

UN ECE Timber Committee

*Program of Work - Strategic Review 2004
Questions Raised by the Secretariat*

1. What should be the Strategic Objective of the integrated programme ..?

The overall strategic objective identified during the last review of the integrated program of work and approved by the bureaux of both the Timber Committee and the European Forestry Commission remains valid. The strategic objectives would appear to continue to reflect the mandate and direction of both parent organizations. However, some refinement in the overall work program will require adjustments given the recent reduction in the level of professional staff.

2. What major work areas should be covered ...?

Over the past several years, all five of the work areas within the integrated program of work have been considered to be high priorities. However, the current priorities need to be reviewed in the context of reduced staffing levels supported by the parent organizations. Accordingly, the following order of the five work areas reflect my priorities:

- a. Markets and Statistics
- b. Forest Resource Assessment
- c. Policy and Cross Sectoral Issues
- d. Technology, Management and Training
- e. European Forest Sector Outlook Studies (EFSOS)

In recognition of the reduction in staff, it would appear necessary to eliminate the work activities related to the EFSOS studies. While the EFSOS studies provide important information on the development of the European forests and forest sector, they are not entirely representative of the entire country membership of the ECE TC and EFC. If these are considered necessary by members countries, then those countries should provide a budget to allow this work to be carried out.

3. What should be its main activities and outputs, ..?

Based on the established priorities identified above as a, b, c, it is considered that these work items should be continued for the duration of the period covered by the 2004 strategic review. These activities should be confirmed during the strategic review and annually by the bureaux.

Activities currently undertaken in support of Technology, Management and Training, despite being undertaken jointly with the ILO, have a limited appeal to some non-European countries. Information on forest technology and forest management are considered to be the highest priority area within the program of work. The training of forest workers is probably best delivered by others.

4. What methods of works should it employ?

The current use of Teams of Specialists (ToS), led by a country nominated specialists, appears to have worked well in the past. However, while people volunteer to either head or participate in a team, one must remember that many countries face tight budgetary restraints and individuals are charged with ever increasing workloads. The use of ToS should continue, but their roles and mandate should be more narrowly focussed with only limited deliverables. Renewals should only be considered once a team has completed its deliverable.

Teams should be supported by a professional from the Secretariat who has responsibility for ensuring that the work is completed on time. Given the number of available professionals, consideration should be given to limiting the number of teams in order to allow the professionals to focus both on the ongoing activities of both their core activities and the those of the teams. We might want to consider limiting each professional to no more than two teams.

The use of interns with funding provided by the supporting country has proved particularly effective in certain projects. This method of work should be continued with the recognition that it also takes time to supervise the work of interns.

5. What resources should it aim ...?

In addition to the current professional staff funded by both the ECE and FAO budgeting processes, additional financial and physical resources (interns, ToS) can be attracted to work on specific targeted activities.

Beyond the current budget, however, there appears to be limited opportunity to attract additional financial contributions to the ongoing budget.

6. Is its formal structure (mandates, etc.) adapted ... ?

Given the nature of the work program and the shared secretariat, the formal structure appears to work well but is subject to unanticipated requirements of either parent body. FAO's reassignment of Dr. Volker Sasse to other duties within the FAO in 2003, is indicative of the fragile nature of the structure. The transfer of one of the key producers has left a large gap which cannot, within the current structure, be filled.

The current structure of the TC and EFC provides the bureaux flexibility in implementing directives of the parent organizations.

7. How should its successes be measured ...?

Measurement of success is always a difficult task and subject to interpretation by those undertaking the assessment. Success can be measured on two levels, at the deliverable stage when projects are created and, secondly, by measuring the satisfaction of the third parties receiving the outputs.

In the first instance, the deliverable can be associated with a delivery date and success can be measured on the basis of "did it meet the delivery schedule". The second component can be

measured by sampling the target audience to ascertain their satisfaction with the content. In the second case, how the question is asked can influence the outcome of the survey and is best undertaken by independent outside consultants.

My experience with asking readers to return “tear out” comment cards has generally been unsatisfactory. Readers either don’t have the interest or the time to return the cards. They will however return a direct questionnaire delivered by e-mail or respond to a telephone enquiry.

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