



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry****Seventy-second session**

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Item 3c of the provisional agenda

Forest information, reporting and outlook**Study on Forest Ownership in the ECE region****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

This document describes the organization, content and plans for reporting on forest ownership in the UNECE region. The process is implemented in close cooperation with the COST Action FACESMAP¹ and other stakeholders. Currently it includes the development of a new questionnaire on forest ownership, which will serve as the main tool for the collection of information for the production of the study.

The Committee is expected to comment and advise on the scope and organization of the process on forest ownership and tenure reporting in the ECE region (see agenda item 29).

¹ COST Action FACESMAP: European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action Forest Land Ownership Changes in Europe: Significance for Management And Policy (FACESMAP)



I. Introduction

1. Forest ownership generally refers to the legal right to freely and exclusively use, control, transfer, or otherwise benefit from a forest. Often rights and responsibilities connected to the forest are transferred from the legal owner to other individuals or groups. As tenure² arrangements also influence the use and management of forests, forest tenure should be considered as an important element of forest ownership related analysis.

2. Forest ownership and tenure arrangements have a significant impact on the management of forest ecosystems, enhancing rural development as well as supplying resources and services. Forests of the ECE region are highly diversified in terms of their ownership and tenure, and it is of utmost importance to have up-to-date information about forests, their management and the role they play in this context.

3. In the ECE region around 70% of the forests are publicly owned, however the structure varies significantly between countries. According to the FAO Forest Resource Assessment 2010, the eastern part of the ECE region consists of almost 100% publicly owned forests. This is mainly due to the forest ownership structure in the Russian Federation but also the predominance of public forests in other countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The publicly owned forests in Central and Western Europe cover 40% of the total forest area although this varies considerably between the countries. Public forests in the western part of the ECE region occupy 68% of the total forest area, which is due to the ownership structure in Canada where forests are predominantly publicly owned, while in the United States the share of publicly owned forests is around 50%.

4. According to FRA2010, the management of 89% of publicly owned forests in the ECE region is carried out by public organizations. The remaining 11% of the public forest area is managed by private corporations and institutions. These forests are mainly located in Russia where the government issues medium or long term leasing agreements.

5. The area of privately owned forests grew between 1990 and 2010 in the ECE region as a whole. This growth has to be attributed to the increase of the forest area in Central Europe, mainly due to the restitution process, while it decreased in North America. Most of privately owned forests belong to individuals (i.e. private persons or families) while a smaller share is owned by corporates, mainly in Northern Europe and North America.

6. The fragmentation of holdings is one of the most important issues related to forest ownership. According to the Private Forest Ownership in Europe report about 86% of privately owned forest holdings are smaller than 5 hectares; however the area occupied by these holdings covers only 19% of the private forest area of reporting countries.

7. The utilization rate of the forest for wood production varies and can serve as an indicator of the role forests play in different countries in the ECE region. For

² Tenure is defined as the relationship, whether legally or customarily defined, among individuals or groups, with respect to natural and other resources. Tenure arrangements determine who can use what resources for how long, and under what conditions.

example in some countries (i.e. France, Finland, Bulgaria and Germany) the utilization rate in private forests is visibly higher than in public forest whereas in other countries (i.e. Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland and Belgium) it is the opposite. However, the full spectrum of conditions has to be taken into account, when explaining these differences.

II. Rationale

8. Ownership has been the subject of generic forest assessments and specific forest reporting initiatives for decades; however, the completeness and quality of available data still varies. Basic information about forest ownership is included in the FAO Global Forest Resource Assessment. This report provides information, by area, for major ownership categories and types of tenure of public forests. More specific information is provided by the pan-European reporting; one of the quantitative indicators (6.1)³ refers to the structure of public and private forest holdings. The most detailed source of information about forest ownership was provided by the Private Forest Ownership in Europe report, which was published in 2010 by ECE/FAO. The study includes a variety of information about private forests, their owners and management; however it is based on the data collected in 2006 from a relatively small group of European countries.

