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The role of forests in the post-2015 agenda

The Role of forests in the post-2015 agenda

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document describes the progress of work by the joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section on forests in the post-2015 agenda in the UNECE region. It outlines the political process related to the development of the Sustainable Development Goals. It also presents the outcomes of the workshop on “Forests and Sustainable Development Goals: a regional view” organised in two parts in Geneva on 22-23 January 2014 and on 16 June 2014.

The Committee is expected to take note of the information provided and discuss how the Secretariat can address the opportunity of integrating its extensive system of monitoring and evaluation of all aspects related to the state of forests, forest resources, forest services and sustainable forest management into the accountability mechanisms for the post-2015 agenda.



I. The global development agenda

1. The current development agenda is based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were officially established as the result of the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. As the deadline date for achieving the MDGs, 2015, is approaching, a debate on the framework for international development beyond 2015 has already been initiated.
2. In order to prepare the post-2015 international development agenda, member States initiated a new process aimed at developing Sustainable Development Goals, based on the following foundation:
 - (a) The outcome document of the 2010 MDG Summit
 - (b) The outcome document from the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20)
 - (c) The outcome document of the 2013 Special Event of the President of the General Assembly
3. The 2010 MDG Summit requested the Secretary General to report on progress in the implementation of MDGs and to make recommendations for the post-2015 agenda. In response, the Secretary General put in place a multi-layered process which included, among others, regional consultations on accountability in the post-2015 agenda led by the Regional Commissions. The input from each of the relevant stakeholders will be a part of the report of the Secretary General, expected at the beginning of 2015.
4. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, member States launched a process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs), which should be action-oriented, concise, limited in number, aspirational, easy to communicate, global in nature and universal. The goals should address in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental). The Conference mandated the member States to form an inclusive and transparent Open Working Group (OWG) to work on the goals and targets and to submit a proposal for SDGs to the sixty-eighth Session of the General Assembly in 2014. The Rio+20 Conference also agreed to form an Intergovernmental Committee on Sustainable Development Financing, in order to assess financial needs and facilitate the mobilisation of resources and a High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in order to provide political leadership.
5. During the Special Event of the President of the General Assembly in September 2013, member States agreed to initiate an intergovernmental process of consultations which will lead to the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda at the beginning of the sixty-ninth session (2015) of the General Assembly. The final phase of the intergovernmental work will culminate in a summit at the level of Heads of State and Government in September 2015 where the sustainable development agenda and related goals (SDGs) will be adopted.
6. Forests are one of the key topics contained in the Rio+20 outcome, “The future we want”, and play an essential role in achieving sustainable development, a green economy and poverty eradication. They are the key land ecosystem ensuring the preservation of biodiversity and they constitute an important source of

renewable materials. Hence, forests are essential to Sustainable Development, the related Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 agenda.

7. The Open Working Group finalized its work in July 2014. Forests and their multiple functions were directly addressed in its final draft under two proposed goals, namely SDG 6 and SDG 15. Goal 15 aims to "Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss." It includes targets related to the implementation and the means of implementation for sustainable forest management (SFM) as well as a target on ensuring the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, and in particular the ecosystems based on forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements. Goal 6, which calls to, "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all," includes a target to protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

8. The international forest community, including through the work of COFFI and EFC, have engaged in shaping the post-2015 agenda because soundly formulated goals and targets will guarantee that forests enhance their role in sustaining the environment and people's livelihoods in the future. The forest related SDGs and targets, proposed by the OWG; and in particular those mentioning sustainable forest management are an important accomplishment. They are expected to significantly facilitate the formulation and subsequent adoption of an effective post 2015 development agenda in the forest sector.

II. Mandate

9. The ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI) and the FAO European Forestry Commission (EFC) at their joint session "Metsä2013", held in December 2013 in Rovaniemi, Finland, discussed how to include forests in Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the strategic importance of properly reflecting forests in the post-2015 agenda. The Committee and the Commission underscored the importance of the SDGs in raising the profile of forests, the need to reflect the multi-functionality of forests in goals and targets as well to build on global objectives for forests and existing criteria and indicators in order to achieve that.

10. The meeting stressed the importance of identifying ways to properly recognise the role of forests in sustainable development and the post-2015 agenda. Member States considered the possible development of a forest goal, related targets and indicators and expressed a strong interest in continuing the debate among experts beyond the "Metsä2013" meeting.

11. In that context, the Committee and the Commission requested the joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section to organise a workshop in Geneva to develop ideas on how to include forests in the SDGs and to report the outcomes to the Open Working Group.

III. Progress of work

12. Along the lines of the Rovaniemi discussions, the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section organised a workshop on "Forests and Sustainable

Development Goals: a regional view” in two parts. The first part was held in Geneva on 22-23 January 2014 and the second part on 16 June 2014.

13. In January, participants from the UNECE region exchanged ideas on how forests can be incorporated in SDGs. They agreed that integration of the benefits from trees and forests into the goals and targets is both desirable and feasible. Many of forest global objectives are already reflected in international policy instruments, thus there would be much to build on. As the outcome to the moderated work-in-group discussion, experts came to an agreement that the following strategies for developing forest related goals and targets were possible:

- Stand-alone forests goal with targets and indicators. This would bring attention to the potential benefit of forests to sustainable development, and show how that potential could be realised through a balanced and holistic approach to forest management.
- Sub-goal of a natural resources or ecosystem services goal with targets and indicators. It would catalyse the necessary integration of forests and trees to related sectors, but would likely result in fewer forest-linked targets and indicators than either of the other options.
- Forest targets and indicators in several or most of the SDGs. This would be the most ambitious option since it would require attention to the huge potential range of benefits that the sustainable management of forests and trees can deliver across all of goals for sustainable development.

