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**Economic Commission for Europe  
Organization**

Timber Committee

**Joint FAO/UNECE Working Party  
on Forest Economics and Statistics**

**Thirty-third session**

Geneva, 23-24 March 2011

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Food and Agriculture**

European Forestry Commission

**Roundtable on Forest Information Challenges**

**Summary**

Environmental reporting remains a challenge for countries but also for many international processes and organizations, at the global as well as the regional and sub-regional levels. This is true also for the reporting processes on forests and forestry in the UNECE region. Given the nature and structure of reporting initiatives across the region, there is a clear need for enhanced cooperation between the various actors to create/develop more effective and efficient systems. The UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section proposes to open a dialogue to identify possible options and practical ways to achieve this goal.

## I. Reporting on forests in the UNECE region: the actors

1. There are several processes dealing with international reporting\* for forests and forest management in the UNECE region. The table below gives a non-exhaustive list of the main reporting processes. Some, such as the State of Europe's Forests (SoEF), comprise both, data collection from countries and analysis of information; others include only one of the elements of the reporting.

Reporting Process	Organization(s) in charge	Elements of international reporting	
		Data collection	Analysis
State of Mediterranean Forests	FAO/SilvaMed	-	+
Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire	FAO/UNECE/ Eurostat/ITTO	+	+
Montréal Process Criteria & Indicators (C&I)	Montreal Process Liaison Office	-	-/+
State of Europe's Forest (C&I)	UNECE/FAO/Forest Europe	+	+
Joint Wood Energy Enquiry	UNECE/FAO	+	-
Forest Outlook Study	UNECE/FAO/EFI	+	+
European Economic Accounts on Forestry	Eurostat	+	-
European Forests – ecosystem conditions and sustainable use	EEA	-	+
European Forest Data Center (EFDAC)	EU JRC Ispra, ENFIN	+	-/+
Forest Health Monitoring	ICP Forests/ UNECE/EU	-	+

2. In addition to the reporting elements addressed, the aforementioned processes include formal status and goals of reporting, scope of collected information and periodicity of data collection and analysis. Those processes often apply different terms, definitions, classifications and data format for reporting similar or the same variables.

3. The table does not include forest-related reporting activities carried out for the global Conventions and processes such as United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and FAO Forest Resources Assessment (FRA). These processes are of high relevance for international reporting in the UNECE region; however, it is unlikely that such global initiatives could be directly involved in the organisation of a dialogue of the regional reporting processes. Global processes serve as a reference for regional reporting initiatives and wherever possible, they should be regarded as overall frameworks for regional initiatives. Due to their comprehensive nature their flexibility to include regional aspects is limited. It is for these reasons that such global processes have not been included in the set of regional coordinating initiatives listed above. Nevertheless, there is a scope for improvement of communication between these two levels of international reporting. Scattered regional international initiatives have little capacity to effectively influence or amend those existing global systems or procedures. However, the chances that visibility (and impact) of national and regional interests increases are higher if regional cooperation is improved.

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\* The terms inventory, monitoring, reporting, assessment are often understood and used as synonyms. However, though there are common elements; each term has its own specific meaning. Overall, they refer to the comprehensive process which encompasses original planning and source data collection, their processing, analysis, interpretation, assessment, dissemination and the discussion of results. For the purposes of this note, the term "reporting" will be used to refer to the whole process although, in most cases, it may include only some of those activities.

## II. Harmonization of reporting: a long story

4. There have been many attempts to harmonize international forest reporting in the region over the last 25 years. The first Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, held in Strasbourg in 1990 highlighted the importance of harmonized information in its resolutions. The EU-related programmes, European Forest Information and Communication System (EFICS), European Forest Information System (EFIS), discussion on developments under LIFE Plus regulation and COST Action E-43 explored possibilities for organizing standardized or harmonized inventory systems for the EU. More recently, the organization of forest monitoring was the subject of discussion organized around the European Commission's Green Paper "On Forest Protection and Information in the EU: Preparing forests for climate change".

