

Terms of Reference for the External Evaluation of the UNECE-FAO United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project: 12/13AW Sustainable Forest Management for Greener Economies in the Caucasus and Central Asia

I. Background

The UNECE-FAO UNDA project “Sustainable Forest Management for Greener Economies in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, implemented 2013-2015, covered the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It provided training and advisory services to government officials working in forestry, as well as other stakeholders who are impacted by forest policies and forest work.

The project included the following products and activities:

- Training materials on sustainable forest management in a green economy, on wood energy and on data collection (English/Russian).
- Regional (2), national (7), coaching (9) and local (28) training workshops (total 56) on forest-policy formulation, bioenergy generation from wood, data collection on forests and forests products including Green Economy principles.
- Web-based hub for knowledge management on forests related issues in the Caucasus and Central Asia (project website).
- A coaching programme for each of three pilot countries (Georgia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan) targeted at the development of national action plans to improve the forest’s sector contribution to a green economy.

More background information can be found at the dedicated project website.

<http://www.unece.org/forests/areas-of-work/forestpolicies/forestscapacitybuilding.html>

All relevant documentation will be provided to the evaluation consultant.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the relevance of the project for the implementation of the UNECE-FAO Integrated Programme of on forests in the UNECE region and the effectiveness of the project in enhancing the capacity of the project countries (see above) in key areas of sustainable forest management. The evaluation will also address the efficiency and sustainability of the project and its activity, in order to learn how to maintain the beneficial effects of the project after its conclusion.

The evaluation will assess whether the project succeeded in contributing to build national capacity to develop forest policies and implement sustainable forest management, taking into consideration the five pillars of the Rovaniemi Action Plan for the forest sector in a green economy: (1) sustainable production and consumption of forest products; (2) a low carbon forest sector; (3) decent green jobs in the forest sector; (4) long term provision of forest ecosystem services; and (5) policy development and monitoring of the forest sector in relation to green economy.

The evaluation should also identify lessons learned from the implementation of the project and issues that need further attention and that could lead to the revision of working modalities in future capacity building projects, and develop practical recommendations for the UNECE-FAO Forestry and Timber Section, participating countries as well as project partners on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of capacity building work.

III. Scope

All seven project countries will be covered by the evaluation; the evaluation process will engage national consultants, national focal points, international and regional consultants, as well as NGOs involved in project implementation. Main activities (workshops) and outputs (training package, reports) and their impact and usefulness will be assessed.

Since there are numerous projects and initiatives on-going in the Caucasus and Central Asia related to forestry, agriculture and environment (especially in Georgia), it is important to be aware of the limitations of this particular project and that it will not be easy to establish what its individual impact might have been, as its impact might not be isolated from the one of other similar projects. To focus the evaluation on the specific impacts of this project, interviews will be undertaken and feedback collected only from people directly involved in the project through regional or national workshops.

Moreover, some project countries such as Tajikistan or Uzbekistan may be reluctant to participate in interviews due to recent political changes in the forestry administration. Written questionnaire can be considered in case the country representatives are not comfortable with interviews.

The evaluation will cover the organizational contribution of UNECE only, not of other organizations. The evaluation will focus the period spanning from the first regional workshop (April 2014) through the second regional workshop (April 2015) to the last national workshop (Azerbaijan, September 2015), which is the period of implementation. The thematic scope of the evaluation is forest sector development in relation to the green economy, forest policy development, forest data collection and wood energy.

The evaluation framework covers this project only, and excludes other capacity building or forest reporting work by the UNECE-FAO Forestry and Timber Section.

Gender and human rights aspects will be also covered by the evaluation, taking into account guidance provided by the United Nations Evaluation Group on the matter (available at <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/980> and <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1452>)

IV. Issues

The evaluation will seek to report on the *effectiveness* of the project in achieving its objectives and its *sustainability*; the *efficiency* of the project, in particular to evaluate how the inputs and resources (funds, staff , time) were utilized in achieving the outputs, and the *relevance* of the project to the priorities and needs of its recipients and the consistency with the attainment of its overall objective. Key questions that the evaluation seeks to answer include:

Effectiveness

1. To what extent the objective of the project was achieved?

2. How did the project strengthen the national capacity of countries in Caucasus and Central Asia to enhance the contribution of their forest sector to greener economies?
3. To what extent the expected accomplishments of the project were achieved? In particular:
 - 3.1. How did the project contribute to increasing the knowledge of countries to develop policies for enhancing the forests sector contribution to greener economies?
 - 3.2. How did the project contribute to increasing the capacity of countries to develop policies for enhancing the forest sector's contribution to greener economies?
4. To what extent the planned activities contributed to achieving the objective and the expected accomplishments?
 - 4.1. How did training modules and the training materials contribute to enhancing the capacity of countries in the different thematic areas covered by the project (i.e. green economy, wood energy and data collection)?
 - 4.2. To what extent the final regional forest workshop offered a platform to share lessons learned from all participating countries, and in particular from the three pilot countries, and to formulate recommendations for follow up at national and international level?
 - 4.3. How did the portal hosted by UNECE-FAO serve as a web-based hub for knowledge management in forest-related issues in the Caucasus and Central Asia?
 - 4.4. How did the coaching programme in the three pilot countries contribute to enhance the capacity and to the development of national action plans for implementing sustainable forest management?
5. What were the challenges/obstacles to achieving the expected results?
6. What has prevented to achieve the desired results?

