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TIMBER COMMITTEE
Fifty-fifth session

IMPLEMENTATION OF ECE PLAN OF ACTION

(Item 2 of the Provisional Agenda)

Note by the secretariat

The document presents the relevant parts of the ECE Plan of Action and indicates how they are being implemented. The Committee is invited to review how the Plan is being implemented, and to report on this to the Commission, possibly along the lines suggested in para. 18.

Introduction

1. On 7 February the ECE approved the Plan of Action (E/ECE/1347) and the proposals on the implementation of the ECE reform (E/ECE/1354). The objective of the present note is to present those parts of the Plan which are of relevance to the Timber Committee, notably indicating what is expected of the Committee by the ECE, as well as making some proposals as to how these matters might be addressed, prepared by the Timber Committee office-holders at their meeting in April 1997.

2. The sections of the Plan addressed to Principal Subsidiary Bodies of ECE (PSBs) are summarised in paras. 12-13 of E/ECE/1354. In the Action Plan, activities for timber are on pages 11/12. Timber has been allocated 3.0% of ECE resources, and is one of the remaining seven ECE Principal Subsidiary Bodies. The present document reproduces these paragraphs, and some relevant paragraphs of E/ECE/1347, with, after each sub-section, comments and proposals by the office-holders (in italics). Operational requests by the Commission, directly addressed to PSBs are in **bold**. The Committee is invited to consider how it should implement the Plan of Action.

3. Although these requests are formally addressed only to the Timber Committee, as the work programme is integrated with that of the FAO European Forestry Commission (EFC), and some of the requests are of a significant nature, they have been brought to the attention of the EFC Executive Committee, which has endorsed the proposals in this document on the occasion of the joint meeting of the two bureaux in April 1997.

4. The eight principles underlying the Plan of Action are:

- focus on areas of advantage, which are sustainable;
- ensure tangible and useful achievements;
- selectivity;
- flexibility in methods of work;
- respond to needs and priorities of countries in transition;
- strengthen cooperation with other international organisations;
- further involve the business community;
- ensure an incremental and transparent process of adjustment.

The Committee is invited to bear these principles in mind during its discussions.

Programme procedure

5. E/ECE/1347 describes the principles and mechanisms of the ECE programme procedure (page 18). It is stated in particular that "the PSBs have the primary responsibility for this adjustment in their respective area of work as they are the best placed to determine their own priorities."

Review of PSBs' related bodies.

6. All PSBs are invited to **review the status of their related bodies and to limit them to two categories**: Working Parties which are of a standing nature, and ad hoc groups of experts which are established for a two-year period, with a precise programme of work and sunset clauses. PSBs are requested to **prepare a report on that review**, which will be examined at the 1998 annual session of the Commission.

7. For the future, the establishment by PSBs of any new related body should take the form of an ad hoc experts group. The Commission will decide upon any proposal from PSBs to establish a working party under their aegis.

The Timber Committee has two Working Parties, the Joint FAO/ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics and the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training. Both are of a "standing nature", with well defined mandates and programmes. It also has a number of "teams of specialists" which correspond in functions and methods of work to the "ad hoc groups of experts" mentioned by the Commission (see list in the annex). It appears therefore that the Committee's work methods already correspond quite closely to those recommended by the ECE. The Committee is invited to confirm that it considers the present structure of its related bodies, and their work methods, to be in compliance with the provision of the Plan of Action.

Length of meetings

8. The **annual meetings of PSBs will be limited to three days** and this objective should be reached within a maximum of two years as of April 1997. If, for specific reasons, a meeting needs to be extended, any additional session beyond the three day limit should be informal.

For some time, the annual sessions of the Timber Committee have taken only three days (interpreted as 6 half days spread over four days e.g. starting on Monday 1500 and finishing on Thursday afternoon, with Thursday morning "free" for report finalisation and informal meetings). The Committee may wish to confirm that its annual session should continue to take 6 half days of formal session, spread over four days.

Reform of the PSB Bureaux

9. All PSBs are requested as soon as possible to **enlarge and strengthen the responsibility of their respective Bureau** in order to enable them to fulfil the functions delineated in the Plan of Action, (p. 16). In view of this increased responsibility, PSBs are also invited to **enlarge the composition of their respective Bureaux**. The enlarged Bureaux will meet as often as necessary to perform their new role.

As outlined in Chapter IV of the Plan of Action, and in addition to the above-mentioned functions, the PSB Bureaux will have to conduct a **periodic review of the work programme of other international organizations and institutions active in the same area** with a view to seeking an appropriate division of tasks through programme adjustments and promoting various forms of cooperation with these organizations. PSBs should also **establish a system by which emerging duplication due to new activities initiated by other bodies would be quickly identified and notified**.

