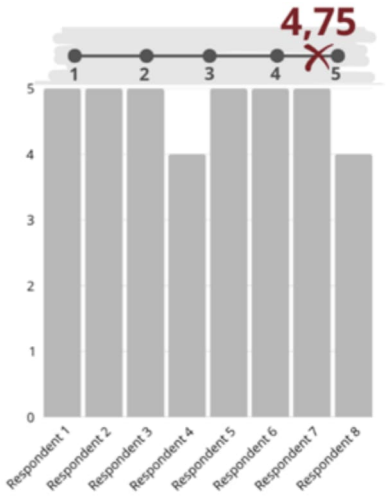


Figure 10: Ratings of training's impact on careers

When asked how much SPDC training contributed to their career growth, respondents gave an average score of **4.75** (see Figure 10), indicating strong impact. Feedback highlights four key effects: (1) Broader perspective and confidence: Participants gained strategic vision, describing SPDC as helping them "stand on a giant shoulder that enabled them to see far". (2) Resilience and motivation: Seeing how other scientists from economically disadvantaged countries succeed strengthened their own determination. (3) Effectiveness at work: Improved understanding of key issues increased efficiency and career advancement. (4) Language skills: Overcoming psychological barriers to working in English enhanced international collaboration, particularly for Spanish-speaking scientists.

When asked about SPDC's future path - whether it should change, adapt, or remain as is - most respondents agreed that SPDC is performing exceptionally well and requires no major adjustments. The consensus was clear: the **current trajectory should be maintained**.

Participants stressed that SPDC's role will remain important, especially when people are drifting apart. The programme continues to go beyond geographical and political boundaries, using science as a clear and neutral way to share knowledge.

5. Final Conclusions

Overall conclusions:

The three programmes provide valuable insights that help forest science move beyond the relative isolation, conservative mindset and inward focus of the forest sector. How: by (1) opening minds and eyes to the need for integrated/interdisciplinary approaches to forest education and research; (2) producing timely and relevant scientific output that pushes beyond disciplinary boundaries; (3) particularly supporting early-career scientists (and especially those from economically disadvantaged regions) to connect to the global forestry community and use their skills and knowledge to push forward the forest sector in their countries; and (4) building and managing a truly global network trying to understand forestry issues not only from a Global North perspective.

The review revealed that these programmes could have not existed without voluntary donor support, their role, especially when sustained and predictable, was fundamental and invaluable. The same applies to the in-kind contribution of those who worked on the various products, who invested their time and energy free of charge to producing the reports and other prodcuts. Thus, the combination of donor support together with the considerable capacities present in the IUFRO network generated results whose true value is difficult to express in monetary terms.

It was also found that in the current times of "information tsunamis" it is very challenging for information products to reach their expected audiences, and quality itself cannot guarantee success in this field. In the absence of reliable information sources or references, assessing the reach and

impact of the programmes on audiences outside the forest science community proved challenging and the analyses probably underrepresent the true impact. The interviews and personal communications suggest that the programmes did have a tangible impact beyond what can be measured directly.

Programme-specific conclusions:

SciPol and WFSE share many similarities, so most conclusions apply to both and are presented together. Where relevant, key differences are highlighted.

Providing science's support to policy development is of paramount importance and **the programmes selected their focus areas very well**, in good time for contributing to the work of relevant global and regional policy fora. Using the 2030 Agenda as the main thread and focusing on processes represented in the CPF was a wise decision, allowing for the programmes to use CPF's network, and in case of SciPol the CPF Joint Initiative, as a major vehicle to gain access to, in particular, the UNFF and the legally binding instruments represented in the CPF. The programmes' outputs appear to have rather long life-span, which could be further expanded through regular updates or remakes, as appropriate.

The programmes also provided major contributions, maybe well beyond their original scope, **to forest science and education**. Developing comprehensive overviews and summarizing the most state of the art knowledge on key issues and challenges affecting forests and forestry at both the policy and practical levels enabled scientific and educational organizations to use these products in their daily work and improve quality on an efficient way. They also supported the engagement of a broad circle of scientists and added value and complemented the work of the IUFRO task forces and divisions.

The consultative processes of the two programmes **have successfully combined bottom-up and top-down approaches**, enabling the programmes to rightly select topics and focus areas. Looking into the future, the swiftly evolving global policy landscape requires further innovations in this area, with a view, in particular, to the fast-approaching milestone year of 2030, when major elements of the current global agenda will expire.

