
WP23_25: Global Forest Observation Initiative

1268,171

Basic Information

Full title of the Initiative

Global Forest Observations Initiative

Short Title or Acronym

GFOI

Current category in the 2020-2022 GWP

GEO Flagship

Proposed category in the 2023-2025 GWP

GEO Flagship

Points of Contact

First Name	Last/Family Name	Email
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Purpose

Objective

Support developing countries to operationalize national forest monitoring systems and associated greenhouse gas accounting procedures.

Please provide a short description of the Initiative

GFOI is a partnership for coordinating international support for improving forest monitoring and associated greenhouse gas accounting capabilities in developing countries. Through collaborative action, GFOI partners support countries to design, develop and operationalize their own national forest monitoring systems (NFMS) and associated emissions measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) procedures to inform their national decision making, international commitments, and track progress in climate action.

GFOI coordinates international assistance under four central components in i.) Capacity Building, ii.) Data, iii.) Methods and Guidance and iv.) Research and Development (R&D). The Initiative is governed by a Leads Group with representatives from all major development partners in the forest monitoring sector.

Why is this Initiative needed?

In recent years, there has been a growing need for countries to better understand their forests, how they change over time and in particular the role they can play in addressing climate change. Developing countries are seeking to develop NFMS and associated MRV procedures to help inform their policy development, international

reporting, transparency measures and, ultimately their efforts to reduce GHG emissions. Furthermore, this increased demand for improved information from forests has been coupled with a boom in the supply of data, tools and other forms of international support available to developing countries to help them improve their forest monitoring capabilities. Without global coordination and a targeted effort to align the boom in both the demand for forest information and the supply of new technology, developing countries would likely be inundated with different approaches and subsequently the development of their NFMS would be at risk of paralysis.

What evidence is there to support this need?

Country obligations under the Paris Agreement, including commitments to meet and revise Nationally Determine Contributions (NDCs). For many developing countries, forests will play a key role in their efforts to curb climate change and hence reliable information is needed to enable informed decision making and action. Additionally, many developing countries are participating in financial mechanisms to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, commonly known as REDD+ which require countries to conduct rigorous MRV before they can access results based payments. Countries also require credible information to enable their participation in Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA), monitor their relevant indicators under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and various other forums.

Is this Initiative open to participation by representatives of any GEO Member, Participating Organization, and GEO Associate?

Yes

Are you aware of other projects or initiatives at a global or regional scale (both in GEO and externally) that provide similar products or services?

No

Please identify the most important actual and/or intended outputs (products, services, etc.) produced by the Initiative, along with their intended and/or actual users. This list does not need to be comprehensive but should identify the outputs which are most used and are expected to have the greatest potential impact.

Output	Status	Users	Additional info
User friendly methods and guidance for the development and operationalization of NFMS.	Regularly updated	Developing countries	
Complementary or consistent capacity building activities delivered directly to developing countries	Regularly updated	Developing countries	
Streamlined access to data, tools, and other technologies for forest monitoring and GHG accounting	Regularly updated	Developing countries	
Targeted R&D to fill knowledge gaps and overcome obstacles to progress	Regularly updated	Developing countries	
Cohesive network of international practitioners to support developing country implementation	Regularly updated	Developing countries	
Targeted communications and information sharing on latest methods, technology, events and other developments in the forest monitoring sector	Regularly updated	Developing countries and international practitioners	
A cohesive global network of experts that can be assigned to support countries the implement and improve their NFMS	Occasionally updated	Developing countries	
An inventory of development partners' forest monitoring support activities in developing countries	Regularly updated	Developing countries and international practitioners	

If needed, please provide additional comments or explanation to accompany the outputs table

Nb. GFOI is the product of the collaborative efforts of its partners, who are assisting developing countries to build their own forest monitoring systems and associated GHG accounting capabilities. These are the ultimate outputs of GFOI's work but the nature of the Initiative as a voluntary partnership for coordinating support to countries means the outputs can not be assigned to GFOI itself. The outputs of GFOI are therefore limited to the collaborative efforts and products of the GFOI community.

What kinds of decisions are the outputs of this Initiative primarily intended to support?