9. The insufficient quality and coverage of data and significant lack of knowledge about forest ownership in the ECE region was noted by the users, who requested the ECE-FAO Forestry and Timber Section to address these issues. The need for a new study on forest ownership was noted at the 34th Session of the UNECE/FAO Joint Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management, where countries and other stakeholders recommended the development of a new study. The secretariat was encouraged to liaise with relevant partners to examine the possibility of developing a new report on this subject.

10. In response to these requests, work on forest ownership related reporting has been introduced into the Programme of Work 2014-2017, as well as in the list of activities to be implemented in 2014, agreed by the joint meeting of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI) and FAO European Forestry Commission (EFC) in Rovaniemi, Finland, December 2013.

III. Process

11. The UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section started preparations by liaising with partners to consider opportunities for cooperation on the production of a new report. For this purpose, an informal core group of experts was established including experts from the Confederation of European Private Forest Owners (CEPF), the European Forest Institute (EFI), the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR), and the Federation of European Communal Forest Owners (FECOF) and the COST Action project, Forest Land Ownership Changes in Europe - Significance for Management and Policy (FACESMAP).

³ Improved pan-European Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management, the MCPFE Expert Level Meeting 7-8 October 2002, Vienna, Austria. Criterion 6: Socio-economic functions and conditions, Indicator 6.1 *Number of forest holdings, classified by ownership categories and size classes*

12. The initial review of available data revealed that major information gaps were related mainly to privately owned forests, in particular in the context of forest ownership changes that have occurred in recent decades. It was also noted that there is a lack of expertise on data collection and analysis on private forest owners which makes difficult the collections of this data. Thus, the establishment of the new COST Action, FACESMAP project was seen as a unique opportunity that could help to improve reporting and address the above mentioned issues. Thanks to a clear convergence of goals and activities, the ECE-FAO Forestry and Timber Section established collaboration with FACESMAP on forest ownership reporting. This collaboration, while respecting the interests of both partners, will distribute the work burden; as well as improve the completeness and meaningfulness of the reporting.

13. Most of the data on forest ownership in the ECE region will be collected through the joint UNECE/FAO/FACESMAP questionnaire, which has been developed by experts from UNECE/FAO and FACESMAP, working in close cooperation with the core group. The preparatory phase includes a multi-stage process of consultation with countries and stakeholders. The compilation of national reports will be undertaken jointly by both UNECE/FAO national experts and the FACESMAP national focal points.

14. A first draft of the new questionnaire was prepared in spring 2014. The draft was based on the 2006 version along with recommendations from the core group. The most important modifications, compared to the 2006 version, included the addition of questions on all forms of forest ownership and tenure and the widening of the geographical coverage to the whole ECE region. The questionnaire aimed at obtaining information related to the utilization rate, fragmentation, and motivations of forest owners, which would help in understanding issues related to the economic, ecological and social aspects of forests along with their relevance to specific ownership categories. When appropriate, terms, definitions and classifications were updated to make them compatible with global and pan-European reporting.

15. The draft, as well as plans for the reporting on forest ownership, was reviewed by the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists (ToS) on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) at its first meeting in May 2014 in Izmir, Turkey. The Team highlighted the importance of the role of national correspondents' capacity to ensure the completeness and quality of this reporting. Furthermore, the Team indicated the need for widening the preparatory process, which should include consultations on the advanced draft with countries and other stakeholders. The Team stressed the importance of cooperation between the UNECE/FAO and FACESMAP national focal points during the production of the national reports and suggested that UNECE/FAO correspondents should lead the work on the quantitative parts, while the FACESMAP specialists should take the initiative in identifying answers to still open questions.

16. Work related to forest ownership reporting, including the questionnaire, was discussed at the 36th session of the ECE-FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management. The Working Party appreciated the work and the overall arrangements for the process and, in particular, the cooperation with the COST Action FACESMAP and other stakeholders.

17. The status of forest ownership in the UNECE region and related information were the subject of a Round Table Discussion organized during the Joint Working Party session. During this Round Table Discussion, delegates and other stakeholders with an interest in forest ownership also commented on the questionnaire on forest ownership. The Round Table Discussion, the input from the panelists and the interventions from the audience provided a wealth of information

on forest ownership, which fed into the new questionnaire on forest ownership in the ECE region.

