



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry****Seventy-second session**

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Item 5 (d) of the provisional agenda

Reporting and implementation of the Integrated Programme of Work and reporting and implementation of related decisions**Implementation of the UNDA and Fire projects****Note by the secretariat***Introduction*

The UNECE-FAO United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project on “Sustainable Forest Management for Greener Economies in Central Asia and the Caucasus” is a two-year capacity building initiative, which aims to assist countries in the region to develop context specific strategies to harness the potential of the forest sector. Seven countries are participating in the project: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

When the countries of this region gained independence in the early 1990’s, they did not have institutional frameworks in place for managing their forest resources. Unfortunately and for a variety of reasons, the relevant institutions remain fragile and suffer from a lack of staff qualified in sustainable forest management.

To address these challenges, the UNDA project is organizing training workshops in each country to discuss the following topics: principles of green economy and sustainable forest management; stakeholder engagement in forest policy processes; forestry data gathering and management; bioenergy generation from wood; and action plan development. The workshops are being implemented using participatory methods. Also under the project, three pilot countries (Georgia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan) are being assisted in the development of national action plans for the forest sector in a green economy.

The Committee is expected to comment on the progress of the project and provide input and advice for the continuation of the UNDA project.

Information about the implementation on the Fire project is contained in the document ECE/TIM/2014/INF.6.



I. Implementation of the project

A. Overall status

1. There are numerous obstacles to achieving the full potential of the forest sector in this region such as illegal logging, poor governance, overcutting and overgrazing leading to forest degradation, deforestation and severe erosion. These are often compounded by weak information systems as well as obsolete policies and institutions.
2. A regional workshop, gathering all seven project countries, took place in Kazakhstan in April 2014. It was followed by a national workshop and a coaching workshop in Kazakhstan, which is one of the three pilot countries that have initiated the development of a national action plan for the forest sector in a green economy. National workshops and coaching seminars in two other pilot countries, Georgia and Tajikistan, took place in June 2014. The pilot countries have developed processes for drafting their green economy action plans, which include stakeholder input through local participatory workshops. Each country is building on their existing policy processes: a new forest strategy is currently under development in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, and in Georgia a forest policy concept was approved 2013.

B. Action Plan Pilot Countries Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan

1. Georgia

3. In Georgia, the State Forest Fund occupies just over three million hectares, of which approximately 2.8 million hectares is covered by forests. This is about 40% of the country's territory. Forests represent a valuable natural resource having special significance for Georgia and for the entire region. The main threats to the region's forests are unsustainable logging for industrial timber and fuel wood, unsustainable grazing and inappropriate operational practices.
4. National government institutions play a central role in planning, decision making and enforcement monitoring. The government acts as owner, manager and regulator. The National Forestry Agency is responsible for formulating policies and strategies as well as managing the forests. In Georgia, local self-governing bodies have certain rights and responsibilities over forests but their nature and scope is not clear.
5. Before its independence from the former Soviet Union, Georgia had plentiful and reliable fossil fuel and hydro-electricity supplies. After gaining independence the energy supply system collapsed and rural households became heavily dependent on fuel wood for heating and cooking. Although the situation has been significantly improved in terms of fossil energy (mainly natural gas and electricity) supply, much remains to be done. Rural households also use forests for grazing and for non-timber forest products for their own consumption and income. Fuel wood is not considered a renewable resource, and every effort is being made to reduce its use.

6. There is a large number of small businesses engaged in harvesting and processing of timber for the industrial timber and fuel wood markets and only a small number of medium to large enterprises, which have the largest share of production for export. The sector is characterized by substantial over-capacity and has a low level of sensitivity to environmental issues.
7. The Georgian Forestry Concept was adopted in December 2013 (new forest strategy), and its purpose is to address existing challenges in the forestry sector, facilitate poverty alleviation, improve the well-being of the population and promote sustainable development. The UNDA project national workshop in Georgia used the Forestry Concept as a starting point and examined how to further develop and link forestry to green growth.
8. The National Forest Agency hopes to remain in the lead and is hesitant to give ownership rights to local populations or the private sector, thinking it might result in further degradation of the forests. However, at the end of the national workshop, the participants acknowledged the significance of outreach, partnerships, and collaboration with those who have overlapping responsibilities and concerns, and agreed that it would be beneficial for the national forest policy to include actively all stakeholders in decision-making processes.

