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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION
European Forestry Commission

JOINT FAO/ECE WORKING PARTY ON FOREST ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS

Twenty-third session, 14-16 May 2001

Programme of work for 2001-2004: role of the Working Party

(Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda)

Note by the Chairman and the secretariat

A number of structural changes over the past decade and the strategic review being carried out by the Working Party's parent bodies have led the Chairman and the secretariat to consider the role of the Working Party and the main challenges facing it.

The Working Party is invited to discuss its own role in the light of the questions posed in this paper

Introduction

1. Under this item, the Working Party is expected to review and approve its programme for the forthcoming years, on the basis of a draft proposed by the secretariat. However, in view of the strategic review of the whole ECE/FAO programme being carried out by the Working Party's parent bodies, and a number of other structural trends described below, the Chairman and the secretariat considered it was appropriate to stimulate a more wide-ranging debate about the Working Party's role. This document provides background information and suggestions for this discussion.

Background

2. The Working Party was founded in 1956; its terms of reference were last formally reviewed in 1985. They are reproduced in annex 1 and may be summarised as follows:

- Keep under review **needs at the international level** for statistics and other information;
- Develop **methodologies** for use in economic analysis as well as techniques for collecting, processing and presenting statistics;
- Undertake **ad hoc projects** in the field of economics and statistics;
- Work with other bodies to achieve **co-ordination of statistical activities**, and avoid unnecessary duplication.

3. In 1995, the parent bodies of the Working Party agreed on a revised vision of their task which was defined as "to monitor and analyse sustainable forest management in the region" and made the Working Party "responsible for guiding the implementation in its area of competence of work areas 1.1 (collection and dissemination of information on trends in the sector, including publication of the *Timber Bulletin*), 1.2 (forest resource assessment 2000, temperate and boreal forests), 1.3 (sustainable forest management in the region, support to the follow-up to UNCED and the Ministerial Conference on protection of forests in Europe), 1.5 (review of markets for forest products and short term forecasts) and 1.6 (forest and forest products sector outlook studies)¹."

4. Working methods evolved over the 1990s, in particular with increased intensity of work by teams of specialists and tighter cooperation between international organisations:

- The "core team" on outlook studies was very active in implementing ETTS V (1996) and was "relaunched" in 1999 to prepare the next studies;
- The TBFRA team guided the work which culminated in the publication of TBFRA in 2000, and is continuing to develop this area of activity;
- The Intersecretariat Working Group on Forest Sector statistics has been formed with the aim of simplifying and co-ordinating reporting and improving comparability between data bases. The most important output so far has been the Joint FAO/ECE/Eurostat/ITTO Forest Sector Questionnaire and the associated data reporting, sharing and validation procedures.
- It is expected that the bureaux in May 2001 will approve the foundation of a team of specialists on marketing and market analysis with similar functions to the above-mentioned teams on outlook studies and TBFRA.

¹ There is thus a structural difference between the mandate for the Working Party, which is to guide the implementation of certain parts of the parent bodies' programme and that of the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training, which has its own programme on which it reports to the parent bodies.

5. A strategic review of the whole ECE/FAO programme was undertaken in 2000/2001: an extended bureaux meeting in February 2001 made a number of proposals, which were reviewed by a side-meeting at the FAO Committee on Forestry in March 2001. The regular bureaux meeting the week before the Working Party session will approve a revised programme of work, for approval by the Timber Committee in October 2001. The Working Party will be informed of progress on the strategic review: delegates are invited to consult the latest versions of the documents in the Timber Committee website². From the process so far, however, it is clear that high priority will continue to be given to those topics in the Working Party's traditional area of activity. Although the bureaux, at their regular meeting will approve a draft programme just before the Working Party session, the Working Party's suggestions can be taken into account, with the bureaux' approval, when the draft is finalised for formal submission to the Timber Committee in October 2001.

6. In summary therefore:

- The Working Party's areas of expertise and experience remain at the core of the parent bodies' priority areas;
- The complexity and intensity of countries' input to the work has been increased by the use of teams of specialists, which, by their nature, are small groups of experts acting in a personal capacity.