Sustainability

7. Could the results be further sustained? In particular:
 - 7.1. To what extent will the benefits of the project continue after completion and without overburdening recipient countries and stakeholders?
 - 7.2. How is the stakeholders' engagement likely to continue, be scaled up, replicated or institutionalized after funding ceases? In case, how will the capacity built to ensure that institutions will take over and sustain the benefits?
 - 7.3. To what extent do the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the work?
 - 7.4. How has the project built in resilience to future risks?
 - 7.5. What were the major factors which influence the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the project?
 - 7.6. How will the established electronic portal be easily maintained??
 - 7.7. How will the project pave the way for the mainstreaming of green economy into forests policies and programmes in the future?

Efficiency

8. Were the resources sufficient for achieving the results? Were the results commensurate with the resources?
9. Were the results achieved on time?
10. Were all activities organized efficiently and on time?
11. To what extent the resources were used economically? How could the use of resources been improved?
12. Where there any alternatives to achieve the same results? If yes, which ones?
13. Was the programme or project implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives? In particular, how do the costs and use of resources compare with other similar projects (within UNECE, FAO or by other UN agencies)?
14. How was the difference between planned and actual expenditure justified (if any)?

Relevance

15. To what extent did the project respond to the priorities and needs of the beneficiary countries? How relevant was it to the target groups' needs and priorities?
16. To what extent is the project aligned with the policies and strategies of the recipient pilot countries?
17. How relevant was the project for the ECE region needs and priorities? How relevant is the project to other regions where FAO is active?
18. What is the relevance of the project for the work of ECE? What is the relevance of the project for the work of FAO?
19. To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid? How can the project be replicated in other contexts?
20. To what extent are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with and relevant to the overall objective and expected accomplishments?
21. To what extent are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with and relevant to the intended impacts and effects?

V. Methodology

The evaluation will be carried out using a questionnaire, followed by targeted interviews to further elaborate the findings of the survey. An extensive desk review of existing documents will also be carried out.

A tailored **questionnaire** will be sent to all participants in national and regional workshops, project national focal points, and national, regional and international consultants, as well as relevant UNECE staff involved in the project. It will include open and closed questions (in English and in Russian). To ensure objective approach, the questionnaire will be prepared by the evaluation consultant, and will be reviewed by the UNECE project manager. It will search to reply to the questions listed in section IV, formulated in a way the evaluation consultant finds best according to his/her previous evaluation experience and expertise in the region.

The **interviews** will take place via phone and Skype. The UNECE project manager will provide the list with contact details);

The **desk review** will be based on project reports and material available including the:

- Project plan;
- Training package;
- Facilitators manual;
- Project website;
- Project progress reports;
- Reports from workshops;
- Compilation of the evaluation results of national and regional workshops (based on UNECE workshop evaluation forms);
- Other documents that the evaluator deems necessary for this exercise.

The UNECE project manager will provide support and further explanation by Skype and phone to the evaluation consultant when needed.

The evaluation consultant will write a **report** on the results of the evaluation based on these terms of reference.

VI. Evaluation Schedule

Develop a timetable for the following phases of the evaluation:

A. Preliminary research: December 2015 (by evaluation consultant)

B. Data Collection: 2013-2015 project documents, reports, workshop evaluations (by UNECE project manager), questionnaire and interviews (by evaluation consultant): December 2015.

C. Data Analysis: January 2016 (by evaluation consultant)

D. Draft Report: (include timing for peer review) End of January 2016 (by evaluation consultant)

E. Final Report: Mid February 2016 (by evaluation consultant)

VII. Resources

An external evaluation consultant identified through the UNECE evaluation roster will be hired and receive support from the UNECE project manager. The UNECE Programme Management Unit will provide guidance on the process for the preparation of the evaluation.

VIII. Intended Use/Next Steps

The evaluation will be consistent with the UNECE evaluation policy. The results will be used in the planning and implementation of new capacity building projects in the Caucasus and Central Asia in the future and, possibly, also beyond the region.

IX. Criteria for Evaluators

The evaluator should have:

- An advanced university degree or equivalent background in relevant disciplines, with specialized training in areas such as evaluation, project management, social statistics, advanced statistical research and analysis.
- Good knowledge of and experience in environmental issues, possibly with a specific knowledge of forests related issues and the green economy
- Relevant professional experience in design and management of evaluation processes with multiple stakeholders, survey design and implementation, and project planning, monitoring and management.
- Demonstrated methodological knowledge of evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for end-of-cycle project evaluations.
- Working languages (written and spoken proficiency): English and Russian.
