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Reporting on and implementation of the 2014-2017 Integrated Programme of Work and related decisions

The ECE evaluation on the assessment of the relevance of the 2014-2017 Integrated Programme of Work (IPoW)

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document contains the conclusions and recommendations of the “Assessment of the relevance of the 2014-2017 ECE/FAO Integrated Programme of Work to the needs of member States and challenges in the forest sector”.

The evaluation was undertaken as part of the 2016-17 Evaluation Work Plan of ECE. The internal evaluation was undertaken by an independent evaluator and results addressed and presented to the ECE Secretariat. Accordingly, the ECE Secretariat prepared a management response. The full text of the evaluation and the management response will be available on the “Open UNECE” webpages at: www.unece.org/info/open-unece/evaluation, under Forestry and Timber.

The Committee is expected to take note of the conclusions and recommendations of the assessment and the related management response.

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I. Conclusions

1. The conclusions are organized in the order of the questions in the evaluation matrix (see main report) and draw on findings from the online survey and the interviews.

A. Regional challenges at the time the Integrated Programme of Work (IPoW) 2014-2017 was elaborated

2. Previous regional challenges were assessed through a review of ECE documents. Challenges were identified in the areas of production, markets and forest governance, biodiversity conservation, climate change and forest disturbances. Some challenges were specific for certain subregions, e.g. a decrease in demand for paper, paperboard and pulpwood in the ECE West and forest governance in the ECE East and Northern and Central Asia. However, biodiversity conservation and in particular eutrophication of soils was an issue across the ECE region.

B. Regional and national challenges today (as of May 2016)

3. The six most frequently mentioned key challenges at the regional level are “achieving sustainability goals”, “adaptation/vulnerability to climate change”, “climate mitigation”, “coordination among forest actors”, “forest governance (e.g. illegal logging, deforestation)”, and “developing new markets for wood”. Respondents explained that climate change and related changing disturbance regimes (e.g. fires, pests) have created a need for new adaptation strategies. Other comments revealed that achieving sustainability goals in relation to the SDGs is perceived as a challenge. Related to the bioeconomy, forest finance together with profitable forest management and the forest sector’s role in a transition to a green economy were mentioned as challenges.

4. At the national level, fairly similar challenges were mentioned. The four most frequently mentioned challenges were achieving sustainability goals, coordination among forest actors, adaptation/vulnerability to climate change, and forest financing.

C. Addressing challenges

5. In order to find out how the IPoW addressed existing challenges, respondents were asked to rate the relevance of the work of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI) / the FAO European Forestry Commission (EFC), Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management (Joint Working Party) and Teams of Specialists (ToS) to the region’s efforts in tackling the challenges. Overall, these bodies were rated as relevant by the vast majority of respondents. Only very few stated that the work was irrelevant. Comments revealed that information exchange, the provision of advice and capacity building were seen as major advantages in addressing challenges. However, there was also concern that the historical focus on wood markets and the industry should not be lost. No comment was made about gender equality in previous, current or future challenges.

6. More than 70% of the respondents felt that their greatest national challenge was either partly or fully addressed by the IPoW. Among the challenges that several respondents felt were not being adequately addressed were forest financing, forest

fires and coordination among forest actors. Among the groups of ToS the following stood out as particularly helpful in tackling national challenges: the ToS on Sustainable Forest Products, the ToS on Forest Products Statistics and the ToS on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management (SFM). Several comments were made on cooperation and information exchange, e.g. to increase synergies between ToS and on strategies related to climate change, such as to develop a suite of readily available adaptation options. It was also suggested to create a ToS on climate change issues.

D. Provision of support

7. Respondents were asked to rate the level of support provided to their country by the three bodies. Around 40% stated that COFFI/EFC and the Joint Working Party provide excellent or good support. Likewise about half of the respondents rated the ToS as excellent or good. As laid out in the section on the interviews, support provided through normative products, seminars, workshops, events and policy work is highly appreciated.

E. Validity of the needs identified during the 2011-2012 Strategic Review in the region

8. The vast majority (93%) of respondents expects that the current challenges at the regional level will remain unchanged during the period 2018-2021. In the interviews it was asked whether respondents expect any impact due to major issues such as migration that are currently on the top of the political agenda in many countries. None of the respondents could make out any direct relationship to forestry questions.

F. Upcoming challenges and needs

9. Various comments were provided on upcoming challenges and needs. They can be summarized into the areas of climate change and forest disturbances, forest resources and biomass, green economy and sustainability, products and other needs and challenges. Recalling that the key areas of concern identified in the literature were production, markets and forest governance, biodiversity conservation, climate change and forest disturbances, it becomes clear, that the online survey did not reveal any fundamentally new challenges. However, the topics of climate change and forest disturbances appear to have gained in importance. These topics were covered in the literature but did not play a prominent role. By contrast, they were frequently mentioned in the answers and comments submitted in the online survey. This may be indicative of a shift of importance of these issues.

