

Economic Commission for Europe

Timber Committee

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

Food and Agriculture Organization

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GUIDANCE OF WORK AREA 2: FOREST RESOURCES ASSESSMENT

AGENDA ITEM 4 (b)

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

According to its mandate, the Working Party is expected to provide guidance to work area 2: Forest Resources Assessment. This document provides information about activities in this work area since the Working Party's last session and plans for the future, drawing the Working Party's attention to any specific issues where guidance is needed. The main topics and issues to be addressed by Working Party are as follows:

- (a) Update on the progress of work on the global process of the reporting on forests resources;
- (b) Update on the progress of work on the reporting on pan-European indicators on Sustainable Forest Management; preparations for quantitative data collection and development of the method for reporting on the sustainability of forest management;
- (c) Information about plans for the organisation of work on SFM reporting and assessment as well as cooperation with countries and organisations in the region.

I. Introduction

1. Activities in work area 2 for the reporting period (April 2012 – March 2013) focused on the preparations and organisation of the next cycle of the regional and the global reporting on forest resources. Series of meetings with participation of experts from countries and international organisations led by the FAO, resulted in the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ) – a joint tool for data collection as requested by different stakeholders. Data collection process will be carried out throughout the year 2013; the ECE/FAO will coordinate the reporting process from countries in Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.
2. The pan-European reporting on quantitative indicators will be carried out in a complementary way to the global data collection. The Forest Europe/ECE/FAO Questionnaire on Quantitative Indicators, which is at the final stage of development, will be sent to countries in June 2013. It is envisaged that data collection for the regional processes will be carried out in a coordinated way with the global one, and facilitated by the ECE/FAO working closely with the FAO Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) Team in Rome.
3. The preparatory process for the collaborative reporting stimulated the cooperation among organisations, processes and countries in the field of forest reporting. The ECE/FAO contributed to the extent possible to projects, workshops, consultations with partners and other related activities in the region. In addition, the “Forest information billboard”, a communication tool for experts dealing with forest reporting, was developed to ensure better exchange of information and to provide more frequent updates of relevant activities.

II. Global reporting on forest resources

4. The global reporting on forests resources 2015 consists of two major components. Similarly to the previous cycles, for the first component national correspondents from all countries and territories will be asked to report on their forests through national enquiries. The first component will be complemented by a second one, the remote sensing survey, which will provide information about forest cover changes in the 1990-2010, period.
5. The data collection process for the national reporting on forests has begun. The data collection system for the 2015 reporting cycle was developed through a collaborative, preparatory process, which included consultations with stakeholders and countries. Advices were received among others through meetings of the FAO Advisory Group on FRA and consultations of a “consortium of willing” – the group of organisations involved in CFRQ. Furthermore, the process and documents were reviewed by national and international experts at the “Technical Consultation: Preparations for the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015”, held in March 2012 in Ispra, Italy and “Inter-C&I process collaboration workshop”, held in August 2012 in Jacksonville, United States. The main input from the pan-European region was provided through the 4th meeting of the ECE/FAO Team of Specialists (ToS) on Monitoring SFM, held in May 2012 in Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation.
5. National reporting for the global reporting consists of two parts. The first one is the CFRQ, which is a joint questionnaire developed by FAO, ITTO, Observatoire des Forêts d’Afrique Centrale of COMIFAC, ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, Forest Europe and the Montréal Process. Information collected through this part is supposed to feed the reporting systems of FAO and other participating organisations and processes. The second part of the global reporting is the supplementary questionnaire, which includes information requested by FAO.
6. The global reporting is organised around 20 major questions. Their content was adjusted to better respond to users’ needs, identified through reviews and debates with stakeholders. While the overall extent of the reporting was reduced compared to the previous edition of FRA, the new questionnaire is more focused on several issues, where more precise information is sought. This includes information about the extent of forest resources, values and trends of their changes. For the first time countries are asked to report on gross deforestation and degradation of their forests. Other improvements include the introduction of an important change on the growing stock definition: the common diameter threshold was established at 10cm. Compared to the previous cycles, more information for assessing the progress towards SFM will be requested from countries.
7. Among other innovations, FAO developed the Forest Resources Information Management System (FRIMS) to facilitate reporting for the CFRQ and FRA 2015. The FRIMS includes online data entry system (optional), which is an alternative to completing the Word document. This system serves also as a tool for quality check and data review as it

has some automatic consistency checks and an interface for communication between national correspondents and reviewers.

8. The global questionnaires were already sent to countries and the deadline for the final reports is 31 December 2013. The preparatory process for national correspondents includes the “Global Meeting in Preparation for the Global FRA 2015 and the CFRQ”, which will be organized in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 6-10 May 2013. ECE/FAO will be coordinating and assisting the reporting process from 54 countries of Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. This support will be provided through the sub-regional reviewers who will assist countries in preparation of their national reports. Further guidance and discussion of the draft national reports will be done at a regional workshop, which will be held in Geneva, Switzerland on 16-17 October 2013.

