BOOSTING RURAL BIOECONOMY NETWORKS FOLLOWING MULTI-ACTOR APPROACHES

NEWSLETTER

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ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER: FOUR-MONTHLY ISSUE - CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ALL PROJECT PARTNERS

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BRANCHES

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PARTNERS

The first meetings of the National Thematic Network (Italy, Finland, Poland and Spain)

ITALY - The launch of the Branches Project in Italy took place at the Energy Exhibition of the EIMA International Fair in Bologna (19-23 October), one of the most important agricultural and forestry mechanization expositions in the World. Such a context was an excellent showcase for a workshop on the development of the bioeconomy in the rural area held on 22 October. As a first step, it was decided to operate with a "bottom up" approach, actively involving the main stakeholders in the sector through specific National Thematic Networks (NTNs). The event, organized by the two Italian Partners (ITABIA and CNR IBE), took place in presence in the prestigious green hall of the fair, but was also followed remotely thanks to live streaming and digital platforms. This was the first opportunity for the 30 members of the Italian NTN - which includes the most representative subjects of the country's agroforestry sector - to meet and discuss how to activate dialogue between interested parties, as well as share good practices and information on sustainable enhancement of agricultural and forestry biomass. Furthermore, following the two-hour workshop, all participants took part in a guided tour of a large demo area (2,500 m^2) entirely dedicated to the exhibition and demonstration of the functioning of modern and efficient operating machines used in forestry yards for handling, conditioning and storage of woody biomass. On the sidelines of all these activities, a number of video shoots and interviews were made that could be used to make interesting informative videos. Regarding this initiative, Matteo Monni (Vice President of Itabia) declared: "Thanks to this fruitful and participatory meeting, we have collected numerous and valuable insights that will help us guide the evolution of the Project". The workshop registration has already been uploaded to the ITABIA website and - once summarized and translated into English - will also be published on the BRANCHES Project website.

FINLAND - The first Finnish BRANCHES workshop and, at the same time, the Kick-off meeting of Finnish NTN were held on Thursday 2 December 2021. The online meeting was jointly planned by Finnish partners Luke and MTK and the event was hosted by Luke. There were a total of 27 participants from R&D institutes, companies, practitioners, public administrations and associations.

The workshop was opened by BRANCHES WP2 Leader Robert Prinz (Luke), who welcomed all

participants and guided them through the programme. Principal Scientist Lauri Sikanen from Luke gave the keynote speech on the broader picture and future trends of forest energy utilization in Finland. The BRANCHES project and the general idea of Finnish National Network were presented by BRANCHES coordinator Johanna Routa. Mikko Sirviö from Mikkone ltd told about the energy wood purchase from a practitioners view. Research manager Kalle Karttunen from the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK) presented outcomes from a survey on the energy wood supply chains organized by forest owners in Finland, which is also the topic of one of the Practice Abstracts (PAs), exactly the PA n.4. Other topics of PAs presented were Risupeto – a novel felling head for efficient harvesting of small diameter wood biomass both in forests and edge zones of road/railway infrastructures, presented by Senior Scientist Juha Laitila, as well as the PA on Boom corridor thinning - a harvester's working method for young dense stands, presented by Senior Scientist Yrjö Nuutinen. The workshop was plenty of lively discussions throughout the meeting, including lots of questions. Few questions were also asked from participants in order to collect valuable practitioners´ feedback within the project: participants voted the cost-effectiveness as one of the most important features of the forest energy supply chain, and small diameter energy wood as a most important raw material.

POLAND - On 22nd September 2021, the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (UWM), The Warmia and Mazury Agricultural Advisory Center Located in Olsztyn (WMODR) in cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University (project facilitator) held a one-day workshop titled “BRANCHES: Boosting Rural Bioeconomy Networks - Lithuanian-Polish Network”.

The event was a part of the international conference - the 10th International Scientific Conference “Rural Development 2021: Challenges for Sustainable Bioeconomy and Climate Change” in Kaunas.

There was both form of participation: online (9 participants) and at location (11 participants). This workshop was an occasion for (1) cross-border knowledge sharing (BRANCHES-Lithuania) and (2) to initiate the Polish and Lithuanian Bioeconomy Networks in the scope of the project and (3) presentation of preliminary results (PA’s) of WP3.

SPAIN - The Spanish Thematic Network was launched in Spain the 30th November. An online seminar was organised to explain not only the objectives of the network, but also benefits, target audience, how to join the network and main outputs for the participants. Additionally, several Practice Abstracts were also presented and basic information regarding the coming actions foreseen for 2022 were summarized. Currently, 5 Practice Abstracts are already published in the network webpage www.intercambiom.org, relative to the torrefaction plant developed by CENER, the HTC plant developed by Ingelia, the olive cake gasification plant developed by Bioliza, the vineyard pruning cleaning system developed by Athisa and the prototype designed by Serrat to collect vineyard pruning biomass.

