

# THE JOINT FAO/ECE/ILO COMMITTEE : FIFTY YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN FORESTRY

## *The evolution and achievements of the Joint Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training from 1954 to 2004*

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### Summary

The preparation of this publication<sup>1</sup> has been undertaken as one of the events to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training. It was established in 1954 as a joint subsidiary body of the European Forestry Commission of FAO and the Timber Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, in cooperation with the International Labour Office, in response to the perceived need to assist countries to optimize the supply of wood from their forests for the reconstruction of their economies in the aftermath of the Second World War. The publication is in two parts: Part I covers the first thirty years of the Joint Committee's existence up to the mid-1980s and is taken almost word-for-word from the account by E. G. Richards issued in 1987<sup>2</sup>; Part II takes up the story of its evolution and activities from the mid-1980s to the present time. Originally, one purpose of looking at the Joint Committee's history was to see what lessons could be learnt which could be applied in steering its future development. However, while the publication was being prepared, recommendations were being made to its parent bodies that, for reasons mainly related to the scarcity of secretariat resources, the Joint Committee should be discontinued, though some of its activities should be maintained.

#### **The first three decades: 1954 to 1985**

Some forest working techniques could still be found after the Second World War that had changed little over 3,000 years, with wood felling and harvesting mostly involving human and animal muscle-power. The 1950s saw the development of motor-manual harvesting based on the chainsaw and farm tractor. Later, equipment specifically designed for forestry came into use, including multi-function harvesting machines. A large part of the Joint Committee's efforts in its early years was devoted to helping countries raise productivity and efficiency in wood harvesting, including the training of forest workers and activities to improve their health, safety and working conditions generally. The ILO played a key role in assisting countries, e.g. through training courses and the provision of travel fellowships, in the latter fields.

Initially, the main part of the Joint Committee's detailed technical work was carried out by study groups in three areas: methods and organization of forest work; mechanization of forest work; and vocational training and prevention of accidents. The study groups met regularly and produced numerous technical reports. The Joint Committee also organized numerous *ad hoc* seminars and symposia, which gave guidance to countries on specific topics and made recommendations on what research and development work was needed. Their results were published as proceedings.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee : Fifty Years of International Co-operation in Forestry – The Evolution and Achievements of the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training from 1954 to 2004*. T. J. Peck and E. G. Richards. ILO Sectoral Activities Department, Working Paper 220, ISBN 92-2-116052-1. International Labour Office, Geneva. 2004.

N.B. Views expressed in the main publication and this summary are those of the authors and may not reflect those of the secretariats of FAO, UNECE or ILO or others concerned with the Joint Committee.

<sup>2</sup> *The development of forest working techniques and the role played by the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Working Techniques and Training of Forest Workers*. Timber Bulletin Vol. XXXIX, No. 3. Special Issue. United Nations, Geneva. 1987.

The first fundamental re-organization of the Joint Committee took place in 1978, when it decided, with the approval of its parent bodies, to replace the study groups with a more flexible and streamlined structure involving teams of specialists but continuing the system of seminars. It divided its activities into three main areas: silvicultural operations and general management; wood harvesting and transport; and vocational training, applied ergonomics, safety and health of forest workers. Subject areas dealt with during the first thirty years were wide-ranging, but the main emphasis was on aspects related to wood supply: harvesting, thinning, transport, handling, debarking, cable-cranes and harvesting in mountainous regions, conversion of timber, forest machinery, forest working techniques and technical tables. Under silviculture and management, activities covered afforestation and reforestation, forest fires, forest management; and under vocational training, etc., they covered training, health and safety, ergonomics and work study.

