

Part I: Conducting a Governance Assessment

Chapter 1: Introduction

This document, the GFI Manual, is a companion document to *Assessing Forest Governance: The Governance of Forests Initiative Indicator Framework* (“GFI Indicator Framework”). The GFI Indicator Framework provides a comprehensive menu of indicators that can be used to diagnose strengths and weaknesses in forest governance. It is available for download at: <http://www.wri.org/our-work/project/governance-forests-initiative/tools#project-tabs>. The GFI Manual helps researchers navigate decisions about how to design and implement a governance assessment using the GFI indicators.

1.1 About the GFI Manual

There is no single approach to undertaking a governance assessment. Decisions about what to assess and how to assess it are intrinsically linked to the goals and location of the assessment. The GFI Manual supports a customized assessment by helping researchers identify their priorities and tailor the assessment process to meet their objectives. Grounded in the experiences of the GFI network, it also draws on good practice guidance from other assessment initiatives.

Part I of the GFI Manual provides guidance on how to design and implement an assessment using the GFI indicators. It is organized around the general stages of conducting an assessment: setting objectives, designing the assessment, collecting data, analyzing results, and communicating findings. For each stage, we identify important issues to consider—such as how to engage stakeholders in assessment processes or choose appropriate research methods—and discuss potential options and trade-offs.

Part II presents the revised indicators with detailed indicator-by-indicator guidance on research methods and potential data sources. The guidance also provides examples to help researchers interpret each indicator and draw conclusions from their research.

Key Terms in the GFI Manual

Civil society organization (CSO). In this Manual, we use “civil society organization” broadly to refer to the wide array of non-governmental and non-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others. These may include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups, labor unions, indigenous groups, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and media organizations.

GFI assessment. GFI assessment refers to the pilot assessments of the GFI Indicator Framework piloted by CSOs in Brazil, Cameroon, and Indonesia between 2009 and 2011.

GFI partners. GFI partners refers specifically to those organizations from Brazil, Cameroon, and Indonesia that are members of the GFI network and completed pilot governance assessments using the GFI Indicator Framework.

Researchers. The GFI Indicator Framework and Guidance Manual can be used by a range of different groups to support activities such as research, monitoring, or advocacy. To avoid referencing the very broad range of users and uses throughout the Manual, we simply use the term “researchers” to refer to any group using the GFI Indicator Framework for any purpose.

1.2 About the Governance of Forests Initiative

The Governance of Forests Initiative (GFI) is a global network of civil society organizations from Brazil, Indonesia, Cameroon, and the United States. GFI works to promote policies and practices that strengthen forest governance to support sustainable forest management and improve local livelihoods. In 2009, we created the draft GFI Framework of Indicators to diagnose strengths and weaknesses in forest governance based on a common analytical framework. Version 1 of the GFI Indicator Framework was field-tested by GFI’s civil society partners in Brazil, Cameroon, and Indonesia between 2009 and 2011. Version 2 of the GFI indicators has been revised based on partner experiences and feedback. Table 1 provides an overview of the GFI pilot assessments.

Table 1: Overview of the GFI Pilot Assessments

	Brazil	Cameroon	Indonesia
GFI Partner Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMAZON • Instituto Centro da Vida (ICV) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bioresources Development and Conservation Programme—Cameroon (BDCPC) • Cameroon Ecology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest Watch Indonesia (FWI) • HuMa • Indonesian Center for Environmental Law (ICEL) • Sekala • Telepak
Thematic areas of assessment ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Tenure • Land Use Planning • Forest Management • Forest Funds² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Use Planning • Forest Management • Forest Revenue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Tenure • Land Use Planning • Forest Management • Forest Revenue
Geographic coverage of assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National level • State level: Mato Grosso, Pará 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National level • Division level: Fako, Haut-Nyong, Nyong-et-Kellé, Océan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National level • Provincial level: Central Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara

GFI partners have used the results of their pilot assessments to carry out evidence-based advocacy for governance reforms at local, national, and international levels, including emerging programs to *reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation* (collectively known as REDD+). For example:

- The **GFI Brazil** coalition developed additional indicators to carry out a detailed [governance assessment of four state-level environmental funds](#) that may be used in the future to channel REDD+ financing.
- The **GFI Indonesia** coalition launched a multistakeholder process including government, civil society, and academic representatives to adapt the global GFI indicators to the specific context of forests and governance in Indonesia. The [GFI Indonesia Indicators](#) are being used to conduct local capacity-building and research in two provinces.
- The GFI Cameroon coalition supports the REDD+–Civil Society Platform to ensure that REDD+ programs in Cameroon incorporate the needs of local stakeholders, share relevant information, and include robust mechanisms for oversight and grievance.

¹ Since the GFI pilot assessments used Version 1 of the GFI indicators, the titles of the thematic areas differ slightly.

² GFI Brazil modified the original forest revenue section to focus more specifically on forest funds.

1.3 Frequently Asked Questions about the GFI Indicators

Who can use the GFI indicators?

The GFI indicators are designed to be applicable for a wide range of groups with an interest in assessing or monitoring forest governance. Examples could include government agencies wishing to assess the effectiveness of policy implementation, legislators seeking to identify priorities for legal reforms, or civil society organizations seeking to monitor government performance.

What can the indicators be used for?

The GFI indicators can be used to carry out an assessment of forest governance, which may support a variety of objectives, such as reforming a law, building capacity of institutions, or monitoring implementation of laws. The indicators are framed as normative elements that describe governance best practices; therefore, the indicator questions can also be used as a guideline when designing new laws, policies, or programs.

Can I use the GFI indicators to compare forest governance in different countries?

The GFI Indicator Framework is designed as a research tool that generates detailed data about forest governance in a given country, region, or case study. While it is not designed to result in an index or ranking of forest governance between countries, it could be adapted for cross-country comparisons depending on the goals of the user.

Do the indicators evaluate social and environmental safeguards?

Yes and no. Although the word “safeguard” does not appear in the indicators, many of them assess the extent to which social and environmental issues are considered in national laws and policies and their implementation. The Indicator Framework can therefore be a useful tool in assessing how country systems establish social and environmental standards in law and how these standards are adhered to in practice.

Do the indicators measure impacts or outcomes?

Governance is largely about process; for example, how decisions are made rather than what those decisions are. GFI indicators are designed to evaluate the quality of processes rather than to measure impacts or outcomes. However, many of the indicators assess the content of laws and plans to determine the extent to which these are designed to promote social and environmental outcomes. Furthermore, indicators that assess policymaking and planning processes typically include questions about the outcomes of the process in order to link the quality of the process to an overall result.

One hundred and twenty-two indicators is a lot. Do I have to do all of them?

No. The indicators are organized by themes and subthemes to help researchers identify priority areas of interest—such as forest tenure, forest law enforcement, or public access to information—and focus their assessment. The choice of how many indicators to complete is up to the researcher, and varies widely depending on resources, time, the goal of the assessment, and how the data will be used.

What geographic scale can I use for applying the indicators?

The indicators are designed to be applicable at many different scales depending on the needs and interests of the user. The scale of the assessment depends on the context of the country or region of evaluation, as well as the priorities of those conducting the research. For example, the GFI civil society assessment in Brazil evaluated forest governance at the federal level as well as in two states of the Amazon since certain forest management responsibilities are decentralized.

What types of research methods can be used to complete the indicators?

The GFI Indicator Framework uses a mixed methods approach to assessing forest governance. Major data sources include laws and policies, civil society reports, government reports and information systems, and interviews with forest sector stakeholders (e.g., government officials, civil society experts, academics, forest communities, and indigenous peoples). Using the indicators does not require complex sampling or survey methodologies, although such an approach could be used.

Can scores or values be assigned to GFI indicators?

Yes. Many researchers may opt to assign scores to GFI indicators based on the data collected in order to succinctly summarize assessment results or quickly identify strengths and weaknesses. Chapter 4 of the GFI Manual discusses options for scoring GFI in greater detail, including methods used by GFI pilot assessments, pros and cons, and best practices.

Can I apply the indicators to any type of forest?

Yes. While the GFI Indicator Framework was piloted in three countries with tropical forests, it can be applied to any type of forest ecosystem (e.g., tropical, temperate, boreal) or governance regime (e.g., publicly owned, privately owned, community-managed, concession agreement). Since the indicators cover a broad range of topics beyond managing forests—such as tenure, land use planning, and functioning of government institutions—many of the indicators can also be applied in countries without significant tracts of forests or in countries promoting afforestation, reforestation, or restoration initiatives.

Can the indicators be used to assess REDD+ programs?

The indicators are designed to evaluate forest governance broadly, but many can be adapted or directly applied to assess programs to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (commonly referred to as REDD+). For example, the indicators aimed at assessing the level of public participation in decision making, the capacity of government to engage stakeholders effectively, and the existence of permanent platforms for stakeholder input into policy could all be used to assess the quality of stakeholder participation in REDD+ processes.

1.4 Overview of the GFI Framework

Forest governance is a complex concept that lacks a clear and widely agreed definition (Box 1). Rather than trying to create a new definition of forest governance, GFI created a framework to help structure the indicators and explain forest governance through several easily understood concepts. The GFI framework provides a simple way to understand forest governance by defining three foundational components of governance and five principles that characterize “good” governance. In addition, the framework outlines six thematic areas reflecting key forest-related issues of common interest and concern. The indicators are grouped by thematic area. The full list of indicators is presented in Part II of this manual.

