Making the Forest Sector Transparent

Background Paper: How do Report Cards Help?

Prepared by Global Witness May 2010

global witness
DAR
Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development
CED
sdi

Global Witness investigates and campaigns to prevent natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses.

References to 'Global Witness' in the report are to Global Witness Limited, a company limited by guarantee and incorporated in England (Company No. 2871809).

Global Witness Limited
6th Floor
Buchanan House
30 Holborn
London EC1N 2HS
Email: foresttransparency@globalwitness.org

© Global Witness Limited, 2010

This material has been funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the department's official policies.

Perú
Derecho Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (DAR)
www.dar.org.pe
Jr. Coronel Zegarra N°260
Jesús María
Lima, Perú
Project Leader:
Hugo Che Pui Deza
dar@dar.org.pe

Ghana
Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development (CIKOD)
www.cikodgh.org
PO Box MD
Madina, Accra, Ghana
Project Leader:
Willie Laate
wilraby@yahoo.com

Cameroon
Centre pour l'Environnment et le Développement (CED)
www.cedcameroun.org
BP 3430
Yaoundé
Cameroon
Project Leader:
Germain Djontu
ced@cedcameroun.org

Liberia
Sustainable Development Institute (SDI)
www.sdiliberia.org
PO Box 5678, Duarzon Village
Robertsfield Highway
Monrovia, Liberia
Project Leader:
Jonathan Yiah
listserve@sdiliberia.org

Table of Contents

1 Introduction 2

1.1 Overview of the '*Making the Forest Sector Transparent*' project 2

1.2 Rationale and structure of this background paper 2

2 A report card: exploring the concept through existing models 4

2.1 Common features of a report card 7

2.1.1 Report cards as assessment tools – comparing the models 7

2.1.2 Reliance on objective- and/or perceptions-based data 11

2.1.3 Powerful tools for making comparisons 12

2.1.4 Tools for policy change 12

2.2 When is a report card not a report card? 13

3 Defining and measuring 'transparency' 14

3.1 Conceptual considerations 14

3.1.1 Agreeing on a definition of transparency 15

3.1.2 The challenge of measuring transparency 15

3.1.3 Measuring transparency in the forest sector 15

3.2 Methodological issues 19

3.2.1 Determining the purpose of a report card 19

3.2.2 Maintaining objectivity 19

3.2.3 Length of the questionnaire 22

3.2.4 Type and sources of data 22

3.2.5 Frequency of data collection and over-time comparison 22

3.2.6 Relationship between the individual report card and the summary compilation 23

4 Conclusion 24

5 References 26

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the '*Making the Forest Sector Transparent*' project

Making the Forest Sector Transparent is a four-year project that supports civil society groups in forest-rich countries to engage with policy makers and advocate for improved forest-sector management.

It was clear from the outset, however, that the problem of poor governance – in this case in the forest sector – is neither straightforward to solve nor easy to measure. As identified in the UK Government's 2006 White Paper, '*Making Governance Work for the Poor*', transparency is key to the demand side of good governance; it therefore follows that a step in the right direction towards improving forest sector policy and practice is to make forest sector governance more responsive and accountable, and this means increasing transparency.

In order to assess progress against objectives, the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project is piloting a 'transparency report card' that will gather data on, and enable a comparison between, the quality, quantity, and accessibility of forest sector information disclosed to the public by governments in forest-rich countries, as a means of assessing transparency and any progress made towards the improvement of forest sector policy and practice. Although the use of report cards is widespread in other sectors, it is innovative in the forest sector. This report card takes a rights-based approach; it is both top-down (looking at the legal obligations each state has to enhance transparency and participation in decision-making) including reference to the individual country's constitution, Freedom of Information legislation, and sector-specific laws – and bottom-up (working with forest-dependent communities to identify information needs, so that communities can assert their rights, and hold duty-bearers to account).

1.2 Rationale and structure of this background paper

This background paper was originally developed to help guide Global Witness and its local partners in their original research into and development of an appropriate report card format for the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project. The paper fed into discussions and thoughts, offered suggestions and pointed at relevant source materials.

The paper is now being published as a supporting document to the first Annual Transparency Report from the project[1]. It is our hope that, by providing an overview of different approaches to report cards whilst also highlighting the key lessons learned from the development of a report card for this particular project, this background paper may help guide others – in any sector – who might also be considering developing and/or using a report card as an assessment tool.

The next section of this paper provides a summary and analysis of various report card models already in use in a wide variety of sectors. Comparing and contrasting models in this way can be extremely helpful in understanding the possibilities that the concept holds and in helping to decide upon the best model (or combination of models) for one's own purposes.

The third section of the paper addresses some of the main conceptual and methodological difficulties related to the assessment of transparency, specifically, drawing on the experience of those involved in the design of the transparency report card for the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project.

Finally, the paper draws some conclusions, summarising the key advantages of report cards as assessment tools; potential limitations to be aware of and ways of minimising these; and key considerations when developing a report card.

Box 1: Origins of *Making the Forest Sector Transparent*

The *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project builds on the extensive experience and expertise gained by Global Witness over the last fifteen years in extractive industry transparency and forest monitoring.

Forest sector policy processes have notoriously been dominated by a narrow group of interests and, too often, use of public forests is undemocratically agreed behind closed doors and without the knowledge or consent of ordinary people, who find themselves effectively locked out of discussions and consultation processes.

The aim of the project – which originally emerged following discussions between Global Witness and members of the Logging Off initiative – is to improve forest sector policy and practice in up to eight forest-rich countries by making governments more responsive and accountable. To this end, Global Witness has formed partnerships with project partners, each an independent local NGO working on forest governance, in four initial pilot countries – ***Peru***, ***Ghana***, ***Cameroon*** and ***Liberia***.

The project will be publishing an Annual Transparency Report; visit www.foresttransparency.info to find out more.

2 A report card: exploring the concept through existing models

The terms 'report cards', 'score cards', 'fact sheets' and even plain and simple 'reports' are often used interchangeably and this blurred distinction raises a fundamental question of what a report card actually is and how it differs from some of these other tools and concepts.

One of the benefits of report cards is their flexibility and the variety of subjects to which they can be, and have been, applied. As a starting point, then, before attempting a definition of what a report card is (and is not), it is useful to take a closer look at some existing report card models used in other fields.

Table 1 collates and describes the main characteristics of a number of different report card models. These have been selected either because they display a range of different possibilities to be aware of; because some of their features may be particularly relevant to the design of a forest transparency report card; or simply because their design raises questions to consider. Although the models have mainly been drawn from initiatives related to governance, development and democracy, some models have also been selected from less closely-related sectors, in order to allow comparison. This list is by no means exhaustive, and readers are encouraged to send us other examples they may be aware of.

Strictly speaking, not all of the initiatives summarised in this table fit the definition of a report card, but they have nonetheless still been included on the basis that they are assessment tools which share many common features of a report card and/or can help in their design.

The table was originally compiled taking into consideration the main features that were a prerequisite for the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project report card:

- The table first provides a summary description of the report card (or the broader initiative) and what it aims to measure;
- Next, there is a brief description of the main features of the model: Does it score and rank, provide a narrative account, take the form of a checklist, or is it a combination of these? Are there multiple individual report cards or an overall one?
- The third column provides a brief assessment of whether or not the report card design allows for comparison through a common set of assessment criteria, and/or whether it offers flexibility to incorporate unique observations;
- Next, there are comments on the assessment methodology used in each model, noting particularly whether or not this methodology is transparent and, if so, where the information on methodology can be found;
- And, finally, a rapid judgement is made on whether or not, and if so, how, the report card fits within a broader initiative and especially whether there is a compilation or analysis which complements the report card and whether and where recommendations are made.

A further discussion of these features follows the chart. Other elements such as the geographical or temporal coverage of the initiative are also discussed.

