



Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

TIM/1997/5/Add.3
15 July 1997

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

TIMBER COMMITTEE
Fifty-fifth session

REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES SINCE THE FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION
AND PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 1998 TO 2002

TEMPERATE AND BOREAL RESOURCES ASSESSMENT 2000

(Item 6 of the Provisional Agenda)

Note by the secretariat

This document contains information on the progress made in the preparation and the implementation of the Temperate and Boreal Forest Resources Assessment 2000 (TBFRA-2000). The delegations will be informed on the status of work in this area at the technical briefing during the 55th session. It includes some issues for the attention of the Committee.

Introduction

1. The Forest Resource Assessments at the global level are an important source of information and reference material not only for policy-makers, but also for managers, researchers, consumers of forest products and services, as well as many others concerned with forestry, ecology, natural conservation and socio-economic development.

2. The United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) and its Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) have identified a number of information gaps for the international forest policy debate, which international organisations are expected to fill. With this respect, high expectations have been raised, in particular, for the FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessments, and for the ECE/FAO work with regard to the temperate and boreal forests.

3. The responsibility for the temperate/boreal part of the Global Forest Resource Assessment 2000 is shared between FAO and the UN/ECE: the project is carried out as part of the programme of work of the Joint FAO/ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics. The ECE/FAO mandate in this area is "to collect and publish information on the forest resources of the temperate and boreal zones (including developed countries outside the ECE region), in the context of the FAO global forest resource assessment" (ECE/TIM/87).

4. The Expert Consultation held in June 1996 in Finland ("Kotka-III") drew up a Global Framework for the Assessment; the Temperate and Boreal Forest Resources Assessment 2000 (TBFRA-2000) enquiry is constituted to fit this global framework although with considerably greater detail. The interim findings of the Assessment will be reported to the Lisbon Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forest in Europe, and the final output should be available in 1999.

TBFRA-2000 scope and contents

5. The TBFRA-2000 scope and coverage has been enriched significantly in comparison with the earlier assessments, so that it could meet new information requirements. Although the information requested on the "traditional" parameters, notably those relevant to wood supply, has been considerably streamlined, that on the non-wood goods and services (NWGS), including nature conservation, biological diversity, protection and socio-economic functions of the forest, has been developed. More emphasis has been put on information on changes over time in the temperate/boreal forest resource.

6. The 21st session of the Joint FAO/ECE Working Party (May 1997, Geneva) reviewed in detail the draft TBFRA-2000 enquiry and advised the secretariat on how it should be improved and finalised. The Working Party noted the high ambitions of the enquiry to collect a comprehensive set of data, which would meet higher expectations of the international forest community as regards information on the forest resource. It was noted that such the ambition had generated new topics, new approaches and new partnerships, and new risks as well.

7. The TBFRA-2000 will cover the following range of information:

- General forest resource data: area of forest and other wooded land, changes in area, "naturalness" status (i.e. "undisturbed by man", "semi-natural", "plantation") and the origin of forests and OWL, ownership and management information, etc;

- Biological diversity and protection status: area of forest and other wooded land according to IUCN protection categories, forest-occurring species at risk or endangered, regeneration and extension of forest, species diversity, etc;
- Wood supply and carbon sequestration functions: age-class distribution, growing stock and woody biomass, annual increment, fellings and removals, etc;
- Forest condition: damage to forest, including forest fires, forest condition;
- Protective and socio-economic functions: indigenous and tribal peoples, access and use by public, non-wood goods and services (NWGS), including their quantity and value, etc.

8. For the most part, the information to be supplied is quantitative (area, volume, mass. etc.). Some issues call for qualitative or descriptive information: (biological diversity, protection status, socio-economic functions). The national correspondents are invited to add comments and explanations about the information supplied, for example regarding the status (official data or estimates), methods of adaptation from original source data to conform with FAO/ECE definitions, etc. It is considered that it would be better to provide an informed estimate, indicated as such, than no data at all. The description of the methods of adjustment will be published, in full, in supporting documentation to the TBFRA-2000, thus improving the transparency and scientific credibility of the process..

9. The information on forest fire and forest condition, which is already being collected at the international level from the majority of countries covered by this assessment, will be presented in close co-operation with the partner bodies (European Commission and ICP-Forest). For those countries already supplying internationally comparable data in response to other questionnaires, there will no need to compile a new set of data.

10. Criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management (SFM), which have been developed by the international processes, notably the Pan-European and Montreal ones in the temperate/boreal regions were taken into full consideration. While the political responsibility of reporting remains with signatory governments, it has been agreed that ECE/FAO should collect as much information as possible on the quantitative indicators of sustainable forest management, developed by the Pan-European process. The TBFRA-2000 enquiry has been designed to cover the requested SFM indicators, notably of the Pan-European process, to the extent possible.

11. The TBFRA-2000 enquiry includes 25 tables, guidelines for national correspondents, and the list of terms and definitions employed in the assessment. Although the secretariat takes the final responsibility for its form and content, it is the result of a wide-ranging and detailed process of consultation, notably but not exclusively through the team of specialists.

Methods of work

12. A detailed enquiry addressed to national correspondents will be the main instrument of data collection. The enquiry was drawn up on the basis of the ToS recommendations, the "Kotka-II" and "Kotka-III" proposals, series of consultations with experts on specific thematic areas, the consultancy work, etc. The enquiry was elaborated so that it would address important, policy relevant issues, covering the key functions of the forest, in a pragmatic and realistic way.