5. The work of Forest Europe and the Montreal Process has resulted in sets of criteria and indicators on sustainable forest management in the regions. These criteria have strongly influenced the scope and practice of national and international data collection systems. The pan-European Criteria and Indicators, for example, shaped the content of UNECE/FAO/Forest Europe reports on state of forests and Sustainable Forest Management (SoEF) and contributed to better coordination of international data collection by involving countries and all relevant regional actors contributing to the process (e.g. international data providers). It is hoped that this will lead to even more harmonized reporting at the regional level. In addition to fostering harmonization of practice and approaches, the SoEF process also facilitates dialogue amongst the regional-level reporting initiatives.

6. At the global level, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) has supported better coordination of global forest-related reporting by establishing a CPF Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting. The initiative gathered major global organizations dealing with forests, including UNFF, FAO, International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Secretariats of CBD, UNCCD, UNFCCC, and focused on global systems; and consults or invites regional processes to participate in its work where this would be helpful. The Task Force's activities have significantly improved communication about forest reporting; though it has not yet secured significant improvement in data integration and harmonization. The results of the Task Force will be of prime importance for national and international reporting activities in the UNECE region. However, the initiative is unlikely to address regional issues, which should continue to be tackled at the regional level.

## III. More efficient and harmonized reporting at the regional level is possible

7. The history of reporting and data collection has taught us that building well coordinated, harmonized regional reporting systems is not easily achievable. Differences between regional forest-related initiatives and experience from earlier efforts to improve coordination confirm this. Nevertheless better communication among the main organizations involved in reporting is needed to improve the efficiency of activities of individual organizations and, most importantly, reduce the current burden on national reporting. To some extent, this role has been undertaken by the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialist on Monitoring SFM. With the help of national experts and representatives of organizations dealing with international reporting in the region the Team ensures exchange of information on the major, relevant initiatives. Furthermore, the Team provides an opportunity for its members to contribute to discussions on two reporting processes, the Global Forest Resources Assessment and the SoEF. The team is not mandated, however, to discuss plans and possible coordination of regional forest reporting activities, and thus has not so far addressed this matter.

8. However, it would certainly be worth discussing and identifying possibilities for better collaboration on forest-related international data collection in the UNECE region. A first step in this direction could be the establishment of a network, composed of all interested partners. In the light of the challenges, the network could, as a first step, decide on a realistic scope, associated goals and working modalities. When

considering goals, the network's first task should be to ensure exchange of information on existing ongoing and planned activities. Further steps would depend on the network's capacity and the willingness of its members to develop the cooperation. The goals could include:

- mutual involvement, on an informal advisory basis, in developing reporting systems in the network's organizations,
- mutually complementary but separate activities and exchange of results,
- joint activities, with shared tasks and responsibilities.

9. Furthermore, the network could serve as forum for discussing forest reporting developments in global initiatives and their implications for forest reporting in the UNECE region.

10. A good opportunity to start this dialogue could be the next meeting of the Joint FAO/UNECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics, which will be held on 23 and 24 March 2011, during the UNECE/FAO Regional Forest Information Week. A roundtable on forest information challenges could initiate discussion on present reporting arrangements at the UNECE level, addressing issues from shortcomings of harmonization activities undertaken so far to the need for additional or alternative measures, including considerations to creating a regional forest reporting-related network.

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### ***Roundtable programme***

***Palais des Nations, Geneva, 24 March 2011***

11.30 Introduction by the Roundtable Moderator - Peter Csoka, FAO (tbc)

11.35 Presentation of the examples of good cooperation on international data collection:

- State of Europe's Forests – Roman Michalak, UNECE/FAO
- Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire – Alexander McCusker, UNECE/FAO

11.50 Questions to Roundtable discussion participants:

- Csaba Mozes, EU Eurostat
- Simon Gillam, UK (tbc)
- Richard Fisher, ICP Forests
- Angelo Mariano, Italy
- Jesus San Miguel Ayanz, EU JRC Ispra
- Aljoscha Requardt, EFI

11.50 Question 1:

*What were the main obstacles to a better cooperation on international data collection in the past?*

12.10 Question 2:

*What possibilities exist for improving coordination of international data collection in Europe?*

12.30 Question 3:

*Is there any scope for the establishment of a network of relevant entities; and if so how should it work?*

13.00 Close of the Roundtable discussion.