Box 1: What is forest governance?

There is no simple or broadly accepted definition of governance. Good governance is often associated with principles such as transparency, participation, and accountability. In the context of international development, the notion of good governance is commonly seen as a critical foundation for achieving positive social, environmental, and economic outcomes.

GFI does not aim to provide a new definition of forest governance. Instead, we provide a framework for understanding the scope of institutions, laws, and practices that influence governance of forests, as well as

how principles of good governance are upheld in the forest sector. In particular, GFI views governance through a procedural lens that focuses on process of how decisions are made about forests, as opposed to focusing exclusively on what decisions are made or the outcomes of those decisions.

Three components of forest governance

For any given indicator, the object of assessment (i.e., the thing being scrutinized) can be one of three different components of forest governance:

- **Actors:** The GFI indicators assess a range of people and institutions that shape decisions about how forests are managed and used. These actors include government agencies, legislatures, companies, communities, the media, and civil society.
- **Rules:** The GFI indicators assess policies, laws, and regulations that affect forests. Some indicators are used to investigate the process by which policies and laws are created and changed, whereas other indicators help evaluate the content of existing policies and laws.
- **Practices:** The GFI indicators assess how actors develop and apply rules to drive practices at an operational level. For example, the indicators gauge the effectiveness of administrative processes and enforcement actions and thereby the extent to which rules are actually implemented.

Five principles of good governance

The five principles of good governance provide the benchmark of quality against which the component of forest governance (actors, rules, and practices) can be assessed. For example, an indicator may show the extent to which a government actor acts in an accountable manner or the degree to which a law promotes transparency by guaranteeing public access to information.

- **Transparency:** Transparency is the process of revealing actions so that outsiders can scrutinize them. Facilitating access to information is critical in order to inform and engage public constituents. Attributes of transparency include the comprehensiveness, timeliness, availability, and comprehensibility of information, as well as the proactiveness of efforts to inform affected groups.
- **Participation:** Diverse and meaningful input helps decision makers consider different issues, perspectives, and options when defining a problem and solution. It allows them to gather new knowledge, integrate public concerns into decision making, and manage social conflicts by bringing different stakeholders and special interest groups together at an early stage. Elements of access to participation include formal space for participation in relevant forums, the use of appropriate mechanisms to invite participation, the inclusiveness and openness of such processes, and the extent to which gathered input is taken into account.
- **Accountability:** Accountability exists when the actions and decisions taken by an actor are subject to oversight, so as to guarantee that they meet stated objectives and respond to the needs of the stakeholders they are meant to benefit. The concept of accountability involves two dimensions: answerability and enforcement. Answerability refers to the obligation to provide information about decisions and actions and justify them to stakeholders and other overseeing entities. Enforcement requires sanction and redress when the actor fails to meet its obligations. Many types of accountability relationships are relevant to forests. The accountability relationship between public officials and citizens is often particularly important.
- **Coordination:** Coordination exists when different actors whose decisions impact forests work together and share information in order to advance common objectives. Most governments have separate authorities with oversight for forests, environment, land use, agriculture, infrastructure, and so on. Horizontal coordination across economic sectors is therefore critical. In addition, many countries decentralize or devolve responsibilities for forest management across multiple administrative scales. Thus, vertical coordination across levels of government is also important.
- **Capacity:** Capacity can be broadly interpreted in terms of financial, human, technological, legal, and institutional resources to perform a function. In the context of forest governance, capacity can be

more narrowly defined as the ability to execute the other four principles of good governance described above.

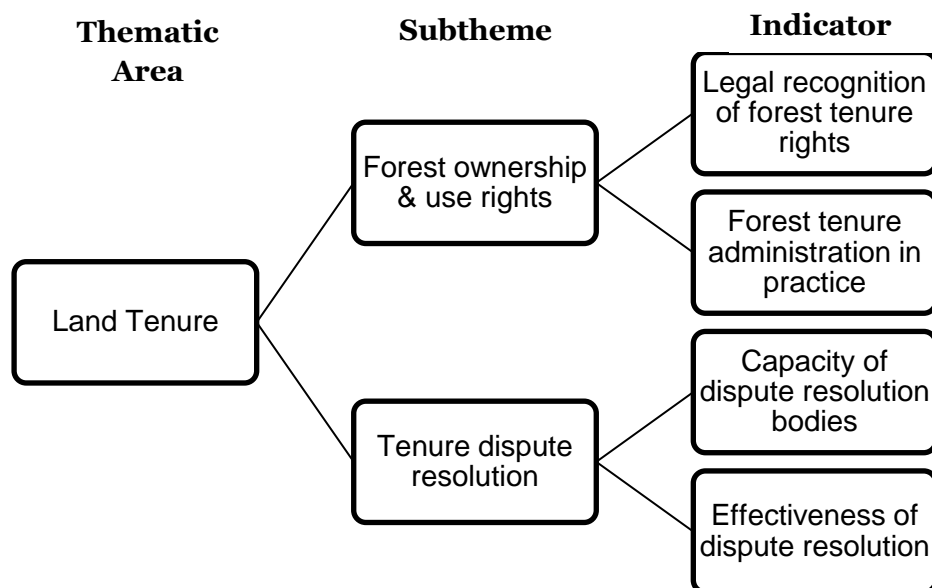
Six thematic areas

The indicators are clustered according to six thematic areas, which reflect key forest-related issues of common interest and concern.

- **Forest Tenure** is a broad concept including forest ownership rights and other secondary rights to access, use, and manage forest resources. Forest tenure shapes the relationship between people with respect to forests by defining who can use what resources, for how long, and under what conditions. The indicators in this thematic area show how a broad spectrum of forest tenure rights are recognized, supported, and protected in both law and practice, whether these rights are held by communities or individuals. They also detail the legal basis for state ownership of forest lands and resources, as well as the procedures for large-scale allocation of rights in public forests through concessions or other types of licenses for commercial purposes.
- **Land Use** addresses various multisector planning processes that determine how forest lands can be used. The indicators in this thematic area explore integrated land-use planning processes—often at a national scale—that seek to put land into optimal uses given the economic and social conditions of an area. They also assess sector-specific planning processes that may impact forest land use, including the forest-specific process of classifying forest uses within designated forest areas. In addition, they address relevant planning processes from beyond the forest sector, such as ones from the mining, agriculture, infrastructure, and energy sectors.
- **Forest management** consists of the operational aspects of monitoring, managing, and enforcing the various uses of forests, including conservation and ecological uses, community uses, and commercial extractive uses. The indicators in this thematic area assess the overarching legal and policy framework that sets the objectives and parameters for forest management, as well as the strategies and plans for achieving those objectives. They also cover forest management planning and implementation at a more operational level, as well as forest monitoring and enforcement activities to ensure compliance.
- **Forest revenues** covers the entire spectrum of revenue management in the forest sector. The indicators in this thematic area address the establishment of a forest charge system (e.g., taxes, royalties, and fees related to forest extraction and use), the administration and enforcement of that system, and the earmarking and reinvestment of those revenues through central budgets, specialized funds, and other revenue-sharing arrangements. Some of the indicators particularly focus on how the benefits from forest management are shared with local communities.
- **Cross-cutting institutions** leads us to take a closer and more direct look at key actors, including the legislature, the judiciary, executive agencies, the private sector, civil society, and the media. The indicators in this section complement the first four thematic areas and can be applied multiple times. For example, the performance of the legislature can be assessed with respect to tenure laws, land use laws, or forest laws.
- **Cross-cutting issues** evaluates several key topics in more detail, including the quality of public participation and public access to information, financial transparency and accountability, and efforts to combat corruption. The indicators in this section complement the first four thematic areas and can be applied multiple times. For example, the quality of public participation can be assessed with respect to a land use planning process or a forest policy reform.

A thematic area is disaggregated into four or five subthemes, each of which includes a list of indicators (Figure 1). This organizational structure, selected for its simplicity and broad global relevance, is designed to help researchers quickly select and prioritize subsets of indicators. The complete list of thematic areas, subthemes, and indicators is found in Part II of this manual.

Figure 1: Relationship between Thematic Areas, Subthemes, and Indicators



1.5 Basic structure of a GFI indicator

The term “indicator” is generally used to describe a quantitative, qualitative, or descriptive attribute that, if assessed periodically, could indicate direction of change (positive or negative) in that attribute. The GFI indicators are qualitative in nature, since they generally aim to assess quality of process rather than quantifying outputs or outcomes. Each indicator, which is categorized by a theme and subtheme, contains three parts:

- *Title*: a short phrase that summarizes the scope of the indicator
- *Diagnostic question*: a question that summarizes the qualitative scale of assessment
- *Elements of quality*: three to six qualitative elements that are the focus of data collection and help the user answer the diagnostic question in a more structured manner

Sample indicator:

Theme: Forest management

Subtheme: Forest legal and policy framework

Title: Legal basis for community participation in forest management

Diagnostic question: To what extent does the legal framework facilitate community participation in forest management?

Elements of quality:

Participation requirements. The legal framework requires public and private forest managers to engage local communities in forest management planning and operations.

Participation platforms. The legal framework establishes permanent structures to facilitate community participation in local forest management activities.

Community-based approaches. The legal framework promotes community-based forest management approaches.

Extension programs. The legal framework establishes financial assistance and extension programs to facilitate community-based forest management approaches.