Table 1: Overview of selected report card models

Summary description	Type of report card model	Comparison / Adapts to individual cases	Methodology	Style of final report
(1) **Commitment to Development Index**, Center for Global Development, 2007: www.cgdev.org/section/initiatives/_active/cdi/				
Rates 21 rich countries on their dedication to policies that benefit poorer nations. Each rich country obtains scores in seven policy areas, which are averaged for an overall score. The scoring takes in account size in order to discern to what extent countries are fulfilling their potential.	• Scoring and ranking model. • Country report cards and overall score card. • Card mainly consists of score and rank numbers but also includes some descriptive data. • No recommendations on the card.	• Assesses 21 countries. • Index allows for comparing country performances by applying the same assessment framework to all countries. • No country-specific questions.	Transparent methodology: Indicators used for each of the 7 components are listed and described and the selection of cases and indicators is justified. Some information on the indicators is included in the report card, although most is to be found in accompanying report/ separate documents.	A series of country-based reports and main overall report.
(2) **Global Accountability Report**, One World Trust, 2007: www.oneworldtrust.org/?display=index_2007_home				
Assesses the accountability of 30 of the world's most powerful organisations from the public, corporate and non-for-profit sectors according to four dimensions: transparency, participation, evaluation, and complaint and response mechanisms.	• Scoring and ranking model; includes some 'yes/no' questions. • Accountability profiles for every organisation. • Card mainly consists of descriptive data, also includes scores and ratings. • No recommendations on the card.	• Assesses 30 organisations. • A cross-sector summary compares each organisation's accountability score to sector accountability averages. • Dimensions assessed are the same for all organisations.	Transparent: Description of conceptual framework and methodology used is provided, including scoring system. Information is not included on the card but on the report and separate methodology paper.	Downloadable report provides full details.
(3) **"Revealing Clothing" Transparency Report Card**, Ethical Trading Action Group, 2006: http://en.maquilasolidarity.org/en/issues/transparency/TRC/2006/companies				
Assesses and compares public reporting on labour standards compliance by 30 top apparel retailers and brands selling clothes in the Canadian market.	• Scoring and ranking model. • Is actually a 'score card', despite its name. • Transparency report card for every company. • No recommendations.	• Assesses 30 retailers and brands. • Factors assessed are the same for all the companies.	Transparent: Information is not included on the card but on the report and separate methodology paper.	Downloadable report card and documents provides full details.
(4) **Report cards on paper mills**, Pulpwatch: www.pulpwatch.org				
Documents the environmental performance of pulp mills around the world. Mills are rated in four different areas according to three categories (green, yellow, red).	• Scoring and ranking model. • Rating into three categories and minimal descriptive information. • No recommendations.	• Attempt to assess all pulp mills around the world. All mills are assessed in the same areas, according to the same criteria. • No comparison is attempted.	Ratings criteria and description of categories are provided on a separate webpage.	No downloadable report; mainly presented as a web-based map.
(5) **Forests Australia Report Card**, Forests Australia, 2008: http://adl.brs.gov.au/forestsaustralia/report_card/index.html				
On the state of Australia's forests. Describes and evaluates progress towards forest sustainability at the national level, according to seven criteria.	• Descriptive model based on a number of indicators. • Single report card on Australia's forests, updated every five years. • No recommendations.	• Assesses one country's forests. • Same criteria are analysed every five years – this facilitates the comparison of the state of the forests over time.	Transparent.	Downloadable report provides full details.

Table 1: Overview of selected report card models (continued)

Summary description	Type of report card model	Comparison / Adapts to individual cases	Methodology	Style of final report
(6) **Secrecy Report Card**, Open The Government, 2008: www.openthegovernment.org/otg/SecrecyReportCard08.pdf				
Assesses the evolution of secrecy in the U.S. federal government over time.	• Descriptive model based on a number of indicators. • Can be equated to a report. It is a single report card / report, updated yearly. • No recommendations.	• Assesses US federal government. • Most indicators are the same from one year to the other. • Alongside quantitative "operationalisation" of secrecy, this easily allows drawing trends and tracing change over time. • Card also shows flexibility by the progressive incorporation of new indicators.	Lack of Transparency: Little justification for and explanation of the indicators used (besides three minimal criteria for their inclusion).	Downloadable report but no accompanying documents.
(7) **HIV prevention report card**, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) under the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (GCWA), together with UNFPA and Young Positives, 2008: www.ippf.org/en/Resources/Guides-toolkits/HIV+Prevention+Report+Cards.htm				
Country-based report cards that summarise the situation of HIV prevention strategies and services. They contain an analysis of five key components that influence HIV prevention: legal provision, policy provision, availability of services, accessibility of services, participation and rights.	• Descriptive report card: each one of the five components is accounted for by highlighting key points and relevant quotes and issues. Report card is mainly based on questionnaire but does not include the questions used, only the information obtained. • Final recommendations address each one of the five HIV prevention components considered.	• Assesses 25 countries. • Each country report card accounts for the same HIV prevention components, and the set of questions behind the data presented is common to all countries, which allows comparison. • "Quotes and issues" section gives the card individualised character.	Transparent: Research is fully documented within a country "research dossier" referred to in the report card. Dossier includes the common questionnaire used for data collection.	"Research dossier" or "research report" for each country report card.
(8) **Kosovo Report Card**, International Crisis Group, 28 August 2000; www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/balkans/kosovo/100-kosovo-report-card.aspx				
Brief account of the political and security situation in Kosovo.	• Descriptive model, with narrative analysis. • Includes list of recommendations.	• Assesses one country. • Individual account, not fit for direct comparison.	Not specified.	Full report, also called "Kosovo report card." Executive summary and the recommendations of this report presented in brief report card.
(9) **Checklist for the Implementation of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa**, Article 19, November 2006; www.article19.org/pdfs/tools/africa-foe-checklist.pdf				
Checklist for civil society to analyse the implementation status of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in any African country.	• Scoring and ranking model. • Checklist: "yes/no" questions on each provision of the Declaration, and space for description.	• Assessment of African countries. • Single questionnaire for all countries.	Unclear assessment criteria: high level of generality of some questions; some confusion between legal provision and practice.	Downloadable checklist report but no accompanying documents.

Table 1: Overview of selected report card models (continued)

Summary description	Type of report card model	Comparison / Adapts to individual cases	Methodology	Style of final report
(10) **Democracy Assessment Framework**, Democratic Audit: www.democraticaudit.com/auditing_democracy/index.php				
Framework for citizens to assess the quality of democracy.	• Scoring and ranking model. • Questionnaire: questions and five possible responses (very high, high, middling or ambiguous, low, very low).	• Single framework for assessment in any given country.	There is a guide to some basic principles and issues to be considered while assessing democracy and freedom.	Downloadable questionnaire but minimal accompanying documents.
(11) **Open Budget Index**, Open Budget Index; www.openbudgetindex.org/				
Comparative dataset on the public availability and timeliness of eight key budget documents in 94 countries. The OBI also assesses the extent of effective budget oversight provided by legislatures and supreme audit institutions and opportunities for the public to participate in budget decision-making. It is intended to provoke public debate and link civil society's experiences on budget transparency across countries.	• Scoring and ranking model. 123 questions, each of them scored according to the multiple choice response provided: "a,b,c,d,e" – based on the level of availability and timeliness of the information. Then averaged for an overall country-score. • Each response can include the comments of the researcher and the two peer-reviewers.	• Assesses 94 countries. • Common framework for all countries, but possibility of adding comments for each individual question. • Scoring model allows for comparison across countries, both as overall performance and in relation to specific budget documents or issues. • The comparison is made in the "Full Report" produced after all countries have submitted the questionnaire.	Transparent: The rationale behind each question and the meaning of "public availability" is explained in detail in a separate document. The specific meaning of "a,b,c,d,e" response is tailored to each question and explained in the questionnaire itself. 100 percent score is awarded for "a" response; 67 for "b"; 33 for "c"; and zero for d".	Website emphasises country-country comparisons with graphs and table. The full global report and individual country reports – each produced biennially – are all available from the website. Separate methodology and original completed country questionnaires are also available.

2.1 Common features of a report card

Whilst the list of models presented in the preceding Table 1 is clearly not exhaustive, this exercise is nonetheless useful in that it allows us to see at a glance those features which are most commonly shared between the different models, and which are therefore important factors in distinguishing a report card from other assessment tools.

2.1.1 Report cards as assessment tools – comparing the models

The first commonality between each of the models presented in Table 1 is that they all serve an assessment purpose; each tool is meant to provide an account of a given situation. *A report card is*

therefore essentially an assessment tool. The actual method used for assessment may vary, with the report cards above mainly falling into two categories - scoring and descriptive:

Scoring and ranking

The main feature of these models is that they award scores according to a standardised scale. The Global Accountability Report (2), for instance, uses an ordinal scale that combines a binary scoring system (allocates 1 or 0 scores depending on whether a particular item or attribute is either present or absent) and a scaled scoring system (which, for example, allocates either 0, ¼, 1 or 1¼ scores.) The report card on paper mills (4), on the other hand, uses a nominal scale that rates mills in three categories: green, yellow or red. Standardisation can be improved by providing guidance on the nominal scale – the Democracy Assessment Framework (10), for example, could include some guidance on what might be considered 'very high' and so on, in the context of each question.

