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Reporting on and implementation of the 2018-2021 Warsaw Integrated Programme of Work and related decisions: Reporting on Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Reporting on Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This document provides an overview of the results and the implementation process of the capacity building project "Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia". The project was funded under the 10th tranche of the United Nations Development Account (UNDA), with the Joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section implementing this project in Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The project strengthened national capacities of the five countries to develop criteria and indicators sets tailored to their national forest sectors, cross-sectoral requirements and international obligations.

In addition, the project assisted countries in developing tailored methodologies (factsheets) for all indicators within the national sets, which enabled project countries to further develop their forest information systems, thereby monitor and support the implementation of sustainable forest management.

The Committee is invited to:

(a)   Support countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia and other ECE sub-regions in developing national reporting mechanisms on sustainable forest management;

(b)   Support the dissemination of the project's outcomes, including the studies on "National Reporting on Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia", the ECE/FAO "Guidelines for the Development of a Criteria and Indicator Set for Sustainable Forest Management" and the "State of Forests of the Caucasus and Central Asia" as appropriate;

(c)   Advise the Joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section on the direction and scope of the capacity building work on national reporting on sustainable forest management and data collection.

I. Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management

1.   The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Earth Summit, in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro adopted Agenda 21[1], including a call for developing systems using economic, social and environmental indicators and metrics to monitor and evaluate progress towards sustainable development. The UNCED also issued a "Non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests"[2] (Forest Principles).

2.   In response to Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles, countries and organizations initiated to work on regional sets of criteria and indicators, either under existing or new processes created for this purpose. Four of these processes include countries of the ECE region: Forest Europe[3], the Montréal Process[4], the Near East Process[5] and the Low-Forest-Cover-Countries Process (Tehran Process[6]) (ECE, 2019).

3.   Since 1992, significant progress has been achieved not only in terms of developing indicators, collecting relevant data and developing assessment reports, but also advancing the concept of criteria and indicators (C&I) as a tool for forest management and policy making. Criteria and indicators nowadays are seen as a complex tool to monitor forest conditions, measure progress towards sustainable forest management (SFM), establish a common understanding of SFM at all levels, set a reference framework for policy design, planning and programming, and to communicate with the society at large.

4.   The development of regional sets of C&I was followed by the production of national C&I sets, which tailored the sets to national, sub-national and local conditions, capacities and needs. However, despite the overall success in the development and implementation of the regional and national sets of C&I for SFM, the lack of capacity prevented some countries from advancing in this area.

5.   To support countries in their efforts to develop criteria and indicators set tailored to their national forest sectors, the Joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section developed the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) capacity-building project "Accountability systems for sustainable forest management in the Caucasus and Central Asia".

II. Building capacity of countries in the Caucasus And Central Asia through Project "Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus And Central Asia"

A. Introduction

6.   The capacity building project "Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia" was funded under the 10th tranche of UNDA and implemented by the joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section. The timeframe of the project was initially 2016-2019 but was extended with additional resources until December 2020.

7.   The objective of the project is to strengthen the national capacity of five countries (Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) to develop national C&I and reporting/accountability systems, for SFM.

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[1]   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf

[2]   http://www.un-documents.net/for-prin.htm

[3]   https://foresteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/III.-ELM_7MC_2_2015_MinisterialDeclaration_adopted-2.pdf#page=5

[4]   https://www.montrealprocess.org/The_Montreal_Process/Criteria_and_Indicators/index.shtml

[5]   http://www.fao.org/tempref/docrep/fao/Meeting/010/AF995E/af995e00.pdf

[6]   https://www.rinya.maff.go.jp/j/press/kaigai/pdf/iran.pdf

8.	The project is to enable target countries to actively participate in international processes related to forests and contribute to the sustainable development of the sector towards a green economy. National criteria and indicators for SFM will also serve to communicate the relevance of forests among policy makers and society at large.

9.	Through monitoring, and accountability countries are expected to advance and achieve SFM. The focus of the project was on defining the information needed, identify gaps, and provide advisory services to help countries in developing their national sets of C&I.

## B.	Overview of national reporting systems on Sustainable Forest Management in project countries

10.	Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were selected for this capacity-building project, as they had no C&I for SFM at the national level, thus no forest reporting systems.

11.	These countries are located in the South-Eastern part of the ECE region and became independent after the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991. Their forests, though small in extent, are biodiversity hubs that provide a whole array of social, economic and environmental services. Forests are predominantly state-owned and managed. Common challenges amongst these countries include: limited resources; a shortage of qualified personnel; a lack of coordination between sectors; and limited public or political awareness of the significance of the forest sector. Forests of these countries can suffer from dry conditions, fire, pests and diseases over-grazing and illegal harvest.