The draft of the Richards paper (*op.cit.*) was discussed by the 16<sup>th</sup> session of the Joint Committee in 1986, which concluded, *inter alia*, that the Joint Committee provided a unique meeting place where forestry administrators, technical experts, practitioners in the field and researchers could discuss matters of mutual interest; it had created a considerable fund of valuable technical information, which however needed to be disseminated more effectively; and generally speaking, the present scope and structure of its programme of work reflected countries' needs and priorities, having evolved considerably over the years with changing conditions, and must in future be kept flexible to meet new challenges. One area to which it considered that more attention should be given was forest management and planning<sup>3</sup>.

### **Moving from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

In the mid-1980s, while wood production was still the principal objective of forestry nearly everywhere, there were already clear signs that other policy objectives, notably the need to enhance the social and environmental functions of the forest, were gaining ground in many countries. The awareness of the need for better forest protection from fires, storms and air pollution, for example, and for the conservation of biodiversity, was also increasingly strong. These factors led to some profound changes in policies and approaches towards forest management.

During the 1980s and 1990s the Joint Committee reacted to these changes by adapting its programme of work and activities, as well as its structure. It tightened up the system of teams of specialists and the role of the coordinators to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that the activities were carried out expeditiously and effectively. It gave greater emphasis not only to environmental concerns, but also to forest management techniques and their application in order to meet the principles of sustainable forest management. In the 1990s the far-reaching transition in the countries of central and eastern Europe from centrally planned to market oriented economies had a major impact on their forestry sectors, and this was also reflected in the Joint Committee's priorities and programme of work. In order to reflect the new priorities it agreed in 1992 to changes in its terms of reference to read as follows:

*“The Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training is to assist countries, in particular those which its parent bodies may identify at any time as requiring priority attention, to develop their forestry activities within the context of sustainable development. This is achieved by fostering international cooperation on technical, economic and organizational aspects of forest management and forest working techniques and of the training of forest workers in logging and forest operations. Special attention is given to **the development and implementation of forest use planning and general management aspects**; increasing the efficiency of labour, the reduction of the physical efforts of the worker and prevention of accidents; the reduction of waste; and **the establishment of an adequate balance between technical, social and economic requirements and the***

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<sup>3</sup> See report of the 16th session : TIM/EFC/WP.1/16, paras. 32 to 34.

**protection of the environment.**” (the main changes to the earlier terms of reference are shown in bold type).

Further improvements were introduced in 1994 on the basis of recommendations by a Task Force, established to evaluate the Joint Committee<sup>4</sup>. It found, *inter alia*, that:

- Over the years, the Joint Committee had undergone some fundamental changes in its structure and methods of work in direct response to changing conditions and member country needs and priorities. These modifications and a re-orientation of both mandate and activities were precursors to what became called in the 1990s “sustainable development”;
- Key among the recommendations were improved planning and evaluation of activities; the use of more modern communications tools to improve dissemination of information; and the idea that the Joint Committee incorporate an advocacy role as part of its ongoing functions, in order to promote the use of ‘best practices’, and to set these in motion through guidelines and codes of practice, as appropriate, in its areas of activity;
- The Joint Committee was continuing to fulfil a useful function for member countries, and its mandate and activities remained essential and relevant for promoting ‘best practice’ sustainable forestry. It would appear to be playing a unique role among international bodies in that its activities were geared to current priorities in member countries and were practical, results-oriented and focused on the practitioner.

The way in which the Joint Committee has evolved over the past twenty years may be seen from the list of topics which it has dealt with through its teams of specialists, seminars or other ways<sup>5</sup>:

Subject area “Silviculture and forest management”: Multiple use forestry, preparation and implementation of forest management plans; information systems; acute forest damage; forest damage manual; forest fires and their prevention; biodiversity; forest site conservation and improvement of sustained yield; use of pesticides in forestry; exploring multiple use and ecosystem management – policy to practice; problems in forestry and forest industry arising from radiation contamination; harvesting of non-wood products in the Mediterranean region; forest operations of tomorrow; afforestation in the context of sustainable forest management; close to nature forestry.