The scores obtained are usually aggregated into a single index and used to establish rankings according to performance: in the Commitment to Development Index (1), for instance, each country receives a score in seven policy areas, which are averaged to give an overall score. This allows the countries to be ranked according to their performance in each one of these areas, and also to provide an aggregated index that takes into account the overall performance of each country. Similarly, the Open Budget Index (11) scores the response to each question, thus allowing for cross-country comparisons in specific budget areas. It also provides an overall country score, which allows ranking according to the general performance.

However, caution must always be applied; there is sometimes the potential for the results obtained through averaging scores to be misleading, unless the basis for the averaging is explained (see Box 2).

Box 2: Aggregating scores through weighting and averaging

In a scoring and ranking report card model, any scoring implies some sort of weighting. If, as a measurement of transparency, we are assessing the public availability of 100 governmental documents and we find, say, 67, then we might conclude that the government is 67% transparent; here, we are giving equal weight to all 100 documents. If, on the other hand, we wanted to introduce an extra level of sophistication, we could also introduce more complex weighting; for example, by recognising in our scoring that some documents are more relevant than others and therefore deserve more weighting than others. In this case, including some explanatory notes on the basis used for the weighting and averaging of the responses is extremely important, to help explain the methodology but also to add to the credibility of the results.

The Commitment to Development Index (1) is an example of the more simple approach, using a simple average score across seven policy areas and assuming equal significance for each. In contrast, the Open Budget Index (11) implicitly weights the significance of certain areas over others. Whilst each question is given an equal weight, to ensure that "more relevant" themes are more heavily weighted in the overall score calculation, there are additional questions included to assess those particular themes. Hence, 58 out of a total 91 questions are focused on the "Executive's annual budget proposal," and the weighting system is communicated transparently to the readers.

Scoring and ranking models typically use a combination of primary and secondary data. For example, the Commitment to Development Index (1) uses data both from official sources, mainly international organisations, plus data collected country by country by the Center for Global Development itself. Likewise, the Global Accountability Report (2) also combines primary and secondary data. The Open Budget Index (11) clearly states what "publicly available information" means, and asks researchers not to answer questions based on information they may have special access to by means of personal contacts.

In most scoring and ranking models, the information on methodology is provided in an accompanying compilation or analysis report or in an attached methodological paper (see Box 2) which makes these models very transparent; and they need to be so: they are the most ambitious in establishing comparisons; have a broad coverage (report cards 1, 2 and 3 each cover between 20 and 30 units of analysis*; report card 11 covers 85 countries); and rankings and aggregated indexes run the risk of turning into "black boxes"[2] if the components and calculations that lie behind them are not adequately explained and made available.

There are cases, of course, when the scoring and ranking model of report cards may not necessarily be the most appropriate means of obtaining results. In the case of the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project, for example, a simple scoring exercise comparing four countries would produce potentially misleading results. Rather, it would be more meaningful to encourage deeper analysis within each country – by providing a narrative analysis of the report card for instance.

Descriptive report cards

In contrast, 'descriptive' report cards concern themselves not with allocating scores but, instead,

*A unit of analysis is a country, company, organisation etc.

Box 3: The scoring system of the Open Budget Index (OBI)

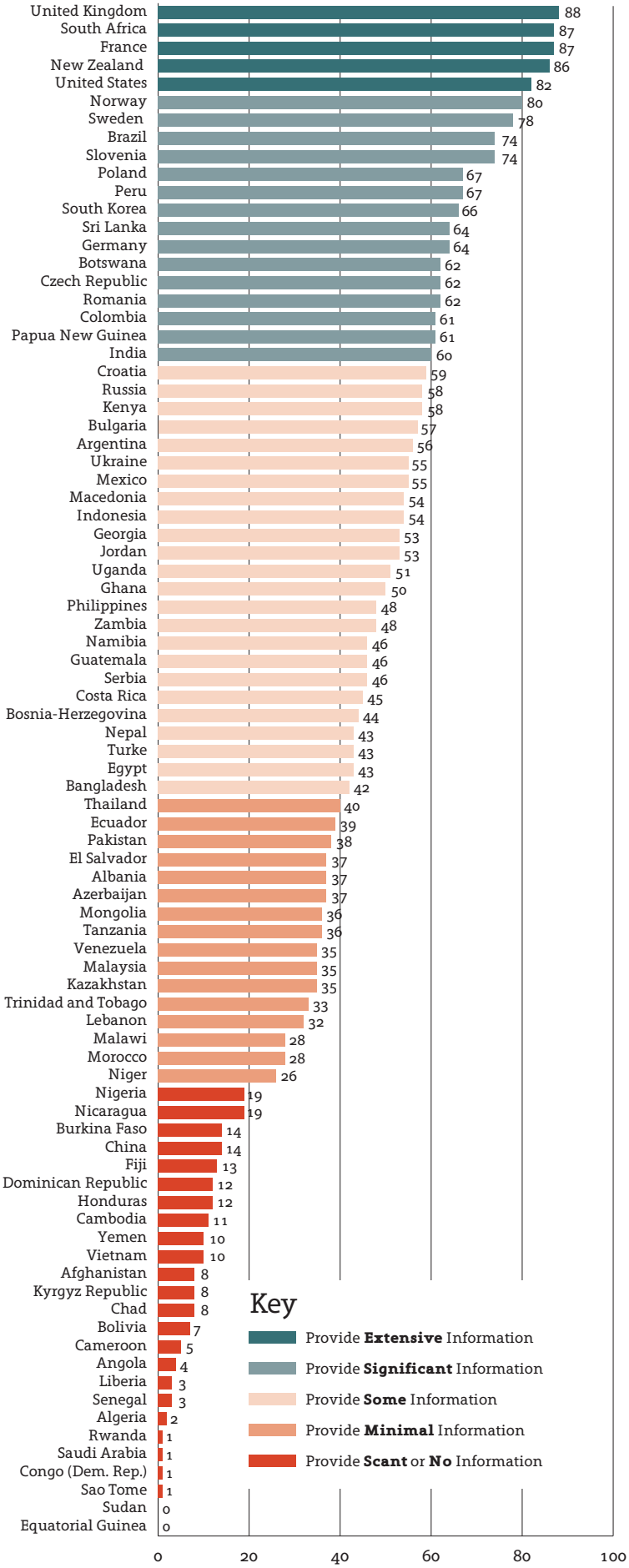
The Open Budget Index (11) is an example of good practice in that the "Guide to the Open Budget Questionnaire 2008" provides a detailed explanation of the rationale behind each of the 123 questions included in the questionnaire and of the scoring system used.

The questions have been grouped into two main areas:

- Questions around the "Executive's annual budget proposal to the legislature," further divided into 5 categories: Estimates for the Budget Year and Beyond (17 questions); Estimates for Years Prior to the Budget Year (17 questions); Comprehensiveness (13 questions); The Budget Narrative and Performance Monitoring (8 questions); Additional Key Information for Budget Analysis & Monitoring (10 questions);

- Questions on the "Four phases of the budget process": Executive's Formulation of the Budget (8 questions); Legislative Approval of the Budget (8 questions); Executive's implementation of the budget (19 questions); Executive's Year End Report and the Supreme Audit Institution (23 questions).

The OBI is calculated on the basis of the responses obtained to 92 out of the total 123 questions. Almost all of the questions have four possible responses (a,b,c,d), plus an option "e" (not applicable/other.) The meaning of each option is fully explained for each question. Answer "a" is awarded a score of 100%, "b" 67%, "c" 33%, and "d" 0%. The percentages obtained are then averaged to form the overall score, which allows countries to be ranked (should a respondent opt for "e", this is not included within the overall aggregate score.)