IUFRO **established novel and proactive methods and produced high quality products** to support the much-needed science-policy dialogue, it appears however that it requires further efforts to engage policy-making in such a dialogue because uptake of results by policy-making remained below the desirable or optimal level. Uptake beyond forestry circles proved to be another challenge. Regardless of how successful and laudable IUFRO's efforts in promoting the results have been, it remains a task for **the programmes to strengthen outreach efforts, and to engage policy-makers more deeply and initiate a living dialogue**. Actions taken at the global level appear adequate, but further potentials may exist at the regional and national levels.

The evaluation concluded that volume and quality of the outputs produced reflect good use of the available resources, but **achieving deeper impact will hardly be possible without expanding the funding base**. Options for increasing efficiency appear to be limited to improving coordination across programmes and perhaps better monitoring/documenting uptake, but deeper analysis of users' needs, enhanced outreach and closer collaboration with policy making would require additional resources and further efforts in budgetary planning and advocacy/outreach. It is imperative however to recall the fundamental role of the **sustained contributions** which have been **the backbone of the activities**, and served as catalists for other donor contributions.

Lastly, although it's beyond its original scope, the review concluded that the **fast evolution of AI changes the nature of the work**, moving emphasis from collecting information to validation, evaluation and analysis. AI-generated short thematic summaries, although of questionable quality, are at the fingertips of pretty much anybody now, and users often prefer easy and speedy access over quality and value. This creates a less favourable environment for traditional products, leading inevitable changes in our thinking on most efficient ways and means of advising policy and practice.

SPDC

SPDC has been relevant in **addressing many gaps in forest-related science education and successfully occupied the science-policy "niche"** by: (1) providing exposure to high-level academia, including emerging forest topics, leading trainers, and key publications; (2) offering practical, field-based learning through thematic networking, Pre-Congress trainings, and one-to-one coaching within SV; (3) raising awareness that forestry is a multifaceted academic career, encompassing not just technical but also social and policy dimensions; and (4) bridging academia and real-world politics, bringing scientific knowledge out of the "ivory tower" and into policy and practice.

The **FLR focus was timely and aligned with stakeholder priorities**, strengthening IUFRO's role in the GPFLR through scientific input, networking, and capacity building. It also supported the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, where FLR is key to restoring forests, enhancing ecosystem services, and fostering broad collaboration.

The SPDC Programme has **institutionalised knowledge exchange through two mechanisms**: Science-Policy/Science-Practice Workshops and Thematic Networking Projects. While policy-makers engaged only indirectly in the workshops, the thematic networking projects enabled genuine two-way communication among scientists, policy-makers, and forest practitioners.

SPDC has been highly successful in building individual capacity, expanding professional horizons and sparking ambition and motivation. Beyond technical skills such as presenting research, reviewing, and publishing, the programme has strengthened communication, psychological (motivation, self-confidence, resilience), and social skills (networking). Participants often act as "multipliers", engaging colleagues and students in SPDC activities through thematic networking, such as the FLR. Institutional capacity development is also evident, with improvements in curricula, the introduction of new programmes, innovative teaching materials and facilitation methods, and enhanced university reputations when hosting IUFRO events.

SPDC **used its human and financial resources efficiently**, keeping overhead and staffing costs low while leveraging additional funding to strengthen its core budget. Through cost-saving measures - such as organising workshops in partner countries, engaging volunteer experts, and adopting online and hybrid formats - the programme maximised reach and impact without increasing expenditure.

SPDC (SAP/SV) serves as a "good springboard" for long-term engagement with IUFRO through its divisions, task forces, working parties, and programmes. Pre-Congress trainings provide an excellent starting point for building academic networks and participating in various projects and processes. The ideal trajectory for participants often follows this path: SAP participant → mentee → teacher → resource person → trainer.

Participants widely agreed that **SPDC involvement directly supported their career growth**. They reported gaining a broader perspective and confidence, greater resilience and motivation, improved work effectiveness, and better English skills that strengthened international collaboration.

There is anecdotal evidence that institutions and stakeholders have **continued using and developing SPDC tools, reports, and networks**, often incorporating them into teaching, facilitation, and daily work, including policy communication. Many participants have also trained colleagues and maintained SPDC networks, some of which have further evolved.

6. Points for Consideration

IUFRO and the management of the three programmes may wish to benefit from considering the following recommendations when responding to the findings and conclusions of this review.