Issues

7. The first issue is recognition of the **increasing quantity, complexity, and importance** of material that is placed before the Working Party for its consideration. By way of example, the provisional agenda for the twenty-third session asks the delegates to

- Review and comment on plans for the European Forest Sector Outlook Studies;
- Evaluate the TBFRA-200 and FRA 200, and review plans for future resource assessment work;
- Review the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire, and in general the collection and dissemination of forest sector statistics;
- Review publications and work associated with market analysis and forecasts.

8. Each of these agenda items is, by itself, a significant and complex topic. Together, the topics cover a wide range of issues for which there is a desire for credible, reliable information that will inform and guide broad-scale policy decisions. Each of the items also is increasingly important in the context of the evolving, intergovernmental forest policy dialogue. Countries are asking for, and are using, the data and analysis discussed by the Working Party to inform debate on topics that are at times sensitive and contentious. The agenda of the Working Party, therefore, must be recognized as one requiring substantial technical expertise and careful consideration of the interaction of technical issues and policy debates.

9. The second concern that stimulates this note is the observation that **the formal role of the Working Party is not well defined, and has evolved, in an unplanned way, over time**. In one sense, the position of the Working Party in relation to the parent bodies (the Timber Committee and Forest Commission), subsidiary bodies (such as Teams of Specialists), and the Secretariat is clear. Nevertheless, many of the activities of the Working Party—such as evaluating, reviewing, endorsing, commenting, and approving—are

² These documents are not being attached to the present paper, as they will be superseded before the Working Party session (when the bureaux revise them and approve a new programme), which might unnecessarily confuse the Working Party discussion.

not defined. There are some topics on which the Working Party has (for example) the authority and responsibility of “gatekeeper” (approving or rejecting); on other topics the role of the Working Party is less clear.

10. There are some circumstances when emphasis is placed on “approving” (such as for the formation and terms of reference for Teams of Specialists). In other circumstances the emphasis is on “review” or “comment.” It is not clear, however, whether the role of the Working Party is determined by the topic, by a decision or request of the parent bodies, by the Working Party itself, by the Secretariat, or by some combination of these. The absence of clarity in these matters can easily lead to inconsistency between the intentions and actions of the Working Party and the expectations and understanding of the parent bodies, subsidiary bodies, and the Secretariat.

11. The Working Party has a long tradition as a body of experts in forest economics and statistics functioning in an official, representative capacity as part of an intergovernmental process. The Working Party exists in the important nexus between the definition and production of detailed, technical information (such as is done by the TOS and the country correspondents), and the broader policy-oriented environment of the parent bodies. It is likely that the intergovernmental policy dialogue that is both increasingly active and, at the same time, demanding a greater quantity of more reliable information will place greater demands on bodies such as the Working Party. It is important however to be realistic in the expectations of what the Working Party can provide, with the time and resources available.

Topics for discussion at the Twenty-third Session of the Joint Working Party

12. If this assessment is accurate, it suggests the need for additional discussion at the upcoming session of the Working Party. This discussion might begin with consideration of questions such as:

- Are the role(s) of the Working Party adequately described and well understood?
- Do these roles differ by topic?
- Do delegates (countries) have a consensus view of the roles of the Working Party?
- Does the Working Party adequately carry out these roles? Have some roles received more attention than others?
- What factors, if any, limit the performance of the Working Party?
 - Capabilities and expectations of members of the Working Party?
 - Working methods at biennial meetings?
 - Inter-sessional activities?
 - Quality and type of work done by subsidiary bodies?
 - Communication among Working Party, secretariat, and parent bodies?

Suggested decisions/actions

13. Discussion of this topic should reveal clearly the views of the delegates on (1) the role(s) of the Working Party; (2) how well the Working Party performs the role(s); and (3) actions that should be taken to address shortcomings or concerns (if any) identified. These views should be transmitted to the parent bodies.

14. The Working Party also should consider the merits of defining and documenting roles and expectations for the guidance of (1) countries (for example, in the selection of delegates), and (2) subsidiary bodies. The roles of the Working party's bureau might also be discussed.