Subject area “Technology, wood harvesting and transport”: Road construction; environmentally sound forest roads and wood transport; Harvesting in mountainous areas; multifunctional machinery in logging operations; machines for small scale forestry; new trends in wood harvesting with cable systems for sustainable management; mechanization of thinning operations; increase of productivity of forest operations; environmental impacts of forest operations; rehabilitation of low-productivity forests; reforestation methods after harvesting; transfer of basic technology region from the ECE region to other regions.

Subject area “Vocational training, applied ergonomics, and other social aspects of forestry: Management of forest worker training; training of professional forest workers; training and further education of people that are hard to reach; the future of the forestry workforce; employment of contractors in forestry; ergonomics applied to forestry; safety is feasible; occupational health and rehabilitation of forest workers; personal protective equipment; extension activities for owners of small forest woodlots; socio-economic aspects of forestry; role of women in the forestry sector in

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<sup>4</sup> Task Force to the Steering Committee of the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training, January 1994. Published by Natural Resources Canada, Canadian Forest Service.

<sup>5</sup> Annexes in the main publication (*op. cit.*) contain the following information: Teams of specialists (Annex I); List of publications, including proceedings of seminars, etc. (Annex II); List of training courses, seminars and workshops (Annex III).

Europe and North America; forestry meets the public; people, forests and sustainability; partnerships in forestry; public participation in forestry.

Workshops for countries with economies in transition: Organization and management of forestry under market economy conditions; commercial, economic and technical aspects of wood raw material supply in a market economy; new trends in thinnings; emerging issues in forest harvesting; administrative structures in forestry; forest operations improvements in farm forests.

While several topics dealt with in earlier years continued to receive attention, especially in the field of harvesting and transport, the above list demonstrates how much the Joint Committee's work has diversified, notably in the fields of management and social questions.

A marked feature of the Joint Committee's activities over the past decade has been the extent to which they have been maintained despite increasingly scarce secretariat resources. This was possible because member countries were prepared to take on more of the tasks, not only the organization of meetings and publication of seminar proceedings, but also in providing expert input to the work of the teams of specialists as well as in other ways. The Steering Committee played a key role in stimulating active participation and ensuring the quality of output. The problem of secretariat resources came to a head in 2001 when the Joint Committee's parent bodies carried out the first strategic review of their programmes, including those of their subsidiary bodies. While the "quality and relevance" of the Joint Committee's work was praised, one outcome of the review was that the secretariat resources allocated to it would have to be reduced.

A second strategic review in spring 2004 reiterated that the Joint Committee had done "excellent and innovative work while adapting its methods of work" but nonetheless recommended that it should be discontinued as a permanent subsidiary body, although ways should be found to continue some of its activities. The Joint Committee will have the opportunity to debate this matter at its 25<sup>th</sup> session in September 2004 before a final decision is made at the joint session of the parent bodies in October.

## Conclusions

In order to assess the Joint Committee's performance over the past fifty years, it is necessary to draw up a list of pluses and minuses. On the positive side, it has been successful in:

- Engaging cooperation among high-level experts at the international level
- Adapting its activities to member countries' changing needs
- Remaining virtually unique in terms of its programme of work
- Providing a forum for the exchange of viewpoints and experiences between forest practitioners, administrators, researchers and teachers as well as professionals from other disciplines
- Making the results of its work available through publications and other means
- Drawing up conclusions and recommendations from its seminars, teams of specialists, etc.
- Undertaking special studies to assist policy-making processes, such as the MCPFE
- Helping to provide a link between policy makers and those on the ground applying policies
- Adapting its structure and methods of work to changing conditions, notably by shifting a large part of its workload from the secretariat to member countries
- Cooperating with other organizations, notably IUFRO, in areas of mutual interest.