18. In general, the Working Party, commenting and advising on the next steps of the process, shared the recommendations developed by the ToS. Furthermore, the Working Party recommended that the questionnaire be further reviewed and refined at the following meetings:

- COST Action Meeting in Freiburg in September 2014,
- ToS Meeting in Geneva in October 2014 and
- COFFI Meeting in Kazan in November 2014.

After completion of the reviewing process, the final draft of the new questionnaire will be released in December 2014 and data collection will follow in spring 2015. The report is expected to be published in autumn 2015.

IV. Questionnaire and recommendations

19. The development of the new questionnaire has been carried out through a consultative process, with the involvement of countries and stakeholders, representing users and producers, researchers and practitioners. The process developed several recommendations and comments that were used in the production of the questionnaire. A summary of the recommendations is provided below.

20. All three pillars of sustainable forest management need to be covered by the new questionnaire. Information collected should allow a comprehensive review of forest ownership including the state of selected forests resources, owners' objectives and performance as well as the financing of forest management under different forms of forest ownership. The questionnaire will offer countries the possibility to describe forest ownership in the overall context of national forestry, the way the current ownership structure has developed over the years and how forest ownership affects forest management.

21. The survey will address major policy/management questions related to forest ownership. The list of relevant questions will be developed with the involvement of relevant stakeholders. One of the most important questions relates to the impact of the fragmentation of forest ownership, which needs to be better defined and reflected in the questionnaire.

22. The questionnaire should allow for the provision of information about:

- How forest ownership and land tenure rights are regulated, implemented and acknowledged,
- Who is responsible for forest management within the different forest ownership categories,
- How duties and responsibilities of public and private forest owners are defined and distributed,
- What is the motivation of owners/managers and what consequences their motivations might have on the management and state of forests,
- How forest owners/managers are organized in associations/producer groups and how these associations/producer groups are structured,
- What is the availability of and the need for policy instruments for helping private forest owners to implement active forest management,
- What is the flow of resources (expenditures and revenues) between state budgets and forest owners?

23. In addition to the reporting on forest, data on other wooded land (OWL) need to be included in the questionnaire even if not all countries are able to provide the same robust information on OWL. The questionnaire should reflect the role of

the full spectrum of goods and products that may be of importance for the different countries of the UNECE region.

24. The questionnaire should make the best use of already collected data. To the extent possible, this questionnaire should be consistent with the previous questionnaire from 2006. All terms and indicators for the questionnaire have to be carefully defined and described in order to obtain comparable data. The terminology and classifications applied in the questionnaire should be consistent with those used in global and the pan-European systems.

25. Reporting guidance for countries in order to improve data collection should be developed. Additional support to the national experts responsible for gathering the data should be provided. Due to the general low availability of data, support from all relevant stakeholders should be sought. In particular support from organizations of forest owners (public and private) would be essential for the successful completion of the data collection process at the national level.

26. The questionnaire should include the two parts (qualitative and quantitative) to be distributed among the COST Action FACESMAP focal points and UNECE/FAO correspondents. If the quantitative data are unavailable, a question could be answered in a descriptive way, this gives the possibility to the country to still provide relevant information. Furthermore the nature of the information (official data vs. expert opinion) should be made visible.

V. Conclusions

27. The overall preparatory and consultative process has confirmed that knowledge on how forest ownership and tenure arrangements affect management systems of forests is essential for understanding and further developing sustainable forest management. The new questionnaire, leading to a new report on forest ownership, will be a crucial tool for improving the situation in this area.

28. The advanced draft of the questionnaire will be presented to the Committee through a separate document (ECE/TIM/2014/INF.4).

29. The Committee is invited to:

- a. Provide comments and suggestions on the scope and organization of the process on forest ownership and tenure reporting in the ECE region,*
- b. Indicate key issues related to forest ownership and tenure in the ECE region that have to be addressed in the new reporting,*
- c. Comment and advise on the form and the content of the joint questionnaire on forest ownership in the UNECE region.*

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