Given the similarities between SciPol and WFSE some recommendations could apply to both of them. These are:

#1: Continue providing forest-related negotiations with impartial, solid, scientific information at all levels
Both policy and science benefit a lot from thematic overviews and syntheses, keeping their production aligned with major policy-making processes (and the possible creation of, or impact on, financial instruments and economic regulators) is a huge asset. The focus should be on global and regional dialogues, noting that the ultimate beneficiaries are national entities, as key components of any international platform, and that international decision-making starts with developing national positions. Reports should have clear and limited focus, too many topics or too broad discussions seem to serve user needs less. Considerations should be given to cost-efficient update or remake of existing products, as and when appropriate.

#2: Keep focus on the IAF as well as the 2030 Agenda, in particular through the Rio Conventions and other legal and soft instruments
In the years to come the 2030 Agenda will continue to drive the global discourse related to forests, therefore the current focus should be maintained, focusing on the legal or political instruments and strategies, as well as on work plans of institutions with major convening power and/or implementation on capacities. Efforts should be made within CPF how to improve access to those members, whose benefits are less obvious, for example governing bodies of financial institutions, and to strengthen ties with other processes beyond CPF, whose work is related to forests. Making connections to members of the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW) could be useful in this regard.

#3: Start preparing for the post-2030 period, establish an internal task force/think tank that follows developments and makes recommendations for IUFRO's engagement
While key challenges continue to remain, the global policy landscape could change after 2030 and IUFRO should be prepared to absorb and respond to the changes. Major review processes will start, at least at the conceptual level, in the coming years and IUFRO should closely follow the related developments. A permanent mechanism within IUFRO could help making timely decisions on appropriate responses. It is important that IUFRO has mechanisms in place that can provide input in the new period from the very beginning.

#4: Develop a concept for consultations in circles broader than currently, and for a mechanism which can provide information on governments' needs

Both policy-making and implementation involve a large number of stakeholders, therefore it is imperative to provide information for all of them. IUFRO should explore how to establish a two-way communication with them that includes learning about needs and providing information/knowledge that facilitates their work and strengthen their contribution. Furthermore, a more systematic communication with governments would be needed, and IUFRO should explore how existing communication channels could be improved or new ones created.

#5: Adjust timing of production cycles so that products are available on time for a good impact

Although production time is considerable and there are obvious limits to acceleration, efforts should be made to release outputs early enough to allow potential beneficiaries to build the information in the national steps of international policy-making. This may require moving away from the current, roughly 2-year production cycle and plan for a longer period, where products may need to be produced with a changing frequency, sometimes even with production processes partially overlapping. Financial implications and thus feasibility of such a system need to be carefully assessed.

#6: Establish closer and more systematic coordination between SciPol and WFSE

Closer coordination between the two programmes could be established, including even through a creation of a coordination group. This may be particularly useful in light of the proposal on the production cycles above. The two programmes building upon each other and/or jointly covering user needs at the various levels could increase impact and improve cost efficiency in both the production and communication.

#7: Develop an enhanced communication and outreach strategy:

- **Keep, or if possible, intensify current outreach and PR activities**

  IUFRO has been rather successful in communicating programme results. This activity should be further enhanced through systematic planning and adding new platforms. Free resources on research communication, like scientific storytelling[57], require no extra budget and guide the creation of 'snackable' content for stakeholders such as politicians, scientists, public servants, NGOs, and the public.

- **Strengthen advocacy in particular through IUFRO's own network and place more emphasis on the national level**

  IUFRO members represent a unique network with access to national governments. Member organizations should actively liaise with their respective governments, help explore their needs and introduce programme products to, and facilitate their uptake in, the national policy making. Ideally, this advocacy/advisory service should not be restricted to governments but include other key national players of policy-making, including the private sector and the civil society. With other words: although the production remains the task of special programmes, promotion should be a task for the entire network.

[57] https://www.linkedin.com/company/karger-publishers/

- **Establish true costs for communication, even if they are considerable**

  Communication comes at a considerable cost. While it doesn't really add to the quality of any product it could however improve the efficiency of the investment made in the production considerably. Even if it may appear high on the budget sheets, especially compared to the total cost, it should be recalled that the latter do not include the actual costs of production which is provided for free by those who created the products.

#8: Develop a new concept for the products and their production in light of broadening support provided by AI

Structure and content of the programme products could be reviewed and re-designed, based on improved understanding of the evolving user needs. Innovation is needed to find new ways, including moving away from the traditional "book – policy brief – factsheet" pyramid to new structures and architecture.