For each indicator, Part II of this manual provides detailed guidance on completing the indicator and a format for recording data and observations for each element of quality (Table 2). For each element of quality, the researcher is expected to provide specific data, generally referred to as “evidence,” that was used to draw a conclusion about the extent to which the standard set forth in the element of quality is being met. Chapters 3 and 4 provide further discussion of collecting and compiling data.

Table 2: Sample Indicator Reporting Structure

<i>Legal basis for community participation in forest management</i>		
Diagnostic question: To what extent does the legal framework facilitate community participation in forest management?		
Elements of Quality	Y/N	Explanation
Participation requirements. The legal framework requires public and private forest managers to engage local communities in forest management planning and operations.		
Participation platforms. The legal framework establishes permanent structures to facilitate community participation in local forest management activities.		
Community-based approaches. The legal framework promotes community-based forest management approaches.		
Extension programs. The legal framework establishes financial assistance and extension programs to facilitate community-based forest management approaches.		
Additional notes:		
Values		Select
Not applicable/assessed		
Zero to one elements of quality		Low ____
Two elements of quality		Low–Medium ____
Three elements of quality		Medium ____
Four elements of quality		Medium–High ____
Five elements of quality		High ____
Documentation:		
Researcher name and organization:		

<p>Secondary sources Record the following: document or source title, author or organization, date published, chapter or page, website (if relevant)</p>	
<p>Primary sources: For each of the above conducted, record: – Interviewee/participant name(s) and title – Institution/company/organization –Location and date of interview</p>	

Chapter 2: Planning the Assessment

A popular adage advises us to “begin with the end in mind.” This tenet is especially pertinent when launching a governance assessment. Planning is essential to focusing the research and ensuring efficient and effective use of time and resources. This chapter reviews the key issues to consider in the initial planning stages, such as setting objectives, designing the assessment, and allocating resources. In addition, it discusses options for engaging stakeholders in assessment planning and tailoring indicators to local contexts.

The planning stages discussed in this chapter should not be interpreted as discrete and sequential steps. Rather, they should be thought of as important elements of assessment planning that often take place concurrently. For example, engaging external stakeholders may be an integral part of setting assessment objectives and identifying priority topics to evaluate. In particular, resource considerations such as budget, staff, and timeline should be kept in mind throughout the planning process.

2.1 Setting Objectives

When conducting an assessment, objective setting is a critical preliminary step that provides a roadmap for the rest of the process. Defined broadly, the assessment objective is the overall outcome that researchers hope to achieve using the data collected by the assessment. Objectives could be focused on creating a specific change or reform, or they could simply aim to generate new information on a particular topic of interest. Objectives established at the start will guide decisions such as choosing which indicators to complete and identifying the target audience for communicating the results. Setting clear objectives is critical for narrowing the focus of the assessment and can also facilitate communication with target audiences about what the assessment will achieve and how the results will be useful.

Objective setting should consider the type of data that researchers hope to obtain from the assessment, as well as how overall results will be used. The GFI indicators generate a “governance baseline” that describes the current situation and identifies weaknesses related to the rules, processes, institutions, or activities being assessed. The data collected during the assessment and the resulting conclusions can be used for a range of objectives. The list below is not exhaustive, but it identifies some common general objectives for forest governance assessment and how the GFI indicators can help achieve them.

- *Influencing policy processes.* Completing the GFI indicators generates descriptive data about the governance situation in the area of assessment, including specific problems to be addressed. These data can be an important input into any type of planning cycle—whether this is a process of revising a forest law or developing a REDD+ strategy.
- *Strengthen implementation of laws, policies, or programs.* Poor implementation of forest laws and policies is a common problem that often stems in part from weak governance and oversight. GFI’s “practice” indicators can be used to help identify how and why implementation deviates from the law, which can in turn help identify solutions.
- *Capacity-building.* The GFI framework and indicators were created in part to develop a common language for forest governance that could be accessible to a range of audiences. It can therefore serve as a tool for capacity-building on understanding governance concepts, identifying best practices, or collecting governance data.
- *Monitoring.* GFI indicators can also be used to monitor implementation of policies, laws, and procedures. For example, some of the indicators evaluate public participation in different types of

decision-making processes, which could be used to monitor how participation obligations are being met. The indicators could also be used to monitor implementation of activities over time.

- *Program design and evaluation.* Donors, project developers, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government agencies may evaluate the impacts of projects and programs using results frameworks or evaluation criteria. The GFI indicators are framed as normative statements that define good practice for a given topic, such as conducting effective consultation processes. As such, the GFI indicators can be used both to design new interventions that seek to promote good governance and to evaluate how well projects or programs are implemented in practice.

Objectives can be framed broadly, as in the list above. However, planning an assessment generally requires a more specific articulation of why governance data are being collected and how they will be used. Table 3 provides specific examples of potential objectives for conducting an assessment.

Table 3: Sample Objectives for Forest Governance Assessment

Influencing law- and policymaking processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating needs for design of a new freedom of information law • Designing new benefit-sharing approaches for REDD+ programs • Identifying priorities challenges to be addressed through reform of the forest law
Strengthening implementation of laws, policies, or programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying capacity-building needs to improve implementation of forest law enforcement • Identifying barriers to registration of land rights for forest communities to develop a new support program
Capacity-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building capacity of government officials to conduct effective participation processes • Training local communities in laws and procedures for submitting public information requests
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent monitoring of compliance with REDD+ safeguards • Monitoring implementation of new program to combat illegal logging • Documenting trends in prosecuting forest crimes over time
Program design and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing results framework for new program supporting community forest management projects

When beginning an assessment, researchers should conduct an initial exercise to define objectives, identify target audiences, and consider how the assessment will be used. In addition, researchers may want to consider contextual factors related to the setting in which the assessment takes place, such as opportunities for influence, potential synergies with other initiatives, and risks. Table 4 presents a list of guiding questions to assist in this process. Note that initial objectives can be revisited or refined later in the assessment process, particularly if new opportunities for using results arise.

Table 4: Key Considerations for Setting Assessment Objectives

<p>Objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the primary objective of the assessment? Are there any additional objectives? • What results will demonstrate that the objective has been achieved?
<p><i>Notes: Objectives are often long-term, so researchers may also define short-term milestones or indicators of progress. Tracking progress toward objectives can identify where changes are needed and can also be a useful tool for communicating about project achievements.</i></p>

<p>Synergies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are other organizations or ongoing initiatives working on similar issues? • Are there opportunities to collaborate with influential actors? <p><i>Notes: Researchers should identify what research or outreach has already been done on the issue(s) of interest to ensure that the assessment will be useful. They may wish to reach out to initiatives or organizations with similar goals.</i></p>
<p>Opportunity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can existing opportunities or processes be leveraged to achieve the objective? <p><i>Notes: Opportunities may arise around a particular process such as development of a new policy or a political change such as an election. Public awareness of issues identified by the assessment may need to be raised as an interim step toward creating change.</i></p>
<p>Target audience(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the primary target audience for achieving the desired objective? • What other influential actors or stakeholders should be involved? <p><i>Notes: Researchers should identify the primary decision makers or implementers who need to be influenced to achieve the desired result. Other influential actors or stakeholders with an interest in the issue should also be identified. See Annex 1 for resources on stakeholder mapping.</i></p>
<p>Data Collection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What data need to be collected to help achieve the assessment objectives? • Which research methods should be used to collect these data? <p><i>Notes: Researchers should consider the type of data they need to collect; for example, influencing policy may require an analysis of the existing legal framework to identify gaps. Researchers should also identify the types of research methods that will likely be used to collect this information.</i></p>
<p>Sharing results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do target audiences typically obtain information? • What research outputs can be used to communicate findings to target audiences? <p><i>Notes: Target audiences may access information in different ways. For example, forest communities often rely on radio broadcasts rather than written documents for information. Research outputs should be tailored to the intended audience, including use of appropriate languages and formats.</i></p>
<p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the potential political or reputational risks of implementing the assessment? <p><i>Notes: Researchers should identify any risks to conducting the assessment or potential barriers to achieving assessment goals. Strategies for mitigating or avoiding risks can then be developed.</i></p>

2.2 Assessment Design

Once researchers have identified the general objective, target audience, and potential use of the assessment data, the next step is to consider the design of the assessment. Critical parameters include the scope and scale of the assessment. Researchers may want to consider engaging external stakeholders in this process (Box 2).

Box 2: Engaging Stakeholders in Assessment Planning

Forest governance is shaped by a broad range of actors, including government officials, legislators, forest communities, indigenous peoples, academia, nongovernmental organizations, and other members of civil society. Engaging these stakeholders in the planning process can help ensure that the needs, interests, and perceptions of stakeholder groups are reflected in assessment design and implementation. Stakeholder engagement enhances the quality and credibility of the assessment, raises the profile of the assessment, and can generate new dialogue on how to solve governance problems.

Early engagement can introduce influential decision makers to the GFI indicators and raise their awareness of the assessment process. It may also be used to solicit stakeholder input into the objectives and design of the assessment, which may help generate “buy-in” and create a sense of ownership over assessment results. Methods for gathering input may include one-on-one meetings, focus groups, workshops, or rapid surveys.

Deciding how to engage stakeholders depends largely on assessment priorities, funding, and interest from external groups. Many tools exist to aid researchers in deciding what forms of stakeholder engagement are appropriate and who should be involved. Annex 1 provides a list of tools for stakeholder identification and engagement.

