

7. Conclusions and outlook

No ... policy – no matter how ingenious – has any chance of success if it is born in the minds of a few and carried in the hearts of none.

H. Kissinger

A national forest policy provides the basis for sustainable forest management. It guides present and future decisions, determines actions and provides direction over a period of time. Ideally, a national forest policy – adopted by government – is a shared vision on forests and trees and their use, negotiated by government and stakeholders.

Many countries develop or revise forest policies to keep abreast of changing circumstances and to enhance the value of forests to society. Almost twice as many countries issued forest policy statements in the 2000s as in the 1990s (FAO, 2010). Each year, on average, numbers increase by more than ten. Many lessons have emerged from these country experiences.

Countries that identify and seize opportunities to adapt their forest policies to newly emerging realities can reap benefits that are not available to others. To be successful, forest policies must keep pace with rapid global change; foresee future developments over a ten-year span or more; address key societal issues within the broader and longer-term national development agenda; and be based on sound information.

In many respects, the triple challenges of food security, energy security and climate security open up possibilities for a wide array of forest-based solutions for a sustainable “green” economy. However, forest administrations will not be able to overcome the challenges or fully capture emerging opportunities unless they address issues from the broader perspective of land use and natural resource management and unless they involve all relevant stakeholders.

A key lesson for a successful policy appears to be that the process (how, why and by whom it was developed) is at least as important as its content. A process that is inclusive and creates a sense of ownership and responsibility for joint implementation fares well, but such processes are not simple and are likely to engender conflict, take longer and cost more. However, without stakeholder buy-in, even the most technically sound policy statements are quickly forgotten. Similarly, the best forest policy serves little purpose unless it is followed up with concrete actions, adjusted as the need arises and supported by effective institutional arrangements and legislation.

Given the critical need to monitor, review and amend national forest policy to keep pace with society’s changing expectations and to meet new demands, including those resulting from international commitments, a permanent process or

platform for dialogue among stakeholders is key to ensure effectiveness over the long term. Such a mechanism allows for continuous adaptation and fine-tuning of the policy and its implementation. It also facilitates the coordination of new and emerging forest-related initiatives and promotes better integration of forest issues across sectors. In this way, the forest policy remains relevant and provides valuable guidance.