National forest assessments and policy influence

This chapter presents the background and objectives of national forest assessments (NFAs), treating them as important tools to influence or monitor policy processes. It also discusses how national policies affect the NFA process.

The chapter also describes the past and present role of NFAs and potential future trends regarding NFA utilization. The synergistic relationships between ecological, economic and social functions of forests are considered, for example investment opportunities in concerned countries and the importance of cost benefit analyses for NFAs.

Lastly, the following questions are explored:
- Why have some aspects of the situation not changed over the years? For example, why is important information still missing and why is existing information not used?
- Are politicians interested in solid data and expert estimations?
- Is more information needed and, if so, what type of information?
- What issues should NFAs avoid?
- How will the increasing emphasis on the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) influence NFAs?

Forestry is not about trees, it is about people. And it is about trees only insofar as trees can serve the needs of people. (Jack Westoby)

1. Introduction

The collection, analysis and use of information at national and provincial level are strategic in nature. The information is used primarily in the development, implementation and monitoring of national forest policies and sector strategies. At present, however, many countries exhibit serious shortcomings in
the supply and use of information required for forestry policy-making. The principal weakness is often a failure to link the supply of information (the producer) to demand (the user). In many cases, collected data remain little used, while policies, strategies and plans are developed in the absence of solid information. In many developing countries, information is still gathered along traditional lines and is often inadequate, largely because donor-driven inventories neglect to undertake analyses of actual needs.

Demand for forest information is also changing. Historically, forest inventories have focused on variables of major interest for commercial timber exploitation, such as growing stock and increment. However, the last 20 years have seen increased interest across most countries in other forest values, such as biodiversity conservation, water quantity and quality, benefits and impacts of forest management, erosion or flood protection, carbon sequestration, recreation, and aesthetic, spiritual and wilderness values. Rapid urbanization in many parts of the world is also altering the relationship between society and forests, with new urban populations demanding different types of goods and services. Native forests are becoming less important for wood production and many countries are aiming to produce the bulk of their required wood within relatively small areas of intensively managed plantations. As a consequence, broader “natural resource management” issues, such as biodiversity conservation, water and carbon sequestration, are nowadays often more important to policymakers than wood supply information.

Policy-makers also need a broad range of data for forest policy and management decisions. This requires assessment of a variety of areas, including: the social and economic dependence of communities on forests, the commercial and subsistence uses of timber and non-timber forest products, forest ecosystems important for conservation planning (including factors such as floristics, structure, age classes and disturbance history), recreation, heritage and other cultural values placed on forests in addition to potential wood supply. These assessments also require new tools that allow integration and analysis of data from different disciplines and sources.

This chapter argues inter alia that the gap between supply and demand of information cannot be remedied by improving the supply side alone (e.g. by introducing or improving national forest inventories); it is also the result of shortcomings on the demand side. As such, it is important to improve policy processes, including administrative environments that affect the production, flow and handling of information. Involving producers and users of data in this process is crucial.

This chapter also examines key questions relating to inventories: Why are inventories needed (including a focus on problem formulation)? What kind of information is needed? How can the links between information provision and policy-making be improved?

Interest in forest inventories has increased significantly in recent years, due in part to the establishment of REDD (Reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation) process agreements. Schemes now exist to strengthen capacity to carry out forest inventories in developing countries, based on new and foreseen national and global requirements for the future.

2. Why is knowledge of forest resources still poor?

Shortcomings in forestry-related statistics seem to have a range of explanations, but are seldom due to lack of techniques. Rather, the interest in using newly developed techniques carries a risk that forest inventories may become technique-driven instead of demand-driven, and focus on using the latest techniques instead of answering key questions.

Most of the shortcomings seem to be related to poor links between supply and demand of information. Some common problems in this
• Mechanisms to formulate policy-relevant questions are lacking.
• The information presented is supply-driven. Inventories are undertaken based on procedures without proper analysis of the questions that need answering. As a result they tend to provide answers to irrelevant questions. Failure to identify actual needs is one of the main reasons why the information obtained is not fully used.
• Inventories are carried out under pressure from donors. In such cases they tend to be one-time undertakings and as such do not provide often-needed information on changes. In addition, few attempts are made to update the results.
• Inventories are sometimes undertaken on the basis of spurious or exaggerated claims that they are a necessary preliminary step to bringing forests under management.
• In some cases, information is kept secret or in closed government files.

