Forest data and transparency: "Zoom" in on Costa Rica's experience

21 July 2020

Recording Link: https://youtu.be/Nftr9Kh6qac

Questions and Answers

For more information about the CBIT Forest project please visit the Boosting transparency of forest data page.

Costa Rica has made many efforts to monitor and conserve its forests. Since 2015, the government has been developing a national system for monitoring land cover, land use and ecosystems (SIMOCUTE: Sistema Nacional de Monitoreo de la Cobertura y Uso de la Tierra y Ecosistemas) that facilitates the collection, integration, management and dissemination of national-scale environmental data and information. SIMOCUTE is comprehensive, multidisciplinary and multipurpose, supporting various decision-making processes. The webinar held on 21 July 2020 (available at the above link) put the spotlight on SIMOCUTE, generating interesting discussion with participants raising many questions - a summary of which can be found below.

1. **What is the primary objective of SIMOCUTE?**

   To provide consistent and coherent information at a national scale on the state and changes of the country's land use, land cover and ecosystems. SIMOCUTE includes several coordinated subsystems that integrate field-based data with remote sensing based information to provide comprehensive data that can improve land use decision making and satisfy a variety of national and international reporting requirements.

2. **SIMOCUTE is based on open participatory discussion processes engaging a range of stakeholders and integration of data from various sources in order to provide information for the whole AFOLU sector. What are the values of this and what have been the challenges of this inclusive approach?**

   It takes more time and planning to organize the different dialogue processes and follow up, but at the same time this has provided us a fantastic opportunity to work together, understand each other and learn from each other and analyze new and more efficient strategies of monitoring across the entire landscape.

3. **What have been the challenges with the use of the sample-based approach adopted for SIMOCUTE and what high-resolution imagery have you been using?**

   Challenges:

   - Designing a sampling methodology that covers all the needs in the country.
   - Inter-institutional coordination to define the roles of the technical personnel responsible for carrying out the photo interpretation exercises.
   - Availability of updated high-resolution images.

   We are still exploring different imagery. Currently high resolution imagery for Costa Rica is available in Google Earth, Bing and Planet.

4. **How is the information on the SIMOCUTE platform validated?**

   Note that the platform has not yet been implemented. However, quality control protocols of the information are being designed under the governance defined in the proposal of the Executive Decree currently under consultation that will come to regulate the functioning of SIMOCUTE.

5. **What will the impact be of the new inter-ministerial Decree once endorsed, and how will this ensure and even further enhance the delivery of SIMOCUTE?**

   This very important Decree forms the political background of SIMOCUTE. It formalizes the joint coordination of the system by the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the national geographic institute CENIGA. It will enable the move from the design stage to the implementation stage, where we will be delivering various information products and expanding the use of our technological platform. This decree establishes commitment to the project at the highest political level, ensuring sustainability.

6. **Deforestation in Costa Rica has a serious impact on the environment and therefore may directly or indirectly contribute to flooding, desertification, sedimentation in rivers, loss of wildlife diversity, and the obvious sheer loss of timber. What are innovations to counter all this?**

   Within the framework of SIMOCUTE we are working to generate the most up-to-date information on the dynamics and impacts of deforestation in the country, to make available to the competent authorities, at the national government and local government levels, so that they can take appropriate actions.

7. **How is SIMCOCUTE helping local public and private actors to implement climate action? Are the data publicly available?**

   We are building the new modules of the SIMOCUTE technology platform where the different information products generated within the framework of this initiative will be shared and which will complement other public sources of information in the country such as SNIT, SINIA and SINAMECC.

8. **Does SIMOCUTE cover only biomass data or also other carbon pools such as soils? And does the system consider degradation?**

   These elements are important in the monitoring exercises carried out in SIMOCUTE. This has been incorporated into REDD + reports, in a process of continuous improvement, with all the reservoirs and activities.

9. **Is SIMOCUTE linked to any early warning system (e.g. forest fire detection)?**

   Such linkages are yet to be defined but there are indeed plans for the integration of early warning systems designed for the detection of forest fires and being currently implemented by the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC).

   As part of an initiative presented by Costa Rica to participate in the GEO-Google Earth Engine Program, Costa Rica has started working in an early warning system to tackle deforestation and forest degradation from illegal activities. This project is under development and the project proposal is available in this link: https://bit.ly/34Szi3k

10. **How are the max/min thresholds for secondary growth forests defined?**

    This link includes the regulations that define the criteria for managing secondary forests in Costa Rica.

    http://www.sinac.go.cr/ES/normativa/Decretos/Principio%20criterios%20e%20indicadores%20para%20el%20manejo%20sostenible%20de%20Bosques%20secundarios%20y%20la%20certificacion%20forestal%20en%20CR.pdf

Case study of Costa Rica

English: http://www.fao.org/3/ca8618en/ca8618en.pdf
French: http://www.fao.org/3/ca8618fr/ca8618fr.pdf
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