The unique features of SPDC gave rise to some further recommendations. These are:

#1: Develop a post-course alumni programme to maintain engagement and track impact

A structured alumni programme would serve two main purposes: (1) maintaining ongoing engagement of SPDC participants, and (2) enabling systematic tracking of the training programme's impact. This could include a shared participant database and reconnecting alumni through targeted events (e.g., targeted networking events, online forums, or webinars for alumni).

To track impact for this programme, a tracer study could be conducted to follow former SPDC participants' career trajectories and professional achievements over time. Other options include annual surveys, and a systematic monitoring of their publications, collaborative projects, or involvement in policy and teaching initiatives. Linking alumni engagement with measurable outcomes would provide valuable evidence of SPDC's long-term contributions to capacity building, scientific networking, and policy influence.

#2: Strengthen mentorship and coaching for more systematic follow-up and engagement

To maximize the impact of SPDC trainings, tailored mentorship and coaching should be provided, taking into account specific regional and national policy contexts. This support would help participants apply acquired skills, such as interacting and networking with national ministries in situations of conflicting policy frameworks, and maintain engagement between global events. Additionally, a systematic mentorship programme could be established to help new SPDC participants navigate IUFRO's often complex structures. Starting before SAP participants travel to trainings, such a programme would also be the foundation for their longer-term engagement with the IUFRO network.

#3: Design targeted programmes to promote gender balance in forestry science

The underrepresentation of women in forestry can be addressed through targeted initiatives, for example in collaboration with IFSA, to strengthen skills, visibility, and leadership among women in the field. Promoting gender balance not only enhances equity and diversity but also increases the programme's attractiveness to donors, as many funding agencies prioritize initiatives that support a gender lens (e.g., EU Gender Action Plan III[58]).

[58] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gender-action-plan-iii-towards-gender-equal-world_en

Despite considerable differences among the three programmes, two recommendations may apply to all of them:

#1: Monitor and evaluate uptake and continuously adjust dissemination in light of the results
A more systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system of uptake would be needed, potentially with stratified information on users and the types of use. Such information would be helpful in designing dissemination of future products and evaluate success and efficiency both the products and the related communication efforts. Communication and outreach plans could also include targets and benchmarks and monitoring should follow progress towards them.

#2: Diversify and strategically engage donors
Continue to expand the donor base for all three programmes and strengthen the involvement of even more governments, philanthropic trusts and foundations and the private sector. Develop a clear value proposition for each donor type - for example, private companies typically expect a measurable return on investment - and consider mechanisms such as a pooled trust fund to facilitate contributions from multiple donors.

7. Annexes

Annex 1: List of interview partners
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Annex 3: Review questions
Annex 4: Tables SPDC Programme
Annex 5: TOR

Annex 1: List of interview partners

Interview Partners	Function/Relation to SPP	Date of Interview
SciPol Programme		
Terry Sunderland	Professor, Department of Forest and Conservation Sciences, Faculty of Forestry, University of British Columbia Author assesments/publications	14.10.2025
Robert Nasi	Director General, CIFOR Collaborator, CPF member	13.10.2025
Ivonne Higuero	Secretary General, CITES Collaborator, CPF member	
Tim Christophersen	Vice President, Climate Action at Salesforce Collaborator/donor assessments/publications in his former position at UNEP	08.10.2025
Ewald Rametsteiner	Deputy Director, Forestry Division, FAO Collaborator, CPF member	17.10.2025
Doris Mutta	Senior Programme Officer, AFF Collaborator Author assessments/publications	17.10.2025
Jenny Wong	Retired Programme Officer, Former Secretariat UNFCCC Collaborator, CPF member	04.11.2025
WFSE Programme		
Markku Kanninen	Former, long-term member of the steering committee, editor, contributor	10.10.2025
Pablo Pacheco	Long term member of the editorial board, editor, contributor	15.10.2025
Almeida A. Sitoe	Contributor, collaborator	15.10.2025
Cesar Sabogal	Contributor, collaborator	06.10.2025
Jerylee Wilkes-Allemann	Contributor	17.10.2025
Hosny El Lakany	Contributor, collaborator	10.10.2025
SPDC Programme		
Ernest Foli	Senior Research Officer at FORIG	09.10.2025
Nana Yeboaa Opuni-Frimpong	Lecturer at University of Energy and Natural resources, Sunyani	06.10.2025
Steve Makungwa	Senior Lecturer at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Malawi and Director CASA	03.10.2025
Adejoke Olukemi Akinyele (Nigeria)	Professor at Department of Forest Production and Products and Dean of the Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria	06.10.2025
Leila Rossa Mouawad	Researcher at the American University of Beirut	13.10.2025
Hermudananto Hermudananto	Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia	20.10.2025
Laura Quevedo	Professor at National University of Asuncion, Paraguay	13.10.2025
Sandra Rodriguez	Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, Mexico	20.10.2025
IUFRO Presidents		
Mike Wingfield	IUFRO President 2014-2019	22.10.2025
John Parrotta	IUFRO President 2019-2024	22.10.2025
Daniela Kleinschmit	IUFRO President 2024-2029	22.10.2025

