



# NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION

## TWENTY-THIRD SESSION

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### IMPLEMENTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, INCLUDING THROUGH NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES

#### I. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

1. In September 2015 Heads of State and Government adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, establishing a global mandate for action towards sustainability and resilience. The agreed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out objectives, which altogether should conduct the world to more equitable progress and well-being. The 2030 Agenda recognizes the need for coordinated cross-sectoral action for achieving the SDGs. The SDGs build on the lessons from the Millennium Development Goals, in an effort to eradicate poverty. The goals are not divisible or to be pursued in isolation. In fact, they call for understanding of the multiple dimensions of sustainable development, while emphasizing the role of the different stakeholders and the relevance of partnerships. In this context, policy frameworks designed to meet the 2030 Agenda necessarily need to be formulated through multi-stakeholder processes that take into consideration linkages and synergies among sectors.

2. Coordination of policy objectives, such as the improvement of food security and the reduction of deforestation has become more important in context of the 2030 Agenda. As highlighted by the 23<sup>rd</sup> session of FAO Committee on Forestry in 2016, forests are relevant for most of the SDGs through the provision of a range of social, economic and environmental benefits that contribute to sustainable livelihoods, income and employment generation, food production, more resilient and sustainable production and consumption systems and combatting climate change. Mainstreaming sustainable forest management (SFM) is, therefore, one of the key requirements for meeting the needs of sustainable development.

3. The critical importance of forests for the SDGs has been fully recognized by the global forest community, leading to the expansion of the four Global Objectives on Forests established by the United Nations Forum on Forests in 2006. In 2017, the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) was

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agreed, extending the four objectives to six Global Forest Goals<sup>1</sup>, including two cross-cutting goals related to governance and coordination (see document FO:NEFRC/2017/7).

4. To measure progress while decreasing reporting burden on countries FAO leads an initiative to develop a global core set of forest-related indicators by a number of organizations (mostly members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests) and processes (see document FO:NEFRC/2017/4). This global core-set will help reporting on progress towards some of the targets of the 2030 Agenda and the UNSPF, in particular those related to sustainable forest management (including SDG 15.2.1) as well as other internationally agreed goals on forests.

## II. NATIONAL FOREST POLICIES AS A FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS

5. "The SDGs are truly transformative, they are interlinked, calling for new combinations in the way policies, programmes, partnerships and investments pull together to achieve our common goals"<sup>2</sup>. To achieve the global transition to sustainable development, countries are now establishing an enabling environment – policies, institutions and governance frameworks aiming at achieving stronger coherence in policies and actions across all levels and scales, from local to global and across various sectors.

6. The FAO promoted National Forest Programme/NFP<sup>3</sup> - governance<sup>4</sup> framework approach to the development and review of national forest policies allows for a better integration of various SDGs in the policy documents through enhancing cross-sectoral coordination and involvement of non-state and marginalized stakeholders, inclusiveness, gender equity, support in income generation from the use of forest products and decent employment; and through promotion of ecosystem services and conservation of biodiversity. A sustainable forest management objective has placed on national policymakers responsibility to craft and rebalance policy priorities and open forest policy formulation process to participation of various stakeholders.

7. In response to this challenge countries have adopted the national forest programmes framework (NFPs) as the main approach to developing forest policies since the 1990s. NFP, as agreed in the international dialogue on forests, denotes a comprehensive forest policy framework built on a number of specific principles, including national sovereignty, country leadership, integration within and beyond the forest sector, participation and partnership (Box 1). Nowadays NFPs may be also understood as a comprehensive forest governance framework based on governance principles and iterative participatory processes. In this sense NFPs encompass the whole policy cycle (with policy definition, implementation, monitoring, evaluation/review and adaptation/re-orientation) as well as other forest related initiatives and actions in the countries.

### Box 1: National Forest Policy and National Forest Programme

NFP framework builds on the iterative process of developing/revising and implementing national forest policies and translating international commitments into action on the ground. In this regard, many countries establish platforms, forest forums or similar multi-stakeholder mechanisms as an integral part of the framework.

In practice terms “policy” and “strategy/programme” are frequently used interchangeably. A programme is often considered more of a long-term master-plan to implement policy or strategy. A national forest policy is defined as “a negotiated agreement among stakeholders on a common

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/UNSPF\\_AdvUnedited.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/UNSPF_AdvUnedited.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> FAO 2016 - Key to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

<sup>3</sup> <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/012/a0826e/a0826e00.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2227e/i2227e00.pdf>

vision and goals for a country's forests and trees, adopted by the government. It provides key strategic policy guidance and should be short and easy for a broad spectrum of society to understand."<sup>5</sup>

8. National forest policies need to be clearly linked with national development priorities and to highlight the cross-cutting role of natural resources for economic growth, social inclusiveness, and environmental sustainability. At the same time, in order to fulfil international commitments more fully and satisfy monitoring and reporting requirements, it is recommendable that national policy makers update their policies and include priorities and objectives responding to the Global Forest Goals, elements of sustainable forest management and corresponding criteria and indicators (C&I).