10. While the top priorities may shift along with external factors and market forces, it is difficult to identify areas of the current IPoW that are likely to decrease in importance in the next years.

II. Recommendations

A. Maintain focus on value chain from forests to forest products/timber and markets

11. The primary recommendation is to continue putting the focus on the value chain from forests to forest products/timber and markets, which is seen as one of the most important comparative advantages of ECE/FAO's common work. For some countries, particular attention should remain on economic questions in regard to forest management (forest accounting, valuation of forest goods and services, digitalization) and in marketing forest products and, where requested, on governance and institutional issues. Clearly, one of the strengths of the ECE/FAO is in data collection, interpretation and dissemination of information about Sustainable Forest Management, economic policies, forest industry and trade. This comparative advantage and unique proposition should be fully maintained.

B. Continue using meetings for knowledge brokering and experience exchange

12. The regular joint meetings are recommended to be used for knowledge brokering and experience exchange and broader coordination of policy efforts, particularly in the European context between ECE- FAO, the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions (RFC) for Europe and Central Asia, and Forest Europe. It is also essential to maintain a good working relationship between the UNECE/FAO Joint Work Programme and the work of the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, which has a technical mandate to develop capacities and institutional strengthening, particularly for countries in need of such cooperation, in Eastern, Southern and South-Eastern Europe, and Central Asia.

C. Use joint meetings to convene with stakeholders from the entire northern forest belt

13. A further recommendation is to use the joint meetings as an occasion to convene with relevant stakeholders from the entire northern forest belt (North America, Europe, Russia including Siberia and Central Asia). In this regard, it should be recalled that the countries of this belt comprise the entirety of boreal forests and a considerable part of temperate forests of the world, more than 40% of the global forest area. The unique opportunity should be used to feed into the larger policy dialogues on SFM, forest and climate change, gender issues and sector governance (both global/United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and regional North America/Forest Europe).

D. Foster sectoral themes that do not receive sufficient attention in other fora

14. While the overall work program 2014-17 is generally assessed as relevant, including a clear ranking of topics to take into consideration, one of the strengths, widely recognized since many years, is the ability to foster sectoral themes that did not receive sufficient attention in other international fora. Topics of importance for a forthcoming IPoW include inter alia focusing the work on specific areas of the green economy, such as (i) more in-depth economic analysis and review pilot implementations on the generation and effective use of forest and wood biomass for

low carbon development and future energy needs; (ii) resilience of temperate and boreal forests and tree species to climate change and economic implication; (iii) and, as proposed by some countries, comprehensive work on wood construction and substitution of other materials through wood products in the building sector.

E. Use the Rovaniemi Action Plan as basis for institutional development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

15. Concerning the Rovaniemi Action Plan, many applauded the very participatory process that included the timber industry and NGOs. However, implementation is proving to be difficult at the national level in some countries. A suggestion is to use the Rovaniemi Action Plan as a basis for economic work and institutional development in the forest sector in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, e.g. through work of the RFC of FAO.

F. Coordinate actions with work for other international agreements

16. In the immediate future, broader developmental concepts, including the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the translation of the Paris Climate Agreement into concrete actions in the forest and related sectors will influence the work of the ECE/FAO from different angles. This will include providing relevant information for monitoring and creating capacities for wider SFM approaches in countries with the need to build capacities. Moreover, ECE/FAO could develop and provide relevant forest data collection and working approaches to support SDG implementation in the member countries.

17. Certainly a way to strengthen a capacity would be to mainstream gender into the forest policies, to ensure participation and leadership of women in the forest sector, as for example is recommended in the output document of the ToS on gender and forestry (FAO 2006) and in some more recent publications (ECE, FAO 2015a, 2015c). One step forward in this direction can be development of national gender strategies for the forest sector and by enhancing cooperation and integration of women in forestry (ECE, FAO 2015b). It will also require developing relevant actions to sharpen the role of forests and forest products across countries' economic sectors. COFFI, in this respect could be inspired by work in the broader environmental sector of the UN and FAO. The Aichi Targets are an important case in point.

G. Reflect on private sector integration into the work of ECE/FAO

18. A recommendation is also to reflect on how private sector actors can be better included in the work of ECE/FAO, in particular in economic issues, including national accounting, legality issues and chain-of-custody and transatlantic trade issues (e.g. through a strengthening of the teams of specialists and special working sessions in the Geneva meetings).

19. Last but not least, it is recommended to dedicate special attention to the 70th anniversary of the UNECE/FAO collaboration next year.