The outputs of GFOI will help partners to better decide how to target their forest carbon monitoring support to developing countries in a more efficient and effective manner. In turn, developing countries will then be better placed to operationalize their NFMS and associated MRV procedures to enable better decision making, reporting and action on the management of their forests and efforts to curb climate change.

How will these decisions benefit from the outputs of this Initiative?

Through participation in GFOI's coordination mechanisms, partners will be able to better understand what kind of specific support a country needs to progress their forest monitoring practices towards operational readiness. In turn, they can then work with other partners to work out how that support can best be delivered through: shared resourcing, leveraging comparative advantages and utilizing GFOI's common resources such as the MGD and others from the GFOI Family of Resources. More

What kinds of impacts (for example, reduced loss of life, monetary savings, conservation of biodiversity, etc.) are anticipated as a result of the use of the outputs of this Initiative?

Reduced forest loss and associated conservation efforts (i.e. biodiversity etc) and action on climate change.

Has this Initiative been asked to provide specific information (for example, reports, data, services) on an ongoing basis to an international convention, organization, or other multilateral body?

No

Technical Synopsis

Please provide a brief description of the methods used by the Initiative to produce its (actual or planned) outputs.

GFOI utilizes a series of coordination mechanisms to facilitate effective cooperation between development partners which leads to a coherent global package of forest monitoring support to developing countries and thus better enables them to operationalize their own NFMS and associated MRV procedures. These coordination mechanisms include: Country-Led Planning (CLPs), collaborative work plan planning, targeted communications, the GFOI Family of Resources, the GFOI Inventory Activities, the GFOI Information Exchange, GFOI Focused Discussions, monthly Leads meeting and the annual GFOI Plenary.

In terms of the common technical framework that GFOI partners use, the Initiative has developed the Methods and Guidance Documentation (MGD) which provides the best available guidance on scientifically sound and operational technology for developing countries to design, build and deliver their NFMS focused on meeting MRV requirements of the UNFCCC. The MGD is globally recognized as an authoritative resource for helping developing countries to meet their international GHG reporting obligations compliant with the IPCC Good Practice Guidance and UNFCCC rules, specifically for REDD+ activities. The MGD has been developed and updated in to a third version, which is available in English, French and Spanish, is used by all GFOI partners to guide their assistance to countries in a coherently and complimentary manner.

Building on the success of the MGD, GFOI has subsequently developed a set of interlinked resources known as the GFOI Family of Resources (GFoR) which also includes REDDcompass platform, the Registry of Tools (RoT) and OpenMRV platform. The GFoR provides a more holistic and user-friendly framework to help countries navigate the complex process of developing their own NFMS and associated MRV procedures. Rather than just providing guidance at the conceptual level in the MGD, GFOI is now able to link specific actions (REDDcompass) that countries can choose to take in developing their systems with relevant sections of the guidance, tools for completing these actions (RoT) and instructional materials (OpenMRV) for using these tools in practice and other products as part of an operational NFMS. Importantly, the GFoR also provides a neutral framework for to organize the vast amount of technical resources that GFOI partners have developed to support countries' forest monitoring and MRV efforts. See reddcompass.org for more details and documentation.

If you would like to provide further details on the technical methods, you may upload one or more documents here.

- no supporting documents provided -

Are there any significant scientific or technical challenges that need to be resolved by the Initiative during the 2023-2025 period?

Yes

Please describe these challenges and the steps being taken to solve them.

Helping countries to conduct their own national planning for operationalizing and sustaining their NFMS and associated MRV procedures. GFOI is currently designing a new activity known as Country-Led Planning (CLP) which will focus on training countries to conduct their own national planning processes, including identifying and addressing their outstanding needs and gaps for operationalizing their NFMS. By increasing countries' planning capacity, GFOI hopes to empower countries to develop holistic plans to sustain their own forest monitoring and MRV processes. From these plans, countries will be better able to identify any outstanding gaps that they can either fulfil themselves or that they need international support to address. GFOI will work to coordinate international partners' support to address these needs where possible. The CLP process is currently being scoped and is intended to be implemented from 2023-24 at least.

Does the Initiative expect to complete any key new outputs, improvements to existing outputs, or improvements to the methods of producing outputs, in the 2023-2025 period?

Yes

Please describe these new outputs or improvements.