Scope

The assessment objective helps define the substantive scope of the assessment and guides researchers in selecting indicators. For example, if the objective of the assessment is to help design a new law on public access to information on forests, the scope of the assessment will be focused on indicators that evaluate the extent to which the legal framework currently promotes transparency. The GFI pilot assessments identified trade-offs between conducting a comprehensive assessment of governance topics and investigating topics in depth. Researchers should therefore consider whether their assessments will be broad or narrow in scope and the level of detail required to achieve assessment objectives. Researchers should also consider the resources available and the time period for conducting the assessment in order to identify a manageable number of indicators.

The GFI framework identifies components and principles of forest governance that relate to six main themes. This organization provides a potential starting point for defining the scope of the assessment (Table 5).

Table 5: Potential Options for Narrowing the Assessment Scope

Themes	As discussed in Chapter 1, GFI groups indicators according to themes and subthemes. These categories are designed to orient the researcher. Each subtheme is organized around a particular issue, such as design of land use plans, forest law enforcement, or administration of forest revenues. Each section attempts to assess the subtheme of interest holistically by examining relevant laws, actors, and practices.
Components	Each GFI indicator assesses a particular component of governance: actors, rules, and/or practices related to the relevant subtheme. Assessment scope could also be organized around one of these components. Examples might include an analysis of land tenure laws, or an assessment of forest sector actors to identify capacity-building needs.
Principles	An assessment may also be designed to take an in-depth look at a particular governance principle, such as the overall quality of public participation in a given country or region. For example, researchers might apply indicators from the public participation subtheme to a range of topics, in addition to drawing on specific participation indicators in the

land use and forest management themes.
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Assessment objectives may not always be aligned with the organization of the indicators, although themes and subthemes can still be used as a guide for identifying relevant indicators. In particular, assessments aimed at informing new policies, programs, or projects—such as REDD+ programs or implementation of FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements—are likely to be cross-cutting. Table 6 below provides a theoretical example of how relevant indicators can be selected from across the relevant subthemes.

Table 6: Example of Indicator Selection

Objective	Scope	Subtheme	Indicators
Identify reforms needed to ensure compliance of logging operations with new timber legality licenses	Assessing compliance requires an understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal obligations for logging operations (e.g., technical, financial, social) • Current levels of compliance with legal obligations • Effectiveness of law enforcement in monitoring compliance 	Legal and policy framework for forest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal basis for forest management planning • Harvesting standards and controls
		Concession allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal basis for allocating concessions • Concession allocation in practice • Social and environmental requirements in concession contracts • Compliance with social and environmental requirements in concession contracts
		Forest management practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of forest management plans • Capacity of forest managers
		Forest law enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal basis for forest-related offenses and penalties • Legal basis for the powers of law enforcement officers • Capacity of law enforcement bodies • Monitoring and enforcement of forest law enforcement operations • Monitoring and enforcement of timber supply chains • Prosecution of forest crimes • Application of penalties
		Administration of forest charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal basis for forest charges • Measures to promote compliance with forest charges • Collection of forest charges
		Private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal basis for corporate financial transparency • Compliance of companies with financial transparency requirements

When defining assessment scope, researchers should also consider supplementing indicators from the Forest Tenure, Land Use, Forest Management, and Forest Revenue themes with indicators on Cross-Cutting Institutions or Cross-Cutting Issues. Many of these indicators ask broader questions about the enabling environment in which forest and land laws are made and implemented—for example, in examining legislative processes, the role of the judiciary or the functioning of executive agencies. The

target audience of the assessment may also help narrow the scope, or identify where additional indicators may be of use. For example, an assessment focused on informing development of a new tenure law might also complete indicators from the legislature subtheme to better understand the lawmaking process and how the target audience—that is, legislators—typically uses information when drafting laws.

Scale of assessment

The “scale” of the assessment refers to the geographic unit of area in which the indicators are applied. Assessment scale often follows administrative boundaries. It could also refer to areas such as land use classifications (e.g. a forest reserve), contracts (e.g., logging concessions), or ecological boundaries (e.g., a watershed). Several different approaches for the scale of an assessment are described in Table 7.

Table 7: Potential Options for Assessment Scale

Approach	Description	Example
Nested	Assess across vertical scales (e.g., national, subnational, local)	Assessment of national system of forest law enforcement supported by case evidence from fieldwork in several regions
Comparative	Assess multiple units of the same type or at the same geographic scale	Comparative assessment of governance in a sample of community-managed forest areas and nearby forest concessions under private sector management
Case study	Assess in a specific area	Case study assessment of governance in an area identified as a potential REDD+ project pilot site

The GFI pilot assessments all used a nested approach that included assessment of national laws and institutions as well as subnational scales. In Brazil, many natural resource management activities are decentralized to the states, which have their own laws on forest, land use, and environmental issues. Since GFI partners conducted the assessment at both national scale and in two states of Brazil, many of the indicators were applied three times. In both Cameroon and Indonesia, where major laws and decisions related to forest resources are centralized, indicators related to laws were only applied at the national level. Partners supplemented national legal analysis with data from case study districts that described how laws were carried out in practice. Box 3 provides additional insights into identifying case study areas. In deciding on the scale of assessment, researchers should consider the following questions:

- At what scale are decisions made and implemented about the topic of assessment?
- Which level of government holds primary responsibility for natural resource management?
- Is the assessment trying to compare governance in different areas (e.g., across levels of government, in different forest concessions)?
- At what scale do the target audiences generally operate?
- At what scale are the relevant opportunities for influence using assessment results?
- What scale is feasible for the selected indicators in terms of research methods and resources?

Box 3: Identifying Case Studies

Although an assessment objective may be about a process, activity, or program that is national in scope, systematically assessing governance across the entire country is often not feasible. Researchers will need to narrow the scale of the research to a manageable area by selecting several “case study” areas at the

subnational level. Depending on the assessment objective, researchers may want to consider classical methods of sampling and research design to identify case studies.

Selection of subnational areas for conducting research is often a function of access and resources. For example, it may be costly to conduct field work in remote locations, so researchers may limit primary data collection to a manageable number of field sites. In addition, research teams may build on existing stakeholder relationships for collecting data, for example by interviewing communities they have worked with in the past. Such an approach may be useful in gaining the trust of those being interviewed for the research, but researchers should clearly acknowledge any potential bias this could create and take steps to mitigate it.

The GFI pilots assessments provide several options for choosing case studies:

- *Geographic coverage:* GFI Cameroon applied forest management indicators in three regions of Cameroon—South, Littoral, and East—in order to cover different parts of the forest zone.
- *Local partnerships:* A key consideration for identifying case study areas for GFI Indonesia—which conducted research in Central Kalimantan and West Nusa Tenggara—was the availability of local partners interested in working together on governance issues.
- *Environmental factors:* Since influencing REDD+ programs was a major objective of the Brazil assessment, partners conducted research in the states with the highest deforestation rates in Brazil: Pará and Mato Grosso.
- *Political factors:* GFI Indonesia’s choice of Central Kalimantan as a site for field research was in part due to its political importance as a pilot province in Indonesia’s REDD+ process.

2.3 Tailoring the Indicators

The GFI indicators are a flexible, globally relevant methodology. Since the indicators are designed to apply to a wide range of contexts, they may be less able to capture the nuance of local governance arrangements. Thus, it can be useful to tailor the GFI indicators in order to clarify terms and concepts or to ensure that the assessment covers a suitable range of locally relevant issues.

Decisions about whether to tailor indicators depend on the assessment objectives, audience, and resources available. Researchers may tailor the indicators themselves or launch a process that involves external actors. The latter approach can be particularly useful if capacity-building, creating dialogue, or generating early “buy-in” from target audiences are key elements of the assessment strategy.

Multistakeholder engagement in planning can strengthen support for the assessment process, improve the design, and establish a user base for the results. It can also facilitate implementation by creating indicators that are easier to apply to national or local circumstances.

But what does it mean to “tailor” an indicator? The experience of the GFI Indonesia network provides some concrete examples of how to tailor global indicators to a specific country. After conducting its pilot assessment, the GFI Indonesia network launched a multistakeholder process with the National Forestry Council to adapt the GFI global indicators to the Indonesian context. GFI Indonesia aimed to produce an Indonesian forest governance standard and to create a more usable tool for the local level. By ensuring that the indicators were available in Indonesian and using more familiar terminology, GFI Indonesia has been able to facilitate uptake of the GFI approach by training local CSOs.

Examples of changes made during the tailoring process include:

- *Adding new legal indicators.* The GFI Indonesia tailoring process created 75 new indicators. GFI Indonesia wanted to capture the complex, stratified nature of the Indonesian legal system. Many of the new indicators are designed to assess laws and the functioning of the legislature in greater detail.
- *Using locally relevant terminology.* Clarifying terminology is a particularly important method for tailoring indicators to enhance local understanding. Changing indicators to reference specific institutions, processes, laws, or locally used terms makes it significantly easier for in-country stakeholders to understand and apply the indicators. One simple example is changing “land use planning” to “spatial planning” in order to reflect the relevant process in Indonesia.
- *Eliminating indicators.* GFI Indonesia was able to omit global indicators that were not relevant in Indonesia; for example, indicators relating to private forest management.
- *Prioritizing community actors.* Many of the additions to the GFI Indonesia indicators were designed to better assess the capacity, needs, and participation of community actors in decision making on land and forests in Indonesia.

