



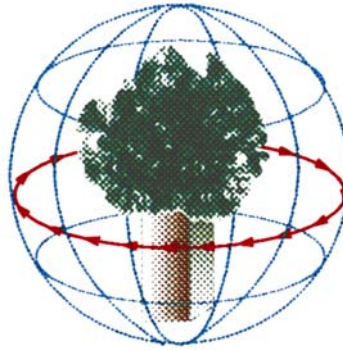
European Forestry
Commission
Food and Agriculture
Organization



Timber Committee
Economic Commission for
Europe

TIM/2003/2

International Forest
Communicators
Network



Network
des communicateurs
forestiers
internationaux

Report on Activities and Accomplishments from 2000 to 2004

*by Ingwald Gschwandt (Austria) - FCN Leader,
Bob Burt (Canada), Juhani Karvonen (Finland) and Tomass Kotovics (Latvia)
Deputy FCN Leaders*

as of September, 2004

FCN Mandate

The FAO-ECE Forest Communicators Network (FCN), formerly called the Team of Public Relations Specialists in the Forest and Forest Industries Sector, was established by the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission in support of the overall goal of creating a positive image of the forest sector including all phases of forest resource management and forest industry.

The mandate given at the joint meeting of the UN ECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission in October 2000 until November 2004 states the following specific tasks:

- promote networking among member states for capacity building and exchange of information in public relations and communication;
- identify key common concepts and promote their incorporation in forest sector communications and public relations activities in the member countries;
- identify key needs for improvement of forest sector public relations and communication and communicate them to the TC and the EFC;
- assist the TC and the EFC to improve public relations and information related to their work;

- promote the development of national capacity in forest sector public relations and communication, particularly in countries in transition;
- stimulate and promote the sound use of wood and other forest products as environmentally friendly and renewable resources.

The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) acknowledged the work of the FCN as contribution to the implementation of resolutions adopted by the Ministers responsible for forests in 44 European countries. Some specific FCN activities form an integral part of the MCPFE work programme.

Method of Work

Participation in the FCN has been kept open to all, sharing the common objectives and the concern about the above mentioned tasks. The team has established a communication network throughout the ECE region, formed subgroups to deal with specific issues and produced a number of publications. The team conducted meetings in different countries of the ECE region, to exchange information on selected topics, to develop concepts, to take stock on achievements and to decide on further activities.

Concerning resources the FCN built completely on voluntary contributions by and inputs of individuals, countries and organisations in terms of expertise, man power and finances. These inputs together with synergies created through co-operations with other actors, such as the MCPFE and the ToS on Public Participation, have generated a climate of remarkable productivity.

The inputs required by the Secretariat of the EFC/TC in Geneva were minor in terms of manpower, but crucial in terms of substance. The Secretariat has hosted the internet website as integral part of the TC website, maintained the contact data base and had a representative participating in the meetings, acting as rapporteur and providing the link to the EFC, the TC and other committees and teams.

Accomplishments related to the mandate of October 2000

- Mandate item: **Promote networking among member states for capacity building and exchange of information in public relations and communication**

Currently the contact data base of the network contains some 190 persons from 30 countries out of the ECE region (Europe and North America) representing both, governmental and private sector organisations.

Informations about the FCN, its members, meetings and publications are posted at the UNECE Timber Committee website under the address <http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/pr/pr.htm>. For internal communications the FCN has established an Intranet site at the web-server of FAO. However, the Intranet site lacks maintenance support by FAO and has therefore not been used effectively.

Meetings were held in 2000 in Newfoundland/Canada, 2001 in Slovakia, 2002 in Latvia, 2003 in the United Kingdom and Quebec/Canada, and 2004 in Bulgaria.

- **Mandate item: Identify key common concepts and promote their incorporation in forest sector communications and public relations activities in the member countries**

In 2000 the FCN kindly supported by the Canadian Forest Service organised the first International Forest Communicators Forum in St. Johns Canada and developed a strategic concept for forest related communications in the ECE region, which states a mid term and short term vision, outlines objectives and proposes actions. The strategy has provided a guiding frame for activities of the network and its individual members.

Based on this strategy and in response to the FCN mandate, the FCN established three subgroups to elaborate concrete outputs with regard to the following subjects:

- Consumer attitudes towards forests and forest based products
- Best practices in forest related communications
- Strategic approaches for building PR capacity

The subgroup on consumer attitudes towards forests and forest based products, led by Ewald Rametsteiner/Austria, analysed a number of representative opinion surveys covering important markets for the forest and forest industries sector of the ECE region, such as Europe, North America and Japan. In this context one important initiative was a perception study launched by the European Union in 2001 examining how forest based industries were perceived by EU citizens, which provided the basis for a sectoral communication strategy of the European Commission. The FCN subgroup collected a wealth of information and put together a package of extremely useful market intelligence. The first part of the findings was published with the title “The Europeans and their Forests” in co-operation with the MCPFE and the UNECE Timber Committee in December 2003. The publication was distributed widely through the Liaison Unit of the MCPFE and is available for download at the FCN web site. A second publication, focussing on public attitudes towards forest based products is under preparation, to be finalised early 2005.

The subgroup on best practices in forest related communications, led by Bob Burt/Canada, gathers examples of remarkable PR campaigns carried out by various actors within the ECE region. A compilation of this examples, highlighting success stories, experiences made and lessons learned, is under preparation, should be ready in 2005 and serve as a basis for in depth analyses of success factors for effective communication on forest issues.