Country owned strategic plans for operationalizing their national systems - coordinated international work plans to help fulfil these plans.

Please identify the key tasks that must be implemented to ensure delivery of these changes, with target dates for completion.

Task	Task description	Expected completion (month/year)
CLP scoping finalized	Finalize the design of the activity, including development of support materials, workshop content and other means of support.	End of 2022.
CLP process implemented	Support countries from all three regions (Asia-Pacific, Africa and Latin America) to complete the CLP process.	End of 2024.

Resources

Have all resources required to implement the Initiative's planned work in the 2023-2025 period been secured?

- Gap in financial resources

What is the estimated funding gap for the 2023-2025 period?

GFOI's funding arrangements are complex, given the voluntary nature of the Initiative and most resources

being provided via in-kind contributions from partners which are managed separately by those partners and it wouldn't be appropriate or possible to comment on those here. The GFOI Office, as the secretariat for the Initiative, is simpler arrangement and will have funding available until the end of 2024 but at a reduced level of approximately \$US1.35m than the ideal position for the period 2023-24 which is the current funding cycle for the Office. Funding considerations for the remaining 2025-26 period have not commenced yet and likely won't until late 2023.

What actions is the Initiative taking to obtain the required resources?

The GFOI Office is working with its partners to identify additional sources of funding, either as direct funding contributions to the Office or via in-kind contributions to support the implementation of GFOI activities such as funding workshops, travel and experts etc.

Please list all financial and non-financial contributions to the Initiative (other than in-kind, voluntary participation by individual contributors) having a value of more than USD 50,000.

- no answer given -

Lessons from the 2020-2022 Period

Were all planned activities for the 2020-2022 period implemented as expected?

No

Please describe which activities were delayed or not implemented and how has this affected plans for 2023-2025.

The Country Needs Assessment (CNA) process was not implemented in full. This was due partially to the impact of the pandemic, a lack of direct funding support and some issues with the methodology which could not be addressed via remote engagement. This forced a rethink of the activity which has now morphed in to the country-led planning (CLP) process which will be implemented from 2023 onwards with some funding support from the GFOI Office.

Various in-person activities were also cancelled during during 2020-22 due to the pandemic, including GFOI Plenaries, Capacity Building Summits, training workshops, Leads meetings and other. This forced GFOI operations in to an entirely virtual realm, like most other organization. Several valuable lessons were learnt about how activities can be progressed remotely, which will be heeded by GFOI going forward including how to use a combination of both remote and in-person engagement with countries to allow for more targeted support that is both broader, deeper and more cost effective.

Were there any key challenges faced by the Initiative in the 2020-2022 period?

Yes

Please describe.

Pandemic - rapid shift to remote operations, including the last minute delay and ultimately cancellation of the GFOI Plenary in March 2020.

Were there any impacts or changes to operations due to COVID-19?

Yes

Please describe.

As mentioned above, operations shifted entirely to the virtual realm. This actually presented some initial opportunities for GFOI, whereby we were able to connect with more people and more frequently than we have ever been able to in-person. However, once the novelty of webinars and virtual interactions began to

wane there was a drop off in engagement. There was also an inability to address complex issues via remote means. Such issues often require intense focus from a group of experts sitting in a room together for several days to make real progress. Unfortunately virtual interactions cannot compete with this but fortunately the GFOI community looks forward to recommencing in-person interactions in 2022 and beyond.

Please describe the key changes proposed for the 2023-2025 period, for example, new projects, new areas of focus, or adjustments to the activity governance.

The main changes to GFOI will be the incorporation of the CLP process and its shift in thinking from its predecessor the CNA process. This will be central to GFOI's work going forward, with implementation organized by the GFOI Office which has traditionally not taken on such implementation tasks. It was deemed necessary for the Office to take this on as it is seen as a core GFOI activity and central to the success of the Initiative going forward.

GFOI will also make full use of the GFOI Family of Resources (GFoR) from late 2022 onwards. The GFoR is a suite of interconnected resources developed by the GFOI community to support countries through the journey of establishing operational National Forest Monitoring Systems (NFMS) and associated emissions Measurement, Report and Verification (MRV) procedures. Importantly, the GFoR also provides a neutral framework to organize the vast amount of technical resources that GFOI partners have developed to support countries' forest monitoring and MRV efforts. This helps countries to consider all the relevant resources for completing a particular step at the right stage in the broader MRV process. The neutral platform allows them to select products that best suit their own unique needs and national circumstances. For development partners, the GFoR provides a framework for presenting their products to countries for use in an operational environment.