13. At the same time the enquiry makes it possible to maintain a high standard of scientific rigour and transparency without placing an excessive burden on the national services responsible for providing the data. The common set of terms and definitions, to be applied in the Global, as well as in the Temperate and Boreal Forest Resources Assessment 2000, will ensure the comparability of results for different parts of the world.

14. The national correspondents have been requested to provide objective information by which it would be possible to evaluate the reliability and comparability of the information in TBFRA-2000. The original source information, including results of the national forest inventories or other original source data publications will be collected in the course of the assessment.

15. To a great extent the success of the TBFRA-2000 depends on national forest inventory activities and abilities of national correspondents to provide comprehensive, consistent and reliable replies to the questionnaire. Much of the information called for in the TBFRA-2000 enquiry will be derived from data collected in the national forest inventories. At present, the network of country correspondents is considered to be the main driving force of the assessment and the main source of information.

16. The majority of 57 temperate/boreal industrialised countries involved in the project have relatively strong forest inventory institutions and are in a position to supply sufficient information on their national forest resources. The challenge of the TBFRA-2000 is to collect and to make this information comparable. Special efforts will have to be made by some countries in transition (CITs) to respond to the enquiry requirements, and a real support from the secretariat and partners of the project will be necessary in this particular area.

Status of the TBFRA-2000 preparation and implementation

17. The preparations for the TBFRA-2000 may be considered to be on schedule: the enquiry form is finalised and many partnerships are in place.

18. The review draft enquiry was tested by a few countries (Finland, Hungary, Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States), and commented by quite a number of experts, including members of the team of specialists. As a part of the widespread consultation, it was also sent for comments to all national correspondents of participating countries and appropriate international organisations.

19. The discussion of the enquiry, reviewing its contents and substance was the main item on the agenda of the meeting in Birmensdorf (March 1997) of the Team of Specialists. Special attention has been paid to consultations with the FAO, Rome. The mandate and the proposed scope of the FRA-2000 were presented to FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) in March. The Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics reviewed the enquiry in detail in May 1997 and advised on its implementation.

20. The comments and remarks received from countries, organisations and individual experts were taken into full consideration in the final version of the enquiry. By the time of writing this note the TBFRA-2000 is prepared for the circulation to national correspondents in summer 1997.

21. Two important briefing meetings with TBFRA-2000 national correspondents are planned. They will be organised soon after the enquiry is circulated. One will focus on countries in transition (Gmunden, at the invitation of the Government of Austria, 1-4 October 1997), and one is for all national correspondents (Geneva, 17-19 November 1997), i.e. shortly after the Committee's session. The latter *ad hoc* meeting is aimed to brief correspondents on the implementation of the assessment and interpretation of the enquiry and review problems encountered. Both meetings should help to improve comparability in interpretation of terms and definitions, and address problems arising in a cooperative and transparent manner.

22. The efforts are being made by the secretariat to obtain extra-budgetary funds to ensure adequate quality of the TBFRA-2000.

23. At all stages of the preparation and implementation of the Assessment, the work is being carried out in close cooperation with the FAO Forestry Department and other organisations (bodies) active in this area (EC/EU, EEA, EUROSTAT, WCMC, UNEP, IUCN/WWF, CBD secretariat, EFI, national institutions, etc). The secretariat also keeps in mind that national and international organizations engaged in TBFRA-2000 should closely coordinate their activities and cooperate with each other to avoid any duplication and keep to the minimum the burden on national correspondents and institutions.

24. The technical briefing on TBFRA-2000 for the Timber Committee's delegates is planned during its 55th session.

Issues for the Committee's attention:

1. Governments have repeatedly confirmed the priority they attach to obtaining better information on the forest resource, at a wide variety of fora, including COFO and the IPF. Furthermore, as partnerships are being built, the resources available can be concentrated in one effort, the Forest Resource Assessment 2000, of which TBFRA 2000 is an integral part, rather than being scattered over a variety of uncoordinated projects. Thus the pan-European process is relying on TBFRA for most of the quantitative indicators of sustainable forest management to be presented to the Lisbon conference in June 1998. Preparations for TBFRA 2000 may be considered to be on schedule, and many partnerships are in place.

2. However, to achieve results which would meet the justified high expectations of member countries and the forest community as a whole, two conditions must be met:
 - countries, through their national correspondents must supply data, of high quality, in the format requested, by the deadline (31 January 1998); and
 - the secretariat must have sufficient resources to validate and analyze the data and present the results in a best possible way (by June 1998, interim; and by Year 2000, final).
3. To achieve the first objective, sufficient priority must be attached at the national level to preparing satisfactory replies to the questionnaire. In particular:
 - national correspondents, and their staff, must allot sufficient time and priority to preparing the reply, by the agreed deadline;
 - they must have the authority and political support, if necessary, to approach other agencies (notably environmental agencies), in order to bring together the wide range of information necessary for TBFRA 2000;
 - they should have the necessary resources to accomplish their task, including travel funds to attend the correspondents' meeting in November 1997.
4. With regard to secretariat resources, there is concern that the quality of the final output will be constrained by the resources available. In addition to its continuing close cooperation with the FAO Forestry Department, and the new partnerships being established, the Geneva secretariat has been actively seeking contributions of funds or in kind (notably loan of experts). Some contributions have been received or promised, but there is still scope for significant improvement.
5. The Committee may therefore wish to:
 - urge countries to provide sufficient material and political support to their national TBFRA 2000 correspondents to enable them to provide the information requested;
 - urge countries to consider whether they are in a position to contribute resources to help the secretariat in its task of validating and analysing the replies received.