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Forest information, reporting and outlook

Global and regional reporting on forests and sustainable forest management

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section is involved in two processes for reporting on forests and forest management: (i) the global Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire/Forest Resources Assessment; (ii) the Joint FOREST EUROPE/UNECE/FAO reporting on quantitative indicators for SFM. These reporting processes were carried out simultaneously in a coordinated way for the first time, taking advantage of the overlap between the two processes.

This document provides a brief description of these two processes and presents an overview of the main activities of the ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section and Team of Specialists on Monitoring SFM on data collection. It also presents the preliminary results and plans for the use of this new data.

Delegates are invited to take note of this information document and provide the secretariat with advice on further work on the current process and planning for the future reporting process.

I. Introduction

1. The ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section (FTS), the FAO Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) Team and the FOREST EUROPE Liaison Units have been cooperating for the last 15 years on the collection of global the regional, pan-European data. This has helped to avoid some duplication, inconsistency and any unnecessary burden on countries. However, the different nature of global and regional reporting made their complete integration impossible and as a result the previous data reporting cycles had to be carried out separately.
2. The new arrangements for the FAO FRA 2015 (in particular the joint global collaborative reporting) and the overlap of the global and the pan-European reporting cycles, facilitated coordination between these two processes. The new arrangement should ensure consistent and harmonised data on the state of forests and forest management at both the global and the pan-European levels. Coordinated data collection should significantly reduce the reporting burden, and lead to more comprehensive forest related information.

II. Global Forest Resource Assessment / Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire

3. FAO's global forest resources assessments, undertaken every five to ten years, have evolved over time to respond to changing needs. The 20th Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) requested FAO to "prepare a long-term strategy for the FRA programme consistent with prospects for sustainable funding". In Response to this request, FAO developed a document outlining a strategy and that explains objectives, activities and outputs for the period 2012-2030.
4. The ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, as well as the members of ToS on Monitoring SFM, contributed to the development of the strategy by participating in several technical meetings, including the global Expert Consultation on "A Long-term Strategy for Global Forest Resources Assessment" Pajulahti, Finland, 13-15 September, 2011. The strategy was endorsed at the 21st Session of COFO, in September 2012.
5. At its 20th session, COFO also recommended that the next Global FRA be prepared by 2015. The overall shape of the 2015 assessment should fit into the framework delineated by the long-term FRA strategy, which includes streamlining and, wherever possible, harmonisation of data collection and reporting.
6. The global reporting on forests resources 2015 consists of two major components: the first component (as in past cycles) has national correspondents from all countries and territories reporting on their forests through national enquiries; a second component, a remote sensing survey, provides information about forest cover changes over the 1990-2010 period.
7. The data collection system for the 2015 reporting cycle was developed through a collaborative, preparatory process, which included consultations with stakeholders and countries. Advice was received through meetings of the FAO Advisory Group on FRA and consultations with a "consortium of the willing" – a group of organizations that are involved in forest data collection, leading to the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ). In addition to FAO, the "consortium" consists of: the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO); FOREST EUROPE; the Montréal Process; the Observatoire des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (OFAC) and the ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section.
8. In the course of the preparatory process, documents were reviewed by national and international experts at the meetings of the Advisory Group, the stakeholders of the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire and through technical consultations, with the contribution of ECE/FAO FTS and ToS members. The meetings were the following:
 - (a) "Preparations for the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015", held in Ispra, Italy, March 2012;

(b) “Inter-C&I process collaboration workshop”, held in Jacksonville, United States, August 2012;

(c) “International Workshop and Seminar on Forest-based Reporting”, held in Tokyo, Japan, December 2012.

9. Additional input from the pan-European region was provided through the 4th meeting of the ECE/FAO ToS on Monitoring SFM, held in Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, in May 2012.

10. The global reporting 2015 is organised around 21 major questions. The new questionnaire is more focused on several issues that; in addition to the information about the extent, changes to values and trends of forest resources; included questions about gross deforestation and degradation of forests. Other improvements included the introduction of a definition of growing stock. Compared to the previous cycles, the questions are oriented more to assessing the progress towards SFM.

11. The Section, working closely with the FAO FRA Team, led work on data collection and the review process from 54 countries of the UNECE region. The ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section supported the process by contributing to the organization of the Global Meeting for FRA National Correspondents, which was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in May 2013. The Section established a group of regional reviewers and organised a regional workshop held in Geneva, in October 2013. This workshop was held jointly with the FRA team, to provide training and improve the reporting capacity of national correspondents from Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Mediterranean countries.

12. The overall process of data collection was completed in June 2014. Forty-one countries (including United States and Canada) provided their national reports, (FAO produced “desk studies” - reports based on available data to cover the 15 countries that were not able to provide national reports).

13. Data collected from countries will be made available in the form of national reports, country profiles, user-specified reports and an on-line database via the Forest Resources Information System (FRIMS). In addition to this, there are plans to produce:

- (a) An FRA Desk Reference containing summaries, graphics and tabular outputs;
- (b) An FAO Forestry Paper for a generic audience (in cooperation with the CFRQ partners);
- (c) A special volume of a scientific journal (Forest Ecology and Management) with a set of peer-reviewed papers, covering specific topics in more detail.

