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**Matters arising from the fifty-fourth session of the Economic Commission
for Europe of relevance to the Committee**

(Item 2 of the provisional agenda)

Note by the secretariat

This document:

- informs the Committee of relevant items of the Commission's session;
- reviews operational activities under the Committee's auspices, including the database on forestry assistance to countries in transition, mandated under Helsinki resolution H3;
- analyses cross sectoral concerns, as regards countries in transition and relations with the business community;

The Committee is invited to comment on the overview and make any necessary suggestions for improvement.

Introduction

1. This document informs the Committee of matters relevant to the Timber Committee arising at the Commission's session and invites the Committee to respond when necessary. These relate essentially to prioritisation, operational activities, and cross-sectoral concerns.

Prioritisation

2. With regard to work programme prioritization, the Commission endorsed the new system of prioritization of PSBs' work programmes proposed by the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work. The new system recommends that:

- All PSB activities using ECE regular budget resources should be included in the prioritization exercise;

- The three-tier system of prioritization should be maintained but PSBs which account for less than 5% of total ECE resources (Human Settlements, Timber and Sustainable Energy) may, if necessary, prioritize their activities on a two-tier basis;

- A proforma should be produced for individual PSBs to complete during the prioritization exercise;

- An explanatory note should be produced to accompany the new proforma, and

- The Chairman or a representative of the GEPW should attend the annual meetings between the Bureau of the Commission and the PSB Bureaux. Other informal meetings between the PSBs and the Group of Experts could be arranged as necessary.

3. All PSBs are requested to apply this new priority setting system each budget-submission year, the next one being 2000 for the biennium 2002-2003.

Operational activities

4. The Commission requested each Principal Subsidiary Body to "look at the operational activities undertaken within its field of competence and mandate and to identify the needs for operational activities and financing for them. The Commission requested that a synthesis of the conclusions of each PSB's review be prepared for consideration at its fifty-fifth session" (E/ECE/1999/37, para. 26).

5. The Committee is therefore invited to review its operational activities and, on this basis, to

- identify needs for operational activities which cannot be met at present;

- specify the constraints encountered in responding to those needs;

- make recommendations on the ways and means to overcome these constraints, including possibilities for additional funding;

- provide strategic directions in terms of priority areas, types of projects and cooperation with partners - development banks, regional or subregional organizations and the business community.

6. The Committee's conclusions will be consolidated with those of other PSBs and submitted to the Commission at its next annual session.

7. Some recent and forthcoming operational activities undertaken under the Committee's auspices are listed in the annex. In fact, most of the activities of the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee could be considered "operational" in that they

focus on the exchange of information and experience, often between practitioners, as well as the training dimension. All the Timber Committee's operational activities are regional or sub-regional in nature, concentrating on sharing of relevant information and experience rather than transfer of assistance or advice to a single recipient country.

8. An important role of the Committee as regards operational activities is to monitor forestry assistance from all sources, bilateral and multilateral, and consider whether or not they are in accordance with countries' needs and priorities. This role is carried out by the secretariat and the team of specialists on countries in transition (see its latest report TIM/1999/5/Add.3). This secretariat role is under its mandate as international coordinator of Helsinki resolution H3 Forestry Assistance to Countries in Transition. Under these activities, a data base on forestry assistance (i.e. operational activities in the Committee's sector) has been created, and is maintained and published; in addition the team periodically reviews these activities as a whole to see whether they coincide with countries' needs and priorities. Thus, the Committee helps to monitor operational activities by countries and other organisations, and helps their task by making it easier to obtain and share information, without having significant operational activities itself.

9. During its first meetings the team of specialists identified the three priority areas for forestry assistance as being;

- Institution and capacity building and framework conditions; building of the legal and policy infrastructure for sustainable development of the forestry and forest products sector, including extension services, as well as education and training;

- Activities related to the development of market-oriented and ecologically sound enterprises in the forestry and forest products sector, with specific references to cross-sectoral and private forest owners issues;

- Issues of general importance for the protection of forests, forest conservation and sustainable development of the forest sector and issues of concern for individual countries or groups of countries.