12.	Since independence, all five countries have struggled with economic recessions and political challenges in developing their own national legislation and institutions. Forestry organizations in the region struggled with the lack of technical and financial capacities to maintain forest management planning systems and to conduct regular forest inventories. There have been visible improvements in recent years, but systematic data collection and forest monitoring lagged. Forest-related statistics are often old and/or unreliable.

## C.	Implementation of the project

13.	The project focused on: (1) enhancing national knowledge (policy makers, national government experts, other stakeholders) of the existing international best practices for sustainable forest measurement, monitoring reporting and (2) enhancing national capacity to develop national reporting and accountability systems.

### 1.	Enhanced national knowledge (policy makers, national government experts, other stakeholders) of the existing international best practice for sustainable forest measurement, monitoring and reporting

14.	The project led to a significant improvement of the national knowledge on best practice for measurement, monitoring and reporting on sustainable forest management. After the launch of the project in 2016 and the first round of national workshops and advisory missions in 2017, intermediate results were presented and reviewed at a regional interim workshop in February 2018, held in conjunction with the meeting of the ECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management. The knowledge gained between and through these meetings assisted the five target countries in developing their first draft sets of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management.

15.	The ECE/FAO Guidelines for the Development of a Criteria and Indicator Set for Sustainable Forest Management[7] developed under this project provide specific concepts, definitions, tools and reference materials to guide the development process of national criteria and indicator sets for SFM.

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[7]	https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/timber/publications/DP-73-ci-guidelines-en.pdf

16.   The publication on "National Reporting on Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia" provides an overview of the project[8], as well as conclusions and recommendations.

2.   Enhanced national capacity to develop national reporting and accountability systems

17.   All five project countries developed their criteria and indicator set for sustainable forest management[9].

18.   At the regional inception workshop in 2016, countries received guidance and agreed on a roadmap for the implementation of the project at the national level. Two rounds of national coaching workshops focused on the present situation in each country and initiated work to define national SFM C&I. While there were many common issues among countries, priorities sometimes differed. Countries embraced the holistic concept of SFM C&I as a reporting tool but also as guiding instrument for national policy and strategy development.

19.   The workshops introduced the seven thematic elements of SFM, identified in the Non-legally Binding Instrument adopted by the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) as a "reference framework"[10], and reviewed C&I from different regional processes before focussing on their relevance, applicability and verifiability. Countries prepared draft national SFM C&I, improving them substantially before presenting them at an interim regional workshop in 2018.

20.   A second round of national workshops finalized the national C&I based on a common understanding of SFM. Participants discussed the essential components of forestry at the national level and developed quantifiable improvements for every component. Data availability was one of most pressing issues. Some countries preferred to work with existing data, while others believed that including indicators for which no data was currently available would encourage stakeholders to work to fill gaps.

21.   While data from old inventories, management plans and similar sources could be used to improve monitoring, countries agreed that there was a need to improve forest management planning systems and to establish regular inventories.

22.   Results of the development of the accountability systems were presented at the final regional workshop (Forest Congress), 28-31 May 2019, Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan. This meeting provided the five target countries with the opportunity to further develop and present their updated sets of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management and discuss needs and challenges for their use. Information on the C&I for SFM was shared with other non-project countries (Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) who also participated in the meeting. Recommendations received during the Forest Congress served as basis for requesting a project extension, in particular to support the development of tailored methodologies for data collection on C&I for SFM.

23.   The project was extended until December 2020 to ensure robustness of the results and enhance national knowledge on tailored methodologies for data collection. The development of factsheets for indicators will further support countries in their implementation of national reporting on sustainable forest management. The publication "National Reporting on Sustainable Forest Management" (in press) summarizes outputs of the project and includes conclusions and recommendations for improvement of national reporting in project countries.

3.   Outputs

24.   One of the main outputs of the project is the national set of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management[11] and factsheets for data collection on relevant indicators. In addition, the project resulted in the development of two publications: "Guidelines for the

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[8]   http://www.unece.org/forests/areas-of-work/capacity-building/unda2016-2019.html
[9]   https://www.unece.org/forests/areas-of-work/capacity-building/unda2016-2019.html
[10]   http://www.fao.org/forestry/sfm/85084/en/
[11]   https://www.unece.org/forests/areas-of-work/capacity-building/unda2016-2019.html

Development of a Criteria and Indicator Set for Sustainable Forest Management" and "National Reporting on Sustainable Forest Management in Central Asia and the Caucasus".