14. The FTS contributed to the review of the first drafts of the above at the meeting of the FRA Advisory Group in Salt Lake City, United States, in October 2014.

15. Release of original data and analytical products is planned for the XIV World Forestry Congress, which will be held on 7-11 September 2015 in Durban, South Africa.

III. Joint FOREST EUROPE/UNECE/FAO reporting on sustainable forest management.

16. FOREST EUROPE and the ECE/FAO parent bodies decided that (for the first time ever), data on pan-European indicators on SFM shall be collected in parallel with the global reporting. The main tool for this process is the “Joint FOREST EUROPE/UNECE/FAO Questionnaire on Pan-European Indicators for SFM”. The questionnaire was developed by the ECE/FAO FTS, supported by the ECE/FAO ToS on Monitoring SFM and the FAO FRA Team.

17. The questionnaire, which builds on the version developed for the 2011 reporting, consists of four major parts:

- (a) Reporting forms for 28 indicators, where countries are invited to provide or verify data;
- (b) Technical specifications for the remaining seven indicators that will be reported by International Data Providers (IDPs);
- (c) Relevant classifications and definitions;
- (d) Tables for checking consistency and correctness of the reported data.

18. Given the overlap with the global reporting the questionnaire ensures consistency of classifications and definitions of these two processes wherever possible.

19. The results of the review of the 2011 reporting cycle, carried out by the FTS and the ECE/FAO ToS on Monitoring SFM in 2012, were the entry point for the development of the new questionnaire. The major updates in the new version of the FOREST EUROPE/UNECE/FAO questionnaire were undertaken for areas of reporting identified in the review process, which were:

- (a) Forest growth and drain, in particular on the availability of wood supply;
- (b) Socio-economic indicators;
- (c) Sustainability of forest management.

20. A thematic sub-group, working on the reporting on the availability of wood analysed, through a special enquiry, how countries reported on this matter. The results helped to develop the questionnaire to make reporting on this area more transparent and flexible. For this work, cooperation with the COST Action FP1001 “USEWOOD” (a scientific project working on the availability of wood) was established. The sub-group developed a method to help countries to report on net annual increment.

21. Reporting on socio-economic indicators was identified as an area to be significantly improved. The work was carried out by the ToS sub-group, with the involvement of relevant organizations. A thematic workshop was organised (Helsinki, Finland, in December 2012) to review existing arrangements and discuss possible improvements for reporting in this area. Proposed changes included modifications aiming to make the values reported more specific and applied classifications better adjusted to national reporting capacities.

22. Work on the reporting method for the sustainability of forest management was continued by the ToS thematic sub-group dedicated to this issue. The method was developed through two meetings of the group organized in Geneva, Switzerland, in October 2011 and February 2013, and reviewed at the 35th session of the Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management, in April 2013. The pilot implementation of the reporting on sustainability of forest management is undertaken in parallel to the pan-European reporting, with the participation of national experts.

23. Results of the work ToS’ thematic sub-groups on the improvements to the 2015 questionnaire were presented and discussed by the Team at its:

- (a) 4th meeting, held in Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, May 2012;
- (b) 5th meeting, held in Geneva, Switzerland, February 2013.

24. Furthermore, the work and the questionnaire were presented and discussed at the:

- (a) 1st meeting of the Advisory Group (AG) on the preparation of the next State of Europe’s Forests (SoEF), held in Geneva, Switzerland, November 2012;
- (b) FOREST EUROPE Expert Level Meeting, held in Madrid, Spain, March 2013;
- (c) 2nd meeting of AG, held in Madrid, Spain, March 2014.

25. The joint pan-European reporting was launched in November 2013. In the case of six of the indicators, reporting forms were prefilled with data provided by EUROSTAT and the ECE/FAO FTS. In addition to a MS Word version, an Excel version was produced to facilitate

the reporting process, data management and to improve quality of the reports. The questionnaire is available in English and Russian at: <http://www.unece.org/forests/forestresources/welcome.html>.

26. The ECE/FAO FTS is responsible for the collection, review and compilation of national data. Countries are assisted by the same reviewers who were involved in the global process. As of the date of release of this document, 30 countries provided their national reports. For those 8 countries that have not provided their reports, the secretariat has already produced reports based on available data. Reports are still expected from the remaining seven countries.

27. The final compilation of data collected is planned for the end of 2014. Similar to previous cycles, all information collected will be made available through the interactive FOREST EUROPE/UNECE/FAO database with the UN Statistical Division interface dedicated to that purpose.

28. Data collection for the pan-European indicators that are not covered by national reporting (reported directly by IDPs) was discussed at the meeting of the ToS on Monitoring SFM, held in Geneva, Switzerland, in October 2013. Data on two indicators (trade and consumption of wood products) will be processed by the ECE/FAO FTS. Collection and processing of the data on the remaining five indicators will be managed directly by the FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit Madrid, which is also responsible for the production of the 2015 edition of SoEF report.
