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UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Sustainable Forest Products

Informal consultation on the content of the forthcoming UNECE/FAO studies on circularity concepts in forest-based industries

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Background

In line with the mandates resulting from the joint COFFI/EFC session, the Joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section (Joint Section) is going to work on a series of studies on circularity concepts in forest-based industries. Building on the discussion on 14 April 2022, the secretariat presented draft idea for the outline of the studies and the Team complemented the ideas with additional details.

Summary of the discussion

The discussion highlighted the following information, which should be taken into consideration in the process of preparing the studies:

- The study on construction could cover more specifically one aspect of circularity e.g., design for disassembly.



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- The study on pulp and paper could focus on only one of the pulp and paper sub-sectors.
 - All studies should include specific examples and case studies.
 - The study on construction should cover different types of construction.
 - ToS members will look for case studies to be included in each study.
 - The study on construction could address the question on how energy efficient wood construction is.
 - Ecosystem services should be considered part of circularity, not a precondition.
 - Evolution of the forest sector and forest management could be covered by the study on circularity preconditions as today there is an expectation that the management will be moved to a sustainable model and the forest area will grow.
 - The question of maximizing the resource efficiency and securing the production should also be covered.
 - Analysis of how technology, innovation and agroforestry can impact production could also be included.
 - It is important to mention that circularity does not always work. It tends to work better with urban populations where recycling infrastructure is in place. It is important to recognize the limitations of circularity. For instance, cases when upcycling of cardboard may make sense vis a vis burning.
 - Studies should include review of policies that address circularity and good practice examples.
 - CSR reasons for circularity could be addressed as well.
 - The question of post-consumer wood classifications could be included.
 - Learning effects of different policies from different countries could be analyzed.
 - What definitions will be used – decision is needed.
 - What policy objectives will be addressed.
 - Logistics and timing are important when considering the circularity benefits. Externalities resulting from them may occur.
 - Studies could identify best practice for each sector and include policies enabling them.
 - Challenges to circularity should be included as well.
 - Question if it is better to recycle paper or pup could be analyzed as well.

Secretariat's proposal for further consultation with the ToS

Based on the discussions, the secretariat has prepared the outline of three studies for consideration of the Joint Working Party session:

STUDY 1 Universal preconditions of circularity in forest-based industries

The study will cover different aspects of forest management such as forest health and regeneration, provision of ecosystem services and the optimal use of forest resources, which have an impact on the circularity of forest-based production processes. The study also aims to link the questions of circularity with the natural carbon cycle. The study will also look at the circularity potential, the challenges and differences in the end-of-life management of forest-based products.

[planned for the end of 2023].

STUDY 2 Circularity concepts in the wood construction sector as an example of long-lived products value chain

The study will analyze how circularity concepts can be applied in the construction industry at different stages of the value chain and in different construction methods. It will also look at the circularity aspects of the retrofitting and demolition of existing buildings. The study will present the industry context as of today and will point out



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opportunities and challenges in transition towards a more circular practice. The analysis will be supported examples of good practice (re-use, re-purpose, re-cycle, urban mining, modularity, etc.).

[planned for the end of 2022]

STUDY 3 Circularity concepts in pulp and paper industry as an example of a group of commodities with short life span

The study will analyze how circularity concepts can be applied in the pulp and paper industry at different stages of the value chain and in different industries using pulp and paper, such as printing or packaging. The study will present the industry context as of today and will point out opportunities and challenges in transition towards a more circular practice. The analysis will be supported examples of good practice (re-use, re-purpose, re-cycle, urban mining, etc.).

[planned for the end of 2023]

Next steps

- The secretariat invites the ToS members to contribute to the studies and indicate which role they would like to have (coordinating, drafting, reviewing, providing resources, etc..) **by 30 May 2022**, so that available resources can be reported to the JWP.
- The secretariat will present the outcomes of the discussions with the ToS to the JWP session on 1 June 2022.