GFOI will make use of a hybrid approach of virtual and in-person engagements from 2023 onwards. This includes country trainings which may commence with an initial briefing, base level training before participants who pass a base level examination are then supported to travel for an in-person workshop that allows for deeper training opportunities. Following this, GFOI experts will continue to engage with country representatives remotely to help them finalizing their training and apply it in operational contexts. GFOI anticipates being able to provide more complete, better targeted and more sustained training to countries at a lower cost using this hybrid approach.

Does the Initiative have outputs (products, services, etc.) available to users now, even if only on a pilot or testing basis?

Yes

Please provide any available information describing this usage (for example, user statistics, results of user testing) and/or feedback from users (for example, user comments, evaluations).

GFOI Methods and Guidance Documentation (MGD) is GFOI primary resource - and averages approximately 4000 downloads per year of the third editions English version alone, which is considered quite high for a document targeted at a specialist community of limited users. This also doesn't account for all those who accessed the HTML version which is now available on the REDDcompass platform, nor the French and Spanish versions which have more recently been released and only incomplete user statistics are available.

REDDcompass platform - averages about 500 users per month from over 50 countries. Over 60% of these are repeat users. Once again, for a specialist topic and relatively small community this figure is considered quite high. This covers the majority of the targeted REDD+ countries with approximately 10 users per country, which is the expected size of the teams of experts working on forest monitoring and MRV systems nationally.

Registry of Tools - this platform has only recently gone live but has not been formally launched yet, therefore no meaningful user statistics are available.

OpenMRV platform - approximately 200 users per month, since its soft launching in mid 2021. This number is still considered solid for a specialist platform and given that promotions have been limited to date, while GFOI finalizes the broader GFoR and how the other resources link to OpenMRV.

Please provide supporting documentation if available.

- no supporting documents provided -

Do you have evidence of any impacts that have occurred in part as a result of using the outputs of the Initiative (for example, policy decisions taken, behaviour changes by users, risks mitigated)?

Yes

Please provide examples, with evidence where available.

Developing countries have made considerable progress in the implementation of their NFMS and associated MRV procedures, with the support of GFOI partners. The resources developed by the GFOI community have been used to compile countless REDD+ submissions from countries to the UNFCCC and other forums such as the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and others. In recent times, there has been a notable increase in the number of submissions made to the UNFCCC in particular. As of 2018, only 35 Forest Reference Emissions Levels (FRELs) had been submitted by countries to the UNFCCC, by late 2021 at least 69 submissions had been made by 55 countries. In terms of REDD+ results, only one submission had been made in 2018 (Brazil) but by late 2021, 20 submissions had been made to the UNFCCC by 14 countries demonstrating real reductions in GHG emissions from forests in developing countries. Furthermore, a significant milestone was achieved by a key GFOI partner country, Mozambique, which was the first country to access performance-based funds for verified emissions reductions from the World Bank-administered FCPF in 2021. Mozambique has long been closely involved in GFOI through workshops, and has used GFOI's shared resources and hosted the GFOI Plenary in 2019; this milestone was thus a great achievement for the FCPF and its donors, as well as for the GFOI community.

Additionally, GFOI's MGD played a vital role in the IPCC's 2019 Refinement of its Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories. The MGD was referenced 14 times in the refinement, with 15 authors of the MGD involvement in writing the IPCC's 2019 Refinement.

Please provide supporting documentation if available.

- no supporting documents provided -

Have there been any internal or external reviews or evaluations of the Initiative since 2019?

No

Please indicate any GEO Work Programme activities with which you have ongoing collaboration.

Please indicate any additional GEO Work Programme activities with which you would like to establish new collaborations.

