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Timber Committee

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION
European Forestry Commission

JOINT FAO/UNECE WORKING PARTY ON FOREST ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS
Twenty-sixth session

to be held in the Palais des Nations, Geneva
15 – 17 March 2004, starting at 10.00 hrs on Monday, 15 March

Item 2 of the Provisional Agenda
Matters referred to the Working Party by its parent bodies

This document presents two matters, not directly linked to guidance of the work areas of the Working Party, but referred to it by its parent bodies or through the UN system. These are:

- UNECE/FAO publications
- “Indicators of achievement” in UN programme budget

The Working Party is invited to comment on the above-mentioned items.

Introduction

1. The Working Party is invited to comment on two matters not directly linked to guidance of the work areas, but referred to it by its parent bodies, or through the UN system as a whole:

- UNECE/FAO publications
- “Indicators of achievement” in UN programme budget

UNECE/FAO publications

2. Most UNECE/FAO activities result in information, intended to be made available to a wide range of people, particularly experts in the matters under discussion. These are mostly, at present, issued as “publications” notably in the following series:

- Timber Bulletin (6 issues a year, statistics and market analysis);
- Geneva Timber and Forest Study Papers (more in depth, final studies);
- Geneva Timber and Forest Discussion papers (contributions to the work, issued on the responsibility of the authors, frequently not a member of the secretariat); and
- International Forest Fire News.

3. The number of UNECE/FAO publications of the above series was six in 2002 and six in 2003. This does not include seminar proceedings and papers, publicity material or UNECE/FAO outputs finally issued by other bodies (e.g. MCPFE for the study of the state of Europe’s forests prepared jointly with the Vienna Liaison Unit). All are available in paper form and on the UNECE Timber Branch website. They are posted on the website when authorised (at the beginning of the physical reproduction/ distribution process, often two months before they are available in paper format).

4. At the level of the UN system as a whole, there is a review of the communications/publications policy, aimed at ensuring that publications fulfil a real need, of good quality, reach their intended audience and distributed by the most effective and economic channels. Because of the heavy costs associated with traditional publications (i.e. on paper), there is a desire to reduce the number of these publications, and to use the Internet as a means of distribution.

5. Within UNECE, the Executive Secretary has expressed her wish that UNECE publications be few in number, of high quality and address policy relevant issues. Purely statistical publications are not considered appropriate. UNECE now has a departmental publications board and all publications are cleared for issue by the Deputy Executive Secretary.

6. It should also be noted that preparing publications takes a major part of the Timber Branch’s resources, in addition to the analytical work, notably as regards quality control of internal and external analysis and layout. There are also significant delays after the publication has left the Timber Branch for reproduction and distribution. Increasingly, the UN services do not have the resources to translate publications (which are given lower priority than documents for intergovernmental bodies), so that even Study Papers are not translated or the translations are issued very late (e.g. 2 years for the TBFRA 2000 in French).

7. The secretariat wishes to:
- Maintain the standards of UNECE/FAO output, and not reduce the volume of information available;
 - Ensure the information reaches its target groups, without unreasonable delays (this includes target groups who do not have access to Internet e.g. in some transition countries);
 - Minimise costs and investment of time and resources, inside the Timber Branch and elsewhere in the UN system; and
 - Present a clear and attractive corporate image of UNECE/FAO's work.
8. Compared to present requirements, the present system, created in the mid 1990s seem to have the following shortcomings:
- Too many outputs on paper, creating a heavy burden of high level approval processes, layout work and physical reproduction/distribution;
 - Insufficient distinction between regular, mostly statistical information, "work in progress" and outputs aimed at policy makers¹
 - Long delays before final paper versions are issued.
9. To address these problems and opportunities, the secretariat proposes the following:
- Only one or two "publications" a year, addressed at policy makers, with the highest standards of analysis and presentation, translated if possible, issued on paper as UN publications. This would include the Forest Products Annual Market Analysis, the outlook studies and other similar work, and would continue to be referred to as the Study Papers.
 - All statistical information (i.e. the contents of the Timber Bulletin issues 1,2, 4, 5 and 6) to be made available only on the website.
 - Discussion Papers to be issued primarily on the website, and by e-mail to interested experts, with their design making it clearer than at present that they are inputs or supplements to the work and source material, rather than a finished UN Publication.
 - A major effort to catalogue and announce all the above (brochures, flyers, newsletters, e-mail circulars etc.), so that they can be easily found, and that experts are aware of their existence. There would be a permanent offer to print out and post material to those who have difficulty downloading from or accessing the website.
10. This should both reduce the number of formal publications, ensuring the highest standards for them, and enable the secretariat to continue making available a stream of relevant and reliable material, at lower cost and with shorter time lags.

11. *The Working Party is requested to indicate its views on the above proposal and suggest ways and means of enhancing the effectiveness of the publications policy taking due account of the resource constraints.*

¹ The distinction between the Timber Bulletin, the Study Papers and the Discussion Papers was intended to address this, but when this system was devised, the Internet was not a viable alternative distribution channel, and in practice, the distinction has been somewhat blurred.

Indicators of achievement

12. The UN programme and budget is now based on Results Based Management (RBM), whereby each subprogramme (e.g. UNECE Timber) not only performs activities, and produces outputs but is required to state expected accomplishments, and to be in a position to demonstrate by indicators, preferably quantitative, that it has achieved these accomplishments. The difficulties of measuring accomplishments in an area where the main objective is improved information and understanding is acknowledged, as is the difficulty of measuring quality of outputs. For the 2002-2003 biennium, on which reporting is taking place now, as well as for 2004-2005, one of the indicators of accomplishment for the sub-programme objective of “improved analysis and information on the forest resource and forest products sector, including quantitative indicators of sustainable forest management” is “Positive assessment by the Joint FAO/UNECE Working Party on Economics and Statistics of the information and analysis provided”.

13. The secretariat considers this assessment by the Working Party to be inherent in the detailed review of work areas 1-3. However, this is too lengthy and detailed for inclusion in the UN RBM website.

14. The Working Party is therefore invited to indicate its assessment of the information and analysis provided by UNECE/FAO in order to “improve analysis and information on the forest resource and forest products sector including quantitative indicators of sustainable forest management”.

15. The Working Party’s assessment will be entered into the RBM website as an indicator of the sub-programme’s performance in this area.