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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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Participants

1. Delton Alderman
2. Silvia Ferlazzo
3. Katie Fernholz
4. Christopher Gaston
5. Branko Glavonjic
6. Alicja Kacprzak
7. Sylvain Labbé
8. Mauro Masiero
9. Rodney McPhee
10. Igor Novoselov
11. Eoin O'Driscoll
12. Richard P.Vlosky
13. Ulrike Saal
14. Giovanni Seri
15. Florian Steierer
16. Andrzej Talarczyk
17. Russ Taylor
18. Annika Vieras
19. Holger Weimar
20. Ekrem Yazici

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 recent section's [study](#) providing an overview of circularity concepts in different forest-based industries, the planned studies should aim to present a more detailed insight into the circularity issues in forest-based value chains, identified in advance.



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It is planned that one study will be drafted in 2022 (and presented during the COFFI session scheduled to be held in November 2022) and two other studies will be drafted in 2023.

The secretariat invited members of the ToS on Sustainable Forest Products and experts in the field to contribute to this work as experts providing sources, drafting the chapters and reviewing the content of the studies.

Summary of the discussion

The discussion highlighted the following key aspects, which should be included in the studies:

- The role of the universal, not only sectoral preconditions of circularity in forest-based industries, such as forest degradation and the end-of-life management.
- The overall objective of reducing the consumption of natural resources.
- The meaning of circularity/circular economy in the forest sector as understood in the study.
- The sustainability of reuse and recycling activities vs burning and landfill as carbon sequestration, based on specific cases.
- The sustainability of energy recovery from biobased materials.
- Sectors of interest: construction, pulp and paper.

It was suggested that the structure of the studies should be based on commonly recognized circularity principles (e.g., 9R) and their analysis in different sectors. Studies should include answers to the following questions:

- What is happening already?
- What are the issues?
- What is a good practice?
- What are bad examples?
- What can be improved in the future?
- What could be the enabling conditions to make the improvements happen?

Secretariat's proposal for further consultation with the ToS

1) Three studies

Following the ToS recommendations, the secretariat would like to suggest the preparation of a series of three studies covering the following topics:

1. Universal preconditions of circularity in forest-based industries
2. Circularity in the wood construction sector as an example of long-lived products
3. Circularity in pulp and paper industry as an example of a group of commodities with short life span

Given the primary interest and expertise in the ToS, the study analysing the wood construction will be prepared first (2022). Research on key building blocks and identification of experts for two other studies will be done in parallel.



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2) Structure of each study

The content of the cap study (1. above) could be the following:

1. Introduction
 - a. Methods and objectives [including the understanding of the circular economy for this study – same for all studies]
 - b. Structure of the study
2. Preconditions of circularity in forest-based industries [each subchapter could contain status quo, challenges, best practice and possible key enabling conditions (tbd)].
 - a. Forest management
 - i. Forest health and regeneration
 - ii. Provision of ecosystem services
 - iii. Optimal use of forest resources
 - iv. ...
 - b. Carbon, energy and resource footprint of renewable material compared to finite resources
 - c. End-of life management of forest-based products
 - i. Bioenergy
 - ii. Landfilling
 - iii. ...
 - d. Policy regulations
3. Recommendations

The content of sectoral studies (2. and 3. above) could be the following:

1. Introduction
 - Methods and objectives [including the understanding of the circular economy for this study]
 - Structure of the study
2. Industry context today
3. Circularity - state of affairs.
 - Analysis of a generic value chain model based on circularity principles at each stage
 - Spot on challenges
 - Examples of good practice (re-use, re-purpose, re-cycle, urban mining, modularity, etc.)
 - ...
4. Recommendations / potential key enabling conditions

The series could continue after 2023 with the analysis of other industries, such as furniture, textile fibers, bioplastics, etc.

3) Next steps

- The secretariat invites the ToS members to comment on point 2) above in writing **by 6 May 2022** (alicja.kacprzak@un.org)
- The next online consultation will be organized **on 10 May 2022**
- 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**