Another category of problems relates to poor appreciation of the importance of information and inadequate allocation of resources for this purpose:
• Inventories are one-time undertakings that soon become outdated.
• There is a shortage of qualified personnel (lack of “capacity”).
• Available qualified personnel are not given appropriate positions.
• It is difficult and expensive to collect information about forest use.

Finally, a number of problems relate to a lack of national commitment. The degree of commitment is influenced by many factors. One important consideration is the belief that knowledge is power. In many countries authorities may not want the true situation to be known as they may have vested interests, things to conceal, or may want to make claims unsupported by statistics. For example:
• Some countries with high deforestation rates may not want to publish the real figures to avoid criticism.
• Conversely, other countries may want to show the highest possible deforestation rates, in order to obtain increased support for forestry.
• Countries may not always want to publish plantation results because of failures that some officials may prefer to conceal.
• Significant levels of illegal felling may take place with the connivance of the forest authorities, who consequently may have limited interest in ascertaining the actual rate of use of forests.

In some cases, poor statistics are the outcome of suppression of information on the part of interested and powerful parties. In most countries, there is therefore a need to analyse the interests of different groups in relation to improving or suppressing statistics. Sometimes forces working against improvement may be so strong that any attempt to upgrade the statistical base will fail.

Alternatively, many forests have not been surveyed because they have limited commercial production potential or because the cost of extensive assessment is not justified by the extent of commercial resources. However, such forests are often important in terms of other social values, as described above. The declining contribution of native forests to timber production is also causing a reduction in the financial resources allocated to surveys of the extent and condition of these forests, despite their importance for other values. Emphasizing the economic value of forest products such as water, biodiversity or carbon sequestration, so as to justify investment in inventory, assessment and monitoring, can be a challenge for some forest managers.

3. Why is information needed?

The need for national-level information is driven mainly by the development of forest sector policies and strategies, their application
and the monitoring of their effects. If these needs are met, other needs may also be covered, for example:
- Fulfilling international commitments, for example, to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).
- Responding to concerns expressed nationally and internationally for improved forest management and protection of forests.
- Providing information to market actors and other stakeholders, for example, to underpin forest certification or other processes aimed at demonstrating the quality of forest management in a country.

3.1 The policy process

The question of “why” is therefore linked to the role of information in the policy process. The political process is emphasized here for the reason that national-level information becomes meaningful only if a functioning policy process exists in the country. Theoretically, the policy process should precede information acquisition, whereas in practice the two are often developed simultaneously. The policy process should include a number of steps, as follows:
- Public debate (“political” or “scientific”).
- Identifying problems and potentials.
- Designing options for (political) action.
- Analysing the consequences of such action (see p. 6).
- Decision-making (which option to choose).
- Implementation (see p. 9).
- Monitoring (see p. 9).

This political process allows new objectives (the “national will”) and new policies (the way to reach these objectives) to be formed. A crucial element is information about the supply and demand of forest products and services. Various studies are required, for example, to investigate the current situation and the need to adjust objectives, and to analyse the consequences of alternative policies.

As a rule, stakeholders should be involved throughout the process and great emphasis should be placed on consensus building, as stronger consensus leads to easier implementation. Governments change frequently but forestry is a long-term undertaking. As such, it is desirable that no drastic changes in policy occur after each election or change of government.

Feedback information is needed throughout all steps of the process. The general public as well as other stakeholders can only participate meaningfully if accurate information exists. The following list proposes issues for consensus building in a prescribed sequence:
- Basic facts about forest resources and their utilization;
- The nature of the main political problems;
- The options available to solve the problems;
- The consequences of different political programmes; and
- Decisions on which political action to take.

In this sequence of steps, consensus building becomes progressively more difficult, and the information required becomes increasingly complex. For example, analysing the consequences of alternative actions demands high-quality information and the ability to interpret it.

In practice, full consensus is hardly ever reached. In cases of disagreement, consensus should at least be sought over the nature of the disputed issues. Disagreement is often the result of varying perceptions with different participants viewing the same information in alternate ways depending on their own experience or situation.

It is important to emphasize that national policies and programmes for the forest sector must be integrated into national objectives and policies. If sector policies consider only sector objectives the result may be conflicting
programmes between different sectors. Even if policies are well integrated conflicts can occur, but such conflicts can be brought into the open and discussed. Conflicts about objectives are difficult to avoid.

In general, national objectives cover components such as employment, price stability, economic growth, balance of payments and income distribution. Statements of these objectives, in turn, lead to the establishment of national policies in the fields of environment and forestry. Forest policy should aim to fulfil the goals of society (and not just goals relating to forestry).

