Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry

Seventy-seventh session
Geneva, 4-7 November 2019
Item 3(c) of the provisional agenda
Joint Committee/Commission matters: Integrated Programme of Work

Food and Agriculture Organization

European Forestry Commission

Fortieth session
Geneva, 4-7 November 2019

Capacity-building in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document provides an overview of past and current capacity-building activities in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This includes updates on the results of the 2016-2020 UNDA project on "Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management for the Caucasus and Central Asia", recent developments on forest landscape restoration and the Bonn Challenge, publications targeting the region and a proposed outline for the Section's future work and contribution to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030).

Please recycle

I.   Background

1.   This document provides an overview of past and current capacity-building activities of the joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This includes updates on the 2016-2020 UNDA project on "Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management for the Caucasus and Central Asia", forest policy dialogues, recent publications targeting the region and developments on forest landscape restoration and the Bonn Challenge, and an overview of capacity-building in support of the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2020 and the pan-European reporting on forests 2020. Further, the document introduces a proposed outline for the Section's future work and contribution to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), including the strategy on "Greening the Landscapes and Infrastructure of Caucasus and Central Asia".

II.   UNDA project on "Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management for the Caucasus and Central Asia"

2.   The UN Development Account project "Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management for the Caucasus and Central Asia" aims at supporting the development of national level criteria and indicator (C&I) sets for sustainable forest monitoring in Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The main target groups were ministries and agencies responsible for sustainable forest management and monitoring in the project countries, as well as other relevant stakeholders.

3.   After the launch of the project in 2016 and the first round of national workshops in 2017, intermediate results were presented and reviewed in February 2018, at a regional interim workshop, which was held in conjunction with the meeting of the ECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management. This allowed for the review of the progress in implementation and for cross fertilization and mentoring input to the five project countries on their criteria and indicator processes and sets for sustainable forest management. The recommendations and guidance received during this regional workshop were the basis for the country-specific design of the second round of national workshops held in 2018 and 2019.

4.   In the course of the implementation of the UNDA project, which originally was scheduled until the end of 2019, all five project countries (Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan) developed national criteria and indicator sets for sustainable forest management. Most of the countries have a final version of the set already submitted for approval through their national systems (Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan). Armenia is still in the process of finalizing and further developing the set.

5.   In May 2019, project countries were invited together with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan to the Forest Congress for the Caucasus and Central Asia (28-31 May 2019, Kyrgyzstan). The Forest Congress covered recent forest developments while strengthening regional cooperation and outlined strategic common approaches for future projects in the region. The main topics were monitoring of sustainable forest management and the presentation of national criteria and indicator sets and implementation of forest landscape restoration.

6.   At the Forest Congress all participating countries reflected on their further priorities and needs regarding their national C&I sets and technical cooperation. Armenia plans to create a short-list of indicators defining the assessment methods and gather data for them. The elaboration of factsheets for the agreed indicators is priority for Georgia. Georgia further plans to test the data collection for the C&I set on local level. Kyrgyzstan considers it important to systematize and align the national-level C&I set with indicators of the SDGs. Kazakhstan intends to use the C&I set as a basis for the development of a national strategic document for forest policy. Uzbekistan plans to develop a C&I implementation mechanism or strategy.

7.   All three non-UNDA project countries, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, consider the development and implementation of national-level C&I as a priority. Azerbaijan

has already developed a draft C&I set under a FAO project, but requires support in testing and implementing it. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan would welcome support in developing C&I in the future.

8.   The publication "Guidelines for the development of a national criteria and indicator set for sustainable forest management"[1], published in English and Russian in May 2019, were another major outcome of the UNDA project. The publication, which provides a detailed step-by-step approach for the development of a national criteria and indicator set was prepared based on guidance prepared for project countries, to assist them in developing their sets. All major regional C&I processes, e.g. Forest Europe, Montreal and UNFF are presented in detail and a comprehensive overview of the different indicators under the seven global thematic elements is provided. Throughout the implementation of the project the guidelines were applied in the project countries and improved by including the feedback from participants. In addition, the publication provides an overview of participatory workshop methods which can be used to structure a multi-stakeholder process for the development of national-level criteria and indicator systems (or other tasks requiring participatory approach).

9.   The UNDA project period was initially from 2016 until the end of 2019, due to availability of additional funding of 90,000 USD, the project was extended to September 2020. The additional resources will be used to initiate and strengthen the implementation of the newly developed C&I sets, in particular in terms of developing related data collection systems and to further support the institutionalisation of the criteria and indicator sets.

10.   Several project countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia) requested further capacity-building on methodological, technical support to facilitate and enhance the data gathering under the criteria and indicators sets already developed. Three main activities are foreseen with the additional resources: (i) the revision and advancement of the criteria and indicator set of Armenia; (ii) a regional workshop to strengthen capacity on methodologies for data collection for indicators; (iii) preparation of tailored methodologies for the national criteria and indicator sets (for priority indicators).

