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Guidelines on the Promotion of Green Jobs in Forestry

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Abstract

The role of forests and forestry is changing rapidly and profoundly. Societies, policy makers and markets are placing a renewed focus on an expanded and universal vision of sustainable development within planetary boundaries. Forests are central to this vision.

Mechanization, reorganization of forestry supply chains, and increasing incorporation of information and communications technology, are reducing the number of workers needed in traditional forestry, on the other hand accelerating climate change and rising concern about biodiversity stress the importance of sustainable forest management. Therefore, while employment in traditional forestry, focused on timber production, will most likely continue to decline, forest workforce will be critical for achieving effective and sustainable management of forests.

The Guidelines are intended to assist stakeholders in the forestry sector to successfully navigate this transition. They identify key areas for action that emerge from the analysis of main drivers of change and their impact on forests and the forestry sector: 1. Understanding the current workforce in forestry and its future needs (data collection on the workforce, including on occupational safety and health); 2. Upgrading the workforce to ensure traditional forestry is fit for purpose (addressing gaps in competencies, fundamental rights at work, including discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining); 3. The need for just transition towards an environmentally sustainable economy which contributes to the goals of decent work for all and the eradication of poverty; 4. Identifying and seizing new opportunities emerging from a shift to green economies (innovation, entrepreneurship and non-traditional job opportunities); 5. Measures to attract the workforce of the future (identification of current and future skills needs in a green economy).

Keywords: green jobs, sustainable forest management, forest workforce, decent work, green economy

Introduction, scope and main objectives

Both the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the emergence of a green economy concepts have significant impact on the forestry sector. At the heart of this transition lies an urgent need to prioritize environmental sustainability, underscored by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20 in 2012 and the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015. Forests are one of the earth's largest renewable resources, the biggest terrestrial carbon sink and provide vital environmental services. They are therefore central to any development path built around a green economy. There is a growing realization that the labor market and green jobs play a crucial role in achieving the transformation to truly sustainable economies. Where the transformation is successful, green economies create more and better jobs than traditional growth models (ILO 2018b; ILO 2013; Poschen 2015).

Meeting political and society's expectations for forests and the forestry sector will depend heavily on having a skilled, motivated and enabled workforce at every level. However today, this workforce is absent or only partly available. On current trends, there is a serious risk that it will not be available in the future. Unless greater attention and foresight are given to human resources requirements, the forestry sector may not be fit for purpose in the 21st century. The number of people employed in traditional forestry will continue to decrease due to mechanization, further development of supply chains for forest products and growing use of information and communication technology and automation. Job requirements will be altered at all levels. In the view of climate change, jobs related to its adaptation (coping with calamities, management of ecosystems with new species composition, fire prevention and management, forest health management) and mitigation (afforestation and reforestation, ecosystem restoration) will likely increase in importance. A new balance within the workforce may evolve, with more management and technical positions as well as a greater service orientation than today.

The intention of the Guidelines is to assist stakeholders in the forestry sector to successfully navigate the transition at both operational and practical levels. A range of suggestions and ideas is offered that may be applicable to diverse and heterogeneous contexts. Stakeholders include authorities in forestry and related sectors at various levels, private as well as state-owned enterprises in forestry, education (both vocational and university) and training providers, labor administration, trade unions and associations of forest workers, and other stakeholders in the labor market linked to forests, their products and services.

The Guidelines cover primary forest production of goods and services, including jobs linked to new upstream and downstream goods and services in a green economy, such as forest-based recreation and tourism, health and education. Further processing of traditional wood and non-wood products has been excluded in view of the complexity of the subject and the broad range of stakeholders.

Definitions

Decent work "sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men" (ILO 2018a);

Occupational Health is the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations by preventing departures from health, controlling risks and the adaptation of work to people, and people to their jobs (ILO/WHO Committee on Occupational Health 1950);

Green Jobs. To achieve consistency with definitions used by other sectors, by statistical offices and organizations, the Guidelines adhere to the definitions adopted by the ILO and the International Conference of Labour Statisticians:

- "Green jobs are decent jobs which (i) reduce consumption of energy and raw materials; (ii) limit greenhouse gas emissions; (iii) minimize waste and pollution; (iv) protect and restore ecosystems; and (v) enable enterprises and communities to adapt to climate change. They help to reduce the environmental impact of economic activity, ultimately leading to environmentally, economically and socially sustainable enterprises and economies." (ILO 2013).

- The term “green jobs” refers to a subset of employment in the environmental sector that meets the requirements of decent work (i.e. adequate wages, safe conditions, workers’ rights, social dialogue and social protection). The decent work dimension of jobs in the environmental sector may be measured according to relevant indicators selected from the ILO manual on Decent Work Indicators (ICLS 2013).