IUFRO Executive Director		
Alexander Buck	IUFRO Executive Director	11.12.2025
Programme Coodinators		
Christoph Wildburger & Nelson Grima	SciPol Coordinators (former and current)	13.10.2025
Pia Katila & Linda Rosengren	WFSE Coordinators (former and current)	20.10.2025
Michael Kleine & Janice Burns	SPDC Coordinators (former and current)	13.10.2025

Annex 2: Bibliography

References

Contributions to international and national policy processes In: 125 year of IUFRO by Johann, E. Buck, A., Burger, B., Kleine, M., Pruller, R., Wolfrum, G., IUFRO, 2017

UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/19/INF/3 Background document on the contributions of member organizations of the collaborative partnership on forests to the achievement of the forest-related Aichi biodiversity targets and to the implementation of the expanded programme of work on forest biodiversity

CPF documents:
CPF Policy Document (rev 2019) CPF, 2017
CPF Strategic Vision towards 2030. CPF, 2020
CPF workplan 2017-2020
CPF workplan 2021-2024

ECOSOC resolutions:
E/RES/2000/35
E/RES/2006/49
E/RES/2015/33
E/RES/2024/15

UNFF documents:
E/CN.18/2015/7 Collaborative Partnership on Forests Framework 2013 and 2014
E/CN.18/2018/3 Contribution of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its members, regional and subregional organizations and processes, major groups and other stakeholders to the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030
E/CN.18/2019/6 Enhanced cooperation, coordination and engagement on forest-related issues
E/CN.18/2020/3 Implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030: activities of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests
E/CN.18/2021/3 Implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030: contributions of and enhanced cooperation with partners towards achieving the thematic priorities for the biennium 2021–2022
E/CN.18/2022/2 Policy discussions on the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030: activities in support of the thematic priorities for the biennium 2021–2022
E/CN.18/2023/3 Enhanced cooperation with partners and the contributions of such partners to achieving the thematic priorities
E/CN.18/2024/2 Policy discussions on the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030: activities in support of the thematic priorities for the biennium 2023–2024
Caswell, S. Enhancing global forest policy coherence and a common understanding of sustainable forest management. Report to the UNFF Secretariat, UNFF, 2018

IUFRO documents:
Overall summary report of SciPol activities 2014-2024 *Internal report*
Overall summary report of WFSE activities 2014-2024 *Internal report*
External Project Review. Component II: Capacity Development *Internal report*

Annex 3: Review questions

		SciPol	WFSE	SPDC
O1	RELEVANCE	To what extent have SciPol/WFSE thematic priorities and outputs addressed the main topics of international forest-related policy processes and the 2030 Agenda? Sub-question: Which specific processes and goals were targeted, and where were gaps observed?		
	EFFECTIVENESS	What mechanisms have SciPol/WFSE used to contribute to forest-related policy processes and the 2030 sustainable development agenda? To what extent have SciPol/WFSE outputs (publications, assessments, briefs) been used by policy-makers, practitioners, and international organizations in decision-making and agenda-setting? Follow-up question: In addition to published outputs, have policy-makers sought further engagement, advice, or knowledge exchange from SciPol/WFSE?		
	SUSTAINABILITY	To what extent have SciPol/WFSE addressed long-term, persistent forest-related development challenges central to international policy processes, and how sustainable are these contributions? What mechanisms are in place to ensure that the knowledge provided by SciPol/WFSE stays relevant for the evolving policy discussions?		
O2	RELEVANCE	To what extent and how effectively have SciPol, WFSE, and SPDC addressed the knowledge gaps and needs of (a) the scientific community and (b) policy-makers/practitioners at national and international levels? What were the reasons for SciPol, WFSE, and SPDC to concentrate on the selected thematic networking activities, and to what extent were these choices aligned with global, national, and stakeholder priorities?		
	EFFECTIVENESS	How effectively have SciPol, WFSE, and SPDC facilitated and institutionalised the exchange of scientific knowledge among different actors, and with what observable outcomes?		
	SUSTAINABILITY	What evidence exists of institutional or stakeholder commitment to sustain and further develop the use of SciPol, WFSE, and SPDC tools, reports, or networks beyond the programme period?		

