

ENHANCING STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMMES

Forestry Policy Brief



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This policy brief has been written for the benefit of those who make and implement forest policies. This includes government staff working in forest departments and agencies as well as senior level decision - makers within ministries concerned with forests, environment and natural resources.

Box 1: National Forest Programmes

“National Forest Programme” (nfp) is an internationally recognised term that describes the wide range of approaches used in the planning, implementation and monitoring of forestry activities at both national and sub-national levels. Nfps are used as a means to co-ordinate and guide forest policy development and implementation processes in a participatory and inter-sectoral manner, integrating forests into wider programmes of sustainable land use, socio-economic development and poverty-reduction.



FROM CONSULTATION TO PARTICIPATION: THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMMES

Many countries around the world are transforming the way in which they plan, implement and monitor activities in the forest sector. This comes as a response to the failures of centralised and top-down approaches to managing and sustaining forest resources. There is a growing recognition of the wide range of goods and services that forests provide at all levels of society – to the millions of people living in or around forests who depend on them for their survival and livelihoods, to national governments and to the global community.

Given the wide range of interests in forest management – and the potential for conflict between these different interests and objectives, it is important to ensure broad-based, participatory and inclusive processes when developing and implementing national forest programmes (nfps) – See Box 1. Experiences from a number of countries around the world suggest that enhanced stakeholder participation in nfps brings the following concrete benefits:

1. Increasing efficiency and impact: Involvement of forest sector stakeholders in the development and implementation of nfps has a number of specific advantages for forest administrations in terms of increasing efficiency, multiplying impact and reducing workload. Some stakeholders are better placed to fulfil certain functions – such as the delivery of training, provision of extension services at the field level and the management of plantations. In such cases, it is prudent for government to redefine its own role and where possible to focus on supporting others to fulfil key functions. This in turn, leaves time for government to concentrate on its core business, such as the development of policies and laws as well as the regulating and monitoring the forest sector.

2. Improving the management of forests in ways that maximise benefits to stakeholders: Given the varying (and sometimes conflicting) interests that different stakeholder groups have regarding the use and management of forests around the world, long term and sustainable management of forests can only be secured if these interests are taken into account during both planning and implementation stages. In addition to fostering sustainable forest management, inclusive and participatory planning ensures that the benefits to local communities, governments, private sector and society as a whole are maximised.

3. Reducing conflicts over forest use and management: If unmanaged, the multiple and diverse interests in the forest sector can lead to conflict. These interests may be expressed in terms of divergent management objectives. In some countries a common source of conflict is between forest conservation objectives supported by national governments and local demands for forest

products and land for agricultural development. In other areas, conflicts occur between short-term needs for income and employment which leads to harvesting of timber or charcoal – and longer term needs such as restoration and sustainable management of forests. These conflicts usually arise as a result of management decisions being taken by national authorities with little or no participation of local stakeholders. Addressing conflict, through forums that involve all major stakeholders tends to reduce the potential for conflict over the long term, leads to the development of more coherent policies, and ultimately eases the work of those charged with overseeing and co-ordinating the forest sector as a whole.

4. Increasing financing for the forest sector:

Engaging with a wider group of stakeholders – both inside and outside government - and involving them directly in planning and implementation of policies leads to increased political support for the forest sector as a whole. In many countries, the forest sector is generally considered to be a low priority for spending and often fails to compete effectively for funding with other sectors such as health, education, water and transport. As a result, budget allocations from national treasury are often insufficient if forests are to provide multiple benefits to society at local, national and international levels. Furthermore, new forest financing instruments including international trust funds, banking institutions and other private sector initiatives provide new opportunities to access additional funding for forest management. Examples include payments for environmental services (PES) such as carbon, water and biodiversity – all of which are linked to sustainable forest management. Creating a favourable environment for such markets to flourish and grow requires the development of new partnerships and linkages between government and non-state actors.

5. Increasing transparency in policy making and implementation.

Broader stakeholder participation in forest policy making leads to strengthened awareness of the potential benefits that forests can provide. This creates awareness of the different interests of other stakeholders, and an understanding about what policies were decided, and why. It also allows all parties involved to remind others of their agreed roles and responsibilities, hence increasing accountability. Improved knowledge by forest dependent communities on their rights and responsibilities with regard to the management and use of forests reduces illegal and corrupt practices, and increases transparency and accountability across the forest sector.



MAKING IT HAPPEN: ENHANCING STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN PRACTICE

Six strategies for broadening and deepening participation in nfp processes are presented below. These strategies may be helpful for government forest departments who are planning or implementing nfps in a participatory manner. Concrete examples are provided in the accompanying boxes from some countries implementing nfp processes.