III.   Technical support in shaping policy

11.   The joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section supports countries in shaping policy and updating relevant strategic documents. Recently Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan requested assistance and benefited from a national forest policy dialogue to update the national forest programme support.

12.   In Azerbaijan, a group of experts updated the national forest programme and action plan. The "National Forest Programme on the protection and sustainable development of forests in the Republic of Azerbaijan (2020-2030)" was drafted in accordance with the "Strategic Roadmap for the production and processing of agricultural products in the Republic of Azerbaijan" approved pursuant to a Presidential Decree dated 6 December 2016 and to the Forest Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section ensured that the Program covers important issues, such as adaptation to climate change and rural development in the context of sustainable forest management, protection of environment and biodiversity. Results were presented to the relevant stakeholders in 2018 and approved for processing.

13.   Kazakhstan requested support with the update of the national forest programme and action plan in 2018. This activity is funded through the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC). This request is in line with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which targeted the transition of the Republic to the "green economy" and defined as one of the main objectives the conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems. A group of national and international experts work together on the update of the national forest programme, aiming to cover all aspects of sustainable forest management, targeting the creation of "green infrastructure". The development of the action plan for the updated national forest programme is supported by a group of diverse experts from the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan and other relevant institutions and international

---

[1] http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51695

organizations, aiming for cross-sectoral cooperation, as there is a need for integrated solutions for land use and logging. First results will be presented to stakeholders by the end of 2019.

IV. The State of forests of the Caucasus and Central Asia

14.   Over the past year national experts from all eight countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia were involved in providing input and reviewing the publication "The State of Forest of the Caucasus and Central Asia"[2].

15.   This publication is the first regional overview of the forest sector in countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia since their independence in the 1990s. It describes forest resources, the forest sector of the region, and major threats facing forests. It also covers forest sector policies, institutions and policy responses that are planned or already in place, and it lists the main issues and challenges facing the forest sector in the region.

16.   Forests in the Caucasus occupy less than 15 percent of the territory, the exception is Georgia, more than 40 percent of which is covered by forests. Forests in Central Asia occupy less than 10 percent of the territory. However, together, forests and other wooded land of the eight countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia cover more than 30 million ha, which is the size of Italy.

17.   The forests of the region are special due to their crucial role in protection against erosion and soil loss in highly vulnerable ecosystems. Almost 90 percent of the forest and other wooded land is designated for protective functions. In many areas, non-wood products from the forests – nuts (pistachios, walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts), fruit and berries, hay, medicinal herbs, mushrooms, honey, flower bulbs, tree seeds and others – play important roles in supporting rural livelihoods. Plantations of saxaul, for example, are one of the few means of helping villages around the Aral Sea, where a reduction of the water area has created a salty desert, with windblown toxic dust that is damaging to health and the environment.

18.   All forests in the region are publicly owned and managed by government forest organisations, funded from central government budgets. All countries have forest laws and policy statements in place. However, forest sector issues have little visibility at the highest policy level. The report sets out a series of practical steps to help respond to the specific challenges identified. These include measures to protect and restore existing forests and to strengthen forest sector institutions, allocating sufficient resources and ensuring their efficient and accountable management.

19.   The study also highlights the need to improve the information base for sustainable forest management, by regularly implementing comprehensive and accurate forest inventories, together with surveys of forest health and vitality, monitoring supply of wood, other goods and services, as well as employment and livelihoods in the forest sector.

20.   The study "State of Forests of the Caucasus and Central Asia" was launched at a side event during the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF14) on 7 May 2019. It was further presented together with two other publications, the "Guidelines for the Development of a Criteria and Indicator Set for Sustainable Forest Management" and "Forest Landscape Restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia"[3], at a event for Ambassadors of the region in Geneva (29 May 2019) and during the Forest Congress in Kyrgyzstan (28-31 May 2019).

V. UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

21.   The United Nations declared 2021 to 2030 the decade on Ecosystem Restoration as a means of highlighting the need for greatly increased global cooperation to restore degraded and destroyed ecosystems, contributing to efforts to combated climate change and to

---

[2] http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51705
[3] http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51698

safeguard biodiversity, food security and water supply (A/RES/73/284). [4] The decade aims at supporting and scaling up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide and raise awareness of the importance of successful ecosystem restoration. It is also a direct contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

22.   Despite these commitments, additional momentum is needed to generate the necessary transformation impact at all levels in order to conserve and restore ecosystems to achieve sustainable development. To date almost 60 countries have announced political commitments to bring more than 170 million hectares of degraded land under restoration as part of the Bonn Challenge[5]. Out of the countries in the UNECE region Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and the United States of America pledged towards the Bonn Challenge.