Approach

The Guidelines are the result of collaborative work between the joint UNECE/ FAO Forestry and Timber Section in Geneva and the Forest Europe Liaison Unit Bratislava. They build on the outputs of the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Green Jobs in the Forest Sector (Joint UNECE/ FAO/ ILO Expert Network) (UNECE 2018) and the Forest Europe Expert Group on Green Jobs, Education and Training Systems. They benefited from expert review during the UNECE/FAO Workshop on Green Forest Jobs held in Geneva in September 2018, which included participants from the Russian Federation and member states from Central Asia and Caucasus. In addition, the joint Section consulted experts from Canada, Turkey and USA in order to ensure geographical coverage of the UNECE region. Recommendations resulting from the Guidelines are available in the Geneva Timber and Forest Discussion Paper 77 (UNECE, FAO 2020).

Results and discussion

The Guidelines present five action areas for the forestry workforce and green jobs to allow for seizing opportunities in a green economy. For each area, recommended practices and actions are described, taking into account the underlying issue, guiding principles, objectives and evidence regarding risks and consequences of potential practices.

Action area 1: Understanding the current workforce in forestry and its future needs

The forest workforce in the UNECE region includes direct employees as well as contractors and service providers. Migrant and seasonal workers can be an important part of the personnel. Information on the workforce, especially on size, composition, age structure, job profiles and occupational safety and health (OSH), is vital but often missing and increasingly difficult to obtain. Efforts are needed to collect data on the status of the forestry workforce and green jobs in forestry, also on aspects which were not monitored by the forest sector before. In addition to the availability, the reliability and representativeness of the data should be increased. Where data is scarce, it should be supplemented by dialogue and surveys with actors in the sector and stakeholder collaboration. Based on the data, the mapping of labor market needs in forestry can be supported by modelling techniques and consultation and dialogue mechanisms among actors in the sector. The mapping should ideally consider productivity increases, age, gender and current and future skills profiles in workforce projections. Combined efforts to develop and implement the human resources and green jobs development plans and strategies are needed at national level, and where appropriate sub-national, local and enterprise level.

Action area 2: Making the workforce in traditional forestry fit for purpose

Economic pressures on the one hand and societal expectations about the sustainability of forest operations and decent work on the other hand have put a spotlight on working conditions in the forest sector. Importantly, the decency of many current forestry jobs leaves to be desired.

The composition of the forestry workforce and the occupational profiles within it are changing, and existing skills gaps will be exacerbated. Skills development can promote innovation, investment and competitiveness, which in turn feed back into social development, thus creating a virtuous cycle (ILO 2010). Therefore, gaps in competencies should be assessed and addressed through education, initial training, life-long learning and retraining opportunities as guiding principles (ILO/OECD 2012; Hetemäki 2014). In addition to productivity and to environmental performance, skills are also critical for work safety (ILO 1998a). Recognizing this, all major forest certification systems include the requirement for a skilled workforce.

To assess skills gaps, fora and mechanisms for dialogue on sectoral skills should involve a broad range of stakeholders from forestry and cross-sectoral cooperation with education and human resources administration sectors. They are a fundamental means to detect needs in the labor market and identify responses in education and skills development. This process can be supported by labor market modelling. In parallel, efforts should be made to upgrade existing skills of workers and motivate them for continuous learning. Priority should be given to contractors and workers performing tasks with major environmental or health and safety risks, migrant workers and forest smallholders. The education, training and re-training should include new curricula elements related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as well as soft skills (communication, negotiation, conflict management, public participation in policy making, teamwork, partnering). International harmonization and recognition of competencies should be promoted (e.g. through sector-wide standards) to enhance the mobility of workers, especially in case of major emergencies.

Requirements for fundamental rights at work and decent working conditions are set by national legislation and by the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (ILO 1998b). International certification standards for sustainable forestry such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) also reflect decent work standards. Any issues, in particular those related to discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as concerns about occupational safety and health (OSH), need to be identified and addressed. Importantly, workers and other stakeholders should know their rights.

Non-discriminatory action should focus on gender equality, migrant workers and minority groups like indigenous peoples. This includes, but is not limited to, equal pay for work of equal value, equality of property rights and access to capital, maternity protection, and equal access to education and employment, including in positions of management and leadership (ILO 2004; ILO 2009). The Guidelines used gender equality example as basis for analysis on non-discrimination.

The report, “Time for Action. Changing the Gender Situation in Forestry” prepared by the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialist on Gender and Forestry (FAO 2006) has shown that although women are significant users of forest products, they rarely have input into forestry decision-making, neither at the macro nor the micro level. Men, who make up 80 per cent of workers, usually earn more than their equally qualified female counterparts. Hence, gender and broader employment diversity strategies for the forestry sector need to be developed at the national level. They should include monitoring participation of women and other groups in the sector, assessing equal treatment and encouraging networks of women foresters or forest owners as fora for debate and support.

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining in forestry should be supported by establishing or reinforcing associations. Workers should also benefit from being protected from anti-union discrimination such as requirements that a worker not join a union or relinquish trade union membership for employment, or dismissal of a worker because of union membership or participation in union activities (ILO 2014). Increased outsourcing of operations and the breaking up of the

workforce into smaller, dispersed units have significantly weakened organization levels and the practice of collective bargaining (FAO 2011). Therefore, mechanisms for social dialogue and collective bargaining should be reviewed and strengthened, also by respecting the rights to organize and to bargain collectively laid out in certification schemes and international trade agreements.