9. Indicators for SFM have been developed by different international processes during the last decades and have recently become part of the monitoring and reporting framework for the Sustainable Development Goals. In an attempt to harmonize the criteria and indicator processes, seven thematic areas emerged that encompass the three pillars of sustainability (Table 1). The elements of SFM cover both the ecological and biophysical side of forests (the extent of the forest resource; biological diversity within the forest; forest health and vitality; and the protective functions of forests), and the socioeconomic aspects of forests (the productive functions of forests, the socioeconomic functions of forests, and legal, policy and institutional frameworks).

*Table 1. Thematic elements of Sustainable Forest Management. Source: UNFF E/2007/42.*

<i>SFM element</i>	<i>Details</i>
<i>The extent of the forest resource</i>	Relates to the overall aim of maintaining adequate forest resources to support the social, economic and environmental objectives related to forests and forestry in a country/region
<i>Biological diversity within the forest</i>	Biological diversity encompasses the variety of existing life forms, the ecological roles they perform and the genetic diversity they contain
<i>Forest health and vitality</i>	Forests are adversely affected by a variety of pests, diseases, climatic events, and natural disturbances, which all impact on the structure and function of the forest
<i>The productive functions of forests</i>	Reflects the economic and social value of forest resources to both forest-dependent communities and national economies
<i>Protective functions of forests</i>	Forests can be managed with soil and water conservation as the main objective, or as an indirect benefit of SFM
<i>Socio-economic functions of forests</i>	A variety of products and services are provided by forests, some easily quantifiable, others less tangible
<i>Legal, policy and institutional frameworks</i>	Forms the normative basis for SFM and provides the enabling environment for implementation

10. By addressing each element within the objectives of their forest policy, countries can use this information for national forest sector development, to ensure an all-encompassing approach to the forest sector management and natural resource management at large.

11. Governance can provide the framework that allows aims and objectives to be set and achieved and will be crucial for progress on SDGs. The use of forest policies as a basis for contributing to the achievement of the SDGs will require policies that employ evidence-based decision-making, as well as

<sup>5</sup> Developing effective forest policy. FAO, 2010

being open to the views and perceptions of stakeholders, accounting for their priorities. In addition, forest policies should look to coordinate with other sectors to maximise synergies in priorities, in particular between the land-use sectors.

12. The global core set of forest-related indicators comprehensively cover the seven thematic elements of SFM, and help countries report on eventual progress towards the implementation of SFM, as it contributes to the achievement of other agreements and goals. It represents an opportunity for countries willing to embrace governance principles and fully introduce them into their policy frameworks, as streamlined monitoring and reporting will encourage transparency and evidence-based decision making in the forest sector..

### **III. FAO SUPPORT TO ENHANCED NATIONAL FOREST POLICIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE SDG**

13. In 2016, FAO conducted a study to assess the capacity of current forest policies to contribute to the SDGs and, in particular, to deliver Goal 15 that requires to “sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss”. The study assessed whether the texts of national forest policies contained SFM objectives and governance principles and if there was an association between the presence of these factors and forest cover changes in the country. It was assumed that policies are going to be more effective when they contain enabling factors, specifically, the thematic elements of SFM and adherence to governance principles. Of the 30 countries studied, just over 40 percent had forest policies with all seven thematic elements of SFM present, increasing to over 80 percent when at least elements were present. In contrast, reference to governance principles for effective policy is less evident in policy documents (only 27 percent of sample countries contained all principles) as they are much more difficult to identify. Progress towards the achievement of the SDGs will demand stronger policy frameworks with carefully designed implementation mechanisms that can address all dimensions of SFM.

14. In 2016-2017 two member countries of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission, Jordan and Kyrgyzstan, have been directly supported by FAO through technical cooperation projects (TCPs) in reviewing and aligning their national forest policies with SDGs with involvement of multiple stakeholders and coordination with relevant sectors. Implementation of the new national forest policy’s priorities will contribute to the achievement of the nationally defined INDCs and national development strategies: the “Jordan’s Way to Sustainable Development” in Jordan and the Concept for sustainable development of Kyrgyzstan 2040; National Development Programme 2018-2022; and National Programme “40 steps” in Kyrgyzstan. In both countries, the revised forest policy priorities also reflect the Global Forest Goals and SFM criteria and indicators.

### **IV. POINT FOR CONSIDERATION**

15. At the national level, continued efforts need to be made to increase consistency of forest policies with SFM elements and ensure that they fully consider governance principles. In addition, coordination with other sectors in policy development and implementation is necessary to increase their effectiveness.

16. The Commission may wish to invite countries to:

- update/review their national forest policies in order to enhance their contribution to the achievement of SDGs;
- Encourage and promote SFM so that every aspect of sustainable management is accounted for in the related policies;
- Use the global core set of forest-related indicators as well as C&I for more evidence-based policy making, review and adaptation;
- Seek cross-sectoral coordination in policy implementation to avoid contradictory actions;

- Ensure that policy implementation mechanisms including legal and financial instruments are designed as practical and relevant tools that facilitate the achievement of policy objectives;
- Align forest policy objectives to broader national development priorities;
- Continuously monitor and review policies to reflect changing national development priorities, as well as international priorities as they emerge, including current priorities such as the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

17. The Commission may wish to request FAO to continue to support countries' efforts on the above areas.