- GEO-TREES - Forest Biomass Reference System from Tree-by-Tree Inventory Data
- GEO BON - GEO Biodiversity Observation Network
- GEOGLAM - GEO Global Agricultural Monitoring
- GEO-LDN - GEO Land Degradation Neutrality
- GEO-WETLANDS - GEO Wetlands
- LAND-COVER - Global Land Cover

Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity Building

Are there specific countries or organizations that your Initiative would like to engage?

Yes

Please list these countries, regions or organizations.

All developing countries seeking to develop forest monitoring systems and associated MRV procedures. These are predominantly located in the tropics and spread across three main regions in Asia-Pacific, Africa and Latin America. Many of these countries are already engaged in GFOI or utilizing the resources but some less than others and still a few who are not at all engaged.

What are your plans to engage them?

GFOI will utilize its planned Country-Led Planning (CLP) activity as the entry point for countries to engage with GFOI. This process will be country driven, therefore only proactive countries will progress through the process to access the resources of the GFOI community as hosted on the GFOI Family of Resources. Some of these countries who have developed their own national plans, which include identification of clear gaps in their national capabilities that require international support to fulfill, may also access additional hands on support from GFOI's capacity building partners where there are resources available to do so.

Does your Initiative engage users in the work of the Initiative (for example, consultation, testing, co-design)?

Yes

Please briefly describe the Initiative's approach to engaging users.

GFOI utilizes its existing management structures to engage with its partners on core issues including monthly Leads meetings, regular component meetings, focused discussions and Plenaries. For engaging with countries, GFOI's Capacity Building component utilizes the existing structures and networks of GFOI's capacity building partners to consult on particular issues. For example, GFOI is currently scoping out its new CLP activity. This scoping exercise was initially proposed to the GFOI Leads Group as the main management body for the Initiative, who subsequently endorsed it. The team then opened consultations on the scoping process to GFOI's Component Managers and other key partners. In their consultations with GFOI's capacity building partners they identified key countries and individuals representatives who can provide valuable inputs to the exercise through one on one consultations. This process helps to ensure the activity is fundamentally supported by the management body (the Leads Group), key implementing partners are aware and able to shape the activity around their own priorities and programs (Component Managers and others) and ultimately the end user group of developing countries is also aware of the activity and able to shape its scope in a realistic manner that best enables operational uptake in countries.

Does the Initiative have a user engagement strategy or similar kind of document?

No

Are there categories of users that are not represented at this time, but you would like to engage?

No

Does the Initiative have a documented capacity development strategy?

No

Please describe the approach to capacity development that is being implemented by the Initiative?

GFOI coordinates partners own capacity building activities and hence draws on their own strategies and processes. GFOI did develop some Capacity Building Principles in 2018 but these are due to be updated and will need to incorporate the new CLP processes and GFoR. This will happen from 2023 onwards.

Are there any commercial sector organizations participating in this Initiative?

No

Are there opportunities for commercial sector uptake of the outputs of the Initiative?

No

Are there opportunities for further commercial sector participation in the Initiative?

Yes

Please describe these opportunities.

GFOI likely need to further consider its engagement with the commercial sector. Individual partners certainly already do this through their own contractual arrangements i.e. one prominent example is Norway's procurement of high resolution imagery from KSAT, Planet and Airbus and there are many other technology providers that GFOI partners work with such as Google, Amazon, Microsoft etc. GFOI will explore opportunities for more structured engagement with the private sector, noting GFOI partners to date are overwhelming from governments, multilaterals, academia, CSOs and other non-commercial entities.

Does the Initiative have a plan for commercial sector engagement?

No

Governance

Please describe the roles of each of the key leadership positions, as well as any team structures involved in day-to-day management.

GFOI is guided by a Leads Group, currently comprising of the Governments of Australia, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) as well as the international Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS), the European Space Agency (ESA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Bank. Membership of the Leads Group is based on partners who make significant financial or in-kind contributions and/or those who seek to coordinate large scale activities through the Initiative. The Leads Group is open to new members from partners who make substantial contributions to the sector.

The Leads Group sets the strategic direction for the Initiative, identifies new opportunities, assesses progress against deliverables, and oversees activities and funding. Each member of the Leads Group is responsible for ensuring that their organization actively participates in the coordination activities of the Initiative and seek to deliver a harmonized package of support with other partners to developing countries.