The Timber Committee bureau (office-holders) consists of the Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen of the Committee and the Chairmen of the two working parties. Usually, it meets with the Executive Committee of EFC (Chairman and three Vice Chairmen) Thus nine people are usually invited to bureau meetings. The office-holders considered that this representation was sufficient to carry out the tasks allotted to them.

With regard to the review of activities of other organisations, a number of systems are in place to avoid duplication:

- *the integrated work programme with FAO (and ILO for the Joint Committee);*
- *the Intersecretariat Working Group on Forest Statistics;*
- *the regular agenda item "Activities of FAO and other international organisations of relevance to the Timber Committee"*

The secretariat for its part actively seeks partnerships, notably in the context of the Temperate and Boreal Forest Resource Assessment.

In the circumstances, it does not appear necessary at this stage to carry out a special exhaustive review of all international activities in the Committee's field.

Management of the programme of work.

10. For all activities, PSBs are requested to **define concrete objectives and a timetable for completion.**

New activities to be undertaken without the possibility of being financed by extrabudgetary resources will be offset by the termination of other activities requiring a similar level of resources.

PSBs will **rank all activities initiated or under way in order of priority.** They will indicate, if any, other important activities which they would wish to undertake beyond the existing programme and which would therefore require additional resources.

As of 1998, all PSBs are requested to **hold their respective annual session during the period January-September** so that any competing demands for resources can be examined by the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work every two years in the autumn, prior to the preparation of the programme budget submission by the Executive Secretary.

The integrated programme as it stands at present contains an objective and timetable for each programme element. The Committee may wish to consider whether these are sufficiently concrete and transparent. Most of the programme elements are considered "Continuing", as this is normal with monitoring/information function, which the 1996 joint session considered as the Committee's core activity. The programme elements have been ranked by order of priority and there is discussion on this at every session. Traditionally, the Timber Committee has met in the second week of October, as part of a process integrating data availability and the cycle of the timber markets. For 1998, the secretariat has reserved the last week of September, to comply with the Plan of Action. The Committee is invited to comment on its methods of management of the programme of work.

Treatment of intersectoral linkages and cross-sectoral concerns

11. Strengthening linkages among sectoral issues contributes to enlarging the bearing of ECE work and increasing its impact. Of particular importance are the linkages of the environment, trade and statistics areas with all the other ECE sectors of activities.

12. When they prepare, adopt and implement their programme of work, all PSBs and their respective Bureaux are invited to **take into account the four cross-sectoral concerns** as identified in Chapter II (p. 13-14) of the Plan of Action, namely: **the outlook for sustainable development, the mainstreaming of the gender perspective, the special concern for the economies in transition and the involvement of the business community**. Concerning the latter, as mentioned in Chapter V of the Plan of Action, PSBs are invited to promote various forms of such involvement in their respective programme of activities. (E/ECE/1347 further states that PSBs' bureaux are invited to review these issues every year in order to monitor decisions and envisage new initiatives; with regard to the business community, "PSBs are invited to **promote various forms of involvement of the business community** in their respective programme of activities. This can be implemented through, inter alia, participation in relevant meetings, support to concrete projects and development of specific outputs such as publications or information material")

13. Fostering intersectoral linkages and cross-sectoral concerns calls for **cooperation and coordination both among PSBs and secretariat divisions**. The PSBs' Bureaux are invited to **review cross-sectoral concerns and inter-sectoral linkages every year** in order to monitor decisions already taken and to envisage new initiatives.

The four cross sectoral concerns are covered in the Timber Committee programme as follows:

- *sustainable development of the forest sector is at the heart of the integrated programme and given highest priority;*
- *the special topic of the joint session in 1996 was "Women in Forestry": the Committee may wish to make suggestions regarding how to "mainstream the gender perspective"*
- *the programme foresees workshops for countries in transition and monitoring of assistance to countries in transition, under the mandate for Helsinki resolution H3;*
- *the business community has traditionally participated in the Committee's market review and is a main user of the ECE/FAO publications: the Committee may wish to consider whether action is needed to reinforce this involvement.*

Implementation

14. PSBs are requested to organize **the implementation of these decisions as of their next annual session**. It is proposed that the Chairman of the Commission and the Executive Secretary meet each of the Chairmen of the PSBs on the occasion of the 1997 Jubilee session of the Commission, in order to brief them fully on these decisions and to discuss ways of implementing them expeditiously. It is also proposed that the **Bureau of each PSB and of the Commission itself delegate one of its members to monitor such implementation**.