Open Budget Initiative: a country-country quantitative analysis
Source: http://openbudgetindex.org/files/KeyFindingsEnglish.pdf

directly reporting on data from indicators. Report cards 5, 6 and 7 are good examples of this type of model. The Forests Australia Report Card (5), for example, measures progress against seven criteria and a set of forty-four individual indicators, as a means of assessing overall progress towards forest sustainability. Rather than attempt to provide an aggregated index on 'forest sustainability' as a whole, the report card analyses the information that has been compiled on each one of the seven criteria and conclusions are drawn at that level. Similarly, the Secrecy Report Card (6) does not attempt to offer an overall 'measure of secrecy' in the U.S. federal government; rather, it compiles and analyses a series of indicators of secrecy.

Broadly speaking, then, descriptive report cards tend to be less interested in establishing generalised comparisons between units of analysis and more concerned with providing an accurate assessment of individual cases: report cards 5 and 6, for example, both cover one unit of analysis each (Australia's forests and the U.S. federal government, respectively), but the only general comparison they establish is over time (from one year to the next, every five years.) Meanwhile, the HIV prevention report card (7) aims to cover around 20 countries yet makes no explicit attempt at establishing comparisons between each of them.

As with scoring and ranking models, descriptive report cards also combine primary and secondary data. However, since descriptive report cards rely on "observable data" and therefore need not justify the complex methodological choices involved in scoring and ranking (the Secrecy Report Card, for example, only provides some basic justification for the selection of indicators), this can reduce the level of transparency. For this

reason, describing and providing the rationale of the criteria and indicators is advised; not only does this contribute to a better understanding of the findings but it also gives credence to the research. The Forests Australia model is considered an example of good practice as it describes the indicators used and their relevance to the criteria being assessed. Likewise, the HIV prevention report cards are each accompanied by a dossier that fully documents the research process followed.

2.1.2 Reliance on objective- and/or perceptions-based data

Another feature of both types of report cards - scoring and ranking and descriptive – is that *they can rely on either objective- or perceptions-based data*: the accountability profiles (2), for example, are based on objective data, while Transparency International's forest sector citizens report card is illustrative of a report card partly built on *subjective data* (see Box 4).

Box 4: Citizens' report cards

Among the civil society tools developed by Transparency International to help counter corruption is a "Forest Sector citizen's report card".[3] The purpose of this report card is to assess citizens' perceptions of the honesty, efficiency, and quality of government forest management services. This may also be broadened out to include perceptions about other government services provided to populations of forest-rich countries, and to collect information on how citizens use government services and if/where there is demand for new services. The aim of publishing the results in a report card format is that awareness of government shortcomings will be raised and examples of good practice promoted. By covering more than one service in its analysis, it invites comparisons and creates a competitive atmosphere for improvement. By collecting data through random and confidential surveys, it protects the identity of informants and is intended to encourage reporting of patterns of corruption.

Similarly, in the health sector, CARE developed a community scorecard [4] to help monitor the performance of health services in Malawi. As with a citizens report card, CARE's community scorecard is intended as a tool to assess the social and public accountability and responsiveness of service providers, soliciting user perceptions on quality, efficiency and transparency. The main differences are that the emphasis in this case is less on the actual scorecard and more on achieving an immediate response and joint decision-making by service providers and that the information is not collected via a survey questionnaire, but via focus group discussions. Each of the focus groups must brainstorm to develop performance criteria with which to evaluate the services under consideration; the facilitators list all issues mentioned and assist the groups to organise them into measurable or observable performance indicators. The number of final indicators should not exceed five to eight. The focus groups are then asked to give a relative score to each indicator (either through consensus or individual voting followed by group discussion.) A scale of 1-5 or 1-100 is usually used for scoring, and reasons behind low and high scores explained. The process is participatory, with community members themselves tasked with compiling their own set of suggestions for improvements to be shared with service providers.

2.1.3 Powerful tools for making comparisons

A further advantage of report cards, and especially scoring and ranking models, is that they can also be powerful tools for *making comparisons* over time or across units of analysis, in that they allow for the same assessment method to be easily replicated. The Secrecy Report Card (5), for instance, which is replicated every year using the same indicators, allows us to compare secrecy in the U.S. federal government from one year to another. Similarly, the Forests Australia Report Card (4) tracks the progress towards forest sustainability by documenting, every five years, information against the same pre-set criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management. Comparisons do not always need to be over time; the company accountability profiles (2), for example, allows for comparisons across a number of different organisations, at any given moment in time. The Open Budget Index (11) allows for both; it is designed in such a way that allows not only for cross-country comparisons (in their overall performance as well as across specific budget issues) at any given moment, but also, being replicated every two years, comparisons over time, in order to assess improvements.

It is important to consider that, depending on which type of model is chosen, there is often a trade-off between the ability to draw comparisons versus specificity of the information provided. As mentioned previously, scoring and ranking report cards tend to be more suited to establishing broader, more ambitious comparisons between units of analysis – e.g. quantitative summaries – whereas the descriptive models are more qualitative in nature; they are more suited to providing an accurate assessment of, and providing much more detailed information on, individual cases rather than establishing straightforward comparisons, even when the same assessment method is reapplied.

However, that is not to say that these two models must be mutually exclusive; in certain circumstances it may be beneficial to combine elements of both. Take the Open Budget Index (11) as an example: whilst, at first sight, this model appears to be based around a simple scoring exercise, researchers must also cite a source or reference when answering the questionnaire, in order to "enhance the confidence of the media and other users in the results." This serves not only to increase the objectivity of the scores, but also to "attract scrutiny and spur a global public debate."

2.1.4 Tools for policy change

Finally, the summarised format of report cards makes them particularly useful tools for *informing decision-making processes and guiding advocacy efforts*, for example of those seeking policy change. Some report cards make this goal very explicit; the HIV prevention report card (7), for example, is introduced to the public as an "advocacy tool." Indeed, this report card, which recommends a series of concrete actions that can and should be taken to enhance HIV prevention, has been used in advocacy and follow-up activities by the national partners and target populations which has resulted in: (i) decision making bodies approaching and addressing issues around HIV prevention for young women and girls; (ii) service providers adapting their HIV prevention strategies and programmes for young women and girls; and (iii) young people being empowered to become more involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Likewise, the Open Budget Index (11) is explicitly intended to provoke public debate and link civil society efforts on budget transparency across countries; the final report describes improvements in a number of countries included in both the 2006 and 2008 surveys and discusses how budget transparency can be improved quickly and with modest cost. The checklist for the Implementation of the Declaration of Principles of Freedom of

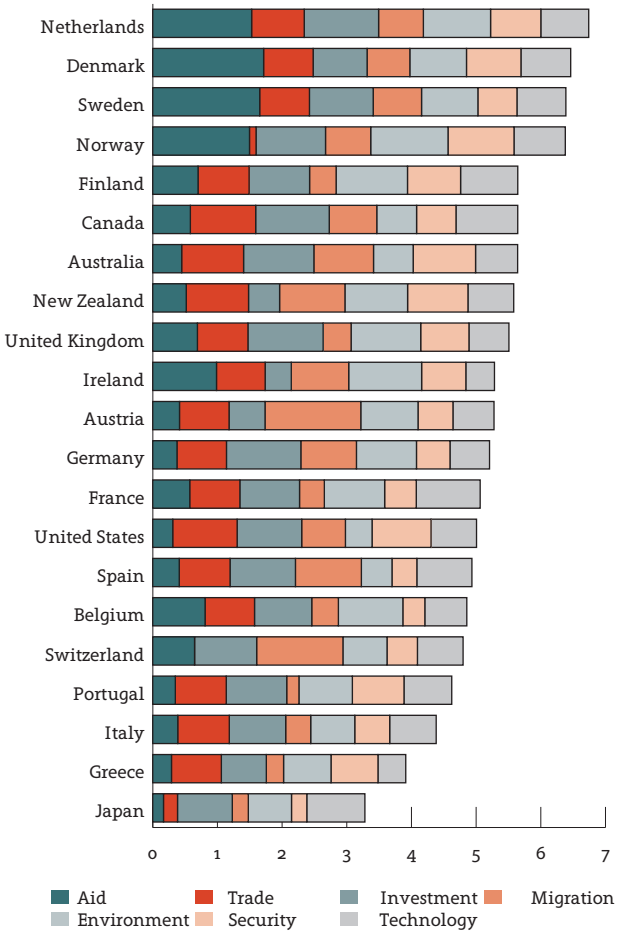
Expression in Africa (9) has been used for researching and writing shadow reports to be submitted to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and for establishing areas of focus for freedom of expression campaigns and advocacy initiatives to influence policy or legislative reviews.[5] Whilst the One World Trust accountability profiles (2) do not state as explicitly their intention to be used as advocacy tools the report does suggest in its conclusions that "what is presented here…offers…ways forward for those advocating for accountability within their own organisations."[6]

2.2 When is a report card not a report card?

Finally, to end this section, it is useful to consider in what ways does a report card actually *differ* from a score card, or from a stand-alone report?