When considering whether to tailor the indicators, it is useful to reflect on the amount of time and resources available for the tailoring process, as well as whether external stakeholders are interested in participating. Researchers interested in tailoring indicators may also look to lessons from other initiatives. For example, the [REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards](#) initiative is supporting multistakeholder processes to develop country-specific indicators based on a global standard in nine countries.

2.4 Resources and Timeline

Approaches to allocating financial resources, personnel, and time to conduct an assessment will vary widely depending on the objectives, scope, and scale of the assessment. This section outlines some general issues to consider when budgeting for and planning an assessment.

Financial resources

Budgeting will likely take place concurrently with the other steps in the planning process, since awareness of the available resources is critical to making decisions about the scope and scale of the assessment. The cost of conducting an assessment varies significantly depending on the scope and scale of the assessment, the amount of fieldwork required, and the general costs of paying researchers and collecting data in the country where the assessment takes place. While researchers may have a general budget identified before launching the assessment process, a more specific budgeting process should be undertaken once the scope and scale of the assessment have been defined. If, after these resource considerations have been made, the initial scope of the assessment seems unachievable, an adjustment and reprioritization of the indicators may be necessary.

Researchers should be sure to include planning and outreach costs in the assessment budget, in addition to the cost of conducting the research itself. Some general costs include:

- *Fixed costs:* Ongoing costs of the assessment typically include staff or consultant salaries, supplies and materials, and in some cases general institutional costs, such as facilities and support services.
- *Planning:* Planning phase costs may include workshops to train researchers on the indicators, costs of engaging stakeholders to help design the assessment, or costs of processes to tailor the indicators.

- *Data collection and analysis:* Primary data collection—such as conducting interviews, convening focus groups, and implementing surveys—is likely to be the major cost in the data collection phase. Additional costs may include convening meetings to review results, either internally or with external stakeholders.
- *Publication:* Costs of publishing any written outputs of the assessment should be considered up front. These will typically include editing, production costs, and printing.
- *Outreach and convening:* Outreach activities may take many forms, but they often include convening meetings, workshops, or larger events to share findings or build momentum for reform.

Assessment teams

Deciding who will collect data or be responsible for other aspects of the assessment process is a highly contextual question, particularly since groups using the GFI indicators could include government agencies, CSOs, forest communities, the private sector, or a coalition of different groups. Assessment teams may be composed of full-time staff of the institutions conducting the assessment, consultants, or a combination of the two. When making decisions about who will conduct an assessment, the following issues should be considered:

- *Size of team.* The size of the assessment team should be adequate to complete the identified indicators within the desired timeline. When planning the assessment, it is also useful to consider whether team members will be working full time on the assessment or if they have additional responsibilities that may limit their availability.
- *Expertise.* Since the governance of forests touches on a range of political, legal, social, economic, and environmental issues, assessment teams should possess some knowledge in these areas, as well as experience using social science research methods. For example, the GFI civil society coalitions bring together organizations with complementary expertise in issues such as tenure, forest monitoring, community engagement, and environmental law.
- *Roles and responsibilities.* Particularly if assessment teams include representatives of multiple institutions, defining clear roles and responsibilities is crucial to ensure that all parties have a shared understanding of how the work will be divided. Assigning roles could consist of dividing up the indicators to be completed by each team member or institution, as well as dividing administrative tasks such as overall management, logistical coordination, quality control, or outreach and communications.
- *Link to objectives.* The question of who conducts the assessment may be linked to overall assessment objectives. For example, assessments aimed at capacity-building may seek out target audiences without expertise to play a role in the assessment, since the process of conducting an assessment can be used as a learning exercise.

Timeline

Breaking the research down into a concrete schedule is also an important part of the planning process. It is often difficult to predict at the outset how much time will be required to complete the assessment, particularly if the assessment involves substantial primary data collection. The GFI pilot assessments were implemented over the course of a year, including time for iterative review of results and follow-up research. The GFI research teams found it challenging to conduct a comprehensive assessment in that amount of time, but as the original field-testers of the assessment tool they did not have detailed guidance in planning or completing the indicators. Table 8 presents an example of a timeline for conducting an assessment, including breaking the research down into specific steps.

When creating a research timeline, researchers should consider the following tips:

- *Be realistic.* For researchers creating a timeline, this is particularly important if the assessment plans to use interviews, surveys, or other forms of primary data collection. Respondents such as government officials or CSO experts may frequently be unavailable, or collecting data in remote areas may be challenging due to lack of infrastructure or roads that are impassable at certain times of year.
- *Plan holistically.* The data collection phase represents only one stage of the assessment process. Time for planning the research, including optional exercises such as training assessment teams, tailoring indicators, or engaging stakeholders in assessment design, should also be factored in.
- *Incorporate time for review.* Regular meetings to review progress, identify data gaps, and plan any follow-up research that is required are integral to ensuring assessment quality.
- *Identify specific deadlines.* Any deadlines related to the end of funding, seasonal changes that affect data collection, or time-bound opportunities for influence (such as a legislative process or public comment period) should be identified and incorporated into the assessment timeline.

Table 8: A Sample Assessment Timeline

ACTIVITY	PERIOD																		RESPONSIBILITY
Identification of sources and methods	■																		Team leader and lead researcher
Collection of documents	■	■	■	■															Research team
Document analysis and response to indicators on rules	■	■	■	■	■	■													Team leader, lead researcher and research assistants
Case study/ interviews of actors					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■						Lead researcher and research assistants
Midterm review meeting									■	■									Team leader
Data verification																	■		Lead researcher/team leader
Draft report																		■	Team leader and lead researcher
Meeting on reporting																		■	Team leader and lead researcher
Finalize report																		■	Team leader and lead researcher
National launch																		■	Team leader

Chapter 3: Data Collection

This chapter delves into the details of the research process. It presents an overview of common research methods and data sources for forest governance assessment, provides guidance on creating a research plan, and discusses challenges and best practices for collecting governance data.

3.1 Data Sources and Research Methods

Robust data collection practices are a critical component of the assessment. Data that can provide an indication of the quality of governance—for example, the quality of public participation or coordination of institutions—are often not documented or may be subjective. Assessments typically rely on a mix of primary and secondary data sources to gather as much evidence as possible about the issue being assessed in order to draw conclusions about the state of the governance issue being evaluated.

The choice of method will depend on each indicator or element of quality. Indicators that assess content of laws or plans can be answered by reviewing the relevant documents. Many practice-oriented indicators ask about less straightforward qualities, such as adequacy of expertise or effectiveness of stakeholder participation. The GFI indicators aim to break these complex issues down in a structured way that facilitates collection of objective evidence to answer the question. Researchers should keep in mind, however, that collecting data on governance topics (such as the quality of public participation or the extent to which government actors are accountable to the public interest) will often rely to some extent on perception-based data.

The indicator worksheets in Part II of the Guidance Manual provide initial guidance to researchers on research methods and sources for each indicator. Researchers should use this guidance as a starting point for choosing methods and sources, but should also tailor these choices based on the objectives, scope, scale, and context of the assessment. Additional discussion of the indicator guidance and how to use it can be found in Part II. Below we discuss common sources of information and research methods in greater detail.

Secondary data

Many of the GFI indicators assess the content of laws, policies, plans, and contracts or the availability of certain documents to assess levels of transparency. This entails gathering and analyzing existing secondary data such as laws, policies, government reports, and other published research (Table 9). Part II of the GFI Manual provides specific guidance on examples of documents to collect for each indicator.

Table 9: Typology of Useful Documents

Category	Document
Legal documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constitution• Laws• Decrees and regulations• Court records

Other government sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy documents • Legislative records • Data from statistical institutes • Agency budgets • Administrative records • Performance reports
Civil society sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research papers • Notes and reports from events • Independent monitoring reports • Academic literature • Media reports

In conducting the GFI pilot assessments, the GFI partners identified significant challenges for accessing data in Brazil, Cameroon, and Indonesia (Box 4). Despite these challenges, we found a variety of potential ways to obtain documents.

- **Formal information requests:** An estimated 94 countries worldwide have legislation on freedom of information. These laws typically establish requirements and procedures governing disclosure of information to the public. They often include formal mechanisms for petitioning information and appealing denied information requests. In countries where such legislation exists, it can be an important tool for gathering data on governance. Even where information requests are denied, documenting this process can inform assessment results by providing insight into the functioning of country’s transparency systems.
- **Informal information requests:** Informal information requests—for example, ones that use personal relationships with government contacts—are often necessary in cases where access to information legislation does not exist, or when government agencies are reluctant to share information with researchers.
- **Legal databases:** For accessing laws and regulations, a variety of free online databases are available. For example, the US Library of Congress maintains the [Global Legal Information Network](#) (GLIN) and [Guide to Law Online](#), which compile laws from around the world.
- **Other online resources:** A variety of other online resources can be helpful when conducting governance assessment. Government agencies may make certain information publicly available via website. Civil society websites or donor programs may be valuable resources. In Cameroon, for example, the Sectoral Program on Forests and Environment, an initiative supported by the German Technical Cooperation (GIZ), has established a website with an extensive bibliography of laws, project reports, research documents, and studies that are available for download. Websites of independent monitors or international initiatives working in specific countries can also provide useful information. For example, Global Witness’s [Forest Transparency Report Card](#) provides transparency data related to forests and land use for seven countries.

Box 4: Data Collection Challenges from the GFI pilot assessments

Although the GFI pilot assessments were conducted in three very different contexts, they identified common challenges in accessing of governance data, particularly from government sources.