The Leads also appoint managers of each of GFOI's four components: capacity building, data, methods and guidance and R&D. The Component Managers are responsible for the planning, delivery and reporting of component activities. Representatives from FAO and SilvaCarbon jointly manage the Capacity Building Component, CEOS and the USFS jointly manage the Data Component, Australia manages the MGD Component and the R&D Component Management will be funded by ESA.

The GFOI Office provides day-to-day management and secretariat services for the Initiative on behalf of the Leads. It supports the Leads Group, Components, and partners to deliver on the objectives of the GFOI. The Office oversees GFOI-specific activities, facilitates coordination between partners, and supports developing country involvement in events and manages the annual GFOI Plenary. The Office is based at the FAO in Rome and staffed with a team of project managers and content specialists.

Collectively the Leads Group, Component Managers and GFOI Office are responsible for the main operations of GFOI and constitute the three management layers.

Is there a steering committee or other governance bodies that advise the Initiative but are not involved in day-to-day management?

Yes

Please describe the roles of each body. If there are multiple governance bodies, please describe the relationships among them (such as through a governance structure diagram).

GFOI also entails the MGD Advisory Group, which is structured as an independent body for providing expert advice and guidance to GFOI. Specifically, the Advisory Group directs the development of the MGD and endorses new materials proposed for inclusion in the GFoR. The Group ensures that GFOI's resources continue to align with the priorities of developing countries and provides guidance on operational methods and approaches in support of GFOI activities. The Group consists of a broad range international experts from both developing and developed countries as well international organization and individual experts. It is chaired by a senior expert appointed by the Leads and supported administratively by the MGD Component Manager.

- no supporting documents provided -

What methods does the Initiative use to communicate with its participants?

- Email / e-newsletters
- Regular conference calls
- Website
- Regular events
- Other

Please describe.

The GFOI Leads Group meets every month. Component Managers meeting quarterly. The GFOI Plenary is convened annually and the GFOI Information Exchange three times a year. The GFOI also employs its communications strategy to share information about GFOI and partners activities in a targeted manner through regular e-alerts, web stories, social media, videos and other channels. GFOI also draws on the communications of its partners to help amplify these messages.

Please describe the key risks that could delay or obstruct the completion of the planned activities and outputs of the Initiative, along with any actions taken to mitigate these risks.

Description of the hazard	Description of the possible impacts	Scale of impact	Likelihood of occurrence	Mitigation measures
Partners are unable to make sufficient in-kind contributions to the core activities of the Initiative.	Difficult to align international support with country needs and reduced ability to coordinate	Severe	Not very likely	Continue to demonstrate the value
Countries not willing to participate in CLP process	Difficult to align international support with national plans, needs and gaps.	Severe	Not very likely	Ensure countries are closely consulted and involved in all stages of the CLP including scoping and implementation planning. This should help them realise the value of the process and prioritize their participation.
GFOI partners' resources are not sufficiently flexible to be able to align with country plans and help address needs for international support	International support is poorly targeted and ineffective	Severe	Possible	Ensure partners are closely consulted and involved in all stages of the CLP including scoping and implementation planning. This should help them realise the value of the process and prioritize their participation.

What methods are used by the Initiative to monitor its effectiveness?

- Informal discussions with users / beneficiaries
- User or beneficiary surveys
- Website statistics
- Consultations or events

Would the Initiative be interested in assistance from the GEO Secretariat for developing an impact plan?

Yes

How are the results of the monitoring and evaluation activities shared with participants and the wider GEO community?

Discussed at GFOI meetings and public events. Significant developments are promoted via communications channels.

Are any monitoring or evaluation activities required by funders/contributors?

Yes

Please describe and provide reports if available.

- no answer given -

- no supporting documents provided -

Participants

Please list the active individual participants in the Initiative

First name	Last name	Email address	Member	Org
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Other information

Please provide any other comments or information that was not included in the previous sections, but you would like to appear in the Implementation Plan.

Please remember the nature of GFOI - not as a global monitoring system but instead a forum for coordinating partners existing forest monitoring support activities to help building developing country capacity in forest carbon monitoring. People can often get confused by this and misinterpret the Initiative's objectives, deliverables and metrics for success.

- no supporting documents provided -

Co-Editor Management

List of co-editors for this initiative

- no answer given -