Box 2: Strengthening capacity for inclusive local level forest planning in Mongolia

Since 2002, in partnership with the Mongolian Nature, Forestry and Water Resources Agency, the FAO and the NFP Facility have worked with forest officers at local and national levels to strengthen their institutional capacity, identify national forestry objectives and raise awareness among relevant stakeholders. Seminars in strategy development, regional study tours and practical training in forest governance enabled forest officers to crystallize their forestry objectives, formulate policies and implement them. Financial support was provided for raising awareness among the local communities on the importance of forest protection.

1. Strengthening the capacity of government and non-governmental partners to undertake participatory and inclusive planning. Although there may be a willingness and interest from government staff to undertake participatory planning and implementation of nfp processes, the skills and capacities needed to facilitate and support multi-stakeholder processes may be inadequate. This may be particularly the case for state forest agencies, which may not have had a tradition for consultative or inclusive planning processes. Some specific measures taken by forest administrations designed to increase internal and external capacity include:

- Training government officers and non-state actors at both national and sub-national levels in facilitating participatory processes in the forestry sector. (See Box 2)
 - Identifying and engaging external facilitators with proven capacity and expertise in participatory planning to support key policy development and /or planning events
 - Promoting information and knowledge exchange through organised forums, knowledge sharing workshops and cross-visits to countries that have taken strong steps to build in-country capacity for participatory nfp processes.
- FAO and the NFP-Facility are strengthening in-country capacity for inclusive and participatory planning and policy development processes through the provision of targeted

training in a number of countries and the development of practical training guidelines.

2. Devolving key roles of central government to local stakeholders. Some countries have taken bold steps in recent years to re-define the role of central government – and to devolve and decentralise key functions to local governments, Civil Society organisations and the private sector. Where this process is accompanied by appropriate legislative measures to enable local stakeholders it can increase efficiency and effectiveness as well as strengthening ownership and legitimacy of new policies and reforms. Some specific actions undertaken by countries implementing nfps include the following:

- Through participatory planning processes, the respective comparative advantages of different stakeholders in implementation can be identified and agreed. One example comes from Tanzania where village level government was seen as an appropriate level to devolve forest management responsibilities (See Box 3)
- Creating policy incentives for participation in the implementation of forest policies. For example, the creation of innovative public-private partnerships with regard to the management of plantation forests has helped improve overall levels of revenue collection, efficiency and output in a number of countries such as South Africa, Uganda and Sri Lanka.

Box 3: Devolving forest management rights and responsibilities to village governments in Tanzania

The 2002 Forest Act in Tanzania emphasises the principle of “subsidiarity” or the delegation of responsibilities to the lowest practical level. Recognising that significant forest resources exist outside government forest reserves which are impossible for central government to effectively administer – the law allows for the transfer of ownership and management responsibilities of unreserved forest land to village governments, through the creation of “village land forest reserves”. The law allows villagers to retain all revenues that are generated through sustainable harvesting and management. As a result, of these policy incentives, over 2.3 million hectares of forests and woodland are now being managed by over 1450 villages, independently of central government. Recent research carried out shows improved management levels in forests managed by village institutions as part of this programme.

Box 4: Creative partnerships for innovative forest financing in Ecuador

In Ecuador, the government agency responsible for forest management working together with a local NGO – Fundación Natura has developed a system for paying communities for the protection and management of the Chongón-Colonche Protective Forest in Guayas and Manabí Provinces. Annual contracts are drawn up with the communities, represented by their boards of trustees. Direct cash payment is made to the communities every three months, based on the costs of monitoring and surveillance. This has resulted in 33,000 hectares of forest being placed under community protection. In addition to contributions from donors such as KfW, financing comes from the beneficiaries of environmental services generated by the forest – namely levies on local water user associations and tourists visiting the forest.

Box 5: Small Growers Group of Forestry South Africa

Small and medium forest enterprises in South Africa face a range of legal and policy constraints with regard to engaging profitably in the forest production and marketing sector. Through its parent body (Forestry South Africa), the Small Growers Group (SGG) have been able to effectively lobby the Department for Water and Forestry Affairs on behalf of its members and is now playing a central role in shaping the government's own Small Forest Enterprise Support and Development Strategy – as part of the wider nfp process. In addition, the SGG has been effective in lobbying local municipalities with a view to integrating forestry issues in local development plans as well as developing specific strategies for supporting small and medium forest enterprises.