- *Existence.* In many cases, GFI partners found that certain types of information were not being collected. Examples include documentation of consultation processes, minutes of coordination meetings between agencies, and information on management of forest revenues and funds.
- *Quality.* Available information was sometimes inaccurate, incomplete, or out of date. Examples

include incomplete administrative records for registration of land ownership as well as management plans.

- *Accessibility.* Perhaps the most persistent challenge for the GFI pilot assessments in accessing information was the reticence of government institutions to disclose it. For example, Cameroon lacks clear procedures or laws requiring government agencies to proactively disclose information. Many government officials at the forest agency were therefore unsure what information could be shared publicly.

All of these limitations create obstacles for completing an assessment, but they also point to concrete opportunities to improve the existence and quality of governance data in a given country or region. Government transparency and public access to information are fundamental aspects of good governance—for the forest sector and beyond—that help create more informed citizens and more accountable governments. Documenting transparency challenges encountered during the assessment may help prompt new efforts to generate governance information or identify specific reforms for information systems.

Primary data collection

Primary data collection is critical for documenting how laws and processes are implemented in practice. It may also be an important strategy for mitigating poor access to documentation. Primary data collection often relies on soliciting stakeholder perspectives and opinions on the topics of interest. Each indicator has specific guidance on which stakeholder groups may be most relevant to provide certain types of data. These may include government officials, law enforcement officers, parliament members, municipal or state level authorities, the private sector, community and indigenous leaders, academics, journalists, CSO staff, implementing agencies or development agencies based in country, or other technical experts. Potential methods for collecting primary data are outlined below. When developing approaches for data collection, researchers should seek to include a broad range of stakeholder groups.

Interviews: Interviews are conducted in a one-on-one setting and can be structured or semistructured. A structured interview follows a set list of questions. Structured interviews may be most appropriate when seeking to compare responses from multiple interviews. A semistructured interview is more flexible and promotes two-way discussion during the interview. The interviewer prepares a questionnaire that serves as a framework for the discussion, but he or she can adapt or add new questions based on responses given during the interview. Semistructured interviews were one of the most important methods of data collection in the GFI pilot assessments, as they give the researcher the flexibility to build off the structure provided by the indicators.

Focus groups: Focus groups are interviews conducted with two or more stakeholders at the same time. The interviewer prepares questions for the group and allows respondents to discuss their answers. Results tend to be on the experiences, observations, and opinions of participants. This method of bringing different stakeholders together in a room is useful for identifying areas of concern for stakeholders, identifying convergent and divergent opinions on a particular issue, and examining social interactions between groups of actors. Focus groups can convene groups of different actors or a single type of actor. The latter approach may be particularly useful for engaging populations that may be marginalized or unlikely to speak up in mixed settings, such as indigenous peoples or rural women. Focus groups should be conducted in a participatory manner, with a neutral party as facilitator who allows respondents to drive the discussion.

Participant observation: Participant observation is often used for studying the environment and practices of a particular group. In participant observation, the researcher may maintain total distance from the group or process being observed, may participate as a bystander, or may participate as a member of the group or process taking place. Participant observation is useful for indicators that evaluate process, such as those focused on participation in decision making. Observational approaches may be particularly relevant for assessments focused on evaluating ongoing decision-making processes, or assessments focused on community level dynamics and interactions.

Surveys: Surveys involve sampling a population to gather data about a particular area of interest. They are usually administered via questionnaires that cover a broad range of topics. Survey questions may be structured as yes or no responses, multiple choice, rating scales, or they may ask open-ended questions. Surveys are often used to gather data from a relatively large sample size or population. Samples may be statistically representative of the broader population or involve stratification in which subgroups of a population are identified and targeted. Surveys may be particularly useful for obtaining data from specific stakeholder groups about their experiences with a particular type of process or service. For example, a survey could be designed to ask landowners or managers about their experiences registering property rights.

Testing Systems: Many GFI indicators test the functioning of government systems and services. Examples include indicators that assess the content of information systems, how information disclosure procedures function in practice, or the availability and affordability of government services. Testing these systems is a useful way to generate new data on the responsiveness and effectiveness of government systems. For example, when conducting their pilot assessment, GFI Brazil sent 16 information requests to the state and federal environmental agencies. They tracked whether and when requests were answered and noted that 43 percent were answered within 1 month, 6 percent in less than 3 months, and 25 percent in more than 3 months, while 25 percent were never answered.

Choosing research methods for collecting primary data

In most cases it will be useful to select a combination of data collection methods to obtain primary data. Interviews were a primary method of data collection in all three GFI pilot assessments. For this reason, the detailed indicator guidance in Part II generally suggests that researchers conduct interviews, but approaches such as focus groups or surveys could be substituted depending on the priorities of the research. Additional resources and tools for understanding and implementing each method are provided in Annex 1.

Several key considerations for considering the trade-offs of different approaches to primary data collection are listed below, and Table 10 provides corresponding guidance questions.

- *Time and accessibility.* Researchers should consider when it is more time- and cost-efficient to conduct research with individuals or in groups. This includes identifying how often respondents are available and the costs associated with each method. In particular, the costs of conducting interviews or surveys with a broad range of participants may be considerable. Methods such as focus groups or participant observation often allow researchers to more quickly and cheaply gather feedback from a larger group.
- *Level of detail.* The choice of research methods may have trade-offs in the level of detail and specificity of the information provided. Methods such as interviews and surveys rely on questionnaires that give the researcher a high level of control over the scope of questions asked. Both methods also allow researchers to ask increasingly specific questions about the issue being assessed. As such, these methods may be more appropriate for detailed studies. Focus groups and

participant observation may be more appropriate for researchers looking to assess general perceptions of governance issues or to highlight areas of agreement and disagreement on particular topics.

- *Social context.* Some respondents may be reticent to share their experiences or perceptions of governance in a group setting. This may be particularly true of traditionally marginalized groups such as indigenous peoples or women. Researchers should be sensitive to the social context in which the fieldwork is being conducted and identify forms of data collection appropriate to the target respondent or group.
- *Data management.* Researchers should consider how they plan to manage and process data, and in what formats they want to present overall assessment results. Surveys are particularly suitable for researchers seeking to generate new, systematic data on governance trends. Interviews may also be used for this purpose but may be difficult to implement on a large scale.

Table 10: Guiding Questions for Research Methods

	Guiding Questions
<i>Time and accessibility</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the allotted time frame for conducting the research? • Are target respondents in reasonably accessible locations? • What are the relative costs of administering the different research methods?
<i>Level of detail</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the research questions to be answered general or specific? • Are the research questions designed to assess knowledge that is unique to the target respondent or to assess general perceptions on governance?
<i>Social context</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are target respondents more likely to provide information in a one-on-one or a group setting? • Are there potential social or cultural barriers to obtaining feedback through certain research methods?
<i>Data management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the research aim to generate new data on governance trends or to verify conclusions from other sources? • Is the research collecting the same data from a range of groups? • How will the collected data be managed and processed? • How will data be presented?

3.2 Creating a Research Plan

Within a given subtheme, multiple indicators may often be answered using the same data sources. Developing a coherent research plan is critical to maximizing the efficiency of the assessment. A research plan should clearly identify what data need to be collected, the data collection methods that will be used, and a general timeline for completing the indicators.

1. *Identify what is being assessed for each indicator.* Each indicator includes guidance on how to define the institution, law, or activity that should be assessed—what we will call the “object of assessment.” For each indicator, researchers should identify the object of assessment as a first step. Indicators in the same subtheme should be applied to the same assessment objects. For example, a researcher interested in completing the Sectoral Land Use indicators should identify a specific sector of interest for which to apply all indicators in the subtheme. Researchers interested in multiple sectors would need to apply each indicator multiple times.

2. *Identify research methods and data sources.* For each indicator, researchers should identify what data are needed, potential sources, and an appropriate research method for obtaining the data. It is often useful to begin the assessment with an exploration of existing secondary data on the topic or topics of interest through a data mapping exercise. This can help identify data gaps that should be supplemented with primary data collection. Guidance on data sources and research methods is provided for each indicator in Part II but may need to be adapted depending on the availability of data.
3. *Group methods and sources.* When planning research for indicators in the same theme or subtheme, it is useful to holistically evaluate the methods and sources required. In particular, it is useful to group questions requiring data from the same sources to expedite the research. Table 11 provides a sample approach for research planning using the Forest Charge Administration subtheme.
4. *Sequence the research.* Finally, researchers may want to consider the order in which they conduct the research. For example, in all three GFI pilot assessments researchers typically started by completing the legal indicators. Beginning with document analysis was a useful way to become familiar with the GFI approach and format, and it facilitated comparisons of law and practice when conducting subsequent fieldwork.