In simple terms, report cards differ from score cards in that report cards go beyond simply providing scores by offering a more complete explanation of gaps or successes, often by including descriptive data. For example, the Open Budget Index (11) presents both the score card for each country, and a separate final report analysing and comparing the single countries' performance according to their scores. By this reasoning, it would probably be more accurate to describe the individual company report cards produced by the Ethical Trading Action Group (3) as score cards rather than report cards – since they essentially score each company in different areas affecting labour standards compliance. Compare this to the HIV prevention card (7), which "reports" rather than "scores." The main difference between a report card and a score card lies, then, not in the methodology used or the type of data relied upon – which can otherwise be quite similar – but in the *choice of the information* they present. Hence, whilst the accountability profiles (2) and the company transparency report cards (3) are based on a similar methodology, the findings are presented in a descriptive way in the former (hence they can be described as report cards), whereas only the scores and ranking obtained are presented in the latter (thus defining these as score cards.)

Meanwhile, the main difference between a report card and a report is that report cards tend to be more brief and to provide a summary or overview of results as opposed to a lengthy analysis, as more commonly found in reports. The two can, however, be combined; some of the examples of report cards outlined in Table 1 are, for example, accompanied by a report, which can serve different functions. The accompanying report may provide a further analysis of the data contained in the report card and draw conclusions and recommendations (see models 2, 3 and 11); fully document the research that preceded the findings (7); or simply summarise the data and findings already on the report card, therefore offering little or no added analysis (1).



Commitment to Development Index 2007
Source: http://www.cgdev.org/section/initiatives/_active/cdi/inside

3 Defining and measuring 'transparency'

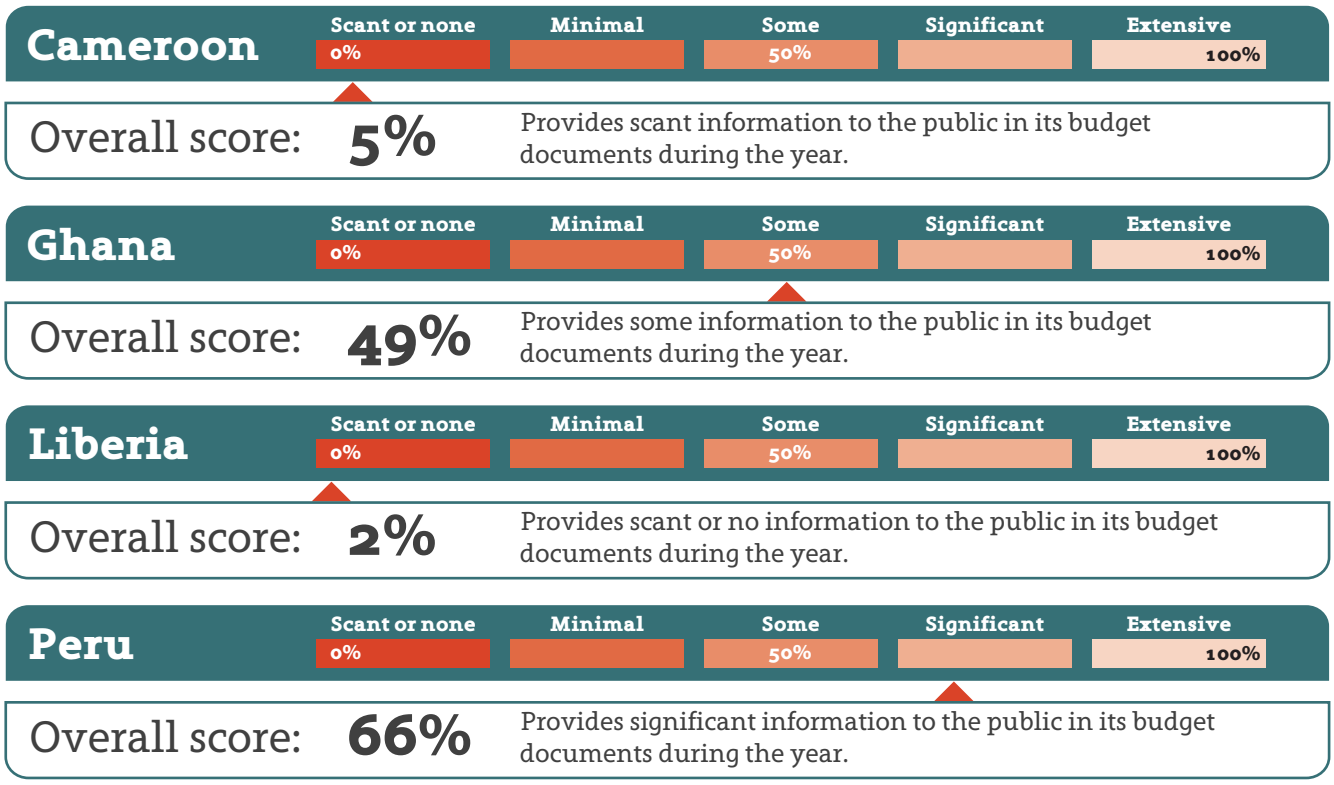
Any measurement exercise raises the question of *what is it* that we want to measure, *how* are we going to measure it and *what is the purpose* of our measurement [7].

The key aim of the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project, from which this background paper originates, is to improve forest sector policy and practice through making forest sector governance more responsive and accountable and, as already discussed in the Introduction, this means increasing transparency. But whilst those involved in this project might have been clear from the outset on the overall mission of the project (e.g. the *purpose* of our measurement), defining and agreeing upon *what it was* we were going to measure and *how* was less straightforward.

A discussion on the conceptual and methodological issues associated with the measurement of *transparency* as a concept was therefore essential during the initial stages of the development of our own transparency report card and it is hoped that this section of this background paper may similarly help to guide others who are considering developing an assessment tool along these lines.

3.1 Conceptual Considerations

When the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project originally developed the concept of a 'forest transparency report card' as a means of measuring accountability and improved governance in the forest sector, before a report card could be designed, it was vital first (i) for the report card to be built upon a commonly-agreed understanding of transparency (the assessment of transparency from a report card exercise will depend on exactly how transparency is conceptualised and defined) and (ii) to consider the relationship between transparency and accountability.



Open Budget Initiative: quantitative data and short qualitative conclusions
Sources: http://openbudgetindex.org/files/cs_cameroon.pdf, http://openbudgetindex.org/files/cs_ghana.pdf, http://openbudgetindex.org/files/cs_liberia2.pdf, http://openbudgetindex.org/files/cs_peru.pdf

3.1.1 Agreeing on a definition of transparency

In a broad sense, transparency is about: how much access to internally-held information citizens are entitled to; the scope, accuracy and timeliness of this information; and what citizens can do if duty-bearers are not sufficiently forthcoming in providing such access. There is a general consensus that transparency is seen as a mechanism for promoting accountability, as excessive secrecy can undermine the quality of public decision-making and prevent citizens from checking the abuses of public power. This can have a corrosive effect on virtually all aspects of society and governance. Transparency – in terms of both information disclosure and dissemination and access to decision-making – is therefore very important as it better enables civil society to: (i) hold government and/or key decision-makers to account; (ii) promote good governance; (iii) improve public policy and efficiency; and (iv) combat corruption.

This idea seems to fit with the concept of "*clear transparency*" that Fox defines in a paper focusing precisely on the relationship between transparency and accountability.[8] According to Fox, *opaque* transparency is insufficient to lead to any accountability. "Clear transparency" can produce "*soft* accountability" – understood as the "capacity to demand explanations" – yet does not, by itself, guarantee "hard accountability", which requires the "capacity to sanction or compensate".

3.1.2 The challenge of measuring transparency

In marked contrast to other aspects of governance (corruption, rule of law, regulatory frameworks etc.) where a plethora of indices exists, there has been quite a significant gap between the extent of theoretical and conceptual contributions made towards an understanding of the concept of transparency, on the one hand, and progress made towards measurement and empirics, on the other.

