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Timber Committee

European Forestry Commission

Joint FAO/UNECE Working Party
on Forest Economics and Statistics

Thirtieth session
Geneva, 2-3 April 2008
Item 5 of the provisional agenda

ROLE OF THE WORKING PARTY

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This report invites the Working Party to discuss its own role of the Working Party in the context of the Strategic Review of the Integrated Programme of Work of the UNECE/FAO.

The document reviews the current terms of reference, mandate and scope of the Working Party. Comments received during the Strategic Review are included.

The secretariat outlines the practices used during the last few years and some of the advantages and disadvantages of these practices. Possible issues for discussion and future steps are outlined.

The Working Party is invited to review this document and prepare responses to the questions and suggestions (highlighted in bold italic). The proposals made at the Working Party will be submitted to the Special Session of the Timber Committee at the end of April.

1. This document is produced in accordance with the programme of work as approved by the Timber Committee in ECE/TIM/2007/9 and the methodology approved for the Strategic Review as outlined in ECE/TIM/2007/4 Annex paragraph 5, suggesting "The Strategic Review gather information [from] participants in the UNECE/FAO work...".

I. Introduction

2. The Working Party was founded over fifty years ago in January 1956 (it was then called the Working Party on Forest and Forest Products Statistics). Since then there have been two major adjustments to its terms of reference and methods of work, to adapt it to changing circumstances and an evolving institutional environment. The terms of reference of the Working Party were last formally approved in the context of the UNECE Reform in 2006 (see annex).

3. In 2007/8, a comprehensive strategic review of the whole UNECE/FAO integrated programme of work is under way, which will culminate in a special session of the Timber Committee with participation of delegates of the European Forestry Commission on 28-30 April 2008. Full information about the Strategic Review and Plan 2008-13 of the Joint Integrated Programme on Timber and Forestry of the UNECE Timber Committee and FAO European Forestry Commission process, including input from countries and stakeholders, is presented on the website at http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/strategic_review/2007-2008/strategic-review.htm. The Working Party, as the only formal permanent body under the Timber Committee and the European Forestry Commission, is expected to make its own contribution to this process, by assessing its own activities and indicating whether they should be continued and if so whether changes are necessary. All aspects of the work are included in the strategic review, from formal mandates, to scope of action, to methods of work.

4. There are two specific remarks about the Working Party from national replies:

- (a) Germany: "Additionally it is necessary to further improve the statistical data basis regarding the forests itself as well as the forest industry sector (e.g. biomass potentials, harvesting figures, fuelwood figures, protected areas in forests). Without reliable data basis, exchange of view between delegations and experts may lead to wrong conclusions or recommendations. In this respect work of Joint FAO/UNECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics - assisted by science - shall become more and more important."
- (b) Canada: "Improve communications between the UNECE Timber Committee, the Joint FAO/UNECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistic and biennial sessions of the Committee on Forestry and the NAFC (FAO North American Forestry Commission). Two members of the NAFC are also members of the EFC. Linkages should be strengthened."

5. *The Working Party is invited to review its activities and methods of work and make proposals for submission to the special session, based on the questions set out in the present document.*

II. Mandate and scope of activities

6. The Working Party is a formal intergovernmental body active in a rather technical field, providing guidance to the secretariat and teams of specialists on three work areas (thereby freeing

the parent bodies from the task of providing this guidance at their increasingly intense and policy focused regular sessions). It is thus at the interface of the governmental/policy field and the technical/research field. In work areas one and two, there are active teams of specialists who make major technical contributions in the area defined by their mandates. The secretariat is seeking to revive the team of specialists in work area three. In addition to this guidance function, the Working Party has the possibility, indeed the duty, to address emerging topics in its area of competence: for instance, in recent years it has considered information on certified forest products, illegal logging and wood energy. Because of this flexibility, it has been able to take a pioneering role in some areas, bringing together expertise from a wide range of sources.

7. The secretariat believes this fundamental concept is appropriate and should be maintained. In addition, the Working Party might also take on guidance functions on aspects of work area five linked to collection, validation, and dissemination of information on forest policies and institutions, as this is increasingly linked to information collection on the forest resource itself. Both the enquiry on the State of Europe's Forests 2007 and FRA 2010 have sections on policies and institutions as these are not included in international sets of indicators of sustainable forest management. Work in the field of monitoring and analysis of forest policies and institutions is increasingly complex and requires coordination and guidance just like similar work for forest products or the forest resource.

8. By addressing work areas one, two, three, and parts of work area five, the Working Party could benefit from a broader approach to monitoring/information collection, which could eventually lead to a better understanding of interactions, better coordination at the national level and improved analysis. However, the Working Party should only address monitoring issues for policy and institutions, and not duplicate the policy forum work done, notably by the parent bodies.

