

Foreword

The battle against climate change cannot be won without the world's forests. Managing the transition to sustainable, resource-efficient and low-carbon economies will depend on forest resources, as will the scaling-up of renewable energy. The quality of life of both urban and rural people depends on their ability to enjoy food, clean drinking-water and recreation. In most countries forests can strongly contribute to all of these.

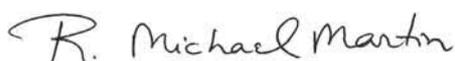
Recognizing the value and importance of forests for society and establishing sound policies to ensure this value is protected, maintained and enhanced is the task of policy-makers. Unlike in the past, when forests were often delegated to technical experts to be managed, policy-makers and stakeholders from different backgrounds now look at forests with renewed attention.

Developing policies that work in practice is difficult. It requires embracing many different and often conflicting interests of increasingly diverse stakeholders, and reaching long-term agreements that these stakeholders adhere to, as it is in their own interest. Where this process succeeds, capturing emerging trends and opportunities and linking closely with the development ambitions of the country, a new path for the management of forest resources can be established.

Many countries develop or revise forest policies to keep abreast of changing circumstances and to enhance the value of forests to society, including through support by FAO. The experience from countries and FAO shows that substantial changes have occurred since the publication of FAO's *Guidelines for forest policy formulation* in 1987, profoundly affecting not only the contents of forest policies but also the way forest policies are developed or revised.

Developing effective forest policy is published to share some of the main lessons that have emerged from these experiences, aiming to support countries in planning and conducting forest policy development processes. Based on a review of practical experiences, it outlines the rationale and purpose of a national forest policy and experiences related to the different elements a forest policy development process usually comprises. This should help senior officials in government administrations and the representatives of other stakeholders, including civil society organizations and the private sector, in developing or revising their national forest policy.

Through this publication and related capacity building support, FAO hopes to contribute to the development of forest policies that, foreseeing emerging trends, are able to affirm and enhance the value and sustainable contributions of forests to society, based on a broad agreement among stakeholders.



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Acknowledgements

This publication has been produced with the generous contribution of time and expertise by a large number of experts. Initiated by Eva Müller and Yves Dubé and based on a first outline by Neil Byron and country case studies contributed by Jean-Louis Blanchez, Materne Maetz, Manuel Paveri and Adrian Whiteman, a draft was compiled by Ewald Rametsteiner. A peer review group of experts from government, non-governmental organizations and academia was convened in Rome from 22 to 23 September 2009 to review and help improve the paper. The following members of the peer review group are gratefully acknowledged for their contributions during the meeting and comments on subsequent drafts of the report: Ramón Álvarez, Marcial C. Amaro, Alex Asare, Jean Balié, Gérard Buttoud, Bwalya Chendauka, Don Gilmour, Ingwald Gschwandtl, John Kaboggoza, Irina Kouplevatskaya-Buttoud, Godwin Kowero, Sanjay Kumar, Jan Laarman, Rocío Malleux, Eduardo Mansur, Ghalia Martini, Arvids Ozols, Hans Thiel and Victor Vidal.

The report also benefited from inputs from numerous other experts who provided written comments, including Hedi Hadri, Haluk Hilmi, Bernd Liss and Franz Schmithüsen, as well as the FAO experts Simmathiri Appanah, Patrick Durst, Claus Eckelmann, Michel Laverdière, Mikko Leppanen and Dominique Reeb. Special thanks also go to Rosalie McConnell and Andrea Perlis and for their support to editing and publishing.

Summary

Ten things to know about forest policy

1. A national forest policy is a negotiated agreement among stakeholders on a common 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.
2. Forest policy goals need to address main societal issues and be closely aligned with a country's development goals. All concerned sectors and stakeholders must be involved in achieving these goals. Such a scope requires a broad perspective of land use and natural resource management.
3. Initiating a policy revision requires a good understanding of the national context, the ability to secure support from high levels of government and key stakeholders, and an accurate assessment of the right time to establish the process.
4. Proper preparation is important, including communication and capacity building, leadership support and sound information on the status and future trends with regard to forests and social, political, economic, environmental and technological factors that determine their use.
5. Participation of key stakeholders at national and subnational levels throughout the process is key, as is joint ownership of the resulting policy and shared responsibility for policy implementation.
6. Drafting forest policy is about accommodating different interests on how to use and protect forests, interests that sometimes conflict. Reaching compromises requires good negotiation and facilitation skills rather than technical knowledge.
7. Policies that work in practice need to be designed with implementation in mind. This requires agreement on the approach and on responsibilities as well as flexibility on the methods to achieve objectives. It also needs an understanding on funding and on re-aligning legal and institutional frameworks with the new or amended policy.
8. Strong and professional communication from the outset and the building of sufficient capacity for those participating in the policy development and implementation are crucial for success. A forest policy that is neither well known nor understood has little impact.
9. The new forest policy and a strategy to put it into practice should be adopted by government at high levels so as to demonstrate commitment and guide authorities in its implementation. Non-governmental stakeholders should likewise express their commitment to both the policy and its implementation.
10. Forest policy should guide daily practice. An institutional arrangement that promotes and facilitates continuous dialogue is essential for effective implementation, operational fine-tuning, coordination with other policies, integration of new initiatives and adaptation over time.