2. Kazakhstan

9. Kazakhstan has been a leader within the Central Asian Region in developing strategies on how to make a transition to a greener economy. The country is eager to diversify and not be overly dependent on non-renewable oil and gas production. A green economy strategy (or concept, as it is called in Kazakhstan) was adopted by the government in 2013. It defines a green economy as 'an economy with high living standards, and careful and rationale use of natural resources in the interest of present and future generations'. The concept outlines a transition to a more sustainable – environmentally friendly development model that aims to increase GDP by 3% and create more than 500,000 new jobs, develop new industries and services and, generally, provide higher and better living standards for people. Overall investment in the transition to a green economy will be around 1% of GDP per annum (USD 3-4 billion dollars per year). The key emphasis in the concept is curtailing destructive and high emission practices, increasing resource use efficiency through modernization and introducing new, more renewable energy production technologies.
10. Forestry would ideally fit these credentials and could play a major part in the transition to a green economy, however within the green economy concept it is difficult to find a reference to forestry. The Forestry Committee in Kazakhstan has set up a working group to develop a full forestry strategy, Kazakhstan's Forest sector Development Program 2020, which will outline how forestry can be developed in a way that is linked to the green economy principles. A first draft is under development and is scheduled to be submitted by July 2014, with its final adoption after review around November 2014.
11. The UNDA project is supporting the development of the forestry strategy in Kazakhstan by providing stakeholder input through local workshops and coaching seminars to ensure that all relevant green economy aspects will be included. Conservation of forests is commonly acknowledged as being important and supported, unlike active sustainable forest management, which

is a relatively unknown concept. Wood energy is a particularly sensitive subject as it is seen as a threat to forests and as a very environmentally unfriendly fuel.

3. Tajikistan

12. The Republic of Tajikistan belongs to the forest-poor countries in Central Asia. Only 3 percent of Tajikistan's territory is covered with forest vegetation. The scale of destruction of forests by illegal logging has increased due to shortages of fuel and energy resources during the last 20 years. Particularly affected are poplar, pistachio, almond, and walnut woodlands, the areas of which are considerably reduced. In many areas, commercially valuable tree breeds have been replaced by shrubs.
13. In addition, uncontrolled grazing in the state forests without complying with pasture rotation principles and without measures to improve the productivity of pastures has resulted in the degradation of forest cover in large areas. The wood industry in Tajikistan is underdeveloped and totally dependent on imported wood. Like in Kazakhstan, a protectionist approach towards forest dominates instead of active sustainable forest management. The forest area will keep diminishing if active steps are not taken to stop this development.
14. The Forestry Agency of Tajikistan has initiated the development of a new forestry strategy and national forestry programme (2016-2025) with the support of several international partners. A first draft is under development and it is scheduled to be submitted to the government by the end of 2014, with its final submission for approval by the government 2015. The UNDA project is supporting the forest strategy development by providing stakeholder input on Green Economy aspects through local participatory workshops and coaching seminars.

C. Future Activities

15. Four local participatory workshops will be organized in each project country following the national workshops by the end of 2014. Local workshops will be organized by national consultants in each country with the support of NGOs, and their objective is to provide stakeholder participation opportunities, and raise awareness about sustainable forest management, wood energy and the green economy. In each pilot country, two coaching workshops and four local participatory workshops will be organized by the end of the year.
16. National workshops in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan will take place between September and December 2014. A second regional workshop will gather all the countries together to analyze the results and lessons learned in the spring of 2015.

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