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Comments and suggestions to the strategic review of the programme of work of the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission

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1. Strategic objectives

The present mission is formulated as follows: " ... to contribute to the sustainable development of the forests and forest products sector, including services in the ECE region". This mission is reflected in the structure of the joint work programme.

– There is no need to revise or re-formulate the current core mission and objectives. Metla emphasises the role of UNECE/FAO in the international forest dialogue, both at regional and global levels. Especially, co-operation with MCPFE and contribution to SFM, through the information collected in the regional FRA, need to be stressed here.

Only a marginal proportion of the ECE resources is allocated to forest issues. In Metla's view this share could be increased. ECE could also be more active in the co-operation with the EU Commission. ECE could provide a readily available forum for many forest issues which at present are being debated within the Commission.

2. Major work areas

From the viewpoint of Metla, these are the priority areas: 1. Markets and statistics; 2. Forest resource assessment; 3. European forest sector outlook studies and 5. Policy and cross-sectoral issues.

Markets and statistics are at the core of UNECE/FAO activities, and their position should be maintained, perhaps even strengthened. Since late 1990s, significant progress was made in joint data collection, data sharing, validation etc., mainly thanks to the IWG.

FRA is the most comprehensive source of information on the forest resource, contributing also quantitative indicators to SFM. Metla has regarded Efsos as one of the key projects in the work programme. Finland has provided staff and funding to Efsos. The present situation is far from satisfactory, as the expected results clearly overstretch available resources. It would be necessary to put more focus on Efsos. If this cannot be achieved, Efsos should be streamlined so that it concentrates on programme element 3.1 (Outlook for European forest products markets). Sub-project 3.1 is to a large extent based on statistics and market analysis, so it might even be worth considering the transfer of 3.1 into work area 1.

From the viewpoint of Metla, work area no. 4 (technology, management and training) is less important. It might be appropriate to cut resources here, thus making it possible to concentrate them more on statistics and the regional FRA. In work area 4, possible coordination with IUFRO activities might be possible.

3. Main activities and outputs

In general, the expected outputs and the available resources are not in balance. Therefore the conclusion is that UNECE/FAO should focus on core activities and drop those where it does not have the best expertise. Programme elements of highest priority: 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 3.1.

As far as the delegation of outputs are concerned, some re-delegation might be possible between UNECE/FAO and Eurostat. For example, could Eurostat play a greater role in the activities intended for countries in transition (e.g. capacity building)? Phare/Tacis funding is certainly available for at least statistical work.

4. Methods of work, formal structures

No major complaints in this respect. The periodicity and timing of regular statutory bodies (TC, EFC, etc.) is suitable. The methods of work are versatile and subject to scrutiny and improvements on a continuing basis. In statistics, Metla especially welcomes the establishment of IWG and JFSQ. Need for closer cooperation with the EU (see comments in point 1).

Metla also welcomes the increased use of teams of specialists. They represent the best expertise in their specific areas. In fact, ToS are necessary as the secretariat resources are insufficient.