

Sustainable Forest Management at the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) follows up on and reviews the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UNECE region. Focusing on practical value-added and peer learning, it creates a regional space to share policy solutions, best practices and challenges in SDG implementation and helps identify major regional and subregional trends.

As an intergovernmental mechanism, the Regional Forum is convened by UNECE, in close cooperation with the regional UN system. It is open to the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including international and regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector.

This year's Forum included a number of roundtables revolving around SDGs under review by the High Level Political Forum (July 2018). Information on the different roundtables can be found here:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/RFSD_2018_roundtable_overview.pdf.

One of the roundtables, jointly organized by UNECE and FAO, focused in particular on Sustainable Forest Management and the SDGs. The concept note and list of case studies can be found at:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/Concept_note_SDG15_1.pdf.

Detailed information on each case study is available at: <http://www.unece.org/rfsd2018.html> (click on SDG15).

The conclusions of the Roundtable and relevant recommendations are included below.

Roundtable on Sustainable Management of Forests and Ecosystems

Summary

- The roundtable was organized to identify the interlinkages between sustainable forest management and the SDGs. The UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 was seen as the main tool for achieving action in this area.
- The strategic partnership between UNECE and FAO for the sustainable management of forests in the region was recognized and considered an effective tool to support the linkage between forests and the forest sector and other SDGs.
- Forests are critical ecosystems, central to all the three pillars of sustainable development (environmental, economic, social).
- Forest management brings together a range of stakeholders (forest owners, businesses, local and state authorities, NGOs and others), who must work together to maintain ecosystem functions and ensure the provision of services and goods.

Key common problems and urgent challenges identified

- **PERCEPTION** – there is a need to develop a common understanding of sustainable forest management as a tool for improving the environment and the potential and the use of forest products as key for sustainable production and consumption.
- **FINANCING** – sustainable forest management financing is still dominated by revenues from wood, as other forest services do not generate sufficient returns.
- **GOVERNANCE/POLITICAL WILL/CAPACITY** – often governance systems overlook the importance of sustainable forest management and there is limited understanding among policy makers about the crucial roles forests play. Businesses have a critical role to play in this regard.
- **PRIORITY OF USES/FUNCTIONS** – while the multifunctionality of forests is widely recognized, disagreement remains regarding the sustainability of some of the uses, e.g. energy directly from wood from the forest or cascaded use of wood, as sustainability of uses may vary in different locations.

Initiatives being developed to address the problems identified

- **COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS RAISING** – these are initiatives to communicate the potential of forests and forest products in support of a green/bio/circular economy, the Paris Agreement and the Aichi Targets for Biodiversity being good examples.
- **TRUST AND PARTNERSHIP** – creation of platforms and dialogues between authorities, local communities, businesses, owners and consumers on how to manage and use forests.
- **VERIFICATION** – transparent reporting, certification, strategic use of public procurement, traceability and availability of information to consumers; further exchange on lessons learnt on the driving forces for certification of forests and of forest products should take place – including genuine demands by consumers, marketing strategies by brand companies and also the implications to the forest owners as well as the value chain.
- **BUSINESS INITIATIVES** – changing the way of doing business in support of a circular economy, “circular companies” and “the circular design of products” (renewable and recyclable).

Possibility of replication and factors contributing to the success of these initiatives

- **MULTIPURPOSE** – designing initiatives with multiple objectives, e.g. i.) afforestation to prevent erosion and sequester carbon ii.) integrating biodiversity conservation into SFM.
- **CONTRIBUTE TO LARGER STRATEGIES** – for instance, part of national strategies and large-scale business plans.
- **CROSS DISCIPLINARY/CROSS BUSINESS** – e.g. addressing tourism, agriculture, water, etc.
- **INCOME GENERATING** – creating jobs for local communities, supporting forest owners and supporting businesses around forest products.
- **ENHANCING ENVIRONMENTAL CAPACITIES OF FORESTS** – resilience and adaptation to climate change, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and restoration activities.

Recommendations

- Developing and adopting a common understanding and single approach to sustainable forest management.
- Opening initiatives to all stakeholders and better involvement of consumers in choosing sustainable patterns of consumption of forest products.
- Changing the narrative about wood and forests and involvement of audiences outside the forest sector.
- Continue to stress the linkages between forests, forest products, green economy and SDGs.