10. The list of priority areas was endorsed by the team's parent bodies and have been reaffirmed several times, most recently at the meeting in July 1999 of the team. They should be considered "strategic guidance" as requested by the Commission.

11. As regards constraints, the one most often mentioned is the lack of funds for travel by experts from countries in transition to meetings under the Committee's auspices and other opportunities to share information and experience. These meetings probably represent some of the most cost-effective ways of helping these countries: yet some of their usefulness is diminished for the lack of travel funds. The great success of meetings where the host country is able to pay participants' travel (e.g. the recent team meeting in Austria, where the host country paid travel costs, and which attracted excellent participation) demonstrates the desirability of making this (relatively minor) expenditure.

12. In summary therefore, the Committee does carry out some operational activities, of a regional and subregional nature, in the context of its regular work programme, and fulfils an important role of monitoring operational activities over the whole region, multilateral and bilateral. It is able to do this without harming its core activities which are defined as "monitoring and

analysis of sustainable forest management in the region", by the use of teams of specialists and other decentralised and participatory methods. All the above operational activities are carried out with minimum secretariat input, as the activities are organised by the host country, which, in some cases also contributes participation costs for some participants. Other agencies, or donor countries also sometimes contribute: for instance many of the costs of the marketing workshops have been borne by Finland, even though the meetings took place in other countries. Input by the Geneva secretariat has been in the form of advice on topics, organisation and contacts, and some substantive papers, in areas where it has expertise.

13. The Committee's present role, of facilitating certain events mostly financed and implemented by others and, above all, of monitoring the state of "forestry assistance" as a whole seems to be an area where the Committee (with its partners) can make a useful contribution, and where it has a comparative advantage deriving from pre-existing networks and official contacts. In this latter role, moreover, ECE/FAO has a ministerial mandate and good networks for collecting and sharing information. Recent meetings, both of the above-mentioned team of specialists on countries in transition and of the pan-European ministerial process on the protection of forests in Europe have endorsed this view.

Cross-sectoral concerns

14. At its fifty-sixth session in 1998, the Committee discussed two of the four cross-sectoral concerns identified in the ECE Plan of Action: sustainable development and gender mainstreaming. The Commission in May 1999 reviewed the contributions of the Committee and other PSBs. "While noting the unevenness of the progress made across the different sectors, the Commission recognised that the integration of cross-sectoral issues was a long term process which could only be achieved through continued action and effort. In this regard the Chairpersons of Principal Subsidiary Bodies expressed their commitment to support the process" (E/ECE/1374, para 28). In relation to sustainable development, the Commission "invited the Committee on Environmental Policy to review all activities related to sustainable development and make suggestions to each PSB and to the Commission on a more systematic approach at the ECE level." In the area of gender mainstreaming, the Commission "expressed its desire to see further efforts made in this regard" (E/ECE/1374, paras 29-30).

15. In 2000 the Commission is due to discuss the other two cross sectoral issues, countries in transition and relations with the business community.

16. With regard to **countries in transition**, programme element 1.4 of the Timber Committee's programme of work provides for a team of specialists to review progress in the forest and forest products sector in countries in transition, identify needs and exchange information and experience on activities undertaken and whether they correspond to countries' needs and priorities. The team met in July 1999 and its report will be attached to TIM/1999/5. In addition as mentioned above, the Timber Section, in accordance with the mandate of Helsinki resolution H3, maintains a data base on assistance to countries in transition in its area of interest, which will be made available in print and on the website. Thus in the secretariat's opinion, the needs of countries in transition are covered as well as possible within the resources available to the Timber Section.

17. With regard to **relations with the business community**, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Relations with the Business Community, established in compliance with the Plan of Action, has invited PSBs to review their cooperation with the business community. In particular, the review should

- show the extent of the participation of the business community in the activities of the Committee, specifying: how the cooperation has been initiated, the type of activities in which they are involved the most, the different types of contributions they make and the mutual benefit resulting from this partnership;
- assess: the reasons for success, obstacles met in developing closer relations, ways to overcome these obstacles;
- identify possible new initiatives if any.