The notion of the political process as a starting point, responsible for identifying and specifying information needs, may seem too theoretical. In fact, both the political process and a system of forest information gathering are usually in place; what is needed is to link them together and make them work in a cycle. This can be done in different ways. In the Swedish example, such a link has been established through an Analysis Unit based at the Forest Agency (see section 6 of this chapter and section 2.4 of Chapter 2).

Sometimes the political process goes astray and opinions are created based on poor information. If this occurs, changing political opinion may prove difficult or impossible, even with accurate information. It is important therefore to have accurate information to hand at the start of the process. Transparency is also crucial in the political process so that those involved in information gathering can judge what information will be needed.

**BOX 1**

**The political process - a national example**

Once a forestry-related problem or issue (often a conflict) is identified and the government considers that political action is required, it appoints a commission of inquiry composed of parliamentarians representing the major political factions and advisers and experts representing government agencies, organizations and NGOs (stakeholders) who may be affected by the decisions taken. The commission undertakes a public investigation into the specified issue, following directives given by the government. It is given resources to commission ad hoc studies, appoint additional ad hoc experts and seek the opinion of stakeholders as needed. Its report is made public and actively circulated to stakeholders for their review. The report with the reviewers’ comments becomes the basis for a government proposal to Parliament. Parliamentary decisions then provide a framework (e.g. a new law) within which designated authorities will supply the details (e.g. rules and regulations) required for its implementation. An informal process involves stakeholders, chiefly forest owners, in negotiations about the practicalities. This process is important for acceptance and smooth implementation, and facilitates the correction of any policy elements found to be inappropriate.

Source: Ekelund & Dahlin 1997
4. What information is needed?

4.1 General overview

As a matter of principle, data collection should be demand driven. The set of information to be gathered and analysed should be defined by need, rather than by ease of measurement with available techniques. Demand could be the result of an in-country analysis of national priorities, but could also evolve from agreements and negotiations between countries on international requirements. In reality, good practice requires that the development of NFAs and the collection of statistics be iterative processes. Sometimes the NFA will respond to a known demand, sometimes it will anticipate demand.

A practical way to approach the question of what information to collect is to identify what data are needed to analyse the consequences of political action (see below). This kind of analysis is highly demanding in terms of information. Data that satisfy these needs will likely satisfy most other needs.

One type of information that can be difficult to assess in this context is information on changes. This is crucial both for monitoring the results of new policies and strategies and the implementation of programmes.

It will also become apparent that some of the relevant questions cut across sectors and are not always considered part of forest administrations. Information acquisition for forestry planning involves far more than forest inventory. Some examples include:

- Information on the use of forest-derived goods and services
- Trade with such goods and services
- Contribution of such goods and services to the economy of rural households
- Employment statistics
- Stakeholder behaviours and expected reactions to policy instruments
- Greenhouse gas emissions and removals by forests and forestry.

Obviously, much of the information needed in the policy-making context is difficult to assess. In view of this, not all information needs will be met immediately. It is more realistic to assume a step-by-step improvement process. To begin with, it may be more important to formulate questions than to answer them. The needs for information will also vary from country to country and from case to case and should be considered with care.

Finally, a number of international processes have developed criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management for different forest types. In some cases, such as the Montreal and Helsinki Processes, these have settled on relatively detailed sets of indicators. Countries involved can choose those relevant to their circumstances and report them at a national level and in some cases at sub-national levels. In the process developed for tropical forest countries by the ITTO, the approach has been to develop a methodology to allow interest groups nationally or in a local area to determine those indicators of forest management most important to them. Indeed, international agreements tend to become increasingly influential on forest data requirements and also require countries to work actively to harmonize estimates, so as to ensure comparability across countries.

4.2 Analyses of consequences of optional policies or actions

Analyses of consequences are a key part of the political process. They consider action programmes that have been designed as different options, and simulate or predict what will happen if a given programme is implemented. The analysis of consequences as outlined here is often complex and very demanding in terms of basic data and techniques.

Scenario-modelling techniques are increasingly used for this type of analysis.
This section discusses a few complementary aspects of scenarios. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see Chapter 11.

The political process begins with the identification of a problem. In the case of forestry, this could be deforestation, the poor condition of young forests, conflicting claims on land in certain landscape types or the loss of sources of non-timber forest products, among others. To address the problem a number of potential solutions are proposed (e.g. different programmes to promote the establishment of young forests of better quality). These may include legislation, research, special monitoring inventories, information campaigns and financial incentives. The consequences of each option (including inaction) then need to be estimated.