The selection of good practices in the EU bioeconomy sector continues: we already have 15 Practice Abstracts in circulation

A little less than a year after the launch of BRANCHES, the Project Partners have already identified several good practices on the bioeconomy which - in the opinion of the appropriate Evaluation Committee - deserve to be disclosed as models suitable to be replicated.

OLIVE CAKE GASIFICATION PLANT (SPAIN)

At the moment, in the flyer format and well cared for in editing, it is possible to have a look at and download the first 15 case studies from the website, all described in clear and concise language.

The topics dealt with mainly concern innovative techniques and technologies applied in the production cycles of biofuels and bioproducts by virtuous companies.

As a minimum objective, by the end of the three years of activity, the BRANCHES project aims to develop at least 50 Practice Abstracts (PAs), which means that, until now, we are fully respecting the roadmap.

COP26 in Glasgow: more shadows than lights

After two weeks of tiring negotiations (1 - 13 November), the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow has come to an end. For all those who hoped for the triumph of the challenge to global warming, the outcome of the negotiations was disappointing due to few lights and many shadows.

First of all, even if a lot of Countries (194) participated in the conference, some of the main emitters of greenhouse gases (China, Russia, Brazil and Turkey) were missing.

Another aspect to note concerns the maintenance of the target of 1.5 °C, a value considered according to the IPCC Scientist Report "Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C" the limit of thermal increase (compared to the pre-industrial period) not to exceed to avoid the disastrous consequences of the climate crisis. This objective can be achieved with a 45% cut in fossil CO_2 emissions by 2030. Since today the thermal increase is estimated at 1.1 °C. To reduce the temperature increase, Europe has already prepared the “Fit for 55 Plan” to cut, by at the end of this decade, 55% of emissions and - according to the Green Deal - to completely neutralize them by 2050.

The third important aspect is the clear stance against coal taken in Scotland. Finally - for the first time in United Nations climate conferences - it is explicitly mentioned as the most harmful fuel of all. Unfortunately, however, we have gone back from the initially proposed "phasing out" to the "phasing down" of coal (imposed by India).

In addition, a total of $ 100 billion annually will have to be allocated to mitigate the effects of climate change in the most disadvantaged areas. It seems that the commitments made previously

will be postponed to 2023, but with the promise of a doubling of the budget by 2025, while the funds not spent to date could risk being lost.

In this context, the decision to stop deforestation by 2030 is also very significant. This measure, certainly very complex to implement, could also be integrated with the decision taken in the G20 to plant at least 1 trillion trees worldwide by 2030. Reforesting is very important, but let's not forget that it is also necessary to better manage existing forests where neglect often causes serious problems such as hydrogeological instability, fires, plant diseases, and the depopulation of large areas!

Finally, the newly signed Climate Pact urges Countries to present new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) on emission cuts at COP27 next year (Egypt 2022). According to the estimates made, the sum of all the NDCs just presented will not produce indeed any reduction in emissions in 2030, but even portends an increase of 13.7%.

Renewables: the sector provides jobs for 12 million people

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), it is estimated that on a global scale in 2020 there were about 12 million people employed in the renewables sector (half a million more, compared to 2019). The numbers contained in the eighth "Renewable Energy and Jobs 2021" report show a sector that, despite the crisis triggered by the pandemic, has registered positive trends. However, there is a negative sign for the employment figure in the bioenergy segment which decreased by about 60 thousand units due to the drop in demand for transport fuels: 3.52 million jobs in 2020 against 3.58 million in 2019. The Country with the most employees in the renewable sector remains China with 39% of jobs, followed by the European Union (11%), Brazil (10%), United States (7%) and India (6%). According to IRENA, the positive growth trend could be maintained in the coming years, but a lot will depend on how the ecological transition will be managed. Measures and programs are needed that are based on a deep understanding of the interconnections between energy, economy and sustainability.

Forest: new EU Strategy published

Last July, the EU Commission presented the Communication on the New Forest Strategy of the EU which contributes to the Fit for 55 packages of measures according to the principle of the multifunctionality of forests. The strategy sets out actions to increase forest volume and quality by strengthening their protection, restoration and resilience. A particular commitment will be to rigorously protect primary and old-growth forests and repopulate degraded ones through sustainable management. With this in mind, practices that are more respectful of the climate and biodiversity (including agroforestry) will be promoted. The strategy emphasizes the need for a correct use of wood biomass in full compliance with its regeneration times and encourages efficient use in line with the cascade principle. In addition, it provides for the development of payment schemes to forest owners and managers to provide alternative ecosystem services (conservation and afforestation practices), which will also be reflected in the National Strategic Plans of the new CAP. Finally, the strategy is accompanied by a roadmap that foresees the planting of three billion additional trees across Europe by 2030. COPA-COGECA and European forestry organizations commented on the strategy stating that the principle of multifunctionality should have be taken into greater consideration as well as the role played by forestry operators. According to some experts, the conservation approach of the Communication could complicate the active management of wooded areas for European foresters.