The agenda item on the Plan of Action at the present session has been arranged in accordance with this request. The timber Committee office-holders met the Chairman of the Commission and the Executive Secretary at the jubilee session. The office-holders nominated Ms. A. Bergquist to coordinate this activity with the secretariat.

Organisation of sessions (E/ECE/1347, section A.2.b)

15. The responsibility of the Bureaux of PSBs will be strengthened in order to enable them to fulfil the following functions related to the organization of sessions: (i) the preparation of **a well-focused agenda** with the definition of objectives and the setting of time-allocation for each item; (ii) indication of principal **topics where decisions are needed**; (iii) delineation of **themes of discussion** of the session; (iv) **monitoring and evaluation of the work** since the previous session; (v) **monitoring and coordination of activities in order to avoid duplication** with the work of other relevant organizations; and (vi) proposing of **priorities** in the programme of work, listing, where possible, various options;

The provisional agenda and organisation of the Committee's session were discussed in detail by the office-holders at their meeting in April 1997, taking into account the aspects identified by the Commission. The Committee is invited to indicate whether any changes in the way the annual sessions are organised is necessary.

16. The secretariat is requested to prepare **pre-session documents which are well-focused and as short as possible**; such documents should be analytical and problem-oriented rather than informative; and an executive summary, together with recommendations or decisions to be taken, should be presented at the beginning of each document.

The secretariat is endeavouring to keep the pre-session documents well-focused and short. In particular, it has prepared an overview document for the discussion of the programme of work, summarising developments, identifying decision points as well as presenting the formal programme for approval. Delegates may wish to comment on the quality of documentation for this session and make suggestions for improvement, notably by indicating topics which, in their opinion, could be covered in less detail, or which need not be brought to the attention of the Committee's session.

17. At the end of each meeting, PSBs are invited to adopt a **short report**, listing the main conclusion points and decisions taken; this report will also reflect, where necessary, divergent points of views on important issues when consensus has not been reached. For substantive topics prompting an exchange of experiences and/or a policy debate, the secretariat is requested to summarize the discussion after the meeting and to consult the Bureau before finalizing this summary and circulating it to member States.

The secretariat will present for the Committee's approval at its final session a report which is as short as possible, while remaining comprehensible. Under this agenda item, and others, delegations may wish to express their opinion as to the topics which should be in the Committee's formal report and those which may be omitted. After the session (or at the report adoption session) delegates may also wish to comment on this topic, in the light of experience gained during the session.

Conclusions

18. The Committee may wish to endorse the following general statement on the ECE Plan of Action:

The Timber Committee took note of the ECE Plan of Action and agreed to put into practice the Commission's requests. In particular:

- *It confirmed that its two subsidiary bodies, the Joint FAO /ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics and the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training, should continue with their present mandates and methods of work.*
- *At present the Committee has 11 ad hoc groups of experts (teams of specialists) with precise mandates and time limited programmes; this work method had proved effective and economic of secretariat resources and should be continued;*
- *The Timber Committee bureau, which works very closely with the bureau of the FAO European Commission, already functions along the lines laid down in the Plan of Action, overseeing implementation of the work programme, preparing the sessions and ensuring there is no duplication with other international organisations;*
- *The annual Timber Committee session should continue to be limited to three days, interpreted as six half day sessions over four days, although exceptions may be necessary in the case of future joint sessions with EFC; from 1998, it should take place in the last week of September;*
- *The Committee agreed to take into account the four cross sectoral concerns identified by the Commission: in this context, it noted that the outlook for sustainable development in its area of interest was at the heart of all its activities, that its programme showed special concern for the economies in transition in many areas and that the business community had been involved in its work from the beginning. As a start towards mainstreaming of the gender perspective, "women in forestry" had been the special topic of the joint session in 1996.*

Annex

Bodies related to the Timber Committee

A. Working parties of a standing nature

Joint FAO/ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics

Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training

B. Ad hoc groups of experts (as of July 1997)

Team of specialists on the Temperate and Boreal Forest Resource Assessment 2000

Team of specialists on public relations of the forest sector

Team of specialists on forestry assistance to countries in transition

Core team for European timber trends studies

Team of specialists on non-wood goods and services

Team of specialists on recycling, energy and market interactions

Team of specialists on reducing the impact of forest operations on ecosystems

Team of specialists on socio-economic aspects of forestry

Team of specialists on forest fires

Team of specialists on management of forests in radio-contaminated areas

Team of specialists on multiple use forestry