At this point it is important to mention the concept of production and consumption studies, developed by Nilsson (1978). These have provided key conceptual inputs into "analyses of consequences". A number of aspects can be emphasized:

- Studies in connection with forest policy development often focus on potential cut, allowable cut or similar quantifications of the supply side. In the policy context such studies become meaningful only if related (in comparable terms) to the demand side (e.g. fellings, removals or consumption). This also applies to non-wood goods and services.
- Realistic scenarios of future developments are possible only if current land use is known and well quantified. In addition, readers will understand forecast changes only insofar as they relate to a known starting situation.
- “Current land use” here includes knowledge of competing claims on land. In relation to forests this includes wood as well as non-wood goods and services.

4.3 Types of information commonly needed

This section presents a commentary on the information components needed in many planning and policy-making situations encountered in the context of forestry. Such a list will always be incomplete and should therefore be viewed as an initial checklist.

Land use
Conflict often arises over different land uses. It is important, therefore, to collect information about current land usage. Land can sometimes be used for wood and agricultural production at the same time.

Forest use
Most forestry practices aim to produce goods and services that people need. It is important to have information on quantities, patterns and trends in the production and consumption of forest products and their associated trade. At present, figures concerning, for example, exploitation may be only guesstimates, reflecting the formal level of allowable cut but bearing little relation to reality. It is also important to possess information about non-wood commodities and services derived from forests.

The present state of the forests
This is basic information collected in most traditional inventories. A characteristic of key importance is the capacity of forests to fulfil their functions. Normally, information needs concern areas, topography, ownership, accessibility, volumes and growth. More recently, information has been collected on forest types and ecosystem descriptions for conservation planning, including age information for “old growth” or primary forests.

Change
Policy-making usually requires information on changes over time, rather than mere status information. Only repeated or “continuous” inventories can provide such information of good quality. Comparability and accuracy are of critical importance in such inventories. It must be understood that continuous inventories imply secured, long-term funding and a stable organization. Most countries that
maintain continuous inventories have taken decades to build up the organization in charge.

**Plantedations**
In many countries, especially in tropical/sub-tropical regions, plantations are established for specific purposes and are often intensively managed for fast growth and high yield (usually exotics). In the future, most wood is expected to come from plantations. More recently, forest land in many countries (e.g. China, Viet Nam) has been distributed over a large scale to smallholder farmers and private entities with multiple objectives. In spite of this, information about plantations is frequently inadequate. The information needs for plantations are typically concerned with purpose, planted area by year, ownership and tenure arrangements, whether on previous forest or non-forest land, site class, species, survival, age, density, health and felling records.

**Trees outside of forests**
Trees outside of forests are an important forest resource. In a number of countries and regions (e.g. Bangladesh, Java, India, Pakistan) studies have shown that the majority of forest products originate from this resource (FAO/RWEDP, 1997). In spite of this, failure to collect information about trees outside of forests is a major flaw in many inventories.

**The role of forests for local communities**
In most developing countries rural people have traditionally depended on forests to a certain extent. "Industrial forestry" has evolved more recently, but there is a growing policy trend to let rural people benefit from nearby forest and tree resources (e.g. community forestry and farm-based forestry). This development brings a wide array of new information needs. In many countries, the knowledge and understanding of socio-economic issues in relation to forest use is insufficient among governments or forest management authorities. As such, the development of policies to strengthen the beneficial role of forests for rural communities and enable these communities to participate in sustainable forest management can prove challenging.

**Other issues**
A variety of traditional types of forest information have been mentioned above. There is, however, an increasing need for other types of information, for example, on biological diversity, availability, ownership including tenure, naturalness, protection status, forest health, forest fires, non-wood forest products, environmental benefits (e.g. hydrological effects), criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. Appropriate inventory methods are not in place for some of these information types.

**Carbon**
The increased attention granted to carbon and hydrological services has provided opportunities to obtain payment for environmental services. In recent years, carbon sequestration has been presented on several occasions as the most important forest product. In the future this might cause significant changes to forestry and forest inventories.

**4.4 Considerations before data collection**
Assuming that the information needs are known, the primary consideration will be to ascertain what information is already available. Organizing this existing information may be a tedious process, but can save money and time. As a minimum, this task requires good archiving and retrieval systems.

A second consideration is the degree of accuracy needed for the intended purpose. A key question is what will be the consequence of an error of a certain size?