Box 6: Trust Fund for Forests - Vietnam

The Trust Fund for Forests (TFF) was established in 2004 with financing from the governments of Finland, Switzerland, Netherlands and Sweden and operates through a joint financing arrangement. One of its key objectives is to align donor support with those of the National Forest Development Strategy (or national forest programme). The implementation of the Forest Development Strategy and the TFF is overseen by the Partnership Steering Committee which is constituted by a range of government departments, development partners and non governmental organizations.

3. Strengthening linkages with other sectors and agencies with a view to increasing recognition and financial support to the forest sector.

Forestry agencies in many countries are embarking on creative partnerships with private sector and NGO bodies with the aim of accessing new sources of financing. Increased recognition and financial support to the forest sector can be developed through the following key strategies:

- Identifying and communicating effectively the wide range of goods and services that forests and forest products contribute to the local and national economy as well as to broader poverty-reduction objectives
- Engaging with agencies such as national statistics bureaus to ensure that these contributions are measured, recorded and reported on a regular basis in routine monitoring
- Providing space within existing and established stakeholder forums for relevant government ministries and agencies with an interest in the forest sector (such as finance, agriculture, livestock, environment, local government, water, energy and tourism) to actively participate.
- Developing linkages to new and emerging markets for environmental services (which include carbon, biodiversity and water) – see Box 4 and financing instruments/ institutions including banks and capital markets.

4. Strengthening the voice of marginalised, forest-dependent interest groups.

Voices of marginalised forest-dependent stakeholders are rarely heard in national policy processes, owing to low levels of organisation and an inability to represent their interests through formal systems. Stakeholder groups who may be particularly affected are indigenous groups living in forest areas; other poor, forest-dependent communities; and those engaged in small and medium forest enterprises (such as charcoal makers and traders or collectors and processors of non-wood forest products). As a result, individual organisations tend to be selected by government and invited to participate in policy processes such as nfps, but without any real mandate to represent views of other groups in a similar situation.

Increased organisation within specific interest groups will increase incentives for participation once individuals begin to see the potential and actual impact of their advocacy activities. Specific strategies that can strengthen the voice of such marginalised interests include:

- Providing institutional or organisational development support to emerging associations, networks or forums that represent specific interest groups
- Strengthening knowledge and understanding on prevailing sectoral laws and policies relevant to their interests and improving their advocacy capacities.
- Creating opportunities for interaction between these interest groups and policy makers through established committees, forums, or platforms with a view to shaping relevant government policies, plans or strategies (see Box 5)

5. Harmonising and aligning international development assistance for the forest sector with government programmes and systems.

In many countries, government agencies responsible for forestry development are the recipients of international development assistance from a range of different sources (including bilateral, multi-lateral and NGO support). The nfp process can be an effective mechanism with which to harmonise and align these varying forms of support as a means to increase efficiency and effectiveness as well as broadening participation. Some specific strategies that can help achieve these goals include:

- Avoiding the creation of multiple, parallel project steering committees, but seeking to use existing inter-sectoral committees, such as those that serve as steering committees for nfps, to guide current and future interventions.
- Financing the nfp by pooling funds from development partners through joint financing and investment arrangements and agreeing common formats for monitoring and reporting (See Box 6), this requires common agreement among development partners.

- Using the nfp as the basis for making agreements between government and development partners on shared indicators, milestones, outputs and goals and then working jointly to assess progress, rather than investing time and resources in creating project-specific monitoring systems and performance frameworks. Recent efforts in Tanzania to create sector-wide monitoring system replacing those at project level is one promising example of this.
- Clearly communicating the results, challenges and progress of nfp implementation to stakeholders outside government in an open, transparent and regular manner (for example, through the use of websites, flyers, press releases, articles and announcements in local language newspapers, radio broadcasts).

6. Institutionalising participation in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of nfps.

There are examples from a number of countries where participation has been strong in the preparation of nfps, but was weaker during the implementation and monitoring of the programme. If participation is to be assured over the long term – it is essential that it is institutionalised and formalised. Some specific approaches that support longer term participation in the nfp process include:

- Inclusive and participatory processes for the identification and involvement of stakeholders, including previously marginalised groups.
- Establishing, mandating and institutionalising a multi-stakeholder platform which provides space for negotiating a common vision, agendas, roles, objectives, definitions and partnerships. In many countries this has taken the form of an NFP Steering Committee (different countries may have different names),