15. As a stimulus to the discussion, the secretariat and chairman would propose the following broad lines:

- The Working Party should remain the lowest level of **intergovernmental** discussion of economic/information/statistical issues in the sector of forestry and forest products. As such, it should continue to interpret and review the work of more technical groups for higher policy bodies, notably its own parent bodies, but also transmit the information needs of the international policy dialogue to those equipped to satisfy those needs.
- It should continue to review and approve the terms of reference of those teams of specialists reporting to it (TBFRA, EFSOS, proposed team on markets, unless this reports directly to the Timber Committee), and comment on their results, without however being expected to approve the output in detail, as this is not a realistic expectation. In addition the secretariat and the team members should take responsibility for their work and their contribution be properly recognised.
- It should continue to be informed of, and invited to comment on, the work of the Intersecretariat Working Group;
- It should continue to review at the intergovernmental level, the international systems for collecting, disseminating and analysing information and statistics on the forest and forest products sector. This review should cover not only ECE/FAO, but also other organisations, without of course encroaching on their responsibilities and mandates, so that an overall view is obtained. A particular objective would be to assess whether the information needs of the international policy dialogue are being satisfactorily met, and if not to identify areas where ECE/FAO could contribute. Further user surveys could play a role here.
- It should address that part of its terms of reference concerned with methodologies, techniques and *ad hoc* projects by holding a half day round table discussion at each session on a topic agreed by its bureau, based on 2-3 presentations and an informed discussion.

Methods of work and resources

16. The resources, in terms of secretariat and meeting time also must be taken into account. Before the ECE reform of the 1990s, the sessions every two years took up a whole week of 8-10 half day session, whereas that reform limited meetings of subsidiary bodies such as the Working Party to 5 half day sessions. At the same time, the secretariat had to devote an increased part of its time to those projects for which the Working Party is responsible: EFSOS, market analysis, TBFRA, improvement of data base, and data dissemination etc. This has led to the present situation where despite the priority and resources assigned to those areas for which the Working Party is responsible, its sessions are too short for the task expected and frequently under-prepared by the secretariat. Possible solutions could include:

- Sessions lasting a full week;
- Annual sessions;
- More intense preparations by the Working Party bureau, which could meet in years between sessions;
- Sessions which focus on a few selected issues (1-2 maximum, if each is to have in-depth attention);
- No report adoption at the session.

17. The Working Party is invited to indicate its preference for methods of work,

Next steps

18. The Working Party is expected to agree on activities and outputs in its area of competence over the next 3-4 years. However, the format of the ECE/FAO programme of work, within which the Working Party's programme should be incorporated has not yet been determined. It will be submitted to the bureaux of the parent bodies the week before the Working Party session. A more detailed presentation of the Working party's programme will be prepared as part of the process of preparation of the bureaux meeting and circulated to Working Party delegates and posted on the website as soon as possible.

19. The Working party is therefore invited to:

- Discuss its future role, by addressing the issues and questions listed above;
- To approve the activities and outputs to be produced under its auspices in 2001-2004 on a basis of a detailed draft which the secretariat will issue shortly before the meeting as an addendum to the present document.

Annex 1 of the Working Party

Terms of reference of the Working Party

The Working Party's terms of reference, approved by its parent bodies in 1975 are to:

- (a) keep under review the needs at the international level for statistics and other information relating to the forestry, wood-processing and forest products sector; and develop programmes to meet these needs. Particular attention shall be paid to improving concepts, definitions and methodologies in order to increase the international comparability of statistics;
- (b) develop, upon request from the parent bodies, methodologies for use in economic analysis as well as techniques for the collection, processing and presentation of information and statistics,
- (c) undertake, upon request from the parent bodies, *ad hoc* projects in the field of economics and statistics relating to forestry and forest products;
- (d) work together with the Conference of European Statisticians and other international bodies in related fields of statistics with a view to achieving coordination of activities and avoiding any unnecessary duplication of effort.

(Although in the interests of brevity, the title of the Working Party only contains the word *forest* the terms of reference make it clear that the sectors covered by the Working Party include statistical and economic questions relating to the forest and wood-processing industries and their products.)