O3	RELEVANCE			To what extent and through what mechanisms has SPDC, via its science-policy-practice interface work, contributed to filling gaps and responding to emerging needs in forest-related science education at global and regional levels over the past decade?
	EFFECTIVENESS			Were the human and financial resources allocated to SPDC used strategically to achieve enhanced knowledge dissemination and improvements in individual and institutional capacities?
	SUSTAINABILITY			What evidence exists that forest scientists from economically disadvantaged countries have applied and sustained the knowledge gained from SPDC's training programmes in their professional contexts? To what extent and in what ways has the SPDC training programme contributed to advancing the professional careers of participating scientists (e.g., skills, opportunities, leadership roles)?

Annex 4: Tables SPDC Programme

SPDC – SAP recipients:

Number of SAP sponsorships for IUFRO event participation 2014-2024

Year	Africa		Asia/Pacific		Latin America		Eastern Europe		Total	
	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
2014	19	19	19	20	11	12	-	-	49	51
2015*	5	9	11	26	7	2	1	1	24	38
2016	5	10	19	28	3	7	4	-	31	45
2017	20	27	16	14	5	9	-	-	41	50
2018	9	3	4	7	1	3	-	-	14	13
2019	14	27	16	31	18	15	1	1	49	74
2020	4	13	10	3	1	1	-	-	15	17
2021	9	18	18	16	23	9	-	-	50	43
2022	23	22	6	6	1	0	3	-	33	28
2023	-	5	1	7	8	5	4	4	13	21
2024	30	35	46	42	32	14	3	3	111	94
Total	138	188	166	200	110	77	16	9	430	474
								Grand Total	904	

*In 2015 no grant allocation received from MFA

Number of SV sponsorships implemented 2018-2024

Year	Africa		Asia/Pacific		Latin America		Europe		Total	
	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
2018	1	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	3	2
2019	-	-	4	1	4	1	-	-	8	2
2020	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
2021	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2022	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2023	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	2	1
2024	2	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	3	2
Total	4	1	5	1	5	2	1	1	16	8

Summary of the 13 **Science-Policy/Science-Practice Workshops:**

Workshop Title/ Location/Date	Description	Number of participants
"Communicating Forest Science: Making Science Work for Policy and Management", Salt Lake City, Utah, USA 30 Sept – 4 Oct **2014**		30 participants, 21 countries
"Making Science Work for Forest and Landscape Restoration" Durban, South Africa, 4-6 Sept **2015**	Science-policy interactions for forest and landscape restoration in conjunction with the World Forestry Congress.	14 participants, 11 countries
"Science-Policy Interactions: Making Science Work for Forest Landscape Restoration" Beijing Forestry University, Beijing, 21-2October, **2016**	+ Provide concepts and methods to researchers on how research results can be transformed into usable information for problem-solving and policy-making; + Present case studies from around the world that demonstrate how past and on-going forest landscape restoration activities can contribute to enhancing benefits to society.	28 participants; 11 countries