18. The conclusions drawn by the Committee will be consolidated with those of other PSBs and submitted to the Ad Hoc Working Group which will review these conclusions and present a report to the Commission at its next annual session.

19. The participation of trade and business circles has always been encouraged in the Committee's work, notably in the market discussions at the annual session, study tours, and at seminars, where their presence has enriched the quality of the discussion and widened the audience for the Committee's output. Indeed the Committee itself is a successor of an interwar *Comité du bois*, which was founded by timber trade interests¹, not governments.

20. In most cases, the business community participates through trade or industry associations, who then communicate the results to their members. Examples include:

- participation of trade and industry associations in annual market discussions, including as panel members;
- information sharing between the secretariat and associations (e.g. the European Panel Federation) notably for the annual market review;
- industry associations have participated in teams of specialists, including those on public relations and on recycling, energy and market interactions (this work has led to Discussion Papers which have been published, to which the associations have made significant contributions)
- the technical seminars and workshops of the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee attract participation of the business community when the topic is appropriate: examples are manufacturers of fire suppression equipment and forest machines, forest contractors, and insurance companies (for occupational safety and health questions).
- representatives of forest and forest industry enterprises regularly participate in the Committee's study tours;
- the survey of users of ECE/FAO publications found that 16% of the respondents were from the "private sector" (i.e. private enterprises) and 12% from "associations". It appears from the survey that the private/business readership of the publications could be increased significantly, and efforts have been undertaken in this direction since the survey was completed in 1998.
- the target audience for the outlook studies and the forest resource assessment includes forest and forest industry companies who could use this analysis for their strategic planning.

¹The secretary of the *Comité du bois* was Egon Glesinger, later the first Director of the Timber Division and Secretary of the ECE Timber Committee.

21. It is perhaps worth pointing out that the concept of what is the "business community" and what is "official" may change over time and between countries. For instance, in some countries a key part of the Committee's core constituency - the national forest service, which has been participating as an "official" part of the Committee's structure - has been privatised or is expected to behave as a commercial company, even if wholly owned by the state. These enterprises are quite frequently expected to continue to carry out some of their former official functions, including participation in Timber Committee activities, despite their revised status and mandate. These are in fact some of the most dynamic participants, and contribute a wide range of skills and experience. This situation reinforces the necessity of continuing to maintain and strengthen links with the business community.

22. The Committee is invited to comment on the above overview and make any necessary suggestions for improving the participation of the business community in its activities. It may wish to endorse, after modification if necessary, the following statement:

The Timber Committee considers that the business community participates actively in many parts of the Committee's work, and that this participation is to mutual benefit: the business community gets access to a valuable source of information and contacts, and is able to make its viewpoint known at the official level, while the Committee's activities are strengthened by the skills and experience contributed by those business representatives who participate in its work (usually at their own expense). There are no serious formal barriers to this participation: one obstacle to more business participation is the difficulty in making the Committee's activities better known outside official circles. The remedy for this is better communication and more user-friendly output, objectives which the Committee is pursuing in any case, to the extent it can with the resources it has.

Annex

List of Timber Committee operational activities

Title: Workshops on marketing of forest products for transition countries

Place/country: Hungary, Estonia, Russia

Date: 1996. 1997. 1998

Title: Workshop on information systems in forestry

Place/country: Finland

Date: May 2000

Title: Workshop on new trends in wood harvesting with cable cranes

Place/country: Ossiach, Austria

Date: 11-17 June 2000

Title: Seminar on harvesting of non-wood forest products in the Mediterranean region

Place/country: Turkey

Date: October or November 2000

Title: Seminar on public relations and environmental education in forestry

Place/country: Switzerland 2001

Date: September or October 2001

Title: Seminar on afforestation techniques

Place/country: Ireland

Date: September 2002