23.   The joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section provided a platform for all pledges coming from the Caucasus and Central Asia during meetings organized in 2018[6] and 2019[7]. Together with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), who provides the Secretariat to the Bonn Challenge, the joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section is now working on following-up on the pledges made. An attempt to scale up and implement forest landscape restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia is made through a project proposal in cooperation with ICRAF (International Council for Research in Agroforestry), MSF (The Michael Succow Foundation) and MSRI (The Mountain Societies Research Institute at University of Central Asia) on the topic to receive funding from the German International Climate Initiative (IKI). The intended aim of the project is to map out restoration regionally and by country, create demonstration sites for relevant forest and woodland types and for agroforestry approaches to restore landscapes across the CCA countries with quantifiable changes in carbon stocks as well as economic benefits; to develop value chains based on tree products/services out of successful forest landscape restoration approaches; to develop studies on the legal framework for forest landscape restoration and resulting policy advice in favour of FLR including advice on planning approaches. Further it aims to support and equip CCA countries with technical capacities to scale up successful forest landscape restoration approaches; support monitoring and information systems on soil carbon, carbon in biomass, FLR and land degradation in the CCA countries, which will be linked to global monitoring systems like the Bonn Challenge Barometer, Global Forest Watch or Trends Earth. It is envisaged to develop a FLR program for each of the CCA countries and the region to implement the pledges made under the Bonn Challenge and further support the work of the Central Asia Desert Secretariat (established under IKI CADI) to facilitate policy dialogue on FLR expanding to the whole CCA region.

24.   Through an extrabudgetary project funded by the German government research for a study on forest landscape restoration in Eastern and South Eastern Europe was initiated. A high-level meeting is planned for this region in spring 2020, which will provide a platform for commitments towards the Bonn Challenge.

25.   FAO and UN Environment are the leading implementing agencies for the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section strives to assist countries in their work on forest landscape restoration in the UNECE region. So far, the engagement of UNECE/FAO on forest landscape restoration was mainly focused on the Caucasus and Central Asia. Building on this experience communication with Eastern and South Eastern Europe was initiated to expand the topic further in the region.

26.   At the 41st session of the joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management (27-29 March 2019) a representative from the World Bank presented the idea of creating a regional initiative for Europe and Central Asia, like AFR100 for Africa or Initiative 20x20 for Latin America, in support of the Bonn Challenge. Jointly with IUCN, WRI, UNECE/FAO, the World Bank proposed ECCA30, a new forest landscape restoration initiative in Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia to bring 30 million ha of degraded

---

[4]   https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/RES/73/284
[5]   http://www.bonnchallenge.org/
[6]   http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47712
[7]   http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50165

and deforested landscapes into restoration in support of the Bonn Challenge. ECCA30 will serve as a regional mechanism to secure additional commitments and accelerate the implementation of the Bonn Challenge and support the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

27.   The joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section initiated work on a strategy on "Greening the Landscapes and Infrastructure of Caucasus and Central Asia"[8]. The Strategy was shared with national focal points and Ambassadors from the Caucasus and Central Asia for review and further development. The joint section communicated to countries and reflected comments in the Strategy. The Strategy was produced and submitted as an accelerating action at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York, and presented at the Nature's Climate Hub during the Forest and Restoration Action Day, 22 September 2019, New York. The vision of the Strategy is that by 2030, the Caucasus and Central Asia are better connected to the rest of the world through much improved infrastructure, and this infrastructure has helped to make the landscapes of the region more sustainable and resilient, with better livelihoods for rural populations and more biodiversity, less pollution, erosion, soil loss and salinization, more sustainable rural energy supply and grazing practices, and fewer GHG emissions. An integrated approach to landscape restoration has been put in place, enlisting the expertise of many sectors, including watershed management, forestry, agriculture and biodiversity conservation. Countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) were invited to the meeting in Geneva, 4 November 2019, to discuss the Strategy.

VI.   Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2020 and the pan-European reporting on forests 2020

28.   The national data collection for 2020 cycles of the FRA 2020 and the Forest Europe/FAO/ECE Pan-European reporting was undertaken jointly, in a coordinated manner. The Forestry and Timber Section continues to be an active partner in both processes. In 2018, the Secretariat co-organized two workshops for the ECE member States (Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia) and assisted national correspondents in their work on compilation and submission of national data. The first workshop introduced FRA 2020 and the pan-European processes, reporting content, terms and definitions, as well as reporting tools (including a new FRA reporting platform). To provide additional support to countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia in their reporting to FRA 2020, the FRA Secretariat and the join UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section organized second workshop tailored to the region to ensure completeness, consistency and transparency of reporting.

29.   National correspondents expressed that countries lack capacity to deliver high quality reporting. For some countries this was the first cycle of reporting ever and it took time to collect data from various places. Future work will be oriented on providing support and capacity building for member States to get the best available data reported for FRA2025. The support will be focused towards increasing member States' capacities to develop particular tools, e.g., criteria and indicators, or monitoring damage and conditions of forests.

30.   The Committee and Commission may wish to take note of the information and provide comments and feedback during the meeting.

---

[8]https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/timber/Forest_Policy/Capacity_building/greening_the_landscapes_of_CCA_strategy_-_eng.pdf