"Working effectively at the Interface of Forest Science and Society", Thimphu, Bhutan 27 - 30 March **2017**	Science -policy interactions required to contribute to the local project on "Climate Change Adaptation Potentials of Forests in Bhutan"	20 participants from Bhutan Government and local universities
"Science-Society Interactions in Support of Forest Landscape Restoration" Freiburg, Germany, 16 – 18 September 2017	Discussed ways and means of transforming scientific knowledge into useful information for policy and management	22 participants from Africa, Asia & LAC
"Best practices for implementing forest landscape restoration in South Asia" International Knowledge-sharing Workshop as contribution to the Bonn Challenge Initiative Chilaw, Sri Lanka, 15-17 August, 2018	The workshop framed discussions around FLR needs in South Asia, governance and policy, engaging stakeholders, financing FLR implementation, FLR decision-support tools at national and sub-national levels.	60 participants from Asia
"Implementing Forest Landscape Restoration in Africa and Asia" Curitiba, Brazil, 26-28 September 2019 (pre-congress workshops)	Aimed at enhanced understanding of the global context for Forest Landscape Restoration, the complexity of implementation and developing a science-policy communication product	22 participants from Africa and Asia
"Implementing Forest Landscape Restoration in Latin America" (in Spanish) Curitiba, Brazil, 26-28 September 2019 (pre-congress workshops)	Aimed at enhanced understanding of the global context for Forest Landscape Restoration and the complexity of implementation in Latin America	19 participants from Latin American countries
"Systematic Evidence Evaluation in Forest Science" – 4 Online Workshops in October 2020 and March 2021	Aimed at systematic reviews of forest-related knowledge with a view to supporting good decision-making. Using a participatory approach, participants were instructed in preparing a series of systematic reviews to support and prioritise policy questions.	64 participants from 23 countries; 45% Female; 55% Male; Regional representation: 6% from Latin America, 36% from Asia and 58% from Africa
Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Forest Landscape Restoration in Ethiopia (hybrid event) 28-30 November 2022	Support the effective development and implementation of FLR activities and support Ethiopia in delivering its national commitments to restoring forest landscapes.	36 participants from Ethiopia
"Systematic Evidence Evaluation in Forest Science" (Pre-Congress Training Workshop) Uppsala, Sweden, 19 – 22 June 2024	Aimed at systematic reviews of forest-related knowledge with a view to supporting good decision-making in policy and practice.	17 participants from Africa, Asia & LAC
Science-Society Interactions: Making Science Work for Policy and Practice (Pre-Congress Training Workshop) Uppsala, Sweden, 19 – 22 June 2024	Participants enhance their understanding of the interconnected realms of forest science and policy. Learn about approaches and tools to successfully bridge these two spheres for improved science-policy interactions and joint learning of scientists and policy-makers.	23 participants from Africa, Asia & LAC
Summary: A total of 13 workshops on aspects of science-policy/science-practice interactions were organized by SPDC between 2014 and 2024 with 355 early-career scientists attending the events.		Total: 355

Annex 5: TOR

External Project Review

Terms of Reference

Background

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) have established a long-term partnership with the objective to enhance the contribution of forest science to international forest-related policy processes and the implementation of sustainable forest resources management, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions.

Over the past several years, IUFRO, with funding support from MFA, has consistently worked towards making available the latest scientific knowledge to global forest-related policy debates and processes. This has been complemented by capacity building for scientists and practitioners at national and local levels in economically disadvantaged regions. Major results achieved and impacts made thus far can be summarised as follows:

The scientific assessments and related policy briefs prepared by IUFRO have provided information for progressing towards the achievement of the SDGs and the goals of the global environmental agreements (CBD, UNCCD, and UNFCCC), and have supported the related processes, initiatives, and resolutions. The work done has emphasised the crucial interlinkages and dependencies between human well-being, socio-economic systems and environmental sustainability, and the governance systems that mediate these complex links.

Work in recent years has focused especially on the relationships between forests and SDGs. It has assessed the potential and anticipated impacts on forests and related socio-economic systems resulting from efforts to achieve the SDGs. Furthermore, the work has addressed the important interconnections and interlinkages, synergies, and trade-offs among the SDGs from a forest and forest-related development perspective. In this context, and especially in the face of climate change, biodiversity loss, and related livelihood challenges including food security, poverty, and inequality, IUFRO's work has focused on forest restoration and forest landscape restoration, as well as on a wide range of forest impacts on human societies. In this way, it strengthens the integration of these interconnected issues into global agreements and processes.

Capacity development for scientists and practitioners in economically disadvantaged regions has focused on forest landscape restoration (FLR), in line with ongoing global policy processes (e.g. UN Conventions and UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration). In this context, the various concepts and approaches of FLR as an intervention into a socio-ecological system, including best practices in field implementation through stakeholder consultations, joint decision-making across sectors, and participatory monitoring, have been addressed in regional and local knowledge sharing, and training workshops in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

During last year's bilateral discussions, MFA and IUFRO agreed to conduct a voluntary external project review and impact assessment of the MFA-supported programmes implemented by IUFRO.

Objectives

The aim of this project review – covering the period from August 2014 to July 2024 – is to establish how far IUFRO's programmes and projects supported by MFA of Finland have contributed to:

- Enhancing forest science contributions to international forest-related policy processes and the 2030 development agenda;
- Supporting the exchange of scientific knowledge between policy-makers, practitioners and researchers at global, national and local levels; and
- Expanding capacity in forest science communication and science-policy-practice interfacing, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions.

Emphasis in this review will be placed on those components of IUFRO's programmes that were financed from resources provided by MFA of Finland, the products/outcomes (i.e. events and publications) generated, and their use and uptake by the various stakeholder groups. Moreover, the review will elaborate on the involvement of experts and institutions from Finland.