In simple terms, if transparency is seen as a mechanism for promoting accountability (the information disclosed needs to be relevant for accountability purposes), then one key way of measuring transparency would be to measure the amount (and scope, accessibility, quality, reliability, accuracy and timeliness) of information disclosed and/or made publicly available.

However, what is clear is that any measurement of transparency – as a tool for accountability – must go beyond a simple assessment of 'disclosure' of information; transparency is not simply about how much access to internally-held information citizens have, but also, crucially, the scope, accuracy and timeliness of this information, as illustrated in the following case studies:

"Opaque transparency" in Ghana

In Ghana, there is a relatively high level of transparency regarding the redistribution of forest taxation to communities, but no comparisons are made with the volume of timber extracted. Communities get paid but they do not know exactly for what.

The Enron case

The famous fraud case in Enron went unnoticed in part because the company was meeting separate transparency obligations to the tax authorities (very low profits, so no tax) and to the shareholders (very high profits, so big dividends). Creative accounting meant there was nothing "incorrect" about their sets of figures, but no-one ever looked at the two sets side-by-side.[9]

Transparency is also concerned with what citizens can do if officials are not sufficiently forthcoming in providing such access; hence the Global Accountability report (2) defines transparency as "the provision of accessible and timely information to stakeholders and the opening up of organisational procedures, structures, and processes to their assessments"[10] as one of four dimensions of accountability – the others being participation, evaluation and complaint and response mechanisms.

Noting this lack of progress on the measurement and empirical analysis of transparency, the World Bank[11] has tried to fill this gap by attempting to construct a broad index of transparency (see Box 5), which builds on the notion of transparency as a mechanism to promote accountability. Considering that transparency assumes both the right and the capacity to articulate accountability demands, the indices comprise an aggregate transparency index with two sub-components: economic/institutional transparency, and political transparency. This Index demonstrates clearly that the way in which one understands transparency will determine what should be taken into consideration for measurement purposes.

Box 5: Transparency Index indicators

Political transparency indices	Economic/institutional transparency indices
• Transparency of political funding • Openness of the political systems • Freedom of the press	• Degree of accessibility • Usefulness of the information provided by public institutions • Economic transparency • E-government • Access to information laws • Transparency in the budget process • Transparency of policy • Transparency of the public sector

3.1.3 Measuring transparency in the forest sector

In terms of transparency in the forest sector specifically, Global Witness' previous work on Independent Forest Monitoring already reflects an understanding of transparency defined by the quantity, quality and credibility of information.[12] Likewise, the World Resources Institute scoping paper on developing a Forest Transparency Initiative also associates transparency with the disclosure of accurate and credible information, and provides a list of specific information about the forest sector to be disclosed.[13] The same document also pairs the information to be disclosed with targeted objectives, and establishes who is responsible for the disclosure of the information (public/private sector.) These lists by the World Resources Institute can be used as a reference point for any initiative on forest transparency.

Other initiatives related to the forest sector have tried to include transparency in their assessment, though as part of a broader evaluation on forest governance. Three are summarised here:

Chatham House: Global response to illegal logging and associated trade

Over the last four years, Chatham House has developed a methodology for assessing the effectiveness of the global response to illegal logging and associated trade[14]. In 2006, it published an initial study of how to measure such effectiveness. This study was followed, in 2007, by the first pilot of their methodology. In addition to seeking to measure the ultimate end goal – changes in the extent of illegal logging and the volume of illegal wood in trade – the methodology also examined earlier phases of the response, including building awareness and political will, voluntary actions by the private sector, and the development and implementation of new policies and regulations by governments. For this purpose, in this study, the long list of potential indicators were grouped under four major headings:

- Awareness/attention
- Government Policy Development and Implementation (under which "transparency" is assessed)
- Private Sector Policy Development and Implementation
- Actual Levels of Illegal Logging and Associated Trade.

The pilot study also sought to measure changes in the response over time. It includes an assessment of the lessons learned during the process of collecting the indicators measured, and concludes with recommendations for a slightly simpler process for data collection. To support the assessment, Chatham House has developed and piloted two new tools. The first is a survey of experts, which includes questions related to the nature and scale of and trends in illegal logging, and also seeks to garner information on the responses of government and the private sector. The survey was targeted at 30–40 relevant experts in each producer country, with a range of respondents from government, the private sector, NGOs, academia and the donor community. The second new tool is a framework of 'ideal' policies, laws and regulations for tackling the problem against which producer, consumer and processing country governments can be assessed. To test the methodology, and to gauge the state of the response at the end of 2008, the indicators were piloted in five countries: two 'producers' of illegal timber (Cameroon and Indonesia), one 'processor' of such timber (Vietnam) and two 'consumer' countries (the UK and US). In the longer term, Chatham House hopes to carry out regular reassessments every two years.

World Resources Institute: Governance of forests initiative

The Governance of Forests Initiative[15] (GFI) developed a pilot framework for assessment of forest governance in Brazil and Indonesia, to be conducted between August 2009 and July 2010. The purpose of this framework is to provide a

common definition and concept for understanding forest governance across a variety of developing country contexts, based on widely agreed principles of good governance. The framework consists of five key principles (see Box 6): (i) Transparency; (ii) Participation; (iii) Accountability; (iv) Coordination; and (v) Capacity. The resulting matrix provides an organisational structure of 94 governance indicators, or diagnostic questions, that assess the quality and adequacy of a particular aspect of governance relating to one of four major issues: (1) Forest Tenure; (2) Land Use Planning; (3) Forest

Box 6: 19 indicators on forest tenure, as they relate to the three governance components: actors, rules and practices

	Applicable principles of good governance
Actors: *government, international, institutions, civil, society, private sector*	
1. Land & Forest – Agencies Capacity administer and monitor forest tenure	Coordination
2. Land & Forest – Agencies Capacity to negotiate and design forest contracts	Capacity
3. Dispute Resolution Mechanisms – Capacity to resolve forest tenure disputes	Capacity
4. Civil society – Capacity to engage on forest tenure issues	Capacity
5. Civil society – Representation of indigenous and community groups	Capacity, Participation
Rules: *policy & law, content, policy- & law-making processes*	
6. Recognition in legal framework of community and indigenous tenure rights	Participation, Accountability
7. Legal support and protection of forest tenure	Accountability
8. Transparent rules for selling and allocating public forests	Accountability
9. Clear responsibilities and authority for forest tenure administration	Accountability, Coordination
10. Coordination of tenure laws/policies with forest management objectives	Participation, Coordination
Practice: *implementation, administration, monitoring, enforcement*	
11. Transparent and accessible land tenure administration services	Transparency, Participation, Accountability
12.Transparent and accessible administration of permits and licenses	Transparency, Participation, Accountability
13. Competitive processes for awarding major forest contracts	Transparency, Accountability
14. Comprehensive design of forest contracts	Accountability
15. Forest Tenure Monitoring is comprehensive and provides accurate information	Transparency
16. Public access to information	Transparency
17. Recognition and resolution of community forest tenure claims	Transparency, Participation, Accountability
18. Participatory community mapping	Participation
19. Accessible and effective dispute resolution	Accountability

Governance indicators framework from World Resources Institute, Governance of Forests Initiative (forest tenure example; others cover land use planning, forest management, and revenues)

Management and Forest Revenues and (4) Economic Incentives. The indicators are further organised into three major components of forest governance: Actors, Rules and Practice. The GFI indicators are intended to provide an objective but qualitative assessment. For each of them, an indicator value (low, low-medium, medium, medium-high or high) is possible, based on a documented explanation of the extent to which various elements of quality are met; each indicator includes an analytical explanation of the value assigned. Although the Framework is applicable across countries, it is not designed to allow quantified comparison of scores across them. The indicators are in a pilot form, and implementing teams are encouraged to tailor them to best capture the unique circumstances within their country.