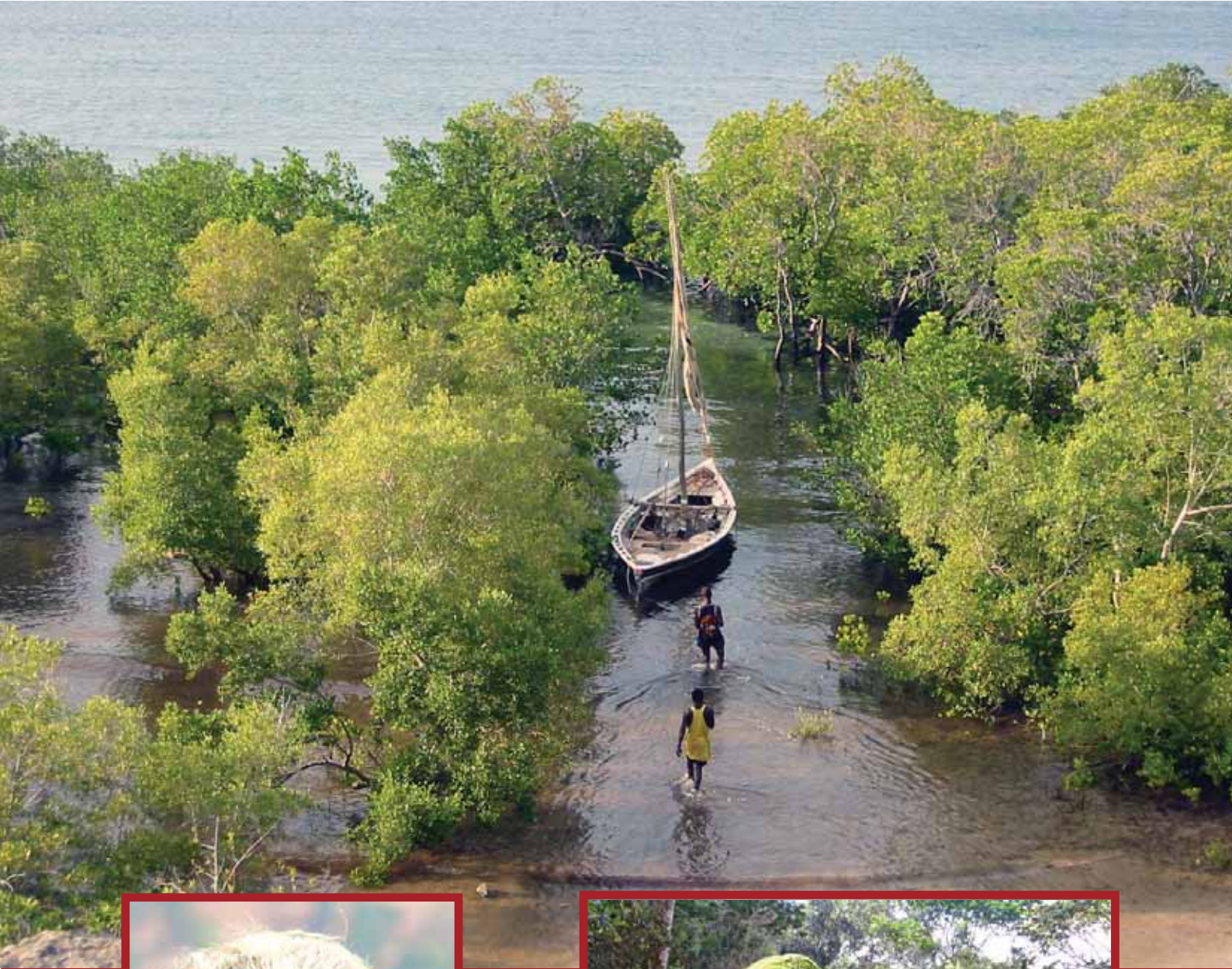
Box 7: Forest Policy Round Tables in Guatemala

As part of the nfp process in Guatemala, sub-national “Forest Policy Round Tables” have been established across all nine forest sub-regions in the country. The round tables are made up of 30 organisations or groups representing NGOs and civil society organisations, private forestry companies, local and national government - all with an interest the production, conservation and use of forest resources. The Round Tables meet on a regular basis and are now institutionalised and recognised by government as a legitimate and mandated forum with which to resolve local forest conflicts, support the formulation of national and regional forest policy and oversee local policy implementation.

- Developing sub-national platforms or forums where local issues can be discussed and resolved (See Box 7)
- Providing opportunities for regular face-to-face interaction between those affected by policy (such as forest-dependent communities or groups) to meet and interact with those who make and implement policy (such as local or national government representatives).

These six strategies are all based on examples of how different countries have broadened and enhanced stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of nfps. There are multiple benefits of participation including, greater political support; increased financing; improved efficiency levels; and reduced conflicts over the management of forest resources. Above all however, enhanced participation brings the promise of forests being managed more sustainably for the benefits of both current and future generations.





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