These components are to be evaluated against the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) catalogue of evaluation criteria addressing the six pertinent issues including (a) **relevance** of the activities; (b) **coherence** with other interventions; (c) **effectiveness** of achieving objectives; (d) **efficiency** in delivering the results; (e) direct and indirect **impacts**; and (f) **sustainability** by clarifying the question whether the net benefits of the intervention will continue or is likely to continue.

Overall, the Review is also intended as a learning process aiming at improving future programme design, planning and implementation.

Target of the Review

The evaluation will extend over the following three ongoing programmes of IUFRO:

Programme	Acronym	Website
Science-Policy Programme	SciPol	https://www.iufro.org/programmes/sci-pol
World Forests, Society and Environment	WFSE	https://www.iufro.org/programmes/wfse
Special Programme for Development of Capacities	SPDC	https://www.iufro.org/programmes/spdc

All three programmes named in the table are long-term endeavours of IUFRO operating since 1983 (SPDC), 2001 (WFSE) and 2007 (SciPol), respectively. They support the mission of IUFRO "to advance research excellence and knowledge sharing, and to foster the development of science-based solutions to forest-related challenges for the benefit of forests and people worldwide."

Information Base

The Review will be based on the following sources of information:

- Annual progress reports by IUFRO to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland including financial statements,
- Other written summarized information to be provided by the Programme Coordinators on project results obtained between 2014 to 2024,
- IUFRO's online information resource system providing a repository of the publications, events and results obtained by the programmes (www.iufro.org),
- Interviews with selected policy-makers involved in global forest-related policy processes, which - in one way or another - made use of the output of IUFRO's programmes,
- Interviews with authors involved with the SciPol and WFSE programmes' expert panels,
- Interviews with scientists in economically disadvantaged regions who benefited from SPDC's activities through conferences, knowledge-sharing and training activities,
- Verbal/virtual communication with the IUFRO President, Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, Coordinators and Project Managers of the three IUFRO programmes.

Implementation of the Project Review

The Review will be implemented by two independent external evaluation experts subcontracted by IUFRO, following consultations with MFA Finland. The experts have specialisations and demonstrated experiences in:

- Global forest policy processes and science-policy interfacing;
- Capacity building in the natural resources sector in economically disadvantaged regions; and
- Management and evaluation of international donor projects.

In addition, basic knowledge of IUFRO as the global network of forest science cooperation and experiences with knowledge transfer and science issues in a global context would be required.

The Review will follow best practices in evaluation processes for development cooperation programmes (based on before-mentioned OECD standards) employing data gathering and information sourcing suitable to evaluate results achieved and impacts made on target audiences such as policy makers, forest science communities and forest practitioners.

Upon completion of the Review, a draft version of the report will be shared with MFA for comments. The results of the Review will be reflected jointly by IUFRO and MFA and will be used to identify shortcomings and areas for improvement to further increase impact and thus better contribute to achieving both the 2030 global agenda and Finland's specific objectives of international development cooperation.

It is envisaged that the evaluation will take 15 working days per reviewer within a timeframe of 3 months from the time of sub-contracting external reviewers to the submission of the final report.

The report shall be published by IUFRO and MFA through their respective channels.

Evaluation Report

The final evaluation report will include the following main aspects:

- Introduction to the external project review, target of the evaluation and applied methodology;
- Summary of evaluation results for all three IUFRO programmes based on the OECD DAC criteria;
- Description of the various evaluation steps such as study of documentation, interviews with scientists and beneficiaries of the programme; and
- Conclusions on the main learning experiences, best practices on the way forward including future financing of these programmes.

The final structure of the evaluation report will be reconciled between the reviewers and the IUFRO Executive Director.

Tasks of the Reviewers

The two independent external reviewers will be responsible for broadly covering the following evaluation tasks:

- Reviewer I: Project evaluation and capacity building
- Reviewer II: Global forest-related policy processes and science-communication

The two experts will jointly implement the review, including screening the relevant documents, conducting the interviews and writing the evaluation report. All meetings/interviews will be held online, and thus, travel will not be required.

The Coordinators and Project Managers of the programmes (SciPol, WFSE, SPDC) will act as resource-persons for providing clarification and responses to the issues raised by the reviewers.

The main tasks are summarized in chronological order in the table below:

Task	Reviewer I	Reviewer II
Inception Meeting	X	X
Finalising the review methodology and work plan	X	X
Review of documents	X	X
Conducting interviews	X	X
Drafting final report	X	X
Presentation of review results	X	X
Final editing and submission of report	X	
Presentation of results to MFA	X	X