

National forest programmes

The term “national forest programme” (NFP) designates the wide range of approaches to the process of planning, programming and implementing forest activities in a country, to be applied at national and subnational levels, based on a common set of guiding principles. One of the main achievements of the international dialogue on forests since the 1990s has been the common agreement among participants that every country should develop an NFP to lead and steer its forest policy development and implementation processes in a participatory and intersectoral way, integrating it into wider programmes for sustainable land use, socio-economic development and poverty reduction.

The purpose of NFPs is to establish a workable social and political framework for the conservation, management and sustainable development of all types of forests, which in turn will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of public and private operations and funding, as well as forests’ contributions to sustainable livelihoods. An NFP comprises not only policies, strategies and courses of action, but also mechanisms for their implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A good information base – from national forest inventories and sector studies, for example – has an important role in an effective NFP.

This issue of *Unasylva* gives examples of how some countries have approached their NFP process, with the conviction that others can learn from the successes and the challenges – keeping in mind that NFPs will necessarily vary according to a country’s socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental situation.

The issue opens with some reflections from J. Heino, leader of FAO’s Forestry Department, on why NFPs are so important, and how FAO supports them. Next, C. Sepp and E. Mansur give an overview of national forest programme principles and process: the iterative phases involved in their development, and the participatory arrangements that are their hallmark. Concrete examples are in the articles that follow.

The case of Kyrgyzstan is a particular one, because economic and political transition provided an opportunity for a complete overhaul of forest policy. I. Kouplevatskaya describes the creation of the national forest programme as an element of the wider reform process which has emphasized participation and democratic governance.

Participation by all forest stakeholders is one of the guiding principles of NFPs. Efforts in the Philippines have emphasized the use of appropriate methods to ensure meaningful participation of villagers in the policy process. P. O’Hara

and J. Pulhin draw some lessons from such initiatives, with a focus on participatory methods and how they help forge new relationships among stakeholders.

One means of expanding participation in the policy process is to use the Internet. Online stakeholder consultation was a novel feature in the development of Canada’s National Forest Strategy 2003–2008. J. Cinq-Mars draws some lessons from this early experience and looks towards wider use of this and other new information and communication technologies in the future.

Guatemala’s NFP focuses on policy dialogue not only at the national level, but also at the subnational level. In describing the country’s NFP process, E. Oliva Hurtarte, E. Sales Hernández and I. Bustos García highlight the Forest Policy Round Tables in the country’s nine forest regions – autonomous discussion groups made up of central government and local authorities, non-governmental organizations, civil-society bodies and private companies, which provide feedback to the NFP.

Two articles examine regional initiatives for strengthening NFPs as a bridge between the national and international levels. W. Thies, J. Rodríguez and E. von Pfeil describe the Pumbo process, an initiative that is strengthening the forest policy dialogue in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Central Africa (article by J.P. Koyo and R. Foteu), the Convergence Plan of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) provides a framework for harmonizing forest policies and programmes and also serves as a basis for the formulation of NFPs.

In Senegal, sweeping reforms carried out in the 1990s introduced a decentralized administrative structure, shifting forest management responsibilities to subnational institutions and communities. As described by O. Diaw, the NFP emphasizes capacity building within this decentralized institutional framework, for effective implementation of programmes to curb desertification, deforestation, forest and soil degradation and biodiversity loss, while also targeting livelihood support and poverty reduction.

Finally, S. Geller and R. McConnell examine how countries can link their national forest programmes and poverty reduction strategies to strengthen financial, institutional and policy support for forest-based poverty alleviation – and thus enhance the role of forestry in achieving national poverty reduction goals.

This issue of *Unasylva* celebrates the fifth anniversary of the National Forest Programme Facility (see page 13), an innovative partnership arrangement that has been helping countries develop and implement their national forest programmes. Most of the experiences recounted in this issue had a link with the Facility – which now embarks on its second phase.

We hope that the sample of experiences presented here will provide inspiration to the more than 130 countries – developing and developed – that are now in some stage of planning or implementing NFPs, and will encourage many more to do so.