The subgroup on strategic approaches for building PR capacity, led by Tomass Kotovics/Latvia, put a special focus on the specific situation in Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC). The group built its work on the findings of the ToS on Countries in transition and the results of a questionair answered by representatives of these countries in the FCN, addressing major concerns and needs of their constituances. An operational output of the groups work is the concept for a Train the Trainers Workshop on specific issues of forest related communications (TTWFC), which enables participants to introduce basic PR understanding, knowledge and skills to their colleagues. Three TTWFC were conducted successfully back to back with FCN meetings (2002 Latvia, 2003 United Kingdom, 2004 Bulgaria).

At the international seminar “Forestry Meets the Public” conducted by the Joint Committee on Forest Technology Management and Training in 2001 in Switzerland, the FCN presented a paper on “Strategic Communications and Sustainable Forest Management”.

- Mandate item: **Identify key needs for improvement of forest sector public relations and communication and communicate them to the TC and the EFC**

The work of the subgroup on consumer attitudes towards forests and forest based products identified significant differences between public attitudes and actual facts. These findings provide a solid basis for directing forest communications to thematic areas most misunderstood and deserving strongest efforts to change misperceptions.

Together with the Team of Specialists on Public Participation and Partnerships the FCN discussed strategies and means for awareness raising about forest issues. The publication of the results, issued in March 2003 with the title “Raising Awareness of Forests and Forestry” reflects substantial considerations and basic concepts in this regards, and is available at the FCN web site for download.

- Mandate item: **Assist the TC and the EFC to improve public relations and information related to their work**

For informations coming from TC and EFC the FCN has been an access gate to national and sub-national communication channels. The various activities and outputs of the TC and the EFC were presented to the FCN at meetings and through the regular communication among FCN members. In addition, working under the auspices of the EFC and the TC and using their Logos on publications of the FCN has increased the visibility of these two UN bodies.

- Mandate item: **Promote the development of national capacity in forest sector public relations and communication, particularly in countries in transition**

The work done by the subgroup on strategic approaches for building PR capacity with a special focus on Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), described above already, was the specific responds to this mandate item.

Holding meetings in CEEC (Slovakia, Latvia, Bulgaria) fostered the engagement of experts from this region. The Train the Trainers Seminars helped in practical terms to extend understanding and increase knowledge about basic communication strategies and concepts.

- Mandate item: **Stimulate and promote the sound use of wood and other forest products as environmentally friendly and renewable resources**

The FCN provided feed back to a number of wood promotion campaigns carried out in different countries, which were presented for discussion at the FCN meeting held in Edinburgh in May 2003.

Most of the activities already described above, like the work on consumer attitudes and on best PR practices, must also be mentioned in the context of wood promotion.

Outlook beyond November 2004

The following actions cannot be finalised by end of the current Mandate in November 2004:

Publication on Consumer Attitudes towards Forest based Products

A report on this issue is still under preparation and could be completed in 2005, given that the FCN does still have a mandate at this time. The publication is recognised in the MCPFE Workprogramme as action for implementing MCPFE resolution V2.

Compilation of Best Practices in Forest Related Communication

A compilation of remarkable examples and case studies of forest sector communication programmes is in preparation and could be completed in 2005. According to the MCPFE Workprogramme the FCN is expected to conduct an international workshop on best practices in forest sector communication based on FCN outputs.

In order to complete work in progress and to meet also requests by countries to continue efforts to strengthen forest sector PR and communication the FCN at its last meeting held in Sofia/Bulgaria in June 2004, decided to propose a new mandate for the period of 2005 to 2008 to be approved by the Joint Session of the UNECE Timber Committee and FAO European Forestry Commission in Geneva, 5-9 October 2004 with the following objectives and major outputs.

Mandate proposal for the period of 2005 to 2008

Objectives:

To improve the ability of the forest and forest products sector to communicate effectively, within and outside the sector, and to raise the awareness of sector policy makers of the potential of modern effective communication tools and initiatives, in co-operation with all relevant stakeholders and in the context of the MCPFE Work programme.

Expected Major Outputs:

- Compendium of successful forest sector communication projects, and contacts, to promote best practices (completion expected for 2005);
- Workshop in communication on forest sector policy for sector policy makers and analysts (building on earlier outputs by the FCN, including studies of public perceptions, Train the Trainers Workshops, best practices compendium, etc.);
- Providing expertise to the UNECE/FAO secretariat to improve communication about the integrated programme, and specifically to the team of specialists on gender in forestry and to other teams, as requested;
- Report on consumer attitudes towards forest products (completion expected for 2005);
- Building national capacity in forest sector public relations and communication, particularly in countries in transition, notably through Train the Trainers Workshops.

Resumee

It is not possible to evaluate comprehensively the impact of the FCN on the forest sectors performance concerning its public relations. However, many countries reported at FCN meetings how much they were able to build on the knowledge and experiences gained through FCN activities in designing PR strategies and campaigns for their institutions.

It is important to understand, that the FCN is the only international forum addressing the issue of forest sector communication. There is no other international forum for

- exchange of information and developing views on topical issues and strategic approaches concerning public relations in the forest and forest industries sector,
- sharing success stories and lessons learned, and
- building contacts and alliances throughout the ECE region with regard to forest related communications.

The outcomes have been remarkable. The inputs required from the EFC/TC Secretariat have been marginal (hosting and updating the web site, maintaining the contact data base, facilitating meetings).