The voice of European Bioenergy - A letter on the Revision of the Climate, Energy and Environmental Aid Guidelines

According to the point of view of Bioenergy Europe*, the Revision of the Climate, Energy and Environmental Aid Guidelines is "unfair treatment of biomass". For this reason - through its extensive network of contacts in all EU Member States - it has addressed an appeal to the national administration (Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Climate, Ministry of Development, etc). The salient points are listed below: "Anticipating the imminent adaptation of the revised CEEAG, which is expected in the first half of December, Bioenergy Europe would like to raise concern about the number of provisions which could result in detrimental effects for the sector; impose additional administrative burden on Member States and could ultimately delay the achievement of the EU's climate and energy objectives.

We would like to draw your attention to the unprecedented establishment of the differentiation between renewable energy technologies by introducing the term 'zero air pollution renewable energy sources'. Such an approach is neither coherent with existing EU legislation and the definition of renewable energy sources provided by the Renewable Energy Directive (2018/2001 EU) nor with the proposed revision of the same directive published last July. This new definition discriminates the use of the largest source of the renewable energy in the EU putting it in the same category as fossil fuels.

We are also concerned by the provisions imposing additional administrative burden on Member States related to state aid for sustainable bioenergy. In particular, the annual reporting on the assessment of the production costs, on which the amount of aid covering short-term costs of biomass fuel is based, would discourage the implementation of efficient support schemes, and negatively discriminate the sector compared to other renewables and energy sources. A similar provision introduces the necessity for Member States to establish a verification mechanism concerning tax reductions for biofuels, bioliquids and biomass fuels assessing if the measure is still needed".

Bioenergy EUROPE

** A non-profit, Brussels-based trade associations bringing together 180 members, including companies, academia, and research institutes from across the European Union*

The biomass-energy system requires a systemic approach*

“Biomass is a very broad category that includes every organic substance of biological origin, in non-fossil form, produced directly or indirectly by photosynthesis and usable for the production of energy or as raw material in the biobased industry. It is a renewable and widely available resource both in the form of residues (agricultural, forestry, industrial or civil) and in agro-forestry products from dedicated crops. Depending on its intrinsic characteristics, it can be used for different transformation processes.

The biomass-bioenergy system is complex and therefore always requires a systemic approach. Bioenergy, considered as the set of technologies that can be used for the production of energy or energy carriers starting from biomass, today represents the renewable energy source that provides the most important contribution to the final energy consumption of many countries. This is above all because bioenergy is the only one of all RES that can meet energy demands in the form of electricity, heat and transport fuels.

Bioenergy is therefore a fundamental component of today's energy mix and also of the trend one: the programmability and versatility of this source make it functional to the transition towards an increasingly renewable generation model participated by consumers. The environmental benefits of bioenergy are equally remarkable and need to be analysed with specific reference to the raw materials and conversion technologies used. The production of energy from biomass can rely on mature technologies and a solid industrial background, consisting of thousands of plants, mostly of medium-small size, scattered throughout Europe. Bioenergy is a continuous and programmable but not inexhaustible renewable source. Therefore, the use of biomass for energy purposes only has value if it is fully sustainable ".

**Text extracted from the introduction, written by Vito Pignatelli (President of ITABIA - Italian Biomass Association), of the recent Position Paper "The contribution of energy from Biomass to the ecological transition process" launched on 27 October 2021 as part of the ECOMONDO event.*

The 2021 Agricultural Outlook conference

The Conference, now in its eighth edition, will take place online on 9 and 10 December and the theme of this year's event is 'Fit for 2030 – resilient EU agri-food systems and rural areas'.

The conference will examine what we can expect global agricultural markets to look like in 2030, in light of the political and market uncertainty currently facing the agricultural sector. Will food systems be more resilient following the Covid-19 pandemic? Will the new common agricultural policy effectively encourage farmers across Europe to embrace the green transition?

Senior representatives from EU bodies and international organisations, farmers, agricultural experts and rural actors will come together to discuss these questions, as well as the broader medium-term outlook for agricultural markets, income and environment.

The EU Agricultural Outlook conference has become a successful annual event for broad exchanges among stakeholders on market prospects in agriculture, including the political framework and uncertainties surrounding market developments in the next 10 years. Each year the conference coincides with the release of the annual report on market prospects.

For more informations: https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/sustainable-development-goals/2021-eu-agricultural-outlook-conference-2021-dec-09_en