25.   The "Guidelines for the Development of a Criteria and Indicator Set for Sustainable Forest Management"[12] provide specific concepts, definitions, tools and reference material to guide the development process of national criteria and indicator sets for SFM. They also provide examples and help define clear priorities and targets for countries. The guidelines were further refined following their application in Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. They may also be relevant for other countries.

26.   The publication on "National Reporting on Sustainable Forest Management in Central Asia and the Caucasus" summarizes the project results and suggests possible follow-up work on developing forest information systems. It describes the state of forest information systems and reporting in Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the outcome of the project "Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia" and suggests avenues for the implementation of C&I sets and forest information systems in these countries.

27.   The implementation of the project was participatory and considered the holistic nature of forest information systems, the existing political, economic and social context, and internal and external reporting obligations. The broad participation of national experts and stakeholders in the project improved their knowledge and capacity on forest information collection and analysis. The effective engagement of local experts also supported the implementation of other projects, such as the collection of data for the "State of Forests of the Caucasus and Central Asia"[13], the analysis of country reports relevant for the study "Forest Landscape Restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia"[14] and improved reporting to the FAO Forest Resources Assessment 2020.

4.   Impact of the project

28.   Countries showed considerable progress in applying the concept of SFM C&I in their national context, considering the interlinkages between national and international policymaking, and accounting for sometimes contradictory societal environmental and economic needs.

29.   The project succeeded as an effective communication tool to show policy-makers, forestry employees, the scientific community, environmental organizations, entrepreneurs and the general public the multi-dimensional nature of SFM and how forests can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

30.   Countries established links and cooperation among national stakeholders, whose feedback was used to finalize the national sets of SFM C&I. Countries have pledged to include national SFM C&I in relevant national legal and policy documents by 2020.

31.   The project also significantly contributed to strengthening regional cooperation in forestry. The topic provided a platform for professional exchange amongst experts in the region. In addition, the project supported national reporting for the 2020 cycle of the FAO Forest Resources Assessment.

5.   Conclusions

32.   The collective efforts of national and international experts, and the joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, led to strengthened capacities to report on sustainable forest management using SFM C&I. The work established a common understanding of SFM that helped participating countries develop a comprehensive vision. The countries have finalized national SFM C&I and have put together fact sheets that will play a key role for further development of their forest information systems.

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[12] https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/timber/publications/DP-73-ci-guidelines-en.pdf
[13] https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/timber/publications/sp-47-soccaf-en.pdf
[14] https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/timber/publications/DP-72-flr-cca-en.pdf

33.   The national SFM C&I differ between countries in content, structure and size. Given the dynamic nature of C&I, further changes can be expected. That said, it will still be challenging for project countries due to lack of capacity and resources.

34.   The political context, institutional capacity and socio-economic structures in the CCA often differ from those of other parts of the ECE region, as do the issues and concerns of forestry. Consequently, implementing SFM will require different approaches, taking account of the environment and often limited resources.

35.   The Committee is invited to:

        (a)   Support countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia and other ECE sub-regions in developing national reporting mechanisms on Sustainable Forest Management;

        (b)   Support the dissemination of the project's outcomes, including the studies on "National Reporting on Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia", the ECE/FAO "Guidelines for the Development of a Criteria and Indicator Set for Sustainable Forest Management" and the "State of Forests of the Caucasus and Central Asia" as appropriate;

        (c)   Advise the Joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section regarding the direction and scope of the capacity building work on national reporting on sustainable forest management and data collection.

Annex

Workshops organized within the project "Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia"

Meeting title, date and location ([ctrl] click on title to access the meeting documents, report and information)

Forest Congress for the Caucasus and Central Asia,
  May 2019 Kyrgyzstan

2nd national Workshop - Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management for Armenia,
  February 2019, Armenia

2nd national Workshop - Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management for Georgia,
  November 2018, Georgia

2nd national Workshop - Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management for Kazakhstan,
  September 2018, Kazakhstan

2nd national Workshop - Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management for Uzbekistan,
  August 2018, Uzbekistan

2nd national Workshop - Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management for Kyrgyzstan,
  April 2018, Kyrgyzstan

Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia,
  February 2018, Georgia

Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management for Georgia,
  November-December 2017, Georgia

Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management for Armenia,
  September 2017, Armenia

Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management for Uzbekistan,
  August 2017 Uzbekistan

Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management in Kazakhstan,
  June 2017, Kazakhstan

Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management for Kyrgyzstan,
  March 2017, Kyrgyzstan

Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia,
  November 2016, Armenia