

Comments on the Strategic Review of the Integrated Programme of Work on Forests and Timber of the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission

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1. What should be the Strategic Objective of the integrated programme of the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission....?

The Strategic Review completed in 2001 has provided an excellent foundation for moving forward and adjusting the Strategic Objective into the future. The Mission, “The UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission will contribute to the sustainable development of the forest and forest products sector, including services, in the ECE region”, is sufficiently broad to provide a great deal of flexibility to the Integrated Programme of Work (IPW) of the TC/EFC. It has been noted by some that the Mission may be overly broad. The question then becomes how should the IPW contribute to the overall effort and how much of a lead should the IPW have?

The IPW must recognize, as it has in the past, its responsibility to provide a forum for leadership in accruing, dispersing, and utilizing the resources of all members to achieve the Mission of the TC/EFC. The unique membership and joint interactions of the TC and the EFC enable member countries to communicate across a wide range of issues while maintaining individual responsibility for their own human and environmental resources.

In its 2000 Strategic Review, the United States noted that “the core mandate remains valid; however, it is somewhat vague, and offers little guidance as to how it is likely to be expressed in terms of priorities and the program of work. Although such vagueness is generally useful, the need to define the comparative advantage of the Secretariat, the fact of scarce resources, and the need to set priorities suggest the need for greater clarity and specificity.”

Since 2000, the growth in interest in the overall Mission, not just by those within the UNECE-TC and the FAO-EFC, has vastly expanded beyond the membership. How then does the Secretariat accomplish greater clarity and specification?

The IPW needs to ensure that the entire forestry and forest products community, not just the membership, is utilizing the efforts of the TC/EFC. While it may not be responsible of the TC or EFC to direct policy matters, it is entirely proper for the TC/EFC to be present to supply information and resources. Responsibility comes with being in a leadership roll. The IPW can activate and utilize all of its resource to provide a wider and better understood situation of the forestry and forest products sectors and services, so that more informed decisions are made by forest practioners, customers and policymakers

2. What major work areas should be covered by the IPW?

The IPW has supported work in five major areas: Market and statistics, forest resource assessments, forest sector outlook studies, technology, management and training, and policy and cross-sectoral issues. While the IPW has done an admirable job in all five areas, consideration should be given to a prioritization of the areas of work. We strongly support continuation of work in all five areas, encouraging a prioritization toward accurate and reliable data and forecasting in the areas of assessments and outlook studies and a high prioritization for capacity building and support and technical involvement input for policy and cross-sectoral issues.

The recently published UNECE/FAO Forest Products Annual Market Analysis, 2002-2004, includes a new special chapter covers the policy implications of forest products market developments in 2002 and 2003, with topics addressed including forest law enforcement governance and trade (FLEGT), certification of sustainable forest management, policies for sound use of wood, industrial development policies and structural oversupply, climate change policy, wood energy policy and trade policy. All of these areas of concern to the IPW, and care has been taken to ensure that the IWP is not proposing policies but rather to forward much needed information to policy and decision makers. Continued similar efforts are responsible undertakings by the IPW.

3. What should be its main activities and outputs, taking into account the strategic objective and the availability of resources?

We commend the secretaries for its continued ambitious schedule of work. Members recognize the limitations of the staff resources and should recognize the ability of the staff to function as facilitators of information and resources. Greater utilization of and emphasis on Teams of Specialists communications and outputs could stretch staff resources, thus utilizing extended resources.

The statistical outputs provide a balanced view of the region that is most difficult to replicate. Data on production, prices, trade flows and market prospects is vital to the industries involved. Likewise, the growing ability to measure biodiversity and sustainability and to provide policy background in such areas is often understated, although widely available in packets of information. Involvement in all of the above is seen as responsible management for the IWP.

In reference to data and other outputs as recommended above, the IWP should work toward ensuring that all member countries participate fully in the outputs. At this time, participation is less than complete, leaving many voids in the data and background information. To the extent that this reflects a need for capacity building in some member countries, voids should be identified and partnership built to close the voids.

4. What methods of work should it employ?

The IWP should continue to utilize member country expertise in developing its outputs, but placing more emphasis on greater coordination and total involvement, necessitating a degree of capacity building in some instances. Teams of Specialists should endeavor to produce timely and informative reports, with direction from the leader and the TC/EFC as appropriate. Consideration should be given to the varying technical capabilities of members and efforts taken to ensure that each is capable at the most advanced level.

5. What resources should it mobilize, and how?

The aggressive and committed schedule of the TC/EFC requires that non-staff resources be fully engaged to undertake the activities and projects of the IWP. Continued emphasis on utilizing team members and Teams of Specialists should continue. However, expectations may need clarification so that activities are completed on times and projects do not languish for lack of effort. The current position of having time sensitive and time restricted Teams of Specialists ensures that the Teams of Specialists are not driving strategies and ensures that less than fully functioning teams are limited.

6. Is its formal structure (mandates, permanent bodies, etc.) adapted to the needs?

The IWP needs to be flexible enough to respond to informational and related needs on a rapid basis. The ability to create and retain Teams of Specialists provides an excellent supportive structure. As 'voluntary members' TOS members are challenged with financial, time and other resource allocation issues. A dialogue with current and past team members could help to respond to the question of team viability. We are opposed to the permanent establishment of teams in all but the most critical situations. The flexibility to create teams and to dissolve teams enables the TC/EFC maximize the knowledge resources of members countries.

7. How should its success be measured and monitoring and self-evaluation be implemented?

There are obviously numerous criteria and indicators of success. At a holistic level, success can be measured in terms of the quality of the product and services provided to the customer. It might be best worthy to query end-users to determine what they deem as success. A difficulty of self-determined success is that there is an inherent disconnect with the products of r services being rendered. Accurate, timely forecasts of market demands may be most meaningful to those producing the documents, but if the end-user ultimately needs an entirely different product for making resource (human, financial, and environmental) determinations, then the success might be measured as high but the functional use low. To endeavor down such tracks is questionable at best.