A third consideration is the amount of work possible with the available resources. If a new national or province-level inventory is deemed necessary, the relevance of the following characteristics to the policy issues can be considered:
• One-time versus continuous inventories;
• Local inventories versus large-scale, sampling-based inventories;
• Field observations versus remote sensing; and
• Inventories of forest resources versus information gathering on economic, social and administrative topics.

5. What follows decision-making?

5.1 Implementation

Governments and parliaments take decisions about new policies and strategies for forestry. The process that follows may take different shapes, depending on the circumstances. The following steps usually form part of the process:

• Legislation. Usually a new policy necessitates passing new laws. These laws need to be accompanied by regulations that specify the exact implications in quantitative and measurable terms.
• Revision of organizational and administrative structures. A new policy may require the adjustment of existing structures or the creation of new ones, for example, in order to prepare the ground for substantially increased extension services.
• Financial arrangements. A new forest policy may have far-reaching consequences for funding, subsidies, fees and taxation, which in turn may imply a need for further legislation and new budget arrangements.
• Getting the message out. Conveying the necessary messages to all concerned may require a substantial information campaign.

Many examples can be found in which good forest policies and strategies were developed, but little happened on the ground. In any case, implementation takes time and nothing will happen unless action is firm and well planned.

5.2 Monitoring

Once new policies and strategies have been implemented their impact must be monitored. Are the policies successful? What problems have been encountered? How have the forests developed? In most cases the actual developments will differ from the expected outcomes to a greater or lesser degree.

Substantial monitoring information can be collected by an NFA. However, it must be complemented in most cases by studies on specific aspects, such as the success of plantations, biological diversity, zoning for recreation and influence on local people.

Results from monitoring (and independent) studies are likely to lead to a public, scientific and political debate. In due time this will lead to requests for changes in the policy or part of the policy. The whole process will then commence a new cycle (or continue the previous one).

6. Linking information collection and forest policy

The planning and policy-making processes in the field of forestry often suffer from a lack of timely, accurate and relevant information. Among the many reasons the following could be highlighted:

• Much information may be present but fails to answer the key questions.
• Information exists but is scattered and spread across many institutions.
• Collected information has been lost or become inaccessible due to lack of good archiving systems.
• Planners and policy-makers have encountered difficulties in tracking and interpreting available information.

These issues raise the following questions: How can data collection focus on policy-relevant questions? How can existing information be organized to ensure its availability whenever and wherever it is needed? How can raw data be made available
to planners and policy-makers in a form that they can understand and use?

Based on the Swedish experience, an analysis unit may sometimes be an appropriate solution. This unit undertakes a set of tasks that link together supply and demand for information (or information gathering and policy-making). The tasks can be collected under one administrative unit or spread over several units that work together. The analysis unit would remain in close touch with policy-makers, so that it can aid in identifying key questions that need answers. It would also stay in constant communication with the data collection process, so that it can retrieve and organize existing information, identify gaps and collate relevant material for use in policy and decision-making. It would have the capability to identify sources of information, understand source information and prepare analyses. The presence of the Analysis Unit would facilitate dialogue between users and producers of information, making information gathering more demand-driven. By assisting policy and decision-makers on request with tailor-made information and studies, the unit would also acquire knowledge of the problems and needs of the user community. In addition, by interacting with data-collating organizations it could feed back to them its knowledge of current and emerging information needs. It can also advise on needs for new research. The main tasks of an Analysis Unit are as follows:

- To undertake work to identify “topical” forestry issues;
- To create and maintain an overview of forestry-related information, which may be scattered in many places (e.g. information on the supply and demand of forest products and services, or on employment in forestry);
- To undertake ad hoc studies to support the formulation and implementation of forest policy, in particular analyses of the consequences of political action;
- To specify information needs that are not being met, based on contacts with users;
- To supply users with tailor-made information based on contacts with data producers – in particular, information compiled from different sources and presented in a consistent form;
- To promote and ensure comparability between information originating from different sources;
- To compile and disseminate standard information relating to the forest sector, for example, in statistical yearbooks;
- To take responsibility for the international exchange of information; and
- To analyse the consequences of various policies and actions.

The Swedish experience shows that long-term political commitment is necessary to make such a unit work well and that it takes decades to build up the necessary expertise. Good contacts with research are also needed. The creation of an analysis unit is often a process of adapting existing organizational structures. In some cases, the ideal method is to concentrate existing scattered activities in one place. The best approach may be to assign the described tasks to an identified group that is sufficiently large to build up an institutional memory. The importance of institutional memory cannot be sufficiently stressed. This remark applies to forest inventory work as well as to data analysis. In administrative environments with frequent changes of personnel it is very difficult to build capacity and progressively accumulate the knowledge that is needed.