Table 11: A Sample GFI Research Plan

Indicator	Assessment Object	Elements of Quality	Research Method	Data Sources
Legal basis for forest charges	The laws and decrees that establish taxes, fees, or other monetary charges for forest use	All	Legal analysis, could be supplemented with interviews with legal experts	Forest policies, laws, decrees, or implementing texts related to administration of the forest charge system
Review and revision of forest charges	The processes and institutional capacity for determining rules for monetary charges	1,2,3,4	Interviews	Government officials who set the rules for and enforce the forest charge system
		1,3,5,6	Document analysis	Records of processes to review forest charges, final decisions or rules governing the forest charge system
		5,6	Interviews	Stakeholders of the forest charge system, forest owners, environmental lawyers

Types and levels of forest charges	Rules of the forest charge systems that determine types and levels of charges	All	Document analysis, interviews with officials if review does not provide sufficient detail	Forest decrees, regulations, implementing texts, guidance manuals, and other official documents defining the details of the forest charge system
Measures to promote compliance with forest charges	Systems and procedures for disclosure and ensuring compliance	1,2,3,4	Testing systems, document analysis	Systems or agency responsible for public disclosure of information on forest charges
		5	Interviews	Interviews with government officials responsible for applying penalties for noncompliance with forest charges
Collection of forest charges	Government agency responsible for collecting forest charges	1,2,4	Interviews	Agency and staff for collection of forest charges
		3	Document analysis	Administrative records of forest charge collection

3.3 Good Practices for Data Collection

Although assessment objectives, design, and methods will vary, we identify some general good practices that apply for any governance assessment process:

- *Triangulation.* While in some cases a single source may provide enough evidence to answer an element of quality, in general researchers should triangulate responses to ensure that there is sufficient evidence to draw robust conclusions. This may mean using both documents and field responses to compare perspectives, or it may require conducting interviews or surveys with many different types of actors.
- *Transparency.* It is critical that any stakeholders participating in the assessment process be clearly informed of the goals of the assessment, the methodology being used, and how their responses will be used. Such an approach raises awareness and understanding of assessment goals and ensures that respondents are comfortable answering questions. Clear explanations of the method may also further assessment goals by demonstrating to respondents the utility of collecting governance data.
- *Documenting the assessment process.* Documenting the planning and conducting of research is often overlooked, but it is critical for quality control and transparency. Researchers should record basic information about sources used and interviews conducted, document initial strategy and planning sessions, describe any processes to tailor indicators, and keep detailed information on when and where the data were collected. Documenting the assessment process—particularly research methods—will also be critical to any future assessments or ongoing monitoring. Furthermore, transparent documentation can enhance the credibility of the assessment when communicating results.
- *Confidentiality.* Given the potentially sensitive nature of the issues covered by the assessment, the researcher should protect the confidentiality of the interview responses gathered as part of the assessment. For example, individual responses to questions or any information that can be used to identify an individual who was interviewed (e.g., name, job title) should not be shared without

the respondent's explicit permission. Guaranteeing confidentiality can help build trust with interview subjects and improve their willingness to share sensitive information.

- *Awareness of limitations.* Researchers should transparently document any limitations or potential bias that stems from the assessment approach or research methods used. For example, methods such as interviews or focus groups tend to measure perceptions rather than empirical facts. While these methods can provide important observations and experiences, they can also yield information that is subjective or incomplete. Acknowledging these limitations as part of the assessment can help ensure that results are not taken out of context or misrepresented.

Chapter 4: Analyzing and Presenting Assessment Results

Analyzing data is unique to each assessment, but in this chapter we provide some lessons and insights on data analysis and presentation, including discussions of methods for scoring indicators and presenting assessment results.

4.1 Compiling and Analyzing Data

Once the data have been collected, the research team must consolidate and analyze them. Indicator worksheets in Part II provide the structure for compiling data gathered. Evidence extracted from documents, field notes, interview transcripts, and other sources should be synthesized and critically examined to draw a conclusion about the situation of governance as broken down in the elements of quality. The worksheets provided in Part II are designed to provide an internal system for recording and managing assessment data. Researchers may devise other approaches to storing and managing data, but they should be sure to be thorough in documenting the assessment object, evidence collected, and sources.

Data analysis

Analyzing governance assessment results is a highly contextual process. Most data analysis will identify areas that need improvement—for example, by noting weaknesses or gaps in existing laws, capacity, or practices. Once an initial process to identify challenges and gaps has been done, researchers may then begin to arrange or prioritize findings according to common themes or areas of interest.

Analysis of assessment data may occur at several different levels. For example, data analysis may refer to:

- Analyzing how well a specific element of quality has been met
- Analyzing data and drawing conclusions about the quality of a specific indicator
- Analyzing strengths and weaknesses across a subtheme or other group of related indicators
- Analyzing strengths and weaknesses across all indicators completed

The detailed indicator guidance in Part II is designed to assist researchers in drawing conclusions about elements of quality and indicators by providing detailed guidance on what to look for and examples of good practices. In this section, we focus on the third and fourth levels listed above; that is, how data compiled into indicator worksheets are subsequently analyzed to identify major strengths, weaknesses, trends, and conclusions.

The objective and scope of the assessment often provides the specific lens for analyzing the data. For example, if the assessment objective is to determine how well a new law promoting community forest management is functioning, the framework for analysis is relatively clear. Researchers would analyze what the collected data indicate about the level and quality of the law's implementation. Identifying clear and specific assessment objectives and scope at the outset of the assessment process can therefore facilitate data analysis.

In some instances, data analysis will be less straightforward, or researchers may identify interesting trends in the data that prompt the need for new approaches to analysis. This may be particularly true in the case of broad governance assessments that have only identified general objectives. For example, the GFI pilot assessments deliberately focused on conducting comprehensive evaluations, and analyzed the data they collected in order to prioritize subsequent research and advocacy. While this approach allows

the researcher a high level of flexibility, particularly if the assessment yields surprising data, it can also complicate quick analysis. Some additional ways researchers could analyze assessment findings in such a scenario include:

- *Legal analysis.* Researchers could analyze what the assessment data show about whether and how good governance practices identified in the GFI legal indicators are codified in the legal framework. Identifying gaps in the legal framework can aid efforts to inform legal or policy reform processes. For example, laws may call for consultation during certain types of processes but lack specific procedures to ensure that consultations are inclusive and accountable.
- *Rules vs. practice.* Identifying where practice deviates from rules, and the underlying reasons why this occurs, can be a critical step toward identifying specific solutions. Poor implementation may indicate that the rules themselves are of poor quality; it may also suggest broader lack of capacity or political will.
- *Actors.* Analyzing actors and institutions can aid researchers in identifying actors who require additional capacity-building or support. For example, if researchers found that forest communities are unaware of procedures for registering their lands, this could identify a clear need for funding and technical support to aid them in securing land rights.
- *Governance principles.* Focusing the analysis on governance principles may reveal interesting trends in how these principles are applied or defined in a given context. It may help researchers identify links between disparate issues; for example, poor coordination could be revealed to be a systemic problem across themes of land use planning, forest management, and forest revenues. Analyzing how principles are applied may also reveal certain values when it comes to good governance; for example, a lack of mechanisms for monitoring and oversight in forest and land management could signify that accountability is not considered to be of importance in managing resources.
- *National vs. subnational.* Particularly in countries with ongoing decentralization processes, analyzing assessment results to identify differences between national and subnational scales may reveal important areas where additional resources, capacity-building, and knowledge-sharing are needed. For example, researchers could find that subnational systems for managing money are significantly weaker than national systems because of a lack of training.

Scoring

Scoring is the process of assigning values or rankings in order to summarize or evaluate the overall findings. Many governance assessment methodologies use scoring as a means of assigning values that facilitate presentation of data or ranking of countries. For example, the World Governance Indicators aggregate data from various surveys and assessments to rank country performance on indicators such as voice and accountability or government effectiveness.

Scoring of the GFI indicators may or may not be necessary, depending on the objectives of the assessment. For example, if the aim is to diagnose a governance problem in order to suggest a solution, the process of systematically collecting and documenting evidence for each element of quality can provide significant insight without assigning a score to indicator. However, scoring may be useful for certain applications, particularly for monitoring trends over time.

The GFI indicator worksheets suggest a possible scoring method that employs a scale from low to high to produce an overall rating for each indicator (Table 12). For each indicator, researchers attempt to respond to the normative statement in the element of quality with a yes or no response. The scoring system for the indicator sums the total of yes responses and produces a corresponding rating as summarized in Table 14.

While the scores are not quantitative, they assign a rating of performance that can be compared with other indicators.

Table 12: GFI Scoring Method

Values	Select
Not applicable/not assessed	
Zero to one element of quality (EOQ)	Low
Two EOQs	Low–Medium
Three EOQs	Medium
Four EOQs	Medium–High
Five or more EOQs	High

The GFI Brazil partners felt that a binary response (yes or no) was not adequate to assign an accurate value to each element of quality. They developed a four-tiered scoring system to capture the extent to which good governance is observed (Table 13). Each category of response is assigned a corresponding numerical value, which is average to create an overall score for each indicator.

Table 13: GFI Brazil Scoring Method

Indicator X					
Elements of quality (EOQs)	1	2	3	4	Explanation
	Never	Some-times	Often	Always	
EOQ1	X				
EOQ2				X	
EOQ3			X		
EOQ4	X				
Average score	2.25				
Overall performance	1–1.5				Very weak
	1.6–2.5				Weak
	2.6–3.5				Moderate
	3.6–4				Strong

Both of these examples provide useful methods for categorizing and comparing indicators. It is important, however, to note that scoring is optional and largely based on the assessment objectives and context in which the assessment is being conducted. Scoring can quickly and effectively convey complex governance information to a range of audiences through the use of charts and graphs. At the same time, scoring may obscure important contextual findings or be misinterpreted. Especially in countries where governance issues are politically sensitive, a low score can be viewed as a negative reflection on institutions, agencies, or individuals and may hinder researchers’ ability to generate constructive dialogue around assessment results. Researchers should keep these issues in mind when deciding whether scoring is appropriate.