14. Hybrid options were also considered. Participants recommended continuing this work in order to contribute to the evolving OWG process, in particular by refining targets, and by identifying and developing measurable indicators. The report from workshop was presented by member States to the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals in February 2014.

15. The second workshop on Forests and SDGs was held in Geneva on 16 June 2014. Participants were informed about developments in the on-going discussions within the Open Working Group and how forests and sustainable forest management were reflected in the most recent text emerging from those discussions. The workshop was built on the results of the first workshop, as well as on the latest goals and targets suggested by the OWG.

16. As background information for the workshop, the UNECE/FAO secretariat identified the OWG goals where the forest sector’s contribution would be particularly relevant and specific as compared to other sectors. Selected goals and targets were organised in three clusters: social, economic and environmental. Targets, where forests were mentioned explicitly were included in all clusters.

17. Participants were split into three work-groups according to these clusters. Each group was asked to develop a proposal for an indicator(s) for those targets that were related to forests. In case where it was difficult to develop an indicator, groups were encouraged to share their main concerns or suggestions and formulate recommendations that would be useful for future work. Participants were also asked to identify targets where the forest sector’s contribution would be particularly visible and important or forests have a specific role in other sectors (such as the SDG on water).

18. As the result of the work in groups, experts developed a set of updated targets and corresponding indicators, based on existing indicators from the forest and other sectors. Additionally participants stressed that:

- At least one target under the relevant SDG should focus on Sustainable Forest Management, in order to reflect the fundamental role that it plays in sustainable development.
- Forest-related indicators should be developed for all targets with a forest component such as biodiversity, ecosystem management, production and consumption patterns, energy, food security, water and sanitation, climate, poverty eradication, gender, health, and urban development.
- Detailed datasets and indicators on forests and sustainable forest management, developed over the years by the forest sector should be properly utilized when developing target-specific forest related indicators.

19. The results of the workshop were forwarded to the thirty-sixth session of the UNECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management which took place in Geneva from 17-18 June 2014. The Working Party acknowledged the important role played by UNECE/FAO in collecting datasets, reporting on indicators and in contributing to the global discussion on the development of forest related targets and indicators for SDGs. The recommendations as well as the report from the first and second ECE/FAO workshop were forwarded to the bureaux of the COFFI and EFC as well as to the meeting of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO), Rome, 23-27 June 2014, for its consideration. They were likewise made available to member States through the UNECE/FAO Timber Section website for their contributions to the OWG process.

20. As follow up to the workshop, at the beginning of July, a representative from the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section participated in the sessions of the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York.

IV. The way forward

21. The second workshop on 16 June acknowledged the important role played by the UNECE/FAO joint section in collecting datasets and reporting on indicators as well as in contributing to the global discussion on the development of forest related SDGs, targets and indicators. The availability of more detailed indicators for the ECE region, supported by the existing monitoring and assessment system, would allow for a better, more targeted and comprehensive monitoring of SFM. It recommended the use of a more detailed set of indicators at the regional level to support the monitoring and implementation of forest related SDG targets.

22. The Forestry and Timber Section already has an extensive system of monitoring and evaluation of all aspects related to the state of forests, forest resources, forest functions and services and sustainable forest management (SDG 15). The section works with partners in countries, international organisations and the scientific community in order to collect information according to agreed standards and rules; improve the quality of the information, notably by ensuring international comparability; store; disseminate and analyse the information; and help countries to strengthen their capacity in this area. The work comprises the following programme elements:

- Collecting, validating and disseminating information according to the criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management
- Regional contribution to FAO Forest Resource Assessment
- Implementing sustainable forest management through support to countries for the development of national systems for forest monitoring

- Improving information on forest types
- Reporting on and analysis of the state of forests in the UNECE region
- Monitoring and analysing forest ownership and tenure

23. Results from the above work are periodically published. They are available at the website and communicated when appropriate to countries on an individual basis. These results provide a scientific, non-biased system of accountability measures.

24. As follow up to the SDG workshops and based on the knowledge of the political process acquired through the mission to UN headquarters in New York to attend the high level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the section continues to monitor the development of the political agenda on SDGs and engages in showcasing its work on monitoring and evaluation of all aspects related to the state of forests and sustainable forest management (i.e. UNECE Regional Ministerial Consultation on Monitoring and Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 15 – 16 September 2014). These are of precise relevance for the implementation of the forest related SDGs that have been suggested by the OWG work.

25. The Secretary General mandated the Regional Commissions to play a significant role in the development of the accountability mechanisms for the post-2015 agenda. In this context, the work of the joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section has an essential role to play and an opportunity to design a complete and effective accountability mechanism, based on existing forest criteria and indicators including data collection, evaluation and dissemination. Such a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of forest related SDGs could serve as an example for other goals and targets as well as for other regions.

26. The Committee is invited to take note of the information provided and discuss how this opportunity could best be addressed.