Transparency International (TI): Forest governance and integrity programme

Transparency International's Forest Governance and Integrity Programme[16] (FGI) tackles corruption as a primary driver of illegal logging and poor forest management. The Programme aims to address corruption at all stages in the timber production chain and examines how it facilitates the unsustainable harvesting, production, conversion,

export, import and procurement of timber and wood products. The scope of the Programme takes in countries engaged in the supply side of the forest products trade as well as those on the demand side. Originally, initiated by TI Chapters located in Asia Pacific countries directly impacted by illegal forestry, the Programme will extend activities to Vietnam, Fiji, Vanuatu, Cambodia and Laos in 2010. Specifically, it focuses on nine Prime Areas of Intervention: reducing political corruption; reducing foreign bribery in supply countries; reducing corruption in licensing and concessions; reducing incidence of timber laundering; reducing judicial corruption; improving due diligence of financial institutions; reducing unsustainable demand for timber and wood products; strengthening national/regional forest governance; and strengthening international governance initiatives. Tools and advocacy strategies are developed and verified through local multi-stakeholder consultations. A TI manual 'An analysis of corruption in the forestry sector'[17], outlines a framework to identify: the corrupt practices in the forest sector that pose the greatest risk to governance and why; the tools that are best positioned to address these corrupt practices; how well these anti-corruption tools are doing at managing the risk; what laws and regulations are lacking or need reform, and what monitoring tools are needed; recommended steps that aim to improve the implementation of anti-corruption tools, and thus improving governance not only in forestry, but throughout society.

3.2 Methodological Issues

Once the report card exercise is completed, documenting and explaining the methodology followed not only offers outside parties a better understanding of the findings but also increases transparency and therefore the credibility of any conclusions and recommendations drawn. Outlined below are some of the key methodological issues that were considered in the design of the transparency report card for the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project and which can provide useful guidance for those also considering designing a similar report card in the future.

3.2.1 Determining the purpose of your report card

As explored in section 3.1, first and foremost, before designing a report card, it is important to know enough about the intended purpose of the report card and to be able to effectively define what is going to be assessed. Box 7 describes the purpose of the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* report card.

3.2.2 Maintaining objectivity

Many citizen report cards use either (i) a market-research methodology (a standard questionnaire, and formal stratified random sampling etc.) or (ii) focus-group discussions closer to other types of participatory research (e.g. 'PRA'[18]). Whichever of the two methods is used, they both generally ask the question: "is the service provider performing?" The problem is that this is a subjective question – different people will interpret performance in different ways and will have vastly different opinions. For the information to be relevant and reliable, one would need a means of 'averaging' (through sampling) or justifying (through face-to-face focus group meetings between citizens and officials) the data.

To overcome such problems associated with subjectivity, a report card can be developed on the basis of objective 'yes-no' questions (as was the case in the card developed for the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project.) In theory, each question requiring a simple yes/no answer should be very straightforward to answer and to interpret and the intention was also to make it much quicker and easier to gather objective data, as a starting point for other advocacy activities (including discussions with officials.)

Box 7: Making the Forest Sector Transparent project transparency report card

What is the purpose of the report card? The transparency report card being piloted by the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project is intended not only to gather data on the level of public access to information – as a means of assessing transparency and any progress made towards the improvement of forest sector policy and practice – but also to identify best practice, including that which might be transferable from one country to another. By also revealing where there is most secrecy and pointing to areas where a select few control all the major decisions regarding a nation's forests, it will also provide a useful tool for civil society to improve their analysis of the issues and to prioritise strategies to tackle them. This will then also drive – and the project will support – local, national and international advocacy aimed at improving policy and practice across the forest sector so that decision-makers and those in positions of influence: (i) respond to the needs of forest-dependent citizens; and (ii) and are accountable to these citizens for what they do (or don't do).

The underlying assumption of this project is that strengthening the ability of ordinary people to access and analyse information will help to reorient forest policy towards their needs. Hence, the project takes a people-centred approach to assessing the level of public access to information as a means to assess the scale of the problem; assess the extent to which efforts to improve transparency in the forest sector are working; identify cases of, and explore possibilities for extension and replication of, good practice.

What is it meant to assess? When designing the report card, it was necessary to agree upon the following: (i) that the level of disclosure, availability and quality of information is an adequate measurement of transparency as a tool to promote accountability (therefore the report card was designed around objective "yes/no" questions about the availability of information); and (ii) that it was feasible for transparency to be assessed on a sector-specific basis (the report card was designed in such a way as to have both a common basis for country-country comparisons and flexibility to support individual country initiatives.)

Nonetheless, even a simple 'yes/no' approach has its limitations. The Checklist for the Implementation of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa (9), for example, which is based in a "yes/no" questionnaire, includes the question "Is the justice system as a whole adequately funded?" But one person's interpretation of "adequately funded" may differ from another person's and so in the absence of any guiding criteria, even a simple 'yes/no' approach can lead to quite a detailed set of questions.

When designing a report card, then, it is important to try to reduce the risk of obtaining subjective or non-comparable answers. This can be done either by (i) setting very specific questions; or (ii) establishing clear assessment criteria. The Open Budget Index (11), for instance, is still based on a "yes/no" questionnaire but the meaning of "yes" or "no" response is further specified (and then attributed the corresponding letter "a,b,c,d,e") according to the level and quality of availability of the budget information required (see Box 3).

Likewise, when designing the report card for the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project, the level of specificity of the questions in the "yes/no" questionnaire was an important factor; the more

specific the question, the less room there is for interpretation and therefore each question requiring a yes/no answer was designed to be as straightforward as possible. This was especially important in the case of this project since the gathering of information took place within the context of different countries and yet the responses needed to be "equivalent" from one country to the other, to establish reliable comparisons. At the same time, it allowed for the possibility of most answers being 'yes... but' – where the qualifying statements might represent a country team's opinion (either their own subjective opinion, or an opinion based on the findings of community consultations, a survey or questionnaire.)

Box 8: Making the Forest Sector Transparent project transparency themes

The 15 themes in the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* report card

1) Laws etc that provide for access to information
2) Legal Standing for communities and NGOs
3) Forest legal framework
4) Transparent access to decision-making
5) Tenure and land use
6) Allocation of permits/user rights
7) Logging operations
8) Extraction of other forest products
9) Environmental services
10) Cultural services
11) Extra-sectoral activities affecting forests
12) Tax collection and redistribution
13) Forest law enforcement
14) "Anti-transparency" norms – caveats that limit transparency
15) Proactive publication and information centres in the Forest Authority

How is objectivity ensured? The transparency report card for this project was designed – in a participatory manner – to gather data through asking 70 questions (indicators of transparency) split across 15 agreed-upon "themes" – each a measure of accountability.

Under each of these general themes, there is a sub-set of related questions: for example, an overall question might be "Is the permit allocation process transparent?" and respondents can answer "yes" or "no" to this question. But the answers to a series of more probing sub-questions helps us to understand how they have arrived at this yes or no answer and helps guide any advocacy work. For example, respondents are then asked to clarify "Do permits exist for all users/services?" and "Is it clear who decides if/when to allocate permits?" and so on.

This data will be collected on an annual basis, so that change can be tracked, and comparisons will also be possible between the data sets of each of the pilot countries.

For more information, see the Methodology section of www.foresttransparency.info

3.2.3 Length of the questionnaire

Of the eleven example report card models featured in Table 1, only three – the HIV prevention card (7), Article 19's checklist (9) and the Open Budget Index (11) – are based on a questionnaire format, and the questionnaires vary considerably in length in each case. When determining the appropriate number of questions to include, key considerations might include: the desired coverage; the level of specificity; issues of feasibility; availability of information; and the intended audience.

It does not necessarily follow that questionnaires that are longer in length are more effective; a useful mantra is "don't ask a question if you are not going to make use of the answer." The assessment methodology used by Chatham House in "Illegal Logging and Related Trade: 2008 Assessment of the Global Response" contains, for example, just four questions (divided into between one and five sub-questions) on transparency, whereas, in comparison, the report card designed for the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project contains seventy questions, distributed over fifteen themes. This difference exemplifies the need to determine the purpose of the exercise and to design your assessment tool accordingly.

3.2.4 Type and sources of data

The collection of both primary and secondary data can be complementary; the report card developed for the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project, for example, which aims to assess the public availability of information, looks for answers to the following: 1. Does the information exist, and is it demonstrably in the public domain? 2. Do local people know what information exists? 3. Have they actually tried to obtain it? While questions 2 and 3 can be answered only by directly asking the people concerned (primary data), the information needed to answer the first question could be obtained from secondary data – for example, it would be feasible to check the existence of this sort of information via a quick internet search, without having to conduct any sort of questionnaire exercise.