An analysis unit also ought to be as independent as possible. Examples exist of units established in universities or government agencies. In many developing countries the university option may be a good solution, although it will require specific funding commitment and support on the part of the government as universities rarely have the resources to collect and store data, although other types of capacity are often available. However, the unit will require close contact with the forest administration to function, and this may not always be possible if a university
location is adopted.

However, the process described above differs significantly from common practice and experience. More or less sophisticated national forest inventories are often undertaken, but their usefulness is unclear. In a typical example, the original reason for undertaking the inventory may have been a forest policy problem such as deforestation and degradation. Combating this problem is a complex matter that affects many sectors of the economy and involves changing the living conditions and behaviour of many people. There is a general notion that more information is needed. In this situation it is only too tempting to request a forest inventory without detailing the precise questions the inventory is supposed to answer. There is then a great risk of the inventory being planned as a one-shot operation that will produce information of little use to the political process. It may give an impression of activity, and may be attractive to donors, but it has little chance of producing the knowledge base that is needed to develop and apply well-targeted policies.

In principle, an analysis unit (regardless of where it is located and how it is organized) is necessary for successful policy-making. It is not enough, though. Commitment to improve policies and make the necessary changes is also necessary. Moreover, the administration in general must also be competent and the administrative set-up suitable. (For more information on how to establish an analysis unit within an NFA organization, see section 2.4 in the chapter on Organization and implementation, p. 17.)

7. Emerging requirements

This chapter argues that a national analysis unit is needed to identify the key forestry questions and the information needed to answer them. The key questions will vary between countries and so will the information. Minor adjustments can of course be needed to meet some of the questions raised by e.g. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' s Global forest assessment (FAO's FRA).

Recent years have seen a rise in the importance of carbon sequestration as one of the main forestry products. This could mean a drastic change for forest inventories. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) will identify the key questions relating to forests and may select the methods used to obtain the necessary information. The requirements of REDD and UNFCC may become so dominant that national needs may be overshadowed.

The new requirements will place more emphasis on continuous inventories and environmental monitoring and change information will become of increasing importance. New techniques may be developed that aim primarily at collecting information about carbon. However, there will almost always be a requirement for broader knowledge of forests than carbon stocks.

The development of REDD will not mean that the importance of national NFAs and analysis units will decrease, rather their importance will increase. Overly strong emphasis on the needs of REDD may leave many information gaps for traditional forestry. Furthermore, REDD may not generate equal attention and concern in all countries. If REDD is developing as optimists believe, this chapter will possibly have to be reformulated completely. As it stands, national needs must still be considered to be of primary concern for NFAs.

8. Conclusions

- Forest sector policies must be seen as an integrated part of overall national policies. Forest policies cannot be developed in isolation. There is a need for cross-sector cooperation.
- When dealing with information gathering, questions of a policy nature should be identified as a first step.
The collection of information (e.g. a national forest inventory) should follow thereafter.

- In most countries there is a need to analyse the interests of different stakeholders with regard to improved statistics on forestry.
- Countries should recognize the importance to policy-making and planning of information about the use of forests, change, plantations, trees outside of forests, non-wood forest products and the role of forests for local communities.
- Countries will need to establish an analysis unit in order to identify information needs and make effective use of forest information in policy-making. This unit should work to actively identify “hot” forestry issues, participate in the collection of statistics and analyse the consequences of different policy measures. It should work in close cooperation with both the policy-making authorities and organizations that collect information. A key task should be to identify needs for different types of information. The unit ought to be as independent as possible.
- Analyses and collection of statistics must be seen in the context of the political process and be designed to inform forest managers of the consequences of their actions. Forest inventories undertaken in isolation are of little value.
- The political process must prioritize consensus. This is a precondition for acceptance and smooth implementation. Planning cannot just aim at finding the technically best solution.
- Any forestry strategy must include an implementation strategy. Preparation of such a strategy requires significant work (and therefore often fails).
- Implementation of forest policies must be followed by adequate monitoring.
- The needs of REDD may imply an increased interest in forest inventories. If these needs become too dominant the value of forest inventories for other uses may be damaged.

**Self-study exercises**

- Discuss the interest of different stakeholders in learning more about forests. Do some stakeholders seem not to want better information?
- Which are the five most important forest policy issues that need to be discussed?
- Which ten types of information are needed in the first hand?
- How can forest policy formulation and information collection best be linked in your country?

**References**