9. Data collection will be followed by the preparation of the final reports from the global reporting. It is envisaged that the main work on data analysis and drafting of the reports will be completed in 2014. Key findings from the FRA 2015 will be released in spring 2015, while the main report will be presented at the session of COFO in October that year.

III. Pan-European reporting on forests and forest management

10. As a follow up to the decisions of Forest Europe and ECE/FAO, data on pan-European indicators on SFM will be collected together with the global reporting. This means that, for the first time, the regional data will be collected in a coordinated way with the global one. It is expected that the joint data collection process should lead to a significant reduction of burden and reduce cost of the national reporting. At the same time, consistency between regional and global data should improve, thus increasing the visibility and relevance of the collected information.

11. National reporting from the pan-European region will cover 28 of 35 Forest Europe indicators through a national questionnaire built on the basis of the version produced for the 2011 report. The questionnaire will address the overlapping areas with the global reporting, ensuring consistency of classifications and definitions wherever possible. At the time of writing this document, the work on the new questionnaire was on-going; the completed draft will be presented to the Working Party at its meeting.

12. The major updates in the new version of the Forest Europe/UNECE/FAO questionnaire were done for areas, already identified in the review process. These were:

- a) reporting on forest growth and drain, in particular on availability of wood supply;
- b) reporting on socio-economic indicators;
- c) reporting on sustainability of forest management.

The development work was done mainly through the ToS’ thematic sub-groups. Results of their work were presented to and discussed by the Team at its 4th meeting, held in May 2012 in Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, and the 5th meeting, held in February 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland.

13. With the increasing interest in information on wood supply potential, the importance of reporting on availability of wood is raising. A thematic sub-group working on that issue analysed, through a special enquiry, how countries report on this matter. The results revealed a high variety of approaches, and difficulties in reporting on areas that are not accessible because of economic constraints. Further improvement in this area is expected from the COST Action FP1001 “USEWOOD”, which works on this issue; however the results from this action will not be available before the deadline for the pan-European national reporting. Therefore it was proposed that, as an interim solution for the current reporting cycle, reporting on forest not available for wood supply will include only areas where harvesting is prevented (or significantly limited) because of legal constraints.

14. Reporting on socio-economic indicators was identified as an area to be significantly improved. The improvement process started with the critical review of existing arrangements at the thematic workshop organised in December 2012 in Helsinki, organised with support of Finland. The development work was continued by the thematic experts, whose work is supported by the Netherlands. Various modifications related to criterion 6 were introduced to the questionnaire. Changes included the use of national currencies for reporting on values and other modifications aiming to make the reported values more meaningful, scope of variables more specific and applied classifications better adjusted to the national reporting capacities.

15. Work on the method of the reporting on sustainability of forest management was continued by the ToS thematic group dedicated to this issue. The method was developed through two meetings of the group, and was discussed by the Advisory Group on the preparation of the next State of Europe's Forests (SoEF), held in November 2012 in Geneva. The most recent version of the method, presented separately in Annex I, is the result of the review and development of the method at the 5th meeting of the ToS on Monitoring SFM (Geneva, February 2013). Advice of external experts was also sought.

16. Several developments were introduced as a result of this participatory process. The method is now seen as an interactive tool for reporting and communicating with countries, significantly extending the role and responsibilities of national correspondents. Furthermore, parameters have been put into three categories (assessment, context and background) to make the assessment more meaningful and to address the dynamic aspects of sustainable forest management. This makes it possible to concentrate on those aspects which can be affected by policy and practice, and not the historical and ecological context which cannot really be changed significantly. More information about principles and details of the method, as well as on the proposed way of its application, is available in Annex I and the related background document (available at: <http://www.unece.org/forests/tos-sfm-2013.html>).

17. The method was developed with the use of the pan-European indicators for SFM; however, the concept can be applied to any other system of the Criteria and Indicators (C&I), either at international, national or sub-national level. At this stage, it is intended to apply the method in the current cycle of pan-European reporting, which is jointly coordinated by ECE/FAO and Forest Europe. For that reason the concept of the method was presented to the Forest Europe Expert Level Meeting, held on 7-8 March 2013, in Madrid, Spain, which welcomed the method as a promising tool and encouraged continuation of this work.

18. The Forest Europe Expert Level Meeting also debated on the next steps for the application of the new classification on European Forest Types in the pan-European reporting. Due to the reported problems related to the application of classification as well as because of some concerns related to the meaningfulness of this reporting, added value and intended use of information, the ELM recommended not to report according to the new classification in the on-going reporting cycle. It is proposed that, for the time being, reporting according to the old classification will be continued, until a decision on the future shape of reporting by forest types is taken.