Similarly, relying primarily on objective data does not necessarily preclude referring to perceptions-based data in a complementary way, as the Secrecy Report Card (6) does.[19]

3.2.5 Frequency of data collection and over-time comparison

As discussed in section 2 of this report, if the same assessment method is replicated over time, a report card can also be a powerful tool for assessing change and improvement. The frequency with which data are collected and updated will depend on the purpose of the report card, the type of information to be covered and the material resources available. Of those models outlined in Table 1, the Secrecy Report Card (5) is replicated every year; the Forests Australia Report Card (4) tracks the progress towards forest sustainability by applying the same

framework every five years; and the Open Budget Index (11) is meant to be replicated every two years to track progress in budget disclosure. Similarly, the Chatham House initiative intends to conduct any future regular assessment biennially. In the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project, data is to be collected on an annual basis.

3.2.6 Relationship between the individual report card and the summary compilation

Some of the initiatives outlined in Table 1 are geared (more or less explicitly) towards policy change, by guiding advocacy efforts or informing decision-making processes. This is indeed the purpose of *Making the Forest Sector Transparent*, and the report card is accompanied by a summary compilation offering further analysis of the findings. It also documents and explains the research process and includes the full questionnaire. The inclusion of conclusions and recommendations in the summary is an important way to outline gaps and successes, and provide a basis for further advocacy work. The Open Budget Index "Full Report" is also a very good example in this respect.

Making the Forest Sector Transparent **Report Card Overview for Ghana**

4 Conclusion

Report cards are popular assessment tools which are intended to provide an account of a given situation. Some of the key advantages of report cards as assessment tools include:

- The "yes/no" questions, helping to increase objectivity;
- Data can be gathered and compiled quickly;
- Use of a standardised format and sets of assessment indicators which are easily replicated makes report cards powerful tools for making comparisons over time and/or across units of analysis;
- The combination of objective "yes/no" data and more discursive analysis helps to identify priorities for advocacy work.

Depending on the object, the purpose and the extent of the analysis, different assessment methods can be employed. Broadly speaking, there are two main models of report cards: (i) Scoring and Ranking or (ii) Descriptive.

- Scoring and ranking report cards are quantitative in nature. Scores are awarded according to a standardised scale (anything from simple binary scoring - 1 or 0, for example – to different categories from which to choose, such as green yellow or red.) The scores obtained are usually aggregated into a single index. Since any scoring implies some sort of weighting, rankings can be established and broad comparisons can be made between units of analysis. This means that scoring and ranking models are particularly apt where there are a large number of units of analysis (for example, 80 countries.)
- In contrast, Descriptive report cards are more qualitative in nature; they rely on the compilation and analysis of a series of different criteria and indicators. Descriptive report cards provide much more detailed information and allow for a greater level of analysis on a case-by-case basis but they are less appropriate to establish straightforward comparisons.

The implication is that by choosing one model over the other, there is often a trade-off between the specificity of the information provided and the ability of drawing comparisons. This can, however, be reduced by devising a report card which includes elements of both methods.

There is also a risk, with report cards, of obtaining answers that are subjective or non-comparable, which makes useful analysis difficult. This can be prevented by setting very specific questions (as the questions become more specific, there is less room for interpretation and for applying different assessment criteria). In this regard, it's important to describe and provide the rational of the criteria and indicators used. This also helps giving credence to the research and contributes to a better understanding of the findings.

Any measurement exercise raises the question of what is it that we want to measure, how are we going to measure it and what is the purpose of our measurement. Report cards are therefore only useful as an assessment tool if we are very clear about what it is we want to assess and if the information we collect is relevant and reliable. It is therefore crucial that, during the design stage, we:

- Know enough about the purpose for which we want to use it and we need to define what we are going to assess;

- Assess how many questions to include, taking into account: the desired coverage; the desired level of specificity; issues of feasibility and availability of information; and the intended audience. A good mantra is “don’t ask a question if you are not going to make use of the answer.”

- Avoid obtaining subjective or non-comparable answers, either by (i) setting very specific “yes/no” questions or (ii) establishing clear assessment criteria (for example, providing further, more specific options for each “yes/no” answer in the form of a,b,c,d or e..);

- Be able to clearly describe and explain the rationale behind the criteria and indicators used; this will help to give credence to the research as well as help explain the findings.

As we have seen from the *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project, for example, the concept of ‘transparency’ is often very difficult to define and accurately measure and therefore any decisions around the understanding of this concept and the methodological choices made regarding its measurement have an important bearing upon the final output.

5 References

1 Please see www.foresttransparency.info for more updates on the status of the printed 2009 Annual Forest Transparency Report (at the time of writing, this printed report was still in production.)

2 David Roodman, 'Building and Running an Effective Policy Index: Lessons from the Commitment to Development Index', 13 March 2006; www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/6661.

3 Kenneth L. Rosenbaum, 'Tools for Civil Society Action to Reduce Forest Corruption: Drawing Lessons From Transparency International', January 2005, p. 23; www.profor.info/profor/node/10.

4 Janmejay Singh and Permesh Shah, 'Community Score Card Process: A Short Note on the General Methodology for Implementation'; http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPCENG/1143333-1116505690049/20509286/comscorecardsnote.pdf.

5 www.article19.org/pdfs/tools/africa-foe-checklist.pdf.

6 Global Accountability Report, p. 65; www.oneworldtrust.org/?display=index_2007_home.

7 See for example Todd Landman, Julia Häusermann et al., 'Map-Making and Analysis of the Main International Initiatives on Developing Indicators on Democracy and Good Governance', University of Essex, July 2003; www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/28/20755719.pdf.

8 Jonathan Fox, 'The uncertain relationship between transparency and accountability', Development in Practice, Volume 17, Numbers 4-5, August 2007, p. 663; http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8c25c3z4.pdf?action=transientDownload;expire=72h;from=2009-12-07:01:54;key=01496c91f32d96819e5c05ca6de954af. Please see www.foresttransparency.info and the forthcoming 2009 Annual Forest Transparency Report for further discussion on the nature of transparency and its relationship to accountability and governance.

9 Malcolm Gladwell (2007), 'Open Secrets: Enron, intelligence, and the perils of too much information'; New Yorker. www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/01/08/070108fa_fact?currentPage=all.

10 2007 Global Accountability report, p. 11; www.oneworldtrust.org/?display=index_2007_home.

11 Anna Bellver and Daniel Kaufman, The World Bank, "Transparenting Transparency: Initial Empirics and Policy Applications", preliminary draft discussion paper presented at the IMF conference on transparency and integrity, 6th-7th July 2005, p. 4. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=808664.

12 Global Witness, 'A guide to Independent Forest Monitoring', 2005; www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/140/en/a_guide_to_independent_forest_monitoring.

13 World Resources Institute, 'Developing a Forest Transparent Initiative: scoping paper', November 2006, Appendix 3; www.globalforestwatch.org/english/pdfs/WRI_Forest_Transparency_Initiative_GLOBE_G8_Illegal_Logging_Dialogue.pdf. (Note that the WRI lists focus primarily on the logging industry; any consideration of them needs to incorporate their adaptation to other forms of forest management, not least Payments for Environmental Service (PES) and climate-change related activities such as Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) schemes.)

14 'Control of Illegal Logging and International Trade in Illegally Logged Timber'; www.chathamhouse.org.uk/research/eedp/current_projects/illegal_logging/.

15 Crystal Davis, Florence Daviet, and Smita Nakhooda ,'Governance of Forests Initiative Indicator Framework', September 2009; www.wri.org/publication/governance-of-forests-initiative-indicator-framework.

16 http://www.transparency.org/regional_pages/asia_pacific/forest_governance_integrity.

17 Blundell A.G. and Harwell E.E. (2009), 'Manual: an analysis of corruption in the forest sector', Transparency International and Natural Capital Advisors LLC, October 2009. http://www.transparency.org/content/download/49141/785491//Forest+sector+corruption+tools+nov+09+FINAL.pdf.

18 See the Participatory Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation website of Wageningen International University & Research centre for a summary of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and similar tools; http://portals.wi.wur.nl/ppme/content.php?ID=394&IDsub=571.

19 See www.openthegovernment.org/otg/SecrecyReportCard08.pdf, p. 5: "A March 2008 Sunshine Week poll found that three-quarters of American adults view the federal government as secretive, and nearly nine in 10 say it's important to know presidential and congressional candidates' positions on open government when deciding for whom to vote."