The requirements for decent work, especially regarding occupational safety and health (OSH), should apply for all workers in the sector, including contractors and forest farmers. The cost of accidents and diseases hugely exceeds the cost of preventive efforts, including reporting, audits and analysis (Garland 2018). In addition, poor OSH performance is a major contributor to the perception that forest work is difficult and dangerous. Improved accident and occupational health reporting, organizational safety cultures and systems that support good practices seem to be key to safer working conditions. All entities involved in forest operations should share the responsibility for OSH. Certification schemes for sustainable forest management can also be one of the ways to improve OSH standards by contractors and forest owners.

An increasing reliance on contracted service providers for forest management and harvesting operations constitutes a challenge for skills development, in particular business management and technical training. These trainings should be provided at low cost and good quality. Commissioning parties should support contractor development and upgrading by long-term contracts, active involvement and on-site presence. Contractors should be treated as valued partners by other actors in the forestry sector, also to improve the poor public image of forest work. International recognition of registration and certification of contractors should be fostered to allow easy movement across borders if changes in demand request it.

Action area 3: The need for just transition

Achieving sustainable development will have a significant impact on forest operations, leading to job gains, losses and transformations in the sector. The loss of jobs often affects regions and workers with limited alternative employment. The expected increase in major forest disasters may increase short-term demand for work in salvage operation and forest restoration, which might then be followed by long periods of low demand for work. Just transition towards an environmentally sustainable economy therefore “needs to be well managed and contribute to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty” (ILO 2015).

To achieve this, strategies and plans should be developed through social dialogue and consensus to mitigate social impacts, also considering gender-specific policies. Institutional and technical capacities of regional and local authorities should be reinforced and coordinated to guide the transition. Simultaneously, an enabling environment should be created for employers and workers at all levels and stages to participate in the policy process and drive the transformation. The just transition framework should be specific to national contexts and address environmental, economic and social sustainability through comprehensive policies.

Action area 4: Seizing and expanding new opportunities for forests in a green economy

The ongoing shift towards a green economy, emphasizing greater reliance on renewable resources, offers significant new opportunities that go beyond simply increasing the supply of traditional wood and non-wood products. Wood energy is a traditional product, but new, cleaner technologies are expanding the market and creating new supply chains. There has been major growth in demand for forest-based ecosystem services, human health, recreation, tourism, environmental education and research (EUROSTAT 2017; Forest Europe, UNECE, FAO 2011). This currently underutilized potential

offers opportunities for job creation, especially for women, but requires new skills profiles, work organization and supply chains to deliver them.

New, non-traditional job opportunities need to be mapped and their benefits evaluated, assessing the economic sustainability as well as the number and decency of newly emerging jobs. This will prevent unintended losses and trade-offs. The identified opportunities can be seized by mobilizing partners and resources beyond forestry, by creating dialogue fora and partnerships and promoting cooperation and networking vertically and horizontally (Forest Europe 2014). Innovation and entrepreneurship should be supported to develop incentives, business models and frameworks for value capture such as payment for ecosystem services. A well-managed transition has the potential to diversify the professional background, gender and ethnicity of the workforce.

Action area 5: Recruiting, retraining and retaining the workforce of the future

In many UNECE member states, the forestry sector has had difficulty for decades attracting enough potential employees, especially for manual and mechanized forest operations in silviculture and harvesting. Women are hesitant to enroll in a forestry and related natural resources program due to concerns about their gender, work locations, and work conditions (Rouleau *et al.* 2017). The repositioning of the forestry sector in a more restricted and competitive future labor market will require retaining existing and attracting new high potential forestry workers. A sustained, sector-wide approach is needed, based on a thorough assessment of current skills and age profiles and identification of current and future skills needs.

The renewal plans should include measures to make forestry work more relatable, attractive and accessible, involving recruitment professionals to effectively communicate the changing nature of forestry work to youth and job seekers. Initiatives to diversify the recruitment base and workforce should be part of the plans by emphasizing the vital role of forestry in a green economy and the meaningfulness of the work.

Conclusions

The Guidelines offer a menu of options from which national and local stakeholders can choose and which they can adapt to fit their respective needs and conditions. The action areas aim to provide specific and operational guidance on how challenges can be tackled, and opportunities seized.

The further development of green jobs in the forest sector will strongly depend on the revision of existing curricula aimed at addressing existing skill gaps and adapting to new career paths. This can also improve the public perception of the forest sector as an innovative sector that attracts qualified workers and offers modern careers in a green economy.

Dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders in the forestry sector and with partners in other sectors are key to a successful transition. Their results should inform policy and strategies such as national forest programs, bio-economy and other sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies, international or national standards and certification schemes, vocational and university education as well as industry-driven initiatives. The application of the Guidelines at national and local levels, in enterprises and administrations, will contribute to ensuring that the forestry workforce is fit for purpose and forestry is able to attract workers in the 21st century's labor market in order to realize the full potential of forests in green economies.

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