19. The ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section is responsible for the preparation and management of the data collection process according to the pan-European indicators as well as for the organisation of the relevant data collection for the global reporting. Using this opportunity the following arrangements are proposed, that would allow for the optimal use of resources and facilitate national reporting:

- a) the overlapping areas of the two questionnaires will be clearly identified, to ensure consistent reporting on common variables;
- b) ECE/FAO will designate one reviewer to assist each country with the preparation of national reports according to both global and pan-European questionnaires;
- c) one FRA National Correspondent will be responsible for the preparation of national reports according to both global and pan-European questionnaires.

20. The basic versions of the global questionnaires were already sent to national correspondents, while work on the pan-European questionnaire is in progress. In order to ensure coordination of work on the reporting process on both questionnaires, the following stages of reporting are proposed:

- a) compilation of the first draft of the pan-European questionnaire – by 15 April 2013;
- b) provision of guidance for the global reporting and review of the draft pan-European questionnaire at the global meeting for national correspondents in Chiang Mai, Thailand – 5-10 May 2013;
- c) release of the final draft of the pan-European questionnaire and designation of reviewers – June 2013;
- d) regional workshop for national correspondents from Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia – 16-17 October 2013;
- e) completion of the global and the regional reporting – end of 2013.

21. Data collection for the pan-European indicators that are not covered by national reporting will be organised separately. This reporting will cover 7 indicators, for which information will be collected through international organisations and research networks specialised in the relevant areas. It is proposed that the next meeting of the ToS on Monitoring SFM, which is planned for 18 October 2013, will be entirely dedicated to this reporting with participation of

experts from the relevant organisations/networks. Gathering, processing and verification of data for this group of indicators are scheduled for the first half of 2014.

III. Cooperation and communication.

22. The intensive international communication and collaboration of the C&I processes and organisations involved in data collection, analysis and dissemination was continued. Undertaken activities were organised in conjunction with the process of the global collaborative reporting on forests. In addition to the technical meetings of individual processes, two global conferences, dedicated to the monitoring and reporting were organised:

- a) "Streamlining forest based reporting - a collaboration workshop", held in Jacksonville, the United States, 19 - 23 August 2012
- b) "Week of International Workshop and Seminar on Forest-based Reporting", held in Tokyo, Japan, 3 - 7 December 2012.

The conferences, while contributing and supporting the global, collaborative data collection process, restored the process of cooperation among the C&I initiatives (the previous meeting was organised in 2008). In addition to the meetings, regular communication among the participants of the process was maintained through teleconferences, initiated and assisted by the Montréal Process (MP).

23. The year 2012 was also important for communication between ECE/FAO and the Montréal Process. For the first time the meeting of the ToS on Monitoring SFM (May 2012, Saint Petersburg, Russia) was attended by the representative of the MP Liaison Office. Likewise, the ECE/FAO expert participated in the work of the two meetings of the MP Technical Advisory Committee (July 2012, Moscow, Russia and December 2012, Tokyo, Japan). This helped to better learn about the goals and work of these two groups, and to identify methods of cooperation for the future.

24. ECE/FAO continued its cooperation with partner organisations and processes in Europe. This included review of programmes and documents, provision of support as well as participation in the parent and advisory meetings. Since the last session of the Working Party, the representative of the Section took part in the following meetings:

- a) Second Joint Working Group Meeting and 3rd MC Meeting of the COST Action FP1001 – USEWOOD, Copenhagen, Denmark, 11-13 June 2012
- b) Second meeting of the Advisory Group on the project on Implementing C&I for SFM, Geneva, Switzerland, 5 November 2012
- c) Inaugural meeting of the Forest Europe/ECE/FAO Advisory Group on preparation of the next SoEF, Geneva, Switzerland, 7 November 2012
- d) European Forest Data Center (EFDAC) Workshop, organised by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission Ispra (JRC), Ispra, JRC, Italy, 13-14 December, 2012
- e) Forest Europe Expert Level Meeting, Madrid, Spain, 7-8 March 2013.

25. At the 34th session of the ECE/FAO Working Party the need for a more frequent and regular communication on forest information relevant developments in the UNECE region was highlighted. The request was discussed further at the 4th meeting of the ToS on Monitoring SFM in Saint Petersburg, which recommended developing a regular, joint Forest Information Billboard to share information about forest related reporting initiatives among organizations and countries. In response to this request, the Section developed a concept and a process for its preparation and dissemination. The first issue of the Billboard, which will be prepared on quarterly basis, was released on 21 March 2013. More information about the Billboard is available on: <http://www.unece.org/forests-welcome/about-us/forest-information-billboard>.

26. *The Working Party is invited to:*

- a) *comment on the current process and plans for the development of the global collaborative reporting on forests and its coordination with the pan-European reporting;*
- b) *provide comments and suggestions on the contents (questionnaire) and collection process on quantitative information for the next SoEF;*
- c) *review the proposed method for reporting on sustainability of forest management, provide advice on the next steps and application of the method;*
- d) *comment and advise on activities for supporting international cooperation and direction of this cooperation.*