Any scoring process should attempt to minimize subjectivity and promote consistency in assigning values. This is critical for comparing results for different indicators, as well as for comparing results over time. In order to ensure comparability and consistency, researchers could agree on assigned scores based on the evidence presented. Presentation of scoring results should include a transparent description of scoring methods and note any limitations or assumptions made. It may be also useful to provide a short qualitative description justifying the assigned score.

Review of results

Engaging interview subjects and other interested stakeholders in reviewing assessment results can provide an important opportunity to test the credibility of assessment results, particularly when relying heavily on perception-based data. Many existing initiatives have tools and lessons for engaging stakeholders and seeking review, some of which are listed in Annex 1. Here we provide insights into four main questions that should be asked when developing a process for stakeholder review of assessment data or results.

- *When.* Researchers may wish to share assessment data in early stages of data collection or analysis in order to incorporate feedback as soon as possible, or they may decide to wait until most of the analysis is complete. While upfront feedback is more easily incorporated into data analysis and assessment outputs, governance information can also be sensitive. Early review may be most appropriate if the goal of stakeholder review is to use feedback to revise the research or the final products of the assessment. If the goal is more focused on creating support for assessment conclusions, review should come after most of the data analysis is complete.
- *Who.* Feedback on results could be solicited from individuals who participated in the assessment process (i.e., as interview or survey respondents), target audiences for the assessment outputs (such as government officials, forest communities, or donor organizations), experts in natural resource management, or a combination of different groups. In general, researchers should link decisions about who will review results to assessment objectives; for example, researchers aiming to influence policy design would want to convene relevant policymakers.
- *How.* Researchers should carefully consider the format in which assessment results will be reviewed. Popular formats may include multistakeholder workshops, facilitated focus group discussions, one-on-one meetings, or even written review. The methods should also be tailored to assessment objectives and who is being asked for review. For example, researchers aiming to publish monitoring reports may solicit written feedback similar to a peer review process for an academic journal.
- *What.* Researchers should give careful thought to what specifically will be reviewed. Review of assessment data compiled in worksheets is challenging. Information will need to be consolidated and presented in an accessible format—particularly if researchers are using participatory formats such as workshops to engage reviewers.

The GFI pilot assessments each took a different approach to the review of results. For example, GFI Indonesia formed a National Advisory Panel of government, civil society, and academic experts to be advisors to the assessment process and provide feedback on a regular basis. GFI Cameroon held a series of workshops at local and national levels to get feedback on assessment findings and recommendations. GFI Brazil also solicited feedback from respondents who participated in the research phase. These experiences highlighted some specific lessons for engaging stakeholders in reviewing assessment results.

- *Allow sufficient time.* Whether review takes the form of a workshop or a written review, allowing sufficient time for the reviewer to become familiar with the method and data is critical. Ensuring time for review and discussion is particularly challenging when employing a workshop format; planning for review sessions should therefore seek to maximize discussion time.
- *Identify clear methods.* When engaging stakeholders in participatory methods of review, such as workshops or focus groups, researchers should set clear goals and identify specific methods for the review process. In particular, they should identify specific questions they want reviewers to answer with respect to the assessment data.

- *Be transparent.* Researchers should clearly articulate the methods for obtaining feedback to stakeholders participating in the review process. Terms of reference or lists of guiding questions are useful tools for ensuring transparency and facilitating understanding of the review process.
- *Tailor methods to the audience.* Researchers should use methods that are familiar to groups participating in the review process. For example, focus groups are typically better suited to local stakeholders or forest communities than written review of results.

4.2 Presenting Results

Deciding how to present results depends primarily on the purpose and intended outcome of the assessment. If the assessment aims at reform, the presentation is closely tied to the influence or advocacy strategy. It should also be tailored to the needs of the target audience, and focused on highlighting key messages as identified during data analysis.

Assessment outputs

Researchers may have already identified the desired outputs of the assessment during the planning process. In deciding on potential outputs, researchers consider the type of output that is most likely to reach and influence the target audience.

Common outputs for a governance assessment may include the following:

- *Reports.* The process of writing an assessment report requires researchers to conduct thorough analysis and think through the best way to report on the process and results of the assessment. As such, writing a report can be a valuable exercise in organizing results and honing key messages. Reports may also be seen as more credible than other forms of communication, especially if they have undergone extensive review. At the same time, busy government officials, forest managers, or forest communities may not use reports as a key source of information, and the costs of writing and publishing such documents may be prohibitive.
- *Focused case studies or policy briefs.* A single governance assessment may generate several smaller research products on different topics. For example, GFI Brazil has published several policy briefs based on pilot assessment findings. For example, a policy paper on governance of funds using GFI indicators can be accessed here: <http://www.imazon.org.br/publications/the-state-of-amazon/governance-deficiencies-of-environmental-and-forest-funds-in-para-and-mato-grosso-en>.
- *Newspaper or magazine articles.* GFI Indonesia has generated numerous articles focused on communicating assessment results to a wider audience. Bahasa Indonesia versions of these articles can be accessed here: <http://tatakelolahutan.wordpress.com/>.
- *Presentations.* Short presentations, whether delivered in workshops or in individual meetings with target audiences, can be effective ways to succinctly share assessment findings without investing significant time and resources in writing reports. This approach has been used often by GFI partners in workshops, international negotiations (e.g., the UNFCCC negotiations), and conferences to share experiences.
- *Brochures and posters.* Outputs such as brochures and posters are often important tools for engaging local level stakeholders, including forest communities and indigenous peoples. They may be used to communicate specific assessment findings, or to address information gaps identified as part of the assessment. For example, GFI Cameroon is developing tools aimed at building the capacity of local communities and local government authorities to understand their rights and obligations with respect to managing their allocated share of forest revenues.

Creating visual aids

Finding ways to present detailed, descriptive data on governance can be challenging. Visual aids can often help simplify descriptions and aid researchers in communicating key messages to target audiences.

Researchers should explore innovative ways to create visual aids that can summarize governance data in a compelling way. For example:

- *Summary tables.* Qualitative data can be packaged and presented in a concise way. GFI researchers have often used summary tables and charts to identify high-level challenges identified using the indicators. Table 14 provides an example from GFI Cameroon that presents a high-level overview of key findings from the assessment. In addition to being useful for listing challenges, summary tables can facilitate the comparison of strengths and weaknesses, or the linking of challenges to corresponding solutions.

Table 14: Example Summary of Key Findings from GFI Cameroon

Topic	Principle	Challenges
Land Allocation Rules and Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency • Capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws and policies are not subject to public participation and take the form of presidential decrees. • Several ministries have authority and interests in the forests. • Land use planning processes conducted in the 1990s are out of date and do not reflect the current threats of hydropower, large-scale agribusiness, and mining.
Participation and Access to Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency • Participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local communities, local government, mayors, and parliamentarians are excluded from land use decision making that impacts forests. • Information on land use changes is only made available after the decision has already been made. • Participation has not been institutionalized. • The local consultation requirement for classifying forests that exist is not well implemented.
Capacity of Forest Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity • Coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MINFOF local services, local governments, and communities lack capacity to implement laws and policies that govern forest management and forest revenues, giving way to poor governance practices and corruption.
Monitoring and Oversight Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability • Capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest officers intended to monitor timber extraction must cover large territories. • Communities lack rights to seek redress if they do not receive their 10 percent of revenues from forest area logging fees.

- *Charts and graphs.* As we discussed in the previous section, scoring indicators can aid researchers in creating charts and graphs to illustrate governance strengths and weaknesses, as well as to compare governance across multiple institutions, geographies, or other units of interest.

4.3 Good Practices for Communicating Assessment Results

There is no single approach to presenting governance assessment results. Nonetheless, the experience of the GFI network identifies some helpful tips for researchers to keep in mind when considering options for communicating about assessment results and recommendations.

- *Present detailed evidence.* A major strength of the GFI method is the generation of evidence that can be used to support governance findings. Presenting specific examples of strong or weak governance enhances the credibility of the claims being made. Evidence can take many forms, including numerical data, documented trends, results of focus groups, or experiences of forest sector actors.
- *Make specific recommendations.* The normative format of the GFI indicators facilitates development of specific recommendations. When presenting findings and making recommendations, it is important to be specific about the types of steps that could be taken to address the identified challenges. The indicators and guidance may provide ideas and examples.
- *Consider the audience.* Presentation of results should be tailored to the target audience. This may require developing a variety of outputs, each tailored to a specific group. In particular, the level of detail of findings and proposed solutions could vary. For example, a meeting to present findings to a forest agency administrator may focus on specific ways to improve information disclosure procedures, whereas a newspaper article on transparency might summarize transparency challenges for a broader audience.
- *Tell a story.* The GFI indicators break governance down in a technical way. While technical discussions may be appropriate for certain groups, relating governance challenges to human and environmental concerns can also be a compelling way to present information. Sharing stories or experiences—either from field data collected or from the process of doing the assessment—can help relate governance challenges to the concerns and interests of target audiences.
- *Avoid overly complex language.* It may be tempting to describe the GFI methodology in deep detail or list all of the indicators researched when presenting findings. While it is important to summarize the research methods, detailed discussions of indicators and elements of quality can be overwhelming for target audiences. Detailed information on how the research was conducted and indicators completed can often be provided in a report annex or on request to interested stakeholders.