9. There are however some reservations, in particular as regards the capacity of Working Party delegations to address the comprehensive challenges outlined above:

- (a) Most countries only send one delegate to the annual session, who is usually a specialist/national correspondent in one particular sector e.g. forest products statistics, markets, forest inventory, or forest economics/sector studies. Sometimes, these specialists have difficulty developing a position in areas outside their own speciality or in making the necessary links to the policy level, so that they only participate actively in some parts of the agenda. (This may even more so be the case if the working party takes on a role with regard to policies and institutions). At the same time, correspondents are required increasingly to understand and provide information outside a developed core area of expertise, as is the case for FRA 2010.
- (b) EU/EFTA countries are well represented at the sessions, as is North America. However participation from countries in transition is inconsistent, chiefly because of weak institutions, shortage of travel funds and low political importance attached to forest sector issues in many countries. The point of view of countries in transition tends therefore to be overlooked during the Working Party sessions.
- (c) In recent years, with the completion of EFSOS, economic analysis has not figured on the Working Party agenda. However, it is to be hoped that with the new emphasis on potential wood supply and on bioenergy, both of which call for a sophisticated economic approach, the Working party will attract specialist in economic analysis.

10. The secretariat believes these problems are real, but not insoluble. The first and third should

be addressed by more intense consultation and cooperation at the national level (desirable in any case, given the complex, intersectoral nature of most important issues), the second by capacity building. The secretariat proposes that countries be invited to nominate a coordinator for the Working Party, who should be tasked with ensuring that all relevant national institutions are consulted before the Working Party sessions.

11. *The Working Party is invited to review its mandate and suggest modifications, if necessary, to the special session on the integrated programme of work.*

12. *The Working Party may wish to invite each member country to nominate a coordinator for the Working Party, whose main task would be to ensure that national expertise is properly coordinated for Working Party sessions. The secretariat, with partners should help countries who do not normally attend Working Party sessions to participate, notably by making clearer the benefits of participation.*

III. Methods of work and organisation of sessions

13. In 2001 (TIM/EFC/WP.2/2001/8, para. 50), the Working Party decided to meet every year rather than every two years, in the interests of continuity and focus. Recent sessions have been devoted to:

- (a) reporting on activities of three work areas and providing guidance;
- (b) sessions devoted to topics of special interest, notably where policy developments are hampered by lack of information or understanding of areas where the Working Party could help to clarify the situation. Examples were: information on markets in certified forest products, illegal logging, wood energy, national wood balances, calculation of potential wood supply, and information dissemination. Sometimes these sessions have taken place during the Working Party meeting, sometimes back-to-back with it.

14. In general, the Working Party has been able to carry out its guidance role and to address emerging issues in its field. Nevertheless, a few problems have emerged:

- (a) where there is an active team of specialists (markets, forest resource assessment), the Working Party guidance has sometimes been weak, or even “rubber stamping”, as there is more technical expertise in the team than in the Working Party and the Working Party delegates do not have sufficiently close links to the policy level. However, all teams need formal guidance from an intergovernmental body if they are to retain their legitimacy.
- (b) The question also arises of the degree of detail appropriate for “guidance”: are the background documents prepared by the secretariat at the right degree of detail, or should they be more or less detailed?
- (c) For the sessions devoted to topics of special interest, the Working Party has sometimes not been able to collect sufficient expertise to comment on the information provided by invited expert speakers on the topic. There has therefore been little “value added” from bringing together subject experts and Working Party delegates.

15. The secretariat believes that these are real problems, but that the advantages of bringing together expertise from different fields outweighs the disadvantages described. If the Working Party agrees to invite the nomination of coordinators of national input, they could do much to address these issues by ensuring that relevant expertise is mobilized for the annual sessions, and, perhaps, by

warning the secretariat if the subjects are unlikely to mobilize interest.

16. There are a number of more practical matters on which the Working Party may wish to express an opinion, including

- (a) Is 2 ½ to 3 days the right length for the annual sessions?
- (b) Should the sessions continue to be annual?
- (c) What should be the share of time devoted to guidance of the work areas and to special issues?
- (d) Is it important to approve the report formally during the session, or can this be left to the secretariat and the Working Party bureau? (The secretariat considers the time necessary for report adoption is justified by clearer decision making).
- (e) How important is it that each team of specialists prepare a specific report for the Working Party (as opposed to more general information, including reports of team meetings)? The practice varies between teams: the Working Party may indicate what information/reporting it needs from teams.

17. *The Working Party is invited to discuss these issues and decide on its future methods of work.*

Annex

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE FAO/UNECE WORKING PARTY ON FOREST ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS

based on those submitted to and approved by the Timber Committee at its 64th session (ECE/TIM/2006/2 and ECE/TIM/2006/8) and the UNECE Executive Committee, October 2006, but incorporating proposals for new wording (underlined)

The Working Party is a subsidiary body of the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission, and contributes to the implementation of the integrated programme of those two bodies. It meets annually to provide guidance on the implementation of work areas 1, 2 and 3 and parts of work area 5:

1. Markets and statistics
2. Forest resource assessment and indicators of sustainable forest management
3. Sector outlook studies
5. Policies and institutions: monitoring and analysis

In particular, within the framework of the integrated programme, the Working Party shall:

- (i) 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; and other data/information;
- (ii) develop, upon request from the parent bodies, methodologies for use in economic analysis of the sector as well as techniques for the collection, validation, analysis and dissemination of information and statistics;
- (iii) undertake, upon request from the parent bodies, ad hoc projects in the field of economics and statistics relating to forestry and forest products; and forest policies and institutions;
- (iv) work together with other international bodies, including MCPFE, Eurostat and the Conference of European Statisticians with a view to achieving coordination of activities and avoiding any unnecessary duplication of effort.