On the negative side, it has to be said that the Joint Committee has:

- Not always been successful in communicating the results of its work to all those who could benefit from it
- Sometimes failed to produce the results of its work in a readily 'digestible' form

- Sometimes found difficulty in ensuring a uniformly high standard in the input of material to its work, e.g. papers prepared for seminars
- Not found it possible to standardize the presentation of results, e.g. as a series of proceedings
- Not been sufficiently successful in persuading its parent bodies and member countries of the importance of its work
- Not been able to forge partnerships with potential funding organizations
- Not paid enough attention to public relations and the promotion of its work.

The tools are lacking for an objective evaluation of the Joint Committee's work. From the authors' subjective perspective, however, the positive aspects heavily outweigh the negative ones. Over the years it has generated and circulated a staggering volume of information. Direct exchange of know-how and experience between participants at seminars and workshops and between members of teams of specialists has probably been the most effective means of communication. Where problems have arisen has been in getting the information more widely distributed. This weakness lay partly within the Joint Committee itself and partly with those in member countries responsible for its wider dissemination. This can largely be attributable to inadequate funding and insufficient support from higher levels of administration.

What of the future? At the time the publication was being prepared uncertainty remained about the continuation of the Joint Committee as a permanent subsidiary body of the Timber Committee and the European Forestry Commission. But continuing demand for wood and other goods and services of the forest and competitive pressure suggests that forest owners, managers and other practitioners will continue to seek help, as they have done in the past, to find solutions to their technical, managerial and human resource problems. And also as in the past, this will include looking to see how other countries are dealing with them. The publication highlights nine areas of concern:

- 1) The profitability, or lack of it, of forest operations
- 2) Nature conservation and biodiversity
- 3) Protection of the forest from fire and other dangers, including global warming
- 4) The forestry workforce
- 5) Leisure, recreation and landscape
- 6) Energy and biomass
- 7) Countries with economies in transition
- 8) Illegal or illicit harvesting and trade
- 9) Sustainable forest management, covering all of the above.

What would be the most efficient mechanisms for international cooperation in these fields? In the past the Joint Committee has been successful in identifying countries' needs and selecting appropriate platforms for cooperation, but has been less successful in passing on the information generated to all the people who could benefit from it, partly for lack of resources. The Steering Committee has played an effective role in bringing together proposals for future activities, selecting the most promising ones, choosing the most suitable means for implementing them and monitoring progress. Whether under the aegis of the Joint Committee or some other banner, this system of having a small group of leading experts appointed by member countries to advise and direct the work should be continued. But it will also need to give careful attention to the problems of communication and dissemination of information.

Whether or not the Joint Committee continues, it will be very important that the institutional know-how it has built up is not lost and that the valuable work it has been carrying out is continued in one form or another. It also seems essential that there must be a 'central authority' within whose own programme the activities are included, in order to give them the necessary credibility and through which the outcomes, in the form of recommendations and guidelines, can be channelled. The authors hope that the publication may inspire all those keen to see the Joint Committee's activities being pursued in the future to search for ways to overcome the barriers threatening to curtail its activities.

## Outline of the main publication

### Foreword

#### Part I: The first three decades: 1954 to 1985

- Forestry in post-war Europe
- Evolution of the Joint Committee's activities over the first thirty years of its existence
- Changes in the method of work: reorganization of the Joint Committee in 1978
- Joint Committee liaison with other bodies
- Subjects dealt with by the Joint Committee
- Conclusions on the first three decades

#### Part II: Moving from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- Forestry under the influence of internal and external factors
- Subjects dealt with by the Joint Committee since 1985
- Further adjustments of the Joint Committee's structure and methods of work to meet changing circumstances
- Conclusions

### Annexes:

- I. List of Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen, Rapporteurs, Co-ordinators and Leaders of Teams of Specialists of the Joint Committee
  - II. List of publications, including proceedings of symposia, seminars and workshops held under the auspices of the Joint Committee
  - III. List of training courses, symposia, seminars and workshops held under the auspices of the Joint Committee
  - IV. Index of Joint Committee publications and activities by subject
  - V. Summary of conclusions